

**JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY ON THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND ITS JEWRY  
FROM THE LATE FIFTEENTH CENTURY TO THE EARLY DECADES OF THE  
TWENTIETH CENTURY**

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
M.A. in Religious Studies

University of Pittsburgh

2006

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
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The thesis analyzes how Jewish historians presented the Ottoman Empire and its Jewish subjects during the long time span between the end of the fifteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. In the first part of the thesis, the key characteristics of the Jewish attitude towards history and history writing are analyzed. Throughout the ages of pre-1820, Jews are observed to be consciously lukewarm towards history. The sealing of the Bible and the emergence of an apocalyptic/messianic world view, which are both considered to have taken place around the last centuries of B.C.E., are illustrated as two major causes behind the emergence of this particular Jewish attitude towards history. In the second part of the thesis, the historiography of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are examined with special emphasis on the period historians who explicitly wrote historical works. As the Ottoman Empire was the super power of the age, in these historical writings, a special divine role was attributed to the Empire. The consecutive part of the thesis focuses on historical writings on the Sabbatian messianic movement. As one of the important episodes of the early modern period of Jewish history, the Sabbatian movement stimulated awareness and interest in history even in the far flung communities of Diaspora and produced a new surge of history writing. The modernization of the Ottoman Empire Jewry that began after the 1840s, and adaptation of numerous already-existing social and intellectual models of the West is the subject of the final part of the thesis.

Each of these western Jewish intellectual movements had their distinctive approach to history and influenced the Ottoman Jewish historians in their writings of history. However, the actual scientific and objective historical writings on the Ottoman Jewry started much later in the second half of the twentieth century and gained popularity in the 1980s with the increased world-wide interest in the Ottoman/Turkish Jewry.

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## **PREFACE**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis advisors Drs. Alex Orbach and Adam Shear for their valuable guidance during the course of this work. I also would like to thank both of my advisors for carefully reading my thesis several times, making constructive criticisms, and correcting my English. This has been a very enjoyable and inspiring study which I look forward to pursue within the scope of my further studies. Last but not least I would like to express my deep admiration to my dear wife who was always helpful and encouraging with her patience and inspired me with her subtle comments and questions.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

In all the different places where Jews lived they were regarded by their contemporaries as remnants of an ancient people who had deep roots in history. This sentiment was especially prevalent among the peoples of the Western hemisphere where monotheistic religions, i.e. Christianity and Islam, were overwhelmingly dominant. Indeed, both in the Christian Bible and the Quran, Jews were introduced as the lineage of Abraham who, with his mythical/legendary personality was identified as the father of the idea of monotheism. Thus, the average Christian and Muslim intellect was familiar with the historical identity of the Jewish people. Indeed, in the play *Merchant of Venice* the Jewish character Shylock interestingly reflects the common sentiment in Shakespeare's age; and he begins one of his tirades by addressing his ancestor: "Hey, Great Abraham ..."<sup>1</sup> Throughout history Jews also regarded themselves as the scion of a "chosen people" of early ages. Indeed, their faith emphasizes the importance of the link that connects them to their ancestors. As one of the salient features of their liturgy, in a constant and continuous manner their God evokes the consciousness of historicity and stresses the importance of historical/genealogical dimension by introducing Himself as "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that, most probably Shakespeare never met a Jew in his entire life time, since in his time there was almost no Jewish existence in England. Jews were expelled from England in 1290 during the reign of King Edward I and their limited resettlement in the island permitted about 350 years latter. Similar to this declamatory speech, the play also reflects the typical stereotyped image of the Jew in a Jewless country.

<sup>2</sup> The introduction of God as God of ancestors is one of the strongest and conspicuous ideas of the Bible. In the book Exodus, in the well-known theophany where God first time appeared to Moses "in a flame of fire out of bush," [Exodus 3:2] as an answer to Moses' question of his name and how he would introduce Him to Israelites, God

Nevertheless, the existing collective folkloric image that strongly associates Jews with the notion of history does not necessarily imply that throughout history, Jews had a strong ongoing interest in history or were keen on reflecting on their history. This idea needs to be scrutinized; and it does generate many questions. First of all, in contrast to biblical history which has a special meaning to Jews, throughout all the centuries after the biblical time, did the ongoing history as *res gestae* (the things that happened, i.e., the most straightforward definition of history) have a special or even ordinary place in Jewish intellectual life? In the very different places where Jews lived, did they show a critical historical awareness for evaluating what was happening in their community as well as in their environment? How much did they have the consciousness of reflecting history and what was their tradition in writing histories as *historia rerum gestarum* (a second definition of history, i.e., the record of events and narration of them)? After all, were Jews different in their interest in history in comparison to their host Christian and Muslim communities? Did they have different motivations and a different genre in reflecting on history? Or did they write histories in larger or smaller quantities in comparison to others?

The answers to these questions will be crucial both in understanding the Jewish interest in history and in analyzing Jewish creativity in the realm of historical writing. A number of different studies written by the scholars of Jewish history (in accord with the third and final definition of history, *Geschichtswissenschaft*, i.e. knowledge or study of history that deals with

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reveals His name as “I AM WHO I AM” and says further “This you shall say to the Israelites ‘ The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’:

This is my name forever,

And this my title for all

Generations.” [Exodus 3:14-15]

Here in these verses, the expressions “forever” and “all generations” strongly emphasizes time, continuity and historicity.

neither the events nor the artistic presentation but the science of research)<sup>3</sup> specifically aims at addressing these questions by approaching them from different aspects.<sup>4</sup>

The present thesis aims at addressing the above questions from the perspective of Ottoman and Turkish Jewry in particular. In doing so, the study will cover a wide range of historians from the late fifteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century. These historians will not be necessarily of Ottoman or Turkish Jewish origin; their common characteristics will be their interest in surveying in one way or another, the Jewish existence in the lands of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey in their works. As a matter of fact, as can be seen from Table 1, none of the historians of the sixteenth century were born or even had their cultural formation in the Ottoman lands, except for Moise Almosnino and Isaac Akrish. Almost all of them were exiles from Spain except Elijah Capsali, a citizen of the Island of Crete that remained under Venetian sovereignty until the second half of the seventeenth century. Furthermore, in the following centuries, in contrast to other realms of literature, the little historiography that did come out was not a product of the main, highly populated Ottoman Jewish communities like Istanbul, Salonika or Adrianople. Although feeble, most of the historical creativity can be seen in the peripheral communities like the ones in Egypt and Jerusalem. It seems that most of the histories of the early period were written by historians who had no direct and first-hand familiarity with historical

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, this is the original meaning of the word history. "History" as a word comes from the sixth century Ionians. It meant to search for knowledge and truth. On these three definitions of history see, James T. Shotwell, *The History of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950) pp. 2-4. In his chapter on scope of history, Shotwell gives a large reference list of scholars who were particularly interested in and philosophical approaches of different definitions of history.

<sup>4</sup> Some of the most well-known works, which are specially focused on Jewish understandings of history and historiography and frequently referred to in this study, are: Bernard Lewis, *History-Remembered, Recovered, Invented* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor. Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996). Salo W. Baron, *History and Jewish Historians* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964). Michael A. Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974). Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

developments and events of their subject matter, i.e. the Ottoman Empire and its Jewry. In fact, in parallel with the typical nature of medieval European/Christian historiography, for these historians, the task of reflecting historical facts “was a secondary one, subordinate to, at times at the service of, other more worthy ones.”<sup>5</sup> As a result, these historical writings were mostly reflections of a disguised or oriented history, carrying little concern to present an unbiased and objective account of facts. These historical writings were shaped and twisted by the frustrations and hopes that emerged as a result of the complex encounter between traditional religious aspirations and political/socio-economic realities.

In the present study special attention will therefore be given to find out and analyze the factors and motivations that affected Jewish historians in their writing of the history of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Jewry. In particular, we argue that Jewish perceptions that were rooted in the Second Temple period deeply affected and shaped in many ways the historical conceptions and presentations of the first historians of the sixteenth century. In the subsequent centuries, the works of these historians were generally accepted as objective as well as reliable, and used by historians of later generation as trustworthy sources. Thus, although it had a dubious historicity in origin, the approach of the first generation historians played an important role in shaping, and to some extent distorting, future writings and they became the basis of later period assertions on the Ottoman Empire and its relation to the Jewish world.

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Bonfil, “Jewish Attitudes Toward History and Historical Writing in Pre-Modern Times” p. 22. According to Bonfil, contrary to modern historians whose concern is avoiding bias, “the medieval authors not only would not aspire to detach themselves from the context on the contrary, would overtly and consciously link themselves to the context.”

As may be conceived, this particular historiography on Ottoman Jewry also contains fundamental characteristics of general understanding and interpretation of the Jewish/rabbinic attitude towards history and historiography. Indeed, an analysis of any particular Jewish historiography cannot be done meaningfully without knowing the general ideas and religious frameworks of thought that shaped Jewish interests and attitudes to both history and history writing. Therefore, in the introductory chapter, special emphasis will be given to examine the characteristics of the general Jewish understanding of history and the traditional approaches taken to it. The thesis suggests that the emergence of rabbinic traditions and messianic movements in the end of the Second Temple period and their more concrete establishment in the first centuries C.E. through written documents available to us, have had a determining role in shaping Jewish conceptions of history and history writing in the succeeding centuries.

In the following chapters of this thesis, Jewish historiography on Ottoman/Turkish Jewry will be explored and will be presented based on three different time periods, each illustrating different characteristics. The first period, presented in Chapter II, will reflect the historical creativity of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In this period, the Ottoman Empire was the focal point in Jewish historiography as an enigmatic, rising, superior power against Christianity, the oppressing archenemy of Judaism. In addition, the Empire attracted much interest and empathy as an asylum for the victims of the Spanish expulsion with its special and welcoming attitude. Indeed, a feeling of gratitude was a common feature among almost all historians of the period. Thus, an extraordinary resurgence of historical writings flourished in tandem with general characteristics of Jewish historiography, especially in the first part of the period.

The outbreak of Sabbatian messianism in the middle of the seventeenth century shook the fundamental foundations of Ottoman Jewry and had repercussions in the entire Jewish world. The messianic movement which created a turbulent period in Turkish Jewish history is of critical importance in any analysis of Turkish Jewry with its unique features and ensuing depressing effects that were being felt in the following centuries. The third chapter of the thesis focuses on contemporary Jewish historical works on the Sabbatian movement. In the present study, the numerous historical works triggered by the movement are introduced as another burst or resurgence of Jewish historiography reminiscent of the preceding century. Furthermore, the historiography of the movement is presented to be unique due to its first-time characteristics.

Starting from the mid-seventeenth century, the decline of the Ottoman Empire began to be felt, and reflections of this decline can be seen in the succeeding two centuries in every aspect of Jewish existence including literary works. Furthermore, the Sabbatai Sevi movement and its distressing effects gave rise to a religious, social and cultural stagnation and paralysis among Ottoman Jewry. During this long period there was very little creativity in the realm of historiography. It was the 1840 Damascus Affair and its repercussions in the Western Jewish world that became a turning point for the Ottoman Jewish community and ended its isolated and introverted situation.

The time period between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will be the subject of the fourth chapter. The awakened interest of the Western Jews and the influence of different modernization movements of the period became the stimulating elements in the social and cultural regeneration of Oriental Jewry. In that chapter of the study, all influential modernization

movements, i.e., the Berlin *Haskalah*<sup>6</sup> and its succession in the Eastern Europe, the French Emancipation ideology and its representative institution in the Empire, i.e. Alliance Israelite Universelle, the Italian Jewish modernization perceptions, and the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums* approach are analyzed with special emphasis on their comparative role on the Ottoman Jewish Westernization movement. Obviously, all these movements also influenced the historians of the period, and new historical works were written with characteristics concurrent with the historians' closeness to one of these movements. In the early decades of the twentieth century, a new consciousness for analyzing history surfaced. However, these new approaches were never in full accord with the critical precepts of the German-based *Wissenschaft* movement, but rather were closer to the "maskilic history" conceptions of Eastern European *maskilim*.

The emergence of a new nationalistic Turkish Republic in 1923, out of the ashes of the pluralist Ottoman Empire, brought a new identity to its Jewish minority, which affected its literary production including history-writing. In the young republic the minorities were not seen as a subject for historical studies and Abraham Galante can be singled out as the only Jewish/Turkish historian who produced historical studies on the history of Turkish Jewry. However, the works of this prolific historian did not have enough critical and analytical depth and carry the marks of being written under an authoritarian one-party regime of a nationalistic government. The year 1982 can roughly be considered as the beginning of the preparations for the commemoration of the quincentennial anniversary of the forced Jewish emigration from the Iberian Peninsula and their settlement in the Ottoman Empire. This idea of anniversary served as a prod for historians

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<sup>6</sup> *Haskalah* is the Hebrew term for defining the Jewish Enlightenment movement. The movement aimed to separate the religious and secular realms and especially focused on secular disciplines such as science, philosophy and literature. *Maskil* (plural *maskilim*) was the Hebrew term given to the adherents of the *Haskalah*.

all over the world and a vast number of new studies of a scholarly caliber started to appear for the first time - excluding several rare exceptions - on the Ottoman and Turkish Jewry.

Because of the wide range of the geography studied, the present thesis will exclude the more distant lands of the Empire such as North Africa and South-East Europe which also stayed under Turkish rule for a relatively shorter time. The thesis will concentrate mainly on the mainland of the Ottoman Empire, the area that later became the Republic of Turkey and Kingdom of Greece.

To deal with Jewish historiography on the Ottoman Empire/Turkey and its Jewish communities requires being knowledgeable on a broad spectrum of concepts in different realms of religion, history and literature. Indeed, Jewish historiography as a branch of learning stands at the intersection of these three disciplines. To study this subject requires a wide critical interest in various themes of these disciplines, and to find meaningful correlations between them. But, after all, it is not the colors or artful mix of them in the palette, but the handling of the brush that makes a good work of art! It is noteworthy that there are not many studies on this barren area of historiography that certainly deserves an endeavor for a good painting.



## 2. JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY AND ITS DISTINCT NATURE

Historiography, like history, is a concept that has parallel meanings at different levels. In its most basic sense historiography is defined as a body of historical literature. In this simplest description every actual recording of a historical event in any form has a historiographic value and becomes a constituting unit of this body. At another level, historiography can be defined as the study of the writing of history. In other words, it is the history of the writings of the historians, which using scholarly means, aims at critical analysis of the triple relations between the historian, his work and the specific period of history he is covering in his work. Clearly, historians do not live in isolation. As stated by Salo Baron, historians differ in their evaluation of the same events “not only because of their different personal philosophies and attitudes, but also because they shared the dominant values and approaches of their respective generations.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in order to be scholarly accurate and objective, historiography also takes into consideration as a fourth dimension the different contexts in which the historian lived.

Concomitantly, Jewish historiography can be defined as the analysis of the writings of historians of both Jewish and non-Jewish origin, about people of the Jewish faith. Indeed, the answer to the question who is a Jew (i.e. the definition of the Jewish identity) is imbued with social and cultural characteristics that were heavily based on the precepts of religion, that is to say Judaism.

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<sup>7</sup> Baron, *History and Jewish Historians* p. xiii.

As stated by Baron, “in no other people’s history has the impact of religion been so strong, continuous, and comprehensive as in the history of Jews, especially in post-biblical times.”<sup>8</sup>

Even the term, “Jewish historiography” has its own specific character and reflects its different conceptual trait in respect to classical understanding of general historiography. This divergent stature stems from the different, even ambiguous character of the Jewish people who were both “at once one and diverse.”<sup>9</sup> In contrast to the traditional marker in defining the history of groups, Jews as a national/political power never occupied a single geographical area after the destruction of the Second Temple; they have not spoken a single common language, nor shared the same cultural, social, economic and political past. Thus, Jewish people did not have a single, unitary national history.<sup>10</sup> Many historians agree that it is more appropriate to consider Jewish history as a collection of finite and discrete histories of different minority communities, each having lived in different parts of the world with their own distinctive cultural characteristics.<sup>11</sup>

The metaphor of rope, as proposed by Michael Meyer, is an interesting way to explain the continuity and the nature of the aforementioned Jewish history. Like a rope, which is a bundle of different strands, Jewish existence is also a combination of histories of different cultures. They “succeed and complement each other along the continuum, varying geographically and according to different strata and competing ideologies within the Jewish communities.”<sup>12</sup> In distinct histories of dispersed Jewish communities, the belief of having a common ethnic origin and

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> David Biale, “Preface: Toward a Cultural History of the Jews” in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), p. xxiii.

<sup>10</sup> Jacob Neusner, “Review of *Ideas of Jewish History* by Michael A. Meyer.” *History and Theory* 14 (1975), p. 213.

<sup>11</sup> Such as David Biale, Jacob Neusner, Robert Bonfil, Michael A. Meyer. Although each expresses the similar approach in different ways, they converge on the dual components of the Jewish existence.

<sup>12</sup> Michael A. Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History* (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1974), p. 40.

shared religious sentiment can be shown as the two conspicuous components that created the continuity of Jewish existence and established the distinction between Jews and non-Jews.

Each perception of history dictates its own characteristic historiography. Concomitantly, the distinct structure of Jewish history gives birth to a unique and different historiography. The two common components, to be a member of a chain of an ancient national origin and more importantly to share a contemporary religious sentiment, became the two major factors shaping explicitly or implicitly the backbone of post-biblical Jewish historiography. It is noteworthy that in this approach, other than general chronologies, there is little place for distinct local histories. In other words, throughout the long centuries, description of ordinary realities or everyday events, in a way the account of common or profane history, i.e. “finite and distinct strands of the rope,” seldom came out and became part of historiography.<sup>13</sup>

From a comparative perspective, even a short glimpse can reveal the distinct place of Jewish history in the frame of general historiography. It is evident that there are some historiographic studies that place other religious faiths also as their central subject.<sup>14</sup> It is also possible to claim that religion played a significant role, in certain periods and at different levels, in the histories of many nations or groups. However, as a general cardinal rule, all these groups took their place on the stage of history as political and military entities and had their own political and military histories. It is true that, in some cases, for shorter periods, it may be difficult to differentiate the

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<sup>13</sup> Whenever histories of more local character come out like the tragic events of the first Crusade or blood-litels, they can continue to be remembered or become popular if they can find a place in the religious realm for example as a part of liturgy like *selihot* and Purim traditions.

<sup>14</sup> As two examples: Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*. (Leiden: E.J Brill, 1968) and John Drury, *Tradition and Design in Luke's Gospel: A Study in Early Christian Historiography*. (Atlanta : John Knox Press, 1977).

religious and political aspects of historical events. The expansion of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries can be a good example where the political and religious zeal or missions intermingled with each other. Indeed, with his deeds Muhammad can be seen both as a prophet and a political/military leader.<sup>15</sup> Emperor Constantine's embrace of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century can be shown as another example of intertwining of religion and political zeal.<sup>16</sup> However, with a critical approach it is still possible to make a distinction between these two realms and to recognize the disguised but real compulsions that are political in essence while being concealed under a religious facade. Thus, especially, over a long time scale, it is not possible to analyze the course of history of any nation or community solely in terms of the religious identities of its members. On this point, the only exception appears to be the Jewish people. The non-separable character of the religious and national aspects of Jewish identity can be claimed to be the crucial factor in the creation of aforementioned critical difference. By the same token, it is possible to say that there are no Christian or Islamic histories but there are histories of Christianity and of the Islamic faith, contrary to the concept of Jewish history. As a consequence, it is difficult, if not wrong, to talk about Christian or Islamic historiographies in the analysis of the histories of particular communities.

Karl Löwith interestingly approaches this unique character of Jewish history from another comparative point of view. He emphasizes the religiously and politically intermingled communal character of Jewish expectations in contrast to Christianity. Indeed, as can be seen in a further

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<sup>15</sup> Wellhausen regards Napoleon as a modern-counterpart to Muhammad. Arent Jan Wensinck, *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina* (Freiburg: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1975), p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Oded Irshai, "Confronting A Christian Empire: Jewish Culture in the World of Byzantium" in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*" ed. David Biale p. 182.

stage of the study, Löwith's remark on the different nature of the Jewish salvation idea, in other words, messianic expectations had strong reflections on the realm of Jewish historiography and appeared to be one of the most salient features of historical writing. According to Löwith:

There is only one particular history – that of the Jews – which as a political history can be interpreted strictly religiously...

Christians are not an historical people. . . In the Christian view the history of salvation is no longer bound up with a particular nation, but is internationalized because it is individualized. . . From this it follows that the historical destiny of Christian peoples is no possible subject for specifically Christian interpretation of political history, while the destiny of the Jews is a possible subject of a specifically Jewish interpretation.<sup>17</sup>

Ottoman-Turkish Jewish history also contains the characteristic features of general Jewish history and constitutes one of the thick strands of the rope. In the lands of the Ottoman Empire and later in the Turkish Republic, in contrast to Christendom, Jews found a relatively peaceful environment. As stated by Shaw, after the middle of the fourteenth century, for ages “Ottomans and Turks provided a principal refuge for Jews driven out of Western Europe by massacres and persecutions.”<sup>18</sup> Especially at the end of the fifteenth century, the expelled Spanish and fleeing Portuguese Jews carried their well established culture and their elaborated social life with its institutions to their new habitats in the Ottoman Empire and found there a convenient atmosphere to continue their intellectual activities, as well as to utilize their highly developed skills and crafts. Indeed, beginning from the fifteenth century, Constantinople, Adrianople, Salonika,

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<sup>17</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning In History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 194-95. Gershom Scholem also describes the difference between Christian and Judaic idea of salvation and messianism almost in similar approach with Löwith. According to Scholem, while in Judaism the concept of redemption or salvation is an “occurrence which takes place in the visible world, and which can not be conceived apart from such a visible appearance,” in Christianity, it is in “spiritual and unseen realm, an event which is reflected in the soul, in the private world of each individual.” See Scholem, “Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism,” in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), pp. 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), p. 1.

Smyrna, Jerusalem and Safed appeared to be vibrant, highly developed theological, cultural, social and economic centers of the Jewish world. In their extensive histories Simon Dubnow and Salo Baron define this period of Jewish history as “a new center” and a “Golden Age” in the Jewish Diaspora. As its history, the historiography of this particular flourishing center also attracts attention and needs to be analyzed. A study and re-evaluation of the historians who reflected different periods of the Ottoman Empire/Turkey and its Jewry may shed light in establishing a critical re-analysis of Turkish Jewish history. As stated by Hacker, “Common stereotypes, on the one hand, and insufficient interrelationships between the study of the history and institutions of the Ottoman Empire and study of Jewish history, on the other”<sup>19</sup> attest to the need of such re-consideration.

Before focusing on our subject, it will be useful to examine in more detail the relation of Jews to their past. The place or the concept of history and its evolution throughout the centuries in Jewish thought, as well as the motivations that influenced historians in writing on history were all products of such dialectical relationships. Indeed, the historiography on Ottoman-Turkish Jewry is also a reflection of such a relationship. Some basic notions that can be extracted from our more general examination can be used as useful and necessary tools in exploring the Jewish historiography of Ottoman and Turkish Jews.

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Hacker, “The *Sürgün* System and Jewish Society in the Ottoman Empire During the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries,” p. 1.

## 2.1. Approaches to History and Historiography among Jewish People

### 2.1.1. Different Approaches of Modern Historians

Almost all students of Jewish historiography agree that, in analyzing the Jewish post-biblical attitude to history and literary works on history, there are two main time periods each with its distinctive characteristic. The first stage is the long time period that begins with the end of the biblical era, i.e., roughly the first century BCE and ends in the first decades of the nineteenth century with the emergence of the movement of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. The modern period that begins with the *Wissenschaft* movement can be seen as the second stage. One of the common points agreed to by the historians is the scarcity of Jewish creativity in the realm of history writing during the long period of the first stage, with the exception of a short, creative, resurgence of history writing in the sixteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

Among the historians, the major divergence comes out in interpreting the reasons for this paucity of Jewish historiography of the first stage. According to Lewis, Yerushalmi, Baron, Meyer and Momigliano, the rarity of historical writings until the nineteenth century was due to the lukewarm attitude of Jews towards history. Other historians, like Funkenstein and Bonfil, reject

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Bonfil rejects the idea of resurgence of Jewish historical writings in his paper "How Golden was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography" *History and Theory*, Volume 27, Issue 4, Beiheft 27: *Essays in Jewish Historiography*. According to Bonfil, most of the sixteenth-century writings that were seen as historical by historians must not be considered historical due to their non-political or non-military subject matter and non-narrative literary style. Actually, Bonfil evaluates these writings according to the norms of the sixteenth century. From our contemporary scholarly vantage point, it is appropriate to consider all these studies as having historical essence. Indeed, in a later stage of his essay in a contradictory manner he states the same point; "Perhaps we should not altogether exclude from consideration works which a centuries' old tradition has seen as historical writings, and which, from a modern point of view, could in fact and with some justification be thus seen." p. 86. In a more recent essay, Bonfil described these works as "the swan song of medieval Jewish historiography." "Jewish Attitudes toward History and Historical Writing in Pre-Modern Times," *Jewish History* 11/1 (1997), p. 8.

this approach and stress that the poor harvest of historiographic writings must not be taken as an implication of the non-existence of historical awareness or historical consciousness among Jewish people. As stated by Rosenthal, according to these historians, “possession of a historical view of the world and the production of historical works are two different things.”<sup>21</sup>

The first group of historians asserts that beginning from the Second Temple period, a novel course of Jewish thought emerged and seemed to be dominant with its more conservative flavor reflected the growing influence of the newly established class of sages, scribes and rabbis. According to these historians, with the triumph of this new religious approach an indifference towards history came to be a general behavioral pattern in Judaism, which in turn became the cause for the scarcity of creativity in Jewish historiography. Yosef Yerushalmi points out the relative silence of rabbis about the events of their time, i.e., mundane history, and defines this lukewarm and indifferent attitude as “if not anti-historical, then at least ahistorical.”<sup>22</sup> Another historian, Bernard Lewis, points to the marked change of the Jewish interest in and attitude to history in the Second Temple period. According to him, the “feebleness of the medieval Jewish historian” and the “sparse and poor”<sup>23</sup> characteristics of medieval Jewish historiographic literature were consequences of the apparent “minimal rabbinical interest in historiography.”<sup>24</sup> For Salo Baron, another prominent writer associated with this approach, the best evidence portraying the “anti-historicism” dominating the Jewish thinking before the rise of the science of Judaism was embedded in the old Talmudic motto *Mai de-hava hava* (what was, was).<sup>25</sup> Michael

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<sup>21</sup> Franz Rosenthal, “The Influence of the Biblical Tradition on Muslim Historiography” in *Historians of the Middle East* ed. Bernard Lewis and P.M. Holt (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> Yerushalmi, p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> Lewis, pp. 22-23.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> Salo Baron, *History and Jewish Historians* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication of America, 1964), p.106.



Meyer also asserts that the rabbis paid little attention to historical events. According to him, they “immersed themselves in the sacred history of a closed period which they continually experienced anew.”<sup>26</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano introduces again the Jewish religion as the source for this indifference towards history and claims that the attachment of Jews to the Torah that had a meaning “definitely beyond history.... killed their interest in general historiography.”<sup>27</sup> For him, the practice of historiography was abandoned “almost entirely from the second to the sixteenth century and returned to historical study only under the impact of the Italian Renaissance.”<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, Bonfil has a different approach in interpreting the scarcity of Jewish historiography. According to him, throughout history there was an existence of Jewish historical consciousness, but it was not reflected in historiography.<sup>29</sup> Bonfil compares the post-biblical attitude towards history with the Christian stance of the same period and after taking into consideration their relative weights, claims that “medieval Jewish production [historical] did not really differ from its non-Jewish [Christian] counterpart which was equally sparse and loosely defined.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, Jewish history writing did not have a special, extraordinary character. Bonfil thinks that the actual divergence of Jewish historiography surfaced after the Renaissance, in the sixteenth century. As the concept of history changed in Christian societies, writers came to

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<sup>26</sup> Meyer, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford, 1990) p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> Bonfil asserts that in Talmudic times, before the shift of Western society from oral to a written tradition or Jewish intellectual activity from synagogue to yeshiva, “*midrash*” served as a means of oral transmission of the entire body of inherited culture including history. Bonfil believes that the term “*midrash*” must not be restricted to biblical inquiry but should be understood more broadly, as oral teaching of oral tradition. See his essay, “Can Medieval Story Telling Help Understanding Midrash? The Story of Paltiel: A Preliminary Study on History and Midrash.” in *The Midrashic Imagination. Jewish Exegesis, Thought and History* ed. Michael Fishbane (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 228-254.

<sup>30</sup> Bonfil, “How Golden was the Age of Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?” p. 90. See also his essay “Jewish Attitudes towards History and Historical Writing in Pre-Modern Times.” According to him, the Jewish attitude towards history in pre-modern times was “very much the same as the Christian one.” p. 33.

regard political and military affairs as their main subject matter and the narrative form came to be recognized as standard literary type for history writing. Therefore, according to him, it was not the religious factors, but the non-existence of the political realm in the Jewish world that accounts for the scarcity of Jewish historiography between Renaissance and the commencement of the *Wissenschaft* movement.

Funkenstein shares most of the views articulated by Bonfil. However, he asserts that the divergence of Christian and Jewish historical thinking occurred in the twelfth century rather than in the Renaissance, when Christian theologians and historians discovered the events at their time also as significant.<sup>31</sup> However, Funkenstein believes that throughout the ages the existence of Jewish historical awareness never ceased and he claims that this consciousness was not reflected in classical historical writings but instead showed itself in the domain of legal reasoning, i.e., *halakhic* discussions.<sup>32</sup>

### **2.1.2. Critical Assessment of Various Approaches**

There are several points about which Bonfil and Funkenstein appear to disregard. First of all, both historians took Christian Western (Latin) historiography as their reference point in their works. This is a misleading approach because before the seventeenth century there were significant intellectual centers of Jewish life in Muslim countries, first in Iraq under the Abbasid regime, then in Moorish Spain and thereafter in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Islamic intellectual

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<sup>31</sup> Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> On this point Funkenstein is completely in disagreement with Bonfil. For Bonfil, the *halakhic* discussions can not be called historiography both because of its subject matter and literary style.

<sup>33</sup> H.A.R. Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 218.

thinking had a great influence on shaping Jewish literary traditions, perhaps even more so than the Christian way of life. In Islamic culture, particularly in the Sunni Muslim tradition, the concept of history had tremendous importance.<sup>34</sup> Concomitantly, in the Middle Ages there was a relatively prolific tradition of historiography in Islamic culture and there were a significant number of well known Muslim historians.<sup>35</sup> According to Bernard Lewis, “the historical literature of medieval Islam is far greater in bulk, just in Arabic, than the literatures of medieval eastern and western Christendom in Latin, Greek and all the vernaculars combined.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Salo Baron also points out the “rise of an Arab historiography, culminating in the works of Al-Mas’udi and Al-Biruni,” and “the revival of the Greek historical literature in Byzantium”<sup>37</sup> in the ninth and tenth centuries which did not create a counter echo among the Jewish intellectuals. Therefore, to portray the different Jewish attitude toward historiography as being in accord with a supposedly common conception of the age, and to claim that “medieval Jewish production did not really differ from its non-Jewish counterpart which was equally sparse and loosely defined”<sup>38</sup> by considering only the Western-Christian attitude as “*non-Jewish counterpart*” reflects a limited perspective on the question.

On the other hand, different from most of the ancient cultures of antiquity (except the Greeks), Jews indeed had a strong old tradition of writing history. When nobody else was writing history, Jews were. Then, why was there no continuation?

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<sup>34</sup> Lewis, *History Remembered, Recovered, Invented*. p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> On this topic, see, for example, medieval Arabic, Persian and Turkish historiography in *Historians of the Middle East* ed. Bernard Lewis and P.M. Holt.

<sup>36</sup> Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans*. (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2004.), p. 406.

<sup>37</sup> Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*. Volume VI, Laws, Homilies, and the Bible. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) p. 199.

<sup>38</sup> Bonfil, “How Golden was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?” p. 86.

Then again, since the early medieval age, in spite of the oral tradition, there was a rich expression of Jewish creativity in different areas of written literature. Since Jews had shown their literary talents and intellectual production in all areas where they were involved, why did they not do so in history writing?

As Bonfil stated, a view widely shared by other historians, the lack of Jewish political activity and military deeds can be a reasonable cause of the scarcity of Jewish historiography. Especially after the Renaissance, Western historiography mostly took its inspiration from ongoing national political aspirations and military activities. However, what Bonfil and others did not take into consideration is that there was indeed the existence in Jewish history of such a political episode in the seventeenth century. As they suggested, this particular incident indeed stimulated a resurgent wave in the production of historiography. As a short survey can show, throughout history, in general, messianic hopes and movements induced a considerable level of political/nationalistic sentiments among the Jewish people.<sup>39</sup> According to some historians such as Scholem, Gibb and Bowen, the Sabbatian messianic movement in the second half of the seventeenth century with its wide geographic repercussions, as well had a political/nationalistic character, particularly among Turkish Jews.<sup>40</sup> The movement was not only a threat to the religious rabbinic establishment, but more importantly it also threatened the existing Ottoman authority. A letter written by Nathan of Gaza, circulated in the autumn of 1665, illustrates the agenda of the mission: “A year and a few months from today, he [Sabbatai] will take the dominion from the Turkish king without war, only by the power of the hymns and praises which

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<sup>39</sup> For example consider the messianic movements of Bar Kochba and David Reubeni. Even the relationship between John the Baptist and King Herod is reminiscent of such power conflict as reflected by Josephus.

<sup>40</sup> Gibb and Bowen, p. 241.

he shall utter.”<sup>41</sup> Indeed, one of the discourses of the movement was the proclamation of Sabbatai Sevi as “Sultans of Sultans” (*Padişahlar padişahı*). According to this idea, as “Suleiman, the son of David,” he would be the coming sultan in Constantinople.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, it is known that on the Shabbat of the 4<sup>th</sup> Tebet of 1665, in the Portuguese Synagogue of Smyrna, Sevi ordained 38 of his colleagues to be the “kings” of the 38 kingdoms that he himself defined (all of which had absurd territories, reflecting the poor state of his geographical knowledge).<sup>43</sup> In his letter of summer of 1665, Nathan of Gaza, the prophet of the Sabbatian messianic movement openly proclaimed to all Jewish communities of the Diaspora, the arrival of the messiah and how he would take the place of the Sultan. In this letter the flavor of political fervor is obvious:

My brethren of the house of Israel know that our Messiah was born in the city of Smyrna and his name is Sabbatai Sevi. Soon his kingdom will reveal itself. He will take away the royal crown from the king of Ishmael and set it upon his own head. The king of Ishmael will serve him as a Canaanite slave, for to him the kingdom belongs.<sup>44</sup>

Gershom Scholem, in his comprehensive study of Sabbatai Sevi, points out the political character of Sabbatian messianism:

The believers knew that the world of political and historical reality would soon perish as Sabbatai set out on his marvelous journey to take the crown from the sultan’s head. ... A national revival, nourished by the tradition and historical experience of many generations,

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<sup>41</sup> Gerbern S. Oegema, “Thomas Coenen’s “Ydele Verwachtinge der Joden” (Amsterdam, 1669) as an Important Source for the History of Sabbatai Şevi” in *Jewish Studies Between the Disciplines- Papers in Honor of Peter Schafer on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Klaus Herrmann, Margarete Schluter, Giuseppe Veltri (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 341.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Olson, “Jews in the Ottoman Empire and Their Role in Light of New Documents: Addenda and Revisions to Gibbs and Bowen” in *Imperial Meanderings and Republican By-Ways* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1996), p. 39.

<sup>43</sup> Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971) p. 312. The full list of these ordained kings and the description of their kingdom with their territory is shown in the document D, in Galante’s book on Sabbatai Sevi. Abraham Galante, *Histoire Des Juifs de Turquie* (Istanbul: Isis Yayimcilik, 1985) Vol. 8, p. 280.

<sup>44</sup> Israel Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, Vol V, p. 142. See also Document A-Nathan’s circulatory letter, in Abraham Galante, vol. 8, p. 278.

had, for the first time since the destruction of the Second Temple, aroused the entire Jewish people. ...the political aspects of traditional messianism and the expectation of Israel's liberation from the yoke of the gentiles and from degradation of exile were evidently taken for granted<sup>45</sup>

Interestingly, the Turkish archival sources which report the conversion of Sabbatai Sevi show *ihtilal*, the attempt to change the governing regime by revolution as the major motivation of the movement. Thus, the Porte perceived the movement in political terms as well:

Jewish people from all sides came together and in accordance with their superstitious beliefs, created seditious disturbances by declaring him [Sevi] their prophet and by disseminating the rumors that there would be a *revolution* ...<sup>46</sup>

Although it might be exaggerated, a poem written by a contemporary Armenian poet reflects Christian's perceptions as the third party, and interestingly illustrates the political atmosphere of Constantinople and the worry among the Christian population of the city: "In those days because of the arming of Jews with the intention to destroy other nations, a lot of people stayed in their homes in horror and with anxiety."<sup>47</sup> As will be discussed in a later part of this study, the religio-political essence of the Sabbatian movement did stimulate the production of a considerable number of historical works and a unique historiography reflecting this interesting episode in Jewish history. Interestingly, this new but short wave of writing history ignored by

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<sup>45</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi, The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 688, 692.

<sup>46</sup> "Ol canibe daha Yahudiler tecemmu' edüp (toplanıp) i'tikad-i batılları üzre bu bizim Peygamberimizdir deyü bais-i fesad (fesat sebebi) ve *ihtilal olacak* meretebe ahvalleri şayi olmakla ..." From records kept by Nişancı Abdi Pasha of September 1666. (Emphasis is mine. I.B.) Quoted from Abdurrahman Küçük, *Dönmeler Tarihi- History of Donmeh* (Istanbul: Rehber Yayınları, 1990) p. 342. According to Uriel Heyd, the non-existence of an official document on the Sabbatian movement was due to the loss of "Mühimme Defterleri" of the period between October 1665 and April 1678. See, Uriel Heyd "Sabetay Sevi ile İlgili Bir Osmanlı Belgesi – An Ottoman document on Sabbatai Sevi," translated by Cengiz Şişman, Istanbul, *Tarih ve Toplum*, July 2003, Vol.38, 223, p. 7. *Mühimme* registers in the Ottoman archives contain copies of the decrees decided upon in the Imperial Council and are the most important Ottoman sources for affairs concerning the non-Muslims and their organizations in the Ottoman Empire. See, Halil İnalcık, "Ottoman Archival Materials on Millets" in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire* ed. by Bernard Lewis and Benjamin Braude.

<sup>47</sup> Abraham Galante, *Histoire Des Juifs de Turquie* (Istanbul, Isis, 1989) vol. 8, pp. 256.

Bonfil and other historians and did not receive its deserved place in the Jewish historiographical analysis of Yerushalmi, Meyer and Lewis.

In conclusion, combining all different approaches, throughout the ages, the element of historical thinking and writing can be shown as never being absent in different literary genres and in the oral “*midrashic*” tradition. This fact in turn can be offered as a proof of the existence of a historical awareness among Jews to some degree. However, still, it is not possible to state that there was enough, observable and distinct interest in history writing among the Jewish people. Indeed, the non-existence of a persistent desire in writing history in a separate form can be noted not as simply a result of neglect but more appropriately as a conscious attitude to history. This reaction can be suggested as the outcome of an imposed religious world view that dulled the aptitude of Jewish minds in their interest in history.

A short survey may reveal several examples reflecting the conscious rejecting approach associated with the religious outlook towards history. The first one was the well-known attitude of Maimonides from the twelfth century: “the books common among Arabs about history, and the ruling of kings, and genealogies [...] a sheer waste of time.”<sup>48</sup> Another rabbi, Isaac b. Samuel from Dampierre, a Tosafist, illustrated a similar approach: “It seems that it is prohibited to look into those wars, written in vernacular ... Even during the weekdays, ... because this is like ‘sitting in a gathering of thoughtless people.’ ...”<sup>49</sup> In the sixteenth century Rabbi Joseph Caro was more definite in his clear-cut prohibition, using almost similar words “It is prohibited on the

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<sup>48</sup> Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 1, 1, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1:24.

<sup>49</sup> As quoted by Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusades* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 149-150.

Sabbath [to read] profane belletristic and erotic literature, such as the book of Immanuel as well as books of wars. They are also prohibited on weekdays because this is ‘sitting in a gathering of thoughtless people’ ...”<sup>50</sup> Is there a time to ponder on general history? Of course there is; “in the toilet.”<sup>51</sup> This rabbinic response can be seen as a hint of some Jewish interest in history but not one of a deep respect. Even in the mid-eighteenth century, just a few years before the *Haskalah*, for Jacob Emden, the well known rabbi of Altona, the time for a Jew to occupy himself with all kinds of secular sciences should be “only during the hour of twilight.”<sup>52</sup>

Thus, after seeing a conscious lukewarm approach towards history, we can reflect on the causes that lay behind this specific Jewish attitude.

## **2.2. Two Major Causes Behind the Jewish Attitude towards History**

A search for finding the reasons for such behavior may lead us to two factors, both of which emerged as a consequence of a number of important concurrent events with Jewish history in earlier centuries. In retrospect, these events appear to be extremely influential and they seem to have shaken the basic conceptions of Judaism by creating deep consecutive effects that can be seen in the following centuries. The first factor was the sealing of the Bible which is considered to have taken place around the second century BCE, in the Second Temple period.<sup>53</sup> The second

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<sup>50</sup> Joseph Caro, *Shulhan Arukh*, as quoted by Bonfil. “Jewish Attitude toward History and Historical Writing in Pre-Modern Times,” p. 12.

<sup>51</sup> Bonfil, “Jewish Attitude toward History and Historical Writing in Pre-Modern Times,” p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Emden, Jacob.”

<sup>53</sup> There are different ideas on the closing date of the Bible. In a broad sense the closing is accepted to have happened somewhere between the second century B.C.E. and first century C.E. See Halbertal, *The People of the*



can be shown as the emergence of new apocalyptic/messianic sentiments and a concomitant world view that was built up as a result of the gradual deterioration of Jewish political identity. A detailed analysis of these two causes will also be useful in evaluating the real meaning of the disguised ideas that can be seen in Jewish historiography on Ottoman and Turkish Jewry.

### 2.2.1. Sealing of the Bible

The sealing of the Bible was a momentous point in Judaism with significant consequences creating a considerable shift in the basic tenets of Judaism, by giving a new direction to the existing structure, as well as to the evolution of Judaism. The closing of Scripture was the end of the prophetic period; in other words it was the termination of the long Biblical and formative phase of the Judaism. The new era, i.e., the early stage of rabbinic Judaism that commenced was the period where not prophecy but first the canonization then the interpretation of Scripture became the main driving motifs in shaping the world of Judaism. Jews were transformed into members of text centered communities where canonization made “texts [that] exert influence in many realms: they are followed and obeyed, studied and read; they are imitated and revered; and [most importantly] they set a standard and bestow value.”<sup>54</sup>

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*Book*. The author claims (p. 16.) that the sealing of Scripture came with the cessation of the prophecy during the Second Temple Era, i.e., the late Persian or early Hellenistic period as early as 150 B.C. Halbertal introduces the finding of all the biblical books (excluding the book of Esther) among the Dead Sea Scrolls and the mention by Josephus of the existence of twenty-two books of the Bible as confirmations of his assertion. According to Yerushalmi, the sealing of the biblical canon occurred 250 years later by the rabbis at Yabneh, around the year 100 C.E. See Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, p. 15. Eric M. Meyers in the same essay vaguely gives two different dates in a controversial manner. The first one is the first century C.E. and the second one is before the end of the Second Temple period. Eric N. Meyers, “Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine” in *Cultures of the Jews*, ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), p.154 and 167.

<sup>54</sup> Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 4.

Concurrently, the sealing of the Bible brought forward a new elite, a class of sages and scribes who introduced themselves as not only the true custodians of Scripture and tradition of oral law, but more significantly as their interpreters. In the period before the destruction of the Temple, it was not the priests, who claimed both aristocratic and sacred lineage, but the Torah scholars, whose status was based on their deep knowledge and skill in interpreting the Scriptural texts, who emerged as the major authoritative/driving power in the new shaping of Judaism. This new approach likewise generated novel institutions. With its seventy one authoritative members, *Beit Din ha-Gadol* (Great Court) acted as a legislative court especially on oral law.<sup>55</sup> Synagogues and the tradition of praying and reading from the Pentateuch and Book of Prophets were also other important newly established features of the period.<sup>56</sup> According to these new Torah scholars' approach, and their theological ideology, wide-ranging rules and teachings of the Judaic belief system, i.e., *halakhah* had to control and dictate in a comprehensive manner, all actions, thoughts and creativity, in other words all aspects of the daily life of individuals and communities.

However, it was actually the interests of the newly emerging and powerfully growing class of sages and rabbis that was indeed shaping this new perspective. As Ann Swidler points out in a different context, once more “ideas, created to serve group interests, come to define the very world within which interests can be formulated.”<sup>57</sup> According to Max Weber, the Torah scholars who had a lower social position than the priests and philosophers had an important role in the “tremendous expansion of lower middle-class and pariah intellectualism,” and their influence among the middle-class urban Jews activated the “cult of fidelity to the law and study of the

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<sup>55</sup> Ellis Rivkin, “Pharisees” in *Judaism. A People and its History* ed. Robert M. Seltzer (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), p. 66.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* There is also a scholarly assertion which traces the emergence of synagogues back to Babylonian exile.

<sup>57</sup> Ann Swidler, “Foreword” in *The Sociology of Religion* by Max Weber (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), p. x.

sacred scriptures of the law.”<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Josephus, as a primary source, also tells us how these new *hakhamim* (sages) were influential with the masses so that “all prayers and sacred rites of divine worship were performed in accord with their exposition.”<sup>59</sup> Gospels and *Acts of the Apostles* are other sources which similarly illustrate the sages as a class of teachers enjoying an elevated and respected status by virtue of their legal expertise and their religious leadership.<sup>60</sup>

The rabbis introduced themselves as the real custodians and expert interpreters of the full original form of Judaic traditions. According to the emergent rabbinic interpretation which strengthened the status of rabbis and sages in their conflict against other types of priestly and political leadership, “the whole of the Law, not only the written (*torah she-biketah*), but also the larger part, the ‘oral’ (*torah she-be’al peh*), had already been revealed to Moses at Sinai,”<sup>61</sup> and they, the rabbis, were the only ones who possessed the true knowledge of the “oral” part and they, the rabbis, had bestowed upon themselves the divine duty of interpreting as well as transmitting the Law to the coming generations in every age. Actually, as stated by Neusner, what was presented as “objective and eternal truths” were nothing more than “statements of a particular viewpoint, serving a particular group and its interest.”<sup>62</sup>

The destruction of the Temple and the termination of the political entity in 70 CE did not bring with it much harm to the rabbinic class. In fact, the demolition of the Temple contributed to the decline of their arch rivals, the priests. With the confirmation and support of the Romans, rabbis

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<sup>58</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 128.

<sup>59</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.298, 18.14-15, quoted by Ellis Rivkin p. 65.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. On the other hand, According to some historians the extent of the influence of sages on the masses is an elusive matter. See Halbertal, *People of the Book* p.22. The author gave a number of references which oppose each other on the nature of the sages’ influence for the time period prior to 70 C.E.

<sup>61</sup> Yerushalmi, p. 19.

<sup>62</sup> Jacob Neusner, “Judaic Uses of History in Talmudic Times” in *Essays in Jewish Historiography* ed. by Ada Rapoport-Albert (University of South Florida, 1991), p. 19.

filled the vacuum and became “the primary legal and governmental authority.”<sup>63</sup> The leading role of the Torah scholar class crystallized first, around the third century, with the compilation of the Mishna,<sup>64</sup> and then later, between the fifth and seventh centuries, solidified once more by the redaction of the Babylonian and Jerusalem versions of the Talmud. The tractate of the Mishna, Pirke Avot, is the most illustrative narrative reflecting the roots of the legitimacy and the divine origin of the authority of the rabbinic class:

Moses received the Torah on Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the men of the great synagogue. The latter used to say three things: be patient in the administration of justice, rear many disciples, and make a fence around the Torah.”<sup>65</sup>

As pointed out by Bernard Lewis, “This puts the authority and the purpose of ‘the men of the great synagogue’ and their successors in a nutshell. Neither kings nor priests it will be noted, have any place in this sequence.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the presentation of the superior status of the sage in comparison to a king and priest can be seen in the Mishna explicitly.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, it was not the exilarch of Davidic lineage but rabbi Judah, the spiritual leader and compiler of the Mishna who was crowned by the nickname “the prince.” Certainly, in the coming centuries, the scholar of the

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<sup>63</sup> Eric M. Meyers, “Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine.” in *Cultures of Jews* ed. David Biale p. 162.

<sup>64</sup> Mention of 128 different sages in the Mishna with a high esteem and exaltation reflects how high the stance of rabbinic dignitaries was in the discourse of the Mishna (which was actually their own production). Their names are either associated with the laws, questions, enactments and preventive measures or mentioned because they played a part in an incident or because of a moral lesson that can be learned from them or because of a homiletic explanation they gave to a verse. See, Avraham Yaakov Finkel, “Appendix” in *Rambam, Maimonides’ Introduction to the Mishnah* (Scranton, PA: Yeshivath Beth Moshe, 1993), pp. 93-97.

<sup>65</sup> Ch.1, Mishna 1.

<sup>66</sup> Lewis, p. 20.

<sup>67</sup> According to a gloss in the *Tosefta* on the phrasing of Mishnaic tractate *Horayot* 2.8: “A Sage takes precedence over a king. [For if] a sage dies, we have none who is like him. [If] a king dies any Israelite is suitable to mount the throne.” Another tractate in the *Tosefta* on *Horayot* 3.5 shows the superiority of the sage over the priest; “If the mamzer [bastard, who according to Deuteronomy, can not marry an Israelite] was a disciple of a sage, and a high priest was an ignoramus, the mamzer who is a disciple of a sage takes precedence over a high priest who is an ignoramus.” *The Tosefta* trans. by Jacob Neusner (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1981), pp. 352-3.

Torah became a sacred person, even supernatural as reflected in the Talmud<sup>68</sup> and had the prestige, authority and superiority over the man of all other realms. He is seen as an embodiment of the heavenly model as is a Torah scroll itself.<sup>69</sup> A similar high esteem of the rabbinic scholar and his sanctified mission can be seen in Ibn Daud's story of the "Four Captives."<sup>70</sup> According to this legend, it was the four mythic rabbinic sages who initiated the four new centers of Jewish learning including Spain and it was with the Divine guidance that these centers succeeded the older institutions of rabbinic authority that had declined in Babylonia.<sup>71</sup>

In parallel to this newly emerging and flourishing rabbinical world view, history also began to be interpreted from a new theological vantage point. Interestingly, the Mishna, which was compiled about a hundred and thirty years after the destruction of the Temple, did not contain much information on either contemporary history or biblical history and its one-time events. However, in subsequent centuries, the Talmudic rabbis in a contrary manner fully focused on biblical history and were "deeply engaged by one-time events and their meaning."<sup>72</sup> According to this understanding, everything that needed to be learned of history already existed in Scripture. It was believed that Scripture contains not only the information of the past, but also concealed hints to read the present. Furthermore it also possessed the esoteric knowledge that could be used to predict the future. As interpreters of Scripture, the scholars were also seen as the only power that

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<sup>68</sup> Jacob Neusner, "Rabbinic Judaism in Late Antiquity" in *Judaism. A People and its History* ed. by Robert M. Seltzer (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), p. 74.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>70</sup> Abraham Ibn Daud, *The Book Of Tradition- Sefer ha-Qabbalah*. Ed. and translated by Gerson D. Cohen. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967), p. 63.

<sup>71</sup> Ivan G. Marcus, "History, Story and Collective Memory: Narrativity in early Ashkenazic Culture," *Prooftexts* 10 (1990):365-388. John Hopkins University Press. P. 381. On the other hand, according to Marcus, in early Ashkenazic tradition the focus was not on rabbinic elites but community. Thus, "Ashkenazic canvas is society itself, not rabbinic heroes." p. 380.

<sup>72</sup> Neusner, "Rabbinic Judaism in Late Antiquity" p. 76.

was able to reach the deep and esoteric meanings of the historical occurrences. Indeed, according to this school of thought, history was the realm of Divine Providence, and everything was believed to have occurred according to a divine plan where humans had no initiative and no ability to control or make any change.

In fact, the sages presented the political and military resistive efforts of the early rabbinic period as futile or even treacherous deeds, claiming that such conduct would bring harm to the existence and continuity of Judaism. Thus, political/military confrontations such as the long tiresome revolts against the Roman Empire, the defense of Jerusalem in 69-70 CE or the heroic resistance in the following years in Masada<sup>73</sup> either never appeared in rabbinic discourse as if they never happened or were reported in a critical manner. In the rare cases where a historic event like the Maccabean victory of 168 BCE was mentioned, the political and military aspects of the incident were consciously pushed into the background.<sup>74</sup> Instead, a religious meaning and importance was attributed to the event by deliberately putting forward theological interpretations for example the lasting of a small cruse of consecrated oil miraculously for eight days as in the case of the Maccabean revolt. The unsuccessful revolt of Simon Bar-Kochba<sup>75</sup> in 132-135 CE was another military episode where the political and military essence of the event were more than de-emphasized, even despised, as can be seen in Sherira Gaon's well known letter of 968 CE, "Then came the time of the Bethar [i.e., Bar Kochba revolt] and Bethar was destroyed and the rabbis

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<sup>73</sup> Our only source on Masada is Josephus' *The Jewish War*. See Bernard Lewis, pp. 5-9.

<sup>74</sup> On this issue see G. Alon, "Did the Jewish People and its Sages Cause the Hasmoneans to be Forgotten," in his *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World* (Jerusalem, The Magnes Press, 1977), pp. 1-17.

<sup>75</sup> According to Lewis, the reason that Bar-Kochba received any attention in rabbinic literature was due to the support of 'Aqiva, one of the greatest of the Rabbis, of late antiquity. Lewis, *History-Remembered, Recovered Invented*, p. 21.

were scattered in every direction.”<sup>76</sup> Indeed, according to the Talmud (Y. Taanit 4:5), it was Bar Kochba’s disregard of the authority of sages that led to the loss of the war.<sup>77</sup> This understanding continued to exist in the following centuries. For example, it was echoed in a similar manner in the twelfth century. Abraham Ibn Daud, a historian living in twelfth century Spain, illustrated the rebellious fighters of that time, Zealots, as the “lawless ones of Israel” who “turned out to be the deadliest enemy of the Jews, for it was they who drove the Romans to destroy the Temple”<sup>78</sup> and at the end caused the defiance of rabbinic discipline. Thus, under the imposed rabbinical historical perspective, not the communal, priestly, political or military leaders, but in contrast, the prominent members of this authoritative sage/rabbi class like Hillel, Shammai, Gamliel, Yohanan ben Zakkai, Simon ben Yohai, and Akiba appeared to be the only well-known figures of this early post-biblical age.<sup>79</sup>

In conclusion, with the sealing of Scripture, historical interpretation and assessment of events were confined inside the boundaries of theological perceptions and became gloomy in the time frame. Furthermore, the rabbis portrayed not only the priests, but also the political and military leaders as secondary, shady figures as if they had no importance or contribution to make in the historical turning points of Jewish existence. As an illustrative example, the only figure shown to have a major historic role in the continuation of Judaism and found to deserve praise was not a military hero but a sage. The action that was deemed worthwhile, to be honored, was not a heroic action, but rather the deceiving of the Romans by the hiding in a coffin of a Jewish sage. The

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<sup>76</sup> Sherira Gaon, “Letter of Sherira Gaon” in *Masterpieces of Hebrew Literature* ed. by Curt Leviant (New York, Ktav Publishing House, 1969), p. 274.

<sup>77</sup> Neusner, “Judaic Uses of History in Talmudic Times” p. 35.

<sup>78</sup> Gerson D. Cohen, “Introduction” in *A Critical Edition With a Translation and Notes of The Book Of Tradition (Sefer Ha-Qabbalah)* by Abraham Ibn Daud. (Philadelphia, The Jewish Society of America, 1967), p. xxxix.

<sup>79</sup> The mention of Bar- Kochba as the only military leader contains a “scant respect” and as stated before seems to have stemmed from Ribbi Akiba’s support. Lewis, *History-Remembered, Recovered Invented*, p. 21.

sage was the much-esteemed Yohanan ben Zakkai, who was recognized as the symbol of the renaissance of Judaism in Yabneh, hitherto an unimportant small city in the west of Palestine.

The history reflected through the prism of rabbinic world was an “orientative” history. Its major orientation was to sustain the well being, authority and the safety of the governing rabbinic system. In the further stages of the study we will witness some more examples of this “orientative” character as reflected in Ottoman Jewish historiography.

### **2.2.2. Emergence of Apocalyptic/Messianic Sentiments and Worldview**

The second factor that had an important role in the creation of indifference towards history can be discerned in the flourishing bitter sentiment among Jews that came out in response to the dismal and disastrous political developments that commenced with the end of the Hasmonean rule in 63 BCE. This turbulent period continued with the imposition of direct Roman rule of Judea in 6 CE, reached its climax with the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE, and finally ended with the brutal repression of the Bar Kochba rebellion in 135 CE. This historical set of events caused the gradual termination of the Jewish political entity, and finally led to the disappearance of the physical Jewish community to a large extent, in their home land, Palestine.

Throughout this period, with the deterioration of the political situation and the increase in Roman oppression, Jews who regarded themselves as God’s “chosen people,” began to feel deeply humiliated and insulted. This offended sentiment of the era can be seen interestingly in the works



of Philo of Alexandria and Josephus, both Jewish historians of the first century.<sup>80</sup> For example, Philo in his *Ad Gaium* reports an instance where the Roman procurator Pilate set up gilded shields in Herod's palace in the holy city, an act considered by Jews as an insult and a "violation of their native customs, which had hitherto been invariably preserved inviolate by kings and emperors alike."<sup>81</sup> Sharing his co-religionists' emotions, Philo described Pilate as "inflexible, stubborn, cruel and obstinate" and his Roman administration with "venality, violence, thefts, assaults, abusive behavior, frequent executions of untried prisoners, and endless savage ferocity."<sup>82</sup> Josephus mentions the same incident in *The Jewish War* and wrote how Jews "begged him [Pilate] to remove the *signa* from Jerusalem and to respect their ancient customs"<sup>83</sup> and how they were distressed "prone all around his house [Pilate's] and remained motionless for five days and nights."<sup>84</sup> In Josephus' different works it is possible to see narratives describing the deep grief of the people under the Roman yoke and the burst of rebellious emotions as guerilla-type actions by Zealot and Sicarii groups.

As pointed out by Weber, this period where "frustration and psychological tension grew in the face of the obvious inevitability of subjugation to a foreign power"<sup>85</sup> imposed a burden of severe depressive feelings, which in turn stimulated the build up of new psychic defensive means. The perplexed minds and suffering spirits which were hitherto nourished with the doctrine of "chosen people" were now in need of new beliefs and doctrines that could explain their relative position

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<sup>80</sup> Philo of Alexandria is much better known and referred as a prolific philosopher. Nevertheless, he was an active member of the Jewish community of Alexandria and he was in the embassy sent to Emperor Caligula at Rome, in the year 40 C.E., for the purpose of asking protection against the attack of the Alexandrian Greeks. His works *De Vita Contemplativa* and *Ad Gaium* are certainly historical in essence.

<sup>81</sup> Philonis Alexandrini, *Legato Ad Gaium*. Edited by E. Mary Smallwood. ( Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961), p. 128.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1960), p. 478.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Weber, p. 128.

among the nations of the earth, the impossibility of gaining any lasting political supremacy, as well as giving good news for an age to come, in which Judaism and religiousness should hold an undisputed possession. Isaiah's biblical expressions reflecting the emotions of an earlier age<sup>86</sup>, the Babylonian exile, now became one of the subliminal motifs of Jewish sentiment in the Roman period, even before the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. Here Israel being introduced once more as the chosen people of one God, "who has plainly declared His purpose ever since the beginning. Though it is now a despised race, trodden under foot, its glorious future is certain."<sup>87</sup>

Thus, from the growing uneasiness and distress, a new vision, i.e., an apocalyptic world view emerged with elaborated ramifications and flourished in the Jewish thinking by producing a new genre of works such as Enoch, Fourth Ezra, Syriac Baruch and some part of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The ancient prophecies like the one shown above of Isaiah, now, under this apocalyptic vision, transformed from its "clear and direct" original context to allegoric and enigmatic interpretations. One of the salient characteristics of these apocalyptic doctrines is the strong notion of Messiah as the harbinger of salvation. Indeed, the Messianic idea "always occurs in the closest connection with apocalypticism."<sup>88</sup> According to this expectation, the arrival of the Messiah would be God's definitive and ultimate intervention in history, and would bring a complete overthrow of the existing wicked order and would be a proclamation of the final triumph of Jewish people. The emergent apocalyptic tendency and especially this expectation of the Messiah influenced the dominant Pharisaic tradition and acted as a powerful force shaping

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<sup>86</sup> "But you, Israel, my servant, /.../ saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off";/do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God;/ .../Yes, all who are incensed against you shall be ashamed and disgraced;/ those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish." [Isaiah 41: 8-11].

<sup>87</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Apocalypse."

<sup>88</sup> Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, p. 4.

the historical consciousness of Jews. Historical awareness was aroused only when the Messianic age was seen as imminent. At those times history was conceived as being “dynamic, charged with meaning,” and relatively higher interest “not merely in Jewish history, but in that of nations of the world”<sup>89</sup> showed itself.

In the light of these messianic interpretations, history began to be conceived of as a continuous line moving toward a predetermined end, that being the arrival of the Messiah. According to this conception of history, everything would be occurring according to a pre-set Divine plan until the final end when the Messiah would appear. For humans it was futile to attempt in the meantime to change the course of events. As Scholem notes, Jewish life was “a life lived in deferment, in which nothing can be done definitively, nothing can be irrevocably accomplished.”<sup>90</sup> Therefore, for the troubled Jew, who was under the yoke of other nations, the trivial time interval between the destruction and redemption was the temporary, profane, repetitious, inscrutable past and present history of others, and certainly did not deserve any particular attention. The primary task which would ease the disturbed Jewish mind was “the fulfillment of written and oral law ... and where the future was concerned, trust, patience, and prayer.”<sup>91</sup>

After the destruction of the Second Temple and the suppression of the Bar Kochba revolt, Jews were dispersed once more to new centers, and they did not become a classical political entity again until the twentieth century. For centuries, Jewish identity continued to be predominantly a religious one. Thus, the inherited religion persisted as the focal point of Jewish existence, and its

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<sup>89</sup> Yerushalmi, “Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen” in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard Dov Cooperman (Cambridge, Mass., 1983) p. 482.

<sup>90</sup> Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, p. 35.

<sup>91</sup> Yerushalmi, *Zakhor. Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, p. 24.

interpretation by the Torah scholars determined in large part the everyday life of individuals and communities who continued to live under the rule of different political and religious systems. This, in turn, brought forward more powerfully the type of a strict, limited and religiously oriented perception of history and its reflection in accord with the rabbinic tradition. Throughout these centuries, the second element, the apocalyptic vision which nourished the mythic and messianic perception of history, also kept its full influence “exclusively under the conditions of the exile as a primary reality of Jewish life and Jewish history.”<sup>92</sup> This vision brought consolation and hope especially in dismal times when oppression and gloom increased. As a result, Jews with their religious confinements have been inclined to conceive history in terms of metahistorical mythic conceptions rather than to confront historical realities directly.

The two factors shaping this conception of history complemented each other and converged on one dogmatic perception of Judaism which continued to exist in the forthcoming centuries: The tragic, lachrymose, and unfolding of the history of Israel in exile until the Messiah’s arrival was indeed nothing more than the repercussions of the fathers’ sinful deeds in an earlier period. This approach that constituted one of the uniting features of Jews of diverse cultures and distinct time periods would assume that the events occurring in particular times in the exile contained no novelty and were nothing more than the atonement of old sins and the fulfillment of yet another milestone in a master Divine plan. According to this historical perception “What had happened long ago had determined what had occurred since, and even provided the fundamental explanations for what was still transpiring.”<sup>93</sup> In conclusion; for a Jew there was no use in being interested in an actual, mundane, profane history and the attempt to interpret it. Rather, there was

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<sup>92</sup> Scholem, p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

a conscious rejection of dealing with history since it would “neither possess wisdom nor yield profit for the body, but was merely a waste of time.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Moses Maimonides, as quoted by Salo Baron in “The Historical Outlook of Maimonides” in *History and Jewish Historians*. p. 111.

### 3. JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY ON THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

#### 3.1. The Ottoman Empire: A New Power on the World Stage<sup>95</sup>

The Ottoman Empire, which became one of the greatest powers of the Middle Ages, emerged initially on the stage of history as a small Turkish frontier principality in 1299 around Söğüt, a small settlement in the south-west part of Anatolia. When it was founded by Osman (Ottoman), the principality was one of the smallest and least powerful among the other Turkmen principalities that appeared in Asia Minor upon the demolition of the Anatolian Seljuk State. Nevertheless, it had an important feature. Geographically, it was just on the borders of the Byzantine Empire and it was the closest Muslim Turkmen entity to Byzantium's important cities including Nicosia (Iznik), Bursa and Constantinople.

In Islam the tradition of *gaza*, Holy War against non Muslims, had occupied an important place. Indeed, at its foundation stage the warriors of the small Ottoman principality devoted themselves to raiding Christian Byzantine lands, which was for them *Dar-al harb*,<sup>96</sup> a territory that must be conquered for the sake of Islam. As pointed out by Turkish historian İnalçık, “*Gaza* was a religious duty, inspiring every kind of enterprise and sacrifice.”<sup>97</sup> Initially, those raiders faced

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<sup>95</sup> For a broader survey for the period, see Halil İnalçık, *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age 1300-1600*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973).

<sup>96</sup> On concise information on Islamic concepts, see David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>97</sup> İnalçık, p. 6. See also Paul Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*, Royal Asiatic Society Monographs, Vol. XXIII, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Luzac and Co., 1963). Paul Wittek, writing in 1938, attributed a major role to the concept of holy war *gaza* in the success of early Ottoman expansion.

little resistance due to the involvement of the Byzantine emperors with the problems on their western borders especially in the Balkans. Their success, acquiring booty and new lands, as well as religious enthusiasm encouraged the participation of zealous warlords, *gazis* from all over Anatolia, united under the flag of Osman. The expansion of the small principality to the West at the expense of Byzantium gained a major impetus after the 1350s with the crossing of the Ottomans to the other side of Çanakkale Bosphorus. In retrospect, it can be seen that this entrance into Europe commenced a new era of more than three hundred years during which the borders of Ottoman territories expanded deep into the West, going inside Christian Europe as far as Vienna. Although the Anatolian Turkish principalities were subjugated around the middle of the fifteenth century, the real expansion of the Ottoman Empire to the East took place much later in the first decades of the sixteenth century. In 1516 Sultan Selim II captured Palestine. This event came to be viewed as being of major importance to the Jewish world. In 1517, Selim II conquered Egypt, the home of an important Jewish community. The Empire reached its zenith of strength and influence under the rule of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-66). The period between his death in 1566 and the end of the seventeenth century is accepted as the early stages of the decline of the Empire since the social, military and administrative structure of the Empire began to deteriorate to a considerable extent.

### **3.2. The Relationship of the Empire to its Non-Muslim Subjects**

A significant point deserving attention is the fact that in the first two hundred years of the Empire, the expansion occurred mostly towards the west. This means that the ruling class of

Muslims rapidly acquired subjects who were non-Muslims. Yet, even in Anatolia, in the cradle of the Empire, throughout all these centuries, a number of sizable Christian sects were to be found. Indeed, the empire flourished by keeping a policy of presenting itself as a protector of the Orthodox Church and its adherents. In accord with Sunni Islamic tradition, the Ottomans attracted newcomers to Islam by introducing favorable conditions for them, but they never forced their non-Muslim subjects to convert. “Islam guaranteed the lives and property of Christians and Jews, on the conditions of obedience and payment of a poll tax.”<sup>98</sup> For Ottomans, this tolerant policy was dictated by political, social and economic necessities, and it mirrored the pattern of the Arab-Muslim expansion between the seventh and tenth centuries. In general, whenever Islam was in a state of strength,<sup>99</sup> the existing conditions would bring with them a relaxation of the discriminatory regulations of Islam. Especially in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in a way similar to the Muslim conquerors of Syria of the seventh century, the Ottomans displayed a more liberal attitude toward their infidel subjects who constituted the majority of their empire.<sup>100</sup> The attitude began to alter in a substantial way with the incorporation of new Islamic lands in the East, i.e., Syria, Egypt and Hijaz and with the change of the demographic characteristics of the empire in the sixteenth century. From the early sixteenth century onwards, an influx of *Hanefi* scholars from these new territories further stiffened the orthodoxy of the Sultans and the

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<sup>98</sup> Inalcik, p. 7.

<sup>99</sup> Raymond P. Scheindlin, “Merchants and Intellectuals, Rabbis and Poets: Judeo-Arabic Culture in the Golden Age of the Islam.” in *Cultures of the Jews*, ed. David Biale, p. 318.

<sup>100</sup> Gibb and Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 209. Gibb and Bowen also point out the close connection of the first members of the house of Ottoman with *batini-sufi* order of Islam. This order inclined to place all religions on a level and had doctrines close to Christian flavor. According to the writers, an approach to a more orthodox Islamic style began to be effective in the first decades of the fifteenth century during the reign of Mehmet I with the suppression of the *batini* rising.



Ottoman government.<sup>101</sup> In the administrative scheme, each different religious group of the empire was seen as a distinct “*millet*” having religious, social and administrative autonomies.

### 3.2.1. Jewish Subjects of the Empire<sup>102</sup>

In the course of its foundation and expansion, the Ottoman state acquired a considerable number of Jewish communities. For example, in the very early years of the expansion, probably in 1324, the first encounter of Ottomans with a relatively large Jewish community occurred in Bursa when the Ottomans captured the city from Byzantium.<sup>103</sup> Again in 1361 when the Ottomans captured Adrianople, they found a well-established Jewish community in the city and according to Mois Franco they brought Jews from Bursa to teach Turkish to the Greek speaking members of the community.<sup>104</sup> However, we have very little information on Jewish communities in the first formative centuries of the Ottoman Empire. The meager knowledge of the period makes any specific research on the Ottoman policy towards Jewish existence futile since there are no elements that can help in describing the Ottoman reactions and treatment of the Jews.<sup>105</sup> Starting from the fourteenth century, with the rapid expansion of the Ottoman Empire and with the flood

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 192. Marc Baer in his Ph.D. dissertation interestingly illustrates the emergence of this new trend in the Ottoman court and in the ruling elites of the Empire. Marc Baer, “Honored by the Glory of Islam: The Ottoman State, Non-Muslims, and Conversion to Islam in Late Seventeenth-Century Istanbul and Rumelia” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, June 2001), pp. 99-150.

<sup>102</sup> Some of the various modern works which aim to illustrate the subject in broad sense include; Salo Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, Volume XVIII. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). Avigdor Levy, *The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1992). Stanford Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 1991). Salahi R. Sonyel, *Minorities and the Destruction of the Ottoman Empire* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Printing House, 1993).

<sup>103</sup> Mois Franco, *Les Histoire des Israelites de L'Empire Ottoman* (Paris: Centre d'études Don Isaac Abravanel, 1980) p. 28. This edition is a reprint of the book written in 1897. The source used by Franco was uncertain since he did not note his references.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>105</sup> Mark Alan Epstein, *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Freiburg: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1980), p. 17.

of Jewish emigration<sup>106</sup> into the Ottoman territory, especially after the waves of the Spanish expulsion of 1492, the Jewish population in the Empire estimated to be anywhere from 100,000 to 250,000. Together with the immigration in the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Jewish community, according to Shaw became not only the largest, but also the most prosperous one in existence in the world by the early seventeenth century.<sup>107</sup>

### 3.3. Historiography of the Period

In line with the general Jewish distance from history writing, the historiographic poverty continued to exist in the Ottoman times. In particular, there is no historical work before the sixteenth century reflecting Jewish existence in the lands that would be the heartland of the Ottoman Empire. Even after the sixteenth century, although there is an abundance of works in almost all branches of Jewish literature which reflects the intellectual and cultural richness of

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<sup>106</sup> Epstein gives a brief explanation of migration of Jews to Ottoman lands beginning from the Hungarian Jewish expulsion of 1376. Isaac Sarfati, a prominent rabbi of Ashkenazic German origin from Adrianople (Edirne) circulated his well-known letter in the first half of the fifteenth century urging Jews to come to Ottoman Lands. Contrary to the general view, Joseph Hacker in his Ph.D. dissertation produced in 1978 at Hebrew University, (*Jewish Society at Salonika and its Environs in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Century. A Chapter of History of Jewish Society in the Ottoman Empire*) interestingly claims a Jewish philosopher Mordehai ben Eliezer Comtino (1430-1480) as the author of the letter. See Stanford J. Shaw, note 10, p. 289. A critical scrutiny of the different versions of this famous letter of unknown date would be an interesting topic for further research.

<sup>107</sup> Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), p. 36. Among the works written on the Ottoman Jewry there was no serious estimation showing the total Jewish population in the Empire. Hence, Shaw's assertion of Ottoman Jewry as the largest in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries needs a cautious approach. According to Moshe Rosman, from around 1500 the Commonwealth (partitions of Poland by its neighbors Russia, Prussia and Austria), was home to the largest Jewish settlement in the world. Moshe Rosman, "Innovative Tradition: Jewish Culture in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth." *Culture of the Jews* ed. David Biale. p. 519. Katz also introduces the population of Ashkenazic Jews in Poland and Lithuania as approximately half million in the fourth decade of the seventeenth century. Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), p. 10.

the Ottoman Jewish thought<sup>108</sup>, in the realm of historiography, Ottoman Jews produced very little both on their own history and on the history of the Empire.<sup>109</sup>

However, the sixteenth century is unique in terms of Jewish historiography in the Ottoman Empire. Beginning from the second decade of the century, there was a “resurgence of Jewish historiography” on the Turks and Jewish communities living in the Ottoman Empire which is incomparable to the earlier or later centuries. This fact is exactly parallel with the general pattern of Jewish historiography in the Renaissance-Baroque period, particularly in Italy, where there was a relatively rich but short period of Jewish creativity in the realm of historical writing. The impact of the Renaissance<sup>110</sup> and more significantly, the arousal of the high emotional sentiments due to the catastrophe that struck the Jewish communities of Spain and Portugal can be suggested as the major causes for this relatively productive period. In the Ottoman case, to be the witness and victim of a traumatic and sudden<sup>111</sup> culturally, socially and economically destructive calamity and the endeavor to find a profound meaning to the agony appears to be the main accounting for such proliferation of historical inquiry. Indeed, except for Elijah Capsali who learned the sufferings occasioned by the expulsion from the exiles whom he helped during their stay in the Aegean island of Crete, almost all other historians were themselves exiles of Spain, first-hand witnesses of the expulsion.

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<sup>108</sup> Leah Bornstein- Makovetsky’s introduces a wide variety of Ottoman Jewish literary creations in her study. “Structure, Organisation and Spiritual Life of the Sephardi Communities in the Ottoman Empire from the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries.” in *The Sephardi Heritage Vol. II. The Western Sephardim* ed. Richard Barnett and Walter Schwab. (Stratford: Gibraltar Books Ltd., 1989)

<sup>109</sup> Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 114.

<sup>110</sup> According to Bonfil, the impact of Renaissance and new understanding in historiography was the main drive in the emergence of Jewish historical writing of the sixteenth century. Bonfil, “Jewish Attitudes Toward History and Historical Writing in Pre-Modern Times” p. 17., “How Golden Was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?” pp. 88-96.

<sup>111</sup> The time limit given to Spanish Jews who were citizens of the land for long centuries was just four months. According to the edict of Expulsion of March 31, 1492, proclaimed by Ferdinand and Isabelle, the Jews who were not willing to convert must leave Spain before the end of July of the same year.

Several motivations were operative in the emergence and flourishing of historical writings stimulated by the misfortunes and sufferings of the Spanish and Portuguese exiles. First, these writers were filled with a strong desire to write down the tragic events for future generations, in order to keep the memory of the heroic people, who with much agony, persisted in carrying on their faith. This same mood motivated the emergence of the historical, dirge-like, writings after the persecutions following the first crusade of 1096. Secondly, a number of these works aimed to calm the sentiments of the victims of expulsion by illustrating how Jewish existence had still continued in spite of the many persecutions that had previously occurred in Jewish history. As an example, these were the intentions of Jacob Tam ben David ibn Yahya when he published a new version of the Jewish historical classic *Yosippon* in 1510 with an introduction. His work was the first historical book printed in Constantinople. As he stated in the introduction, the “bestial hatred and cruel, barbarous massacre” was not a new incident and the distress of the Jewish people would have an end if they avoid being sinful;

Deathly terror seized the exiled people. Cold despair filled their hearts, for the people do not remember what happened to them in former times. They do not know the sufferings and afflictions they endured in earlier generations, ... And this ignorance is an immense loss, especially in our grievous day, for great would be the consolation of downcast spirits if they knew that their fathers suffered much only because they departed from God’s way, and that as soon as they directed their hearts to God He manifested His great wonders and redeemed them from suffering and distress with His mighty hand.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> As quoted in Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature* Volume V, ed. and translated by Bernard Martin (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1974), p. 20.

Nevertheless, all these motivations had minor and secondary roles besides the most important impulse which was of a messianic-mystical character.<sup>113</sup> In the depressing moments of the post-expulsion, the introduction of the idea that *ki hine yamim ba'im* – “for behold the days approach” i.e., that the messianic age, ultimate redemption and divine justice was imminent, served as a means of consolation to distressed minds. Indeed, the messianic longings which surfaced in every disastrous episode of Jewish history gained momentum after the catastrophic effect of expulsion, and once more messianic-mystical moods began to take a dominant place not only in historiography but in all the different realms of literary creativity.<sup>114</sup>

An appropriate starting point in our study will be to scrutinize the historians of the period (the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) and their works and analyze the driving ideas behind their historical narratives. This approach will also help us to see the surge of history writing particularly in the first part of this period. In this study, we will especially focus on the six historians who had greater influence on the next generation of historians and whose works were better known. These historians can be seen as reflecting the typical Jewish mind set of the age and approach to the Ottoman Empire and its Jewry just after the Spanish expulsion.

Among the first historians<sup>115</sup> of the sixteenth century, two of them, Elijah Capsali from Crete and Joseph Ha-Kohen from Italy, have a special significance in our study since both of them wrote books particularly related to the Ottoman Turks and to Jews living in the Ottoman lands. As a Portuguese Marrano historian, Samuel Usque has an important place in sixteenth-century Jewish

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<sup>113</sup> Yerushalmi is very definitive on this view. According to him “when Jews express a sudden and keen interest in the conflict of nations ...the interest is primarily messianic.” Yerushalmi, “Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen.” p. 467.

<sup>114</sup> Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, Volume V, p. 21.

<sup>115</sup> See Table I at the end of the chapter.

historiography. His historical work reflected the typical characteristics of the intellectual mindset of his age and gave an esoteric significance to the Ottoman Empire. Solomon ibn Verga, a converso, who returned to his original faith, also wrote two books having historical content after he left Portugal. His first book, supplemented and published by his son Jacob in Edirne, contains some unique descriptions of Ottoman Jewry. Joseph ben Isaac Sambari, who lived in Egypt, is yet another historian of the late seventeenth century. Sambari especially provided information on the early periods of the Ottoman Empire. David Conforte was an important intellectual from Egypt in the same century; however he approached history from another perspective. He concentrated on the bibliographical information of important rabbis and spiritual leaders of his age.

As can be seen from Table I, among the historians of the period, Moise Almosnino was the only one who was born and lived in one of the main centers of the Empire, i.e., Salonika, a city that had a large Jewish population, vivid intellectual activity and was close to the other Jewish cultural centers. Conforte and Sambari were the other two historians who were born in the Empire. However, they wrote their works in Egypt, a location peripheral to the main cultural centers of the Empire. While there were some interesting points in their works, in general these three historians occupy a position of secondary importance in the literature due to the content and the form they offer. The other historians in this survey were either non-Ottoman subjects like Capsali, Ha-Kohen, Usque, Solomon ibn Verga and Samuel Algazi who never saw the Ottoman Empire<sup>116</sup> or immigrant exiles from Spain such as Samuel Sulam, Tam ibn Yahya, Isaac Akrish

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<sup>116</sup> Except Usque who had traveled in the Ottoman Empire.

ben Abraham<sup>117</sup>, Judah Vega and Joseph ibn Verga. The exile group, educated in Spain (except Akrish), appeared not to be innovative in their new land and did not write original histories by themselves, but rather published or edited historical works. The non-Ottoman historians are the most important group among these historians. Their works on the Ottoman Empire and its Jewry contain original content and form. These works gained wide popularity and were re-published several times throughout the next centuries. These historians also had considerable influence on historians of the next generation. However, except for Usque, who had visited some important centers of the Empire including Palestine, the other historians were never in the Ottoman Empire and wrote their histories from a distance, mostly basing their accounts on hearsay and more importantly under the influence of mythical and messianic elements.

The paucity of native Ottoman Jewish historians especially in highly Jewish populated and culturally developed centers like Salonika and Constantinople is noteworthy. It appears that in these centers the prevalent forms of intellectual and literary activity centered on Biblical verses and Rabbinic texts leaving little or even no place to the writing of history. Thus, intellectual creations of scholars and educated circles were “mainly exegetical and homiletical in nature”<sup>118</sup> in accordance with the characteristics of a typical rabbinic community. The lack of historical interest prevailed also in a few intellectually more diverse small groups where there was also the

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<sup>117</sup> There are contradicting information about Akrish’s birth date and birth place. According to Graetz, Akrish was born in 1489, in Spain. See Graetz, Vol. IV, p. 386. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* verifies this information exactly. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Akrish, Isaac b. Abraham.” However, according to another encyclopedia, he was born in 1530, most probably in Salonica. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CD-ROM Edition, s.v. “Akrish, Isaac ben Abraham”. On the other hand, Goldman states that, Akrish lived about 10 years in Cairo between 1543 and 1553, in Rabbi David Ibn Zimra’s house, where according to Akrish he was appointed to be “the teacher of his [Ibn Zimra’s] children and grandchildren, of his sons of his sons and daughters.” See, Israel M. Goldman, *The Life and Times of Rabbi David Ibn Abi Zimra*. (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1970), p. 3&7. One might doubt on *Encyclopedia Judaica*’s data since it seems Akrish to be too young in those dates to be the teacher of grand children of Ibn Zimra.

<sup>118</sup> Hacker, “The Intellectual Activity of the Jews of The Ottoman Empire During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries” in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century* eds. Isadore Twersky and Bernard Septimus (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 111.

study of philosophy and science. Indeed, in the education of a young rabbi which included study of diverse subjects, the study of history was neglected. For example, R. Solomon Le-Bet Ha-Levi in sixteenth-century Salonika wrote about the long training process of a candidate in becoming a scholar. As can be seen there is no place of learning of history in this program of study:

...And from the order of his words we learn by a hint that first a person should begin to learn Torah in order to achieve perfection in behavior, and so, when he behaves imperfectly we rule that he does not behave according to Torah. Afterwards he should learn logic in order to avoid making mistakes and misinterpreting omens and analogies, and so, if he errs, we say that he has acquired no wisdom. After this he should learn physics to be able to comprehend metaphysics. Thus, if he shows no comprehension, we may conclude that he has no knowledge, because through physics the existence of the First Cause can be demonstrated, as anybody who has studied the eighth book of the Physics knows. Afterwards he should devote himself to providing the necessities of his life, and lastly, he must return to study Torah so as to understand it with all its secrets and so as to observe its commandments with their true intent ...<sup>119</sup>

### **3.3.1. Six Major Historians**

#### **3.3.1.1. Elijah Capsali**

Elijah Capsali was a rabbi and a historian who was born in 1485 and spent all his life in Candia, Crete which had been under Venetian rule since the thirteenth century. He was the heir of two famous families of the island, Delmedigos and Capsalis, both of whom were active as spiritual leaders of the island. His great-uncle, Moshe Capsali, was one of the prominent rabbis of

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<sup>119</sup> R. Solomon Le –Bet Ha-Levi, *Lev Avot*, folio 59a. In another writing Ha-Levi describes his own training in becoming a scholar: "...The words of the sages ... were too sublime for me... to substantiate them... sometimes according to the rules of language and at other times according to their roots in Mishnah and Talmud; sometimes on the basis of geometric and arithmetical axioms; sometimes on the basis of physics and astronomy, and occasionally in accordance with ethical propositions, and at other times on the basis of esoteric traditions.... Thus, ever since I determined to acquire a bit of these sublime fields of wisdom, and studied at fixed times each of them with excellent teachers, and learned some of the languages of the nations in order to acquire the profound explanations and important texts to be found in their worthy books, I relied first on the study of Torah and Talmud and codes, and devoted myself to study in the important *yeshivot* of our great city ...." *Lehem Shelomoh*(Salonika, 1597), folio 2a. As translated and quoted by Joseph Hacker, "The Intellectual Activity of the Jews of The Ottoman Empire During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries" p. 124-125.



Constantinople and became the first Chief Rabbi in the wake of the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmet II. It can be assumed that using his family links and relations and being the head of the Jewish community in Crete, Elijah Capsali had access to some original information on the Jews of his age. Indeed, according to some documents he was in active communication with eminent contemporaries like Jacob Berab, Joseph Caro<sup>120</sup> and David ibn Abi Zimra.<sup>121</sup> He received his rabbinical education in Padua, which was then one of the well-known centers of Talmudic scholarship.<sup>122</sup> He wrote two lengthy history books: the first is *Sippurey Venezia* (1517), which is a history of Venice. His second book, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, which especially interests us, was written during the plague of 1523 as a survey of the history of the Ottoman Empire down to his day with special reference to and interest in the Ottoman Jews. Capsali is accepted as one of the few Renaissance – Baroque period historians who had a relatively modern approach to the writing of history in terms of the genre and the content of his studies, as well as his sober concern for the order, accuracy and the use of both Jewish and gentile sources.<sup>123</sup> In his introduction to *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* (The Minor Order of Elijah) we can see his mission to reflect the truth: “I shall not write anything that is vague and sealed until its absolute verification shall become clear to me.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Cecil Roth, *Encyclopedia Judaica* –CD-ROM Edition., s.v. “Elijah Capsali.”

<sup>121</sup> Goldman, p. 9. Charles Berlin in his dissertation thesis gives a wide list of leading rabbis in Egypt, Palestine and Constantinople whom Capsali had correspondence. Berlin, “Elijah Capsali’s Seder Eliyahu Zuta” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, September 1962), pp. 42-43.

<sup>122</sup> Elliott Horowitz in a colorful style conveys young Capsali’s account of the funeral of Rabbi Judah Minz who died in 1509, one week after Capsali’s arrival to Padua hoping to study at Minz’s renowned yeshiva. Elliot Horowitz, “Families and Fortunes: The Jews of Early Modern Italy” in *Cultures of Jews*. pp. 573-575.

<sup>123</sup> Bonfil, “How Golden was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?” in *Essays in Jewish Historiography*, History and Theory, Beiheft 27 (1998), p. 83.

<sup>124</sup> *Seder*, 6. According to Bonfil, Capsali’s attitude reflects the high esteem accorded to history and the presentation of the historian’s craft as a very noble one.

Capsali's books have not been published<sup>125</sup>, and thus his work reached only a very limited audience. In his studies, the deeds of the three conqueror sultans, Mehmet II, Selim and Suleiman are strongly emphasized. The conquest of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmet II, the state of the Jewish communities of Constantinople during and after the conquest, and their relationship with the victorious Turkish sultan, is presented in some detail. The reader is left with the impression that Mehmet II liberated the Jews of Byzantium with the conquest of Constantinople, and that they had a peaceful, harmonious life during his reign. The book also contains accounts of the Romaniot rabbis Moshe Capsali and Eliyah Mizrahi, showing how the sultans respected them. It also describes the political and military advances in Ottoman history in chronological order, including for example the civil war between Beyazit II and Cem. The expulsion of Jews from Spain during Sultan Beyazit II's reign is described at length with details. In his chronicle, Capsali explains how he learned the tragic account of the expulsion directly from the exiles during their passage through Crete:

And the stories of Spain ... there were always poor [wayfarers] in our home, for the exiles took shade under the beams of our roof. And lo, the charming and exiled Spaniards would often pass us by, and we set out for them a bed and a table and a chair and a lamp, and

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<sup>125</sup> One might assume that with its pro-Ottoman Empire and anti-Christian approach, the book had no chance to be printed in Venice or in any printing center in the West due to the existing political and religious climate of the age. From political point of view, throughout the sixteenth century the Ottoman Empire was in war both in land and sea with Venice and Christian world. On the other hand, in the same century, there was a distrustful approach toward Hebrew books, with accusations that they might have anti-Christian content. Indeed, the first papal edit calling for the burning of the Talmud proclaimed in 1553, and as Bonfil stated in the same years, "many Italian Catholics had more than one occasion to warm themselves at a "good fire" kindled with Hebrew books." See, Bonfil, "Some Reflections on the Place of Azariah de Rossi's *Meor Enayim* in the Cultural Milieu of Italian Renaissance Jewry," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century* ed. Bernard Cooperman (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 34. Isaac Akrish in his testimony in the preface to Efodi's "letter" also mentions how his library was confiscated by the Venetian Government "in the year of the burning of the Talmud." See, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Akrish, Isaac b. Abraham." The copies of the *Seder* in original manuscript are existent in the collections of the Bodleian Library and the British Library. In 1869, Venetian rabbi Moses Lattes published excerpts from *Seder* under the title *Likkutim Shonim mi-Sefer de-Vei Eliyahu*. See, *Encyclopedia Judaica –CD-ROM Edition*, s.v., "Capsali, Elijah." and *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v., "Moses Lattes."

whenever they came to us they would turn aside thither, and they told me everything about the great and terrible exile from Spain.<sup>126</sup>

We note that the *Seder* is the source of the statement attributed to Beyazit II<sup>127</sup> which reveals his tolerant, welcoming and rational attitude towards the new immigrants: “I don’t consider this king [the Catholic monarch Ferdinand], who impoverishes his own country and enriches ours, as wise.”<sup>128</sup> Sultan Selim also has a prominent place in Capsali’s book as the conqueror of Palestine and Egypt. The desperate situation of Jews in Egypt under the reign of the Mamluk sultan Tuman Bey is described in a dramatic and detailed style.<sup>129</sup> The conquest of Egypt by Sultan Selim and the salvation of the Jews from a possible massacre are presented in the book as a miraculous happy end. Again in *Seder*, Selim’s favorable relationship with the Jews is given with anecdotes in a rich manner and the sultan was presented as a highly righteous, compassionate almost divine figure.

Throughout *Seder*, Capsali shows his broad knowledge and his deep interest in historical events; but actually he has a concealed purpose underneath this outer layer. His book must not be viewed simply as a historical narrative. Indeed, in the sixteenth century, to write a book just for historical purposes would not be in accord with the understanding and religious traditions of the era. According to Charles Berlin, Capsali’s purpose was to show the Ottoman Turks as the divine instrument of redemption and the “associated history down to Capsali’s own time was, in effect,

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<sup>126</sup> *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, taken from Bonfil p. 19. It is important to note that in the expulsion year, Capsali was still a child just seven years old. Although there must have been exiled Jews who passed through Crete in subsequent years, it is more appropriate to think Capsali received a lot of details of this event from his father and great uncle in Istanbul (Moses Capsali) who were deeply involved in helping the immigrants in Crete and in the Empire.

<sup>127</sup> This statement attributed to Beyazit II was widely used in 1992 during the celebrations of quincennial anniversary of the Jewish immigration to the Ottoman Empire. Epstein points out that the attribution of the statement to Beyazit II is incorrect. Epstein, p. 60.

<sup>128</sup> Capsali, quoted by Bonfil, p. 10.

<sup>129</sup> For broader detail see Aryeh Shmuelevitz’s essay on this topic. Aryeh Shmuelevitz, “The Jews in Cairo at the Time of the Ottoman Conquest: The Account of Capsali,” in *Ottoman History and Society* p. 37-42.

the acting out of the messianic drama.”<sup>130</sup> The new phase in the *world* order would be accomplished by the divine power of the Ottoman-Turks and their glorious victory against Christendom. With references and quotations from the sacred books like the book of Daniel, the three Ottoman Sultans, Mehmet II, Selim and Suleiman, were presented as messianic figures and all their deeds were shown as acts of a divine plan, which in its ultimate end would lead Jews to a messianic era. That is also the reason why Capsali either found excuses or omitted to write about the cruel, unjust acts of these sultans. He was particularly careful not to create any damage to their reputation and messianic image. Thus, Capsali’s writing of the history of gentiles does not originate from his interest in the historical events or his desire to reflect the historical facts to succeeding generations, but is driven by his aspiration, although in a disguised and concealed style, to convey his message. For Capsali only matters of the messianic message were of interest. Indeed, he was assigned this mission by a heavenly call:

And when I saw this great vision, all my strength ebbed away and a great terror fell upon me so that I ran away and hid. And I raised my eyes and I saw a man dressed in linen, and touching me he strengthened me saying: “Fear not, be at peace, strengthen thyself and be strong ... Knowest thou why I came unto thee, get thee up, why does thou lie upon thy face, take unto thee a writer’s inkhorn to thy side, and write with a man’s pen the history of the days and their events, be strong and of good courage, neither be thou dismayed for the Lord thy God is with thee wheresoever thou goest.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Charles Berlin, “A Sixteenth-Century Hebrew Chronicle of the Ottoman Empire: The Seder Eliyahu Zuta of Elijah Capsali and its Message” in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography and Literature in Honor of I.E. Kiev* ed. Charles Berlin (New York: Harvard Publications, 1971), pp. 21-44.

<sup>131</sup> Capsali, Seder, as quoted by Robert Bonfil, “Jewish Attitudes Toward History and Historical Writing in Pre-Modern Times,” p. 18. Bonfil introduces this passage as evidence showing the “assignment of history to the realm of prophecy.” However, it is also possible to interpret Capsali’s vision as his pretext for writing history. It is a common fact that, since the early ages dreams and visions were often used in explaining and adorning deeds as if they were acts of divine will. On the other hand, Joseph ha-Kohen also mentions his dream in his sober historical work and claims that it is the Lord who “hath spoken” in his dream. Here Yerushalmi identifies him as the biblical-dream interpreter Joseph. Yerushalmi, “Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen.” p. 475. Adam Shear presents another example from the sixteenth century showing how dreams and being called by messengers, as agents of “divinely inspiration or request” can be used “for purpose of legitimating” of writing a non-halakhic work. Indeed, in his essay, Judah Moscato, as an author needed to show that “he has the authority” to write a commentary on *Kuzari*, (a book even having some historical essence.) See, Adam Shear, “Judah Moscato’s Scholarly Self-Image and the

It is possible to say that Capsali's approach was indeed concurrent with that of the general for medieval Jewish thought about history. As a general rule, the Renaissance-Baroque Jewish historians' main task was not historical but religious.

### 3.3.1.2. Joseph ha-Kohen

Another sixteenth century historian who wrote the history of Ottoman Turks in a broad sense is Joseph-ha Kohen. Coming from a family associated with the Spanish exiles, he was frequently obliged to move from city to city in Renaissance Italy due to the recurrent expulsions of the age. He received a comprehensive education and became a highly esteemed physician. His first historical work, *Divrey ha-Yamim le-Malkhei Zerfat u-le Malkhei Beit Ottoman ha-Togar*, was a history of the kings of France and Ottoman Turkish sultans. In the preface, contrary to contemporary writers of history, Joseph ha-Kohen introduced himself as a historian without offering any apology, and presented himself as the second most important historian in Jewish history after Josephus: "All the gate of my people knows that no author has arisen in Israel like Yosippon the priest. ... The writers of chroniclers ceased, they ceased, until I, Joseph, did arise."<sup>132</sup> Indeed, Joseph was a pioneer in his realm since he was a careful and methodical researcher who made notes, kept registers, and conducted a wide correspondence.<sup>133</sup> His historical works reached their final state over a long time span due to his continuous addition of

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Question of Jewish Humanism." in *Cultural Intermediaries* ed. David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 149-156.

<sup>132</sup> Yerushalmi, "Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen." p. 462. Yerushalmi in his book points out this specific saying of ha-Kohen as an evidence showing in the sixteenth century the consciousness to write history appeared as something new for Jews, a new beginning after a long interruption. *Zakhor. Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. p. 61.

<sup>133</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Joseph ha-Kohen."

information on ongoing events of his age, which he gathered from all possible sources. *Divrey ha-Yamim* or *The History of the Kings of France and of the Ottoman Turkish Sultans* is indeed the only historical work of the sixteenth century written by a Jew, the content of which can be classified as gentile history rather than Jewish history.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, Yerushalmi introduces *Divrey* as the only work of the period that focuses primarily on non-Jewish material.<sup>135</sup> The book consists of two parts. It seems Part I was at first intended to be the entire book. Part II which contains the description of events of his own time was added subsequently at a later date for the purpose of an update. In the book, the history of the Ottoman Turks is not described as much as is French history and the Crusades. Most of the sources of information on the Ottoman Empire rely on Joseph-ha Kohen's personal correspondence (for example with his brother Meir living in Salonika) and on the book of Paolo Giovio, *Comentario de le cose de' Turchi*, published in 1531. Like Capsali's *Seder*, Joseph-ha Kohen's work reflects a novel approach to history due to its genre, using gentile sources and having a proper chronological order. The work has a sober, earnest, systematic character and reflects the skill and wide historical knowledge of its author. From a simpler point of view, *Divrey* appears as a history of others, i.e. Ottoman-Turks, crusaders and the French people, as well as the political conflicts and wars of these powers. On the other hand, the work has a symbolic layering and should be analyzed using the approach of "anthropological history"<sup>136</sup> because it contains a concealed main theme. The Turks, who represent Asia and Islam, are viewed as one component of the conflict, and the French, who

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<sup>134</sup> Bonfil, "How Golden was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?" p. 94.

<sup>135</sup> Yerushalmi, "Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen." p. 462.

<sup>136</sup> Marcus, "History, Story and Collective Memory: Narrativity in Early Ashkenazic Culture" *Prooftexts* 2 (1982). According to Marcus, in an "anthropological" analysis of history the historian approaches the historical text with an interpretative strategy by paying special attention to the context of the narrative. In this approach the historian assumes that the narrative as written contains "an actual historical extra-textual reality" that is embedded in "a set of symbolic expressions of experiences or events that can be known only as mediated through the narrative."

represent Europe and Christendom, as the other.<sup>137</sup> The conflict between these two components resembles the “wars of Gog and Magog”, - one of the traditional eschatological themes of apocalyptic literature.<sup>138</sup> According to this apocalyptic belief, the different nations of the world will be reduced to two powers, and after the final conflict of these two powers the messianic era will be ushered in.<sup>139</sup>

Joseph ha-Kohen’s second work of a historical character, *Emek ha Bakha* (Valley of Tears), was much more popular and published many times during the medieval age. Ha-Kohen in this work was highly influenced by his contemporary Samuel Usque. In *Emek ha Bakha*, ha-Kohen depicts the dramatic episodes of Jewish history from “the day of Judah’s exile from its land” in lachrymose style (as the name of the book explains) with emphasis on the sufferings and the sorrows of the Jews, even in terms of paying less attention to historic aspects.<sup>140</sup> The last part of the book which was added later bringing it up to 1575 contains the story of the rise of Joseph Nasi in Turkey and his attempt to rebuild a Judaic center in Tiberias, in Palestine.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Yerushalmi, “Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen” p. 466.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 467.

<sup>139</sup> Martin Jacobs rejects Yerushalmi’s approach of attributing an eschatological or messianic meaning to Joseph ha-Kohen’s *Divrey*. Jacob also claims that in *Divrey*, “history is not shaped by the will of men but through heavenly guidance,” but different than Yerushalmi presents Ottomans “as a means of God to chastise Christianity ... *not in a far-off apocalyptic future but already in history*.” Martin Jacobs, “Joseph ha-Kohen, Paolo Giovio, and Sixteenth Century Historiography,” in *Cultural Intermediaries*, eds. David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri. pp. 67-85. With his assertion Jacobs is verbatim in parallel with Heinrich Graetz’s presentation of the 1860s. According to Graetz, ha-Kohen’s “chief aim was to point out the justice of God *in the cause of history*, showing how violence and cunning met with their desert, and were cast down from the height attained.” Graetz, *History of the Jews*, Vol. IV, Chap. XVI, p. 556.

<sup>140</sup> Baron points out that Joseph ha-Kohen “devotes three lines to the intervention of the sultan with the pope” in the Ancona affair which was unique in Jewish history as the organized Jewish opposition but assigns two pages to a description of Jewish sufferings. Baron “Newer Emphases in Jewish History,” in *History and Jewish Historians*, p. 98.

<sup>141</sup> Meyer Waxman, *A History of Jewish Literature* Vol. II (New Jersey: Thomas Yoseloff, Publisher, 1933), p. 474.

### 3.3.1.3. Samuel Usque

Samuel Usque, the third historian whose work treats the Ottoman Empire and its Jewish community, was a former Portuguese Marrano. The only source of information on him is his only work which contains very little biographical detail. However, his work reveals his talent as a writer as well as his deep education, broad culture and proficiency in different languages. After he left Portugal in the 1530s, he lived mostly in Naples and Ferrara. He also traveled to Salonika, Constantinople and visited the Holy Land. His book *Consolaçam As Tribulaçoens de Israel* – [*Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*] was written in Portuguese in the form of pastoral dialogues and accepted as a masterpiece among the classics of Portuguese literature. Its language reflects Usque’s main purpose of convincing Marrano refugees and Marranos to return wholeheartedly to Judaism. His book contains a beautiful literary dedication embedded with symbolism to Dona Gracia Nasi who apparently provided the sustenance for his work and would later become one of the prominent figures of Ottoman Jewry. This dedication also illustrates the high esteemed leading role of Donna Gracia among her compatriots of *Portuguese nation*.<sup>142</sup> The book also contains short dialogues related to Jewish scenes from Constantinople and Salonika in the sixteenth century.<sup>143</sup> Although these dialogues have some historical essence we have to bear in mind that the ultimate purpose of Usque’s work is not historical but religious.<sup>144</sup> The Ottoman Empire is indeed described extravagantly as a holy-sacred power and its existence as a great consolation for Jews.

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<sup>142</sup> “... you are the heart in the body of our people: in the remedies you have offered you have always shown that you feel our people’s sufferings more poignantly than anyone else.” Samuel Usque, *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, tr. by Martin A. Cohen (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1965), p. 37.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210-211.

<sup>144</sup> Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974).



You will rise to a higher degree of consolation in the great nation of Turkey. This country is like a broad and expansive sea which our Lord has opened with the rod of His mercy, as Moses did for you in the Exodus from Egypt, so that the swells of your present misfortunes, which relentlessly pursue you in all kingdoms of Europe like the infinite multitude of Egyptians, might cease and be consumed in it.<sup>145</sup>

The Turks are presented as “sublime mercy from the Lord.”<sup>146</sup> It is in their land that the existing tribulations of Jews will be demolished: “The dawn will break and the longed-for morning after winter’s stormy night will graciously appear to us,”<sup>147</sup> With the existence of the Ottoman Empire, there is a reason for consolation. The Ottoman Empire is ascendant, favoring and embracing the Jews.<sup>148</sup>

Here the gates of liberty are always wide open for you that you may fully practice your Judaism; they are never closed. Here you may restore your true character, transform your nature, change your ways, and banish false and erring opinions. Here you have begun to embrace your true ancient faith and to abandon the practices opposed to God’s will, which you have adopted under the pressures of the nations in which you have wandered. ... For here you may come to terms with your soul, and unafraid that pressures will remove it from His Law, as has happened in other kingdoms.<sup>149</sup>

In the dialogue on Constantinople of the year 1542 we see a misfortune in the making and how the intervention of a court physician resolves it. The resemblance of this event to the story of Purim is attention grabbing. The image of the Turks and the Sultan were presented with saintly elevated motifs in conformity with the general approach of this period. From this essay we see how the court physician, Moses Hamon was respected and had influence on the Sultan. The dialogue on Salonika of the year 1545 shows the city under Ottoman reign was a holy, beautiful,

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<sup>145</sup> Usque, *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, tr. by Martin A. Cohen p. 231.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Martin A. Cohen, “Introduction” in *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, p. 25.

<sup>149</sup> Usque, p. 231.

friendly and peaceful city that embraced all the Jewish immigrants with as much love and goodwill as if she were Jerusalem.<sup>150</sup> The great fire accounted by Usque in the city also can be seen in another source i.e., in the *responsa*- legal decisions of Rabbi Samuel De Medina.<sup>151</sup> According to Usque, 100 Jews lost their life in this well-known fire of Salonika. Goodblatt referring to his source states the losses between 150 and 200.<sup>152</sup>

#### 3.3.1.4. Solomon Ibn Verga

Another important historian of the post Spanish expulsion period is Solomon ibn Verga. He was an eye witness to the sufferings of Spanish Jews, both in Spain and in Portugal where he settled after the expulsion of 1492. In 1506<sup>153</sup> after being a *converso* for nine years, Verga seized the opportunity offered by King Manuel's decree proclaimed in the wake of the Lisbon Massacre, for *conversos* to leave Portugal.<sup>154</sup> In the 1520s Verga wrote his book *Shevet Yehuda*- [Staff of Judah], a compilation of the accounts of the persecutions undergone by the Jews between the

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>151</sup> Morris S. Goodblatt, *Jewish Life in Turkey in the Sixteenth Century as Reflected in the Legal Writings of Samuel De Medina*. (New York: The Jewish Seminary of America, 1952), p. 22.

<sup>152</sup> The identity of Goodblatt's source is not clear and needs clarification. The source can be either De Medina or Conforte who is another historian from the seventeenth century. (Listed as No. 12 in Table II.) If the source is a *responsa* of De Medina (he was the *dayyan* – rabbinic judge and highly esteemed scholar of Salonika of the period) then this discrepancy of two different figures may imply that some of the information in *Consolaçam* is based on dubious hearsay, thus the reading of Usque needs much caution. If the source is Conforte than we can assume Usque's figure is correct since in most cases Conforte's trustworthiness is open to doubt.

<sup>153</sup> Azriel Shochat, *Encyclopedia Judaica* – CD-ROM Edition, s.v. "Solomon ibn Verga." According to Yerushalmi, Verga left Portugal in 1508. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor. Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. p. 60. Yerushalmi's source on Verga is M. Benayahu's publication in *Sefunot, II* (1971-1978).

<sup>154</sup> Verga's life after his departure from Portugal was enigmatic. It is possible to find different versions in sources. According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, he escaped from Portugal to the Ottoman Empire and settled in Adrianople and wrote his book there. Franco who was one of the writers of the *Encyclopedia* repeats the same information in his book. Franco *Essai sur L'Histoire Des Israelites de L'Empire Ottoman* p. 75. Graetz in his comprehensive history gives the similar information. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* has a different version. According to this encyclopedia, after he left Portugal, Verga went on to Italy and stayed some time in Rome. There is no mention of his sojourn in the Ottoman Empire. According to the *Encyclopedia* he wrote his book in the 1520s. In his book, Yerushalmi depicts Verga's life completely differently. According to Yerushalmi, Verga never went either to Italy or to the Ottoman Empire and died in Flanders. Yerushalmi claims Verga wrote his book before 1513. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor. Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. p. 60.

destruction of the second temple and his own day. Compared to other historians Solomon Ibn Verga was quite different since he had a more secular oriented approach to the subject matter. He saw the problem of expulsion as a natural phenomenon subject to the laws of causation and rejected the idea of God's will as the determining factor in history. Contrary to other writers in this period, he offered no messianic motifs in his accounts. Although he seems to be a loyal Jew, in reality ibn Verga had a wide, controversial, attitude towards the traditional edifice of Judaism. As can be seen from his writings, he scorned the theological tradition and the learning of schoolmen; derided the philosophical approaches of Jewish scholars; parodied the philosophy of Judah Halevi; almost mocked the teachings of Maimonides; challenged medieval allegorical exegesis and natural science; and finally attacked the Talmud.<sup>155</sup> His book contains some historical accounts on the early development of the Ottoman Empire. However, most probably these accounts were not written by him but by his son Joseph Ibn Verga. Joseph also escaped from Lisbon with his father and immigrated to Turkey. He became a prominent Rabbi and *dayyan* in Adrianople. It was Joseph who published *Shevet Yehuda* in 1553 probably in Adrianople, thirty years after his father wrote the book. He added some supplementary material to his father's book related to the Ottoman Empire. An illustrative example is the account of the blood libel of Amasya, which took place in 1545.<sup>156</sup>

### 3.3.1.5. David Conforte

He was born in Salonika about 1618 and educated to be a rabbi in accordance with the family tradition. After studying in different well-known *yeshivot* in Salonika and Jerusalem, he settled

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<sup>155</sup> Shochat

<sup>156</sup> Dubnow, *History of the Jews* trans. Moshe Spiegel (London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1969) p. 484.

in Cairo as a rabbi and *dayyan*. His major work, *Kore ha-Dorot*, is a chronicle containing information on authors and their works from post-Talmudic times until his own time. Contrary to the views of some earlier and contemporary historians, his work must not be regarded as being only a chain of tradition, but rather as a different work of a biographical character based on meticulously collected information on prominent scholars. Indeed, Conforte is the first historian who prepared an alphabetical list of scholars since the Tosafist period.<sup>157</sup> *Kore ha-Dorot* is especially important as a source of information on Sephardic scholars who lived in Mediterranean countries like the Ottoman Empire, Italy, Africa and the Near East, as well as the literary works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Conforte knew most of his contemporary scholars personally and he was the first person who attempted to extract the name of the scholars from rich responsa literature and meticulously searched for supplementary information on these scholars and their work. Conforte also had the chance to examine the original copies of many works and documents some of which did not survive to our days. Indeed, in those years the Iscandari library in Alexandria, where he studied, was famous for its rich collection of rare documents and books.<sup>158</sup>

### 3.3.1.6. Joseph Ben Isaac Sambari

Joseph Ben Isaac Sambari is another historian who lived in the last decades of this period. He joins Conforte as the only two Jewish historians of the Sephardic world of the seventeenth

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<sup>157</sup> Moshe Nahum Zobel, *Encyclopedia Judaica* –CD-ROM Edition, s.v. “David Conforte.” It seems it would be wrong to identify Conforte’s work both due to its genre and philosophy as an example “fully within the genre” of the *shalshet ha-Kabbalah* -chain of tradition type literature as asserted by Yerushalmi. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor. Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. p. 140n-41.

<sup>158</sup> According to *Encyclopedia Judaica* “Rabbi Abraham ben Eleazar Iscandari (1565?-1650) maintained a yeshiva in his own house and possessed a large and valuable library, containing many manuscripts. The historians Sambari and David Conforte resided with him and assisted with his library.” *Encyclopedia Judaica* –CD-ROM Edition, s.v. “Iscandari.” Here there must be a mistake since Sambari was only ten years old when R. Abraham ben Eleazar Iscandari died.

century. However, strangely neither of them mentioned each other in their historical works. The current information on him is scarce. We depend exclusively on some biographical details that can be extracted from his chronicle *Divrey Yosef*, written in 1672. Most probably he had the chance to study in the famous library which was founded by Rabbi Abraham ben Eleazar. As an Egyptian chronicler his work is especially important in reflecting the historical details of the Jews in the Islamic world, particularly in Egypt. Stylistically, Sambari often embellished the lives of his heroes with legends and curious anecdotes.<sup>159</sup> For example, himself a kabbalist, Sambari wrote that in his old age Maimonides turned kabbalist and claimed that he had seen a mystic treatise of Maimonides.<sup>160</sup> His book, *Divrey* also contains substantial information on the early periods of the Ottoman Empire, its Jewish community, the functions of Jews in courts, and various eminent scholars in the Empire. However, the main sources for his book on the Ottoman Empire were the works of Elijah Capsali, Joseph ha-Kohen and Ibn Verga. Yerushalmi asserts that with its “conservative and moving in well-worn groves” character *Divrey Yosef* did not bring a new style and outlook different than the previous century.<sup>161</sup> It is also important to note that modern critics consider his accounts both of Egypt and the Ottoman Empire as unreliable.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Waxman, *A History of Jewish Literature* Vol. II, p. 465.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. According to our knowledge, among Maimonides’ works there is no such mystic treatise. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Moses Ben Maimon.” In fact, in early kabbalistic literature there was no mention of the existence of this particular treatise. However, his works particularly *Guide of the Perplexed* by this time had achieved a mystical status and spread in Kabbalistic circles. See Idel, “Maimonides’ Guide of the Perplexed and the Kabbalah.” *Jewish History* 18: 197-226, 2004.

<sup>161</sup> Yerushalmi, *Zakhor. Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. p. 139n-41.

<sup>162</sup> The well known and much cited but actually incorrect information that *hahambaşı*-chief rabbi Moshe Capsali occupied a permanent place in the *Divan-i Humayün*- royal government council of Sultan Mehmet II and even had precedence over the *mufti* belongs to him. (This information appears in many history books on Ottoman Jewry such as Graetz, Dubnow, Moise Franco and Naim Güleriyüz. Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*. Vol. IV., p. 268., Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews from the Later Middle Ages to the Renaissance*. Volume III, p. 395. Dubnow erroneously presented Sambari’s depiction as if it belongs to Elijah Capsali. Moise Franco, *Essai sur L’Histoire des Israelites de L’Empire Ottoman* p. 32.) As shown by modern historians this information can not be true (Joseph Hacker, “Ottoman Policy Towards the Jews and Jewish Attitudes Toward Ottomans During the Fifteenth Century.” p. 119., Epstein, p. 56.) since various Turkish and Hebrew sources demonstrate a contrary perspective and such an arrangement definitely would be contrary to the prevailing practices of the Ottoman administration of the fifteenth century. (Hacker, p.119.) Furthermore, according to historians even the *mufti* was not a member of the *Divan*. See, *Encyclopedia AnaBritannica*, s.v. “Divan-ı Hümayun.” (Turkish)

According to these scholars, “he possessed good sources, but he misused them. He frequently exaggerated and confused facts and chronology for no apparent reason.”<sup>163</sup> This criticism deserves special attention because in the nineteenth century, Graetz in his popular eleven-volume history referred extensively to Sambari on subjects related to the Ottoman Empire.

### 3.3.2. Other Historians

The other historians of this period as shown in Table I appear less significant in the production of innovative, influential and literarily superior historical studies. On the other hand, even today, there is very little known on these historians since very few scholars focused on these historians and their work. Indeed, there are no translations of these historical studies into other languages. Among them, Jacob Tam ben David ibn Yahya, an exile from Spain was known as an important rabbi and codifier. The introduction he wrote to the publication of the well-known *Yosippon*, which no one at that time doubted to be an ancient work from the Second Temple Period, is important in illustrating the high esteem in which *Yosippon* was held by sixteenth century writers. This approach also illustrates the existing interpretation of history writing in his time. According to ibn Yahya;

Although it is characteristic of historical works to exaggerate things that never were, to add to them, to invent things that never existed, nevertheless this book [*Yosippon*] ... is

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<sup>163</sup> Hacker, “Ottoman Policy toward the Jews and Jewish Attitudes toward the Ottomans during the Fifteenth Century” in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire* eds. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982), p. 119. H.Z. (J.W.) Hirschberg is another scholar who in the conclusion of his work portrays Sambari as “not completely reliable.” See Hirschberg, “The Agreement between the Musa’ribs and the Maghribis in Cairo 1527,” in *Salo Wittmayer Baron Jubilee Volume*, eds. Saul Lieberman and Arthur Hyman. (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1974), vol. II, p. 590. See also D. Ayalon (Neustadt), “Some Problems Concerning the Negidut in Egypt During the Middle Ages,” *Zion*, 4 (1939), pp. 126-149. (in Hebrew)

completely distinct from them.... For all the words of this book are righteousness and truth, and there is no wrong within it.<sup>164</sup>

The bibliophile Isaac Akrish ben Abraham was another important exile from Spain who was known to be interested in rare books, manuscripts and documents. Indeed, his enthusiastic interest on rare books can be observed in his own words, “Whenever I would earn some money, I would hire scribes to copy some of his [Rabbi David ibn Zimra’s] choice books, among them volumes which neither my father nor my father’s father had ever seen. It would almost be unbelievable to recount all of them.”<sup>165</sup> Akrish did not write original historical studies; rather he edited works by using the rare material available to him. For example, around 1577, with the help of Joseph Nasi, duke of Naxos, Akrish published in Constantinople two edited books containing historical documents of major importance. By giving place to these documents in his works, Akrish rescued them from disappearing into oblivion. Indeed, Akrish is the first historian who in his work *Kol Mevasser* brought to public attention the famous correspondence between Hasdai ibn Shaprut and the king of the Khazars as well as the legend of those Jews who lived near the Sambation River, through an account of a certain Muslim named Ali. In his introduction Akrish reflects his aim to ease the troubled spirits and to “strengthen the people in order that they should believe firmly that the Jews have a kingdom and dominion.”<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>165</sup> Commentary of Isaac Akrish to Song of Songs. Quoted by Goldman, p. 33.

<sup>166</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*-CD-ROM, s.v. “Akrish, Isaac Ben Abraham.” This interpretation of Akrish certainly carries a messianic character, reflecting the existing mood of the period among Jewish intellectuals. Indeed, here there is a strong resemblance to the episode of David Reuveni who appeared in Italy in 1524. Reuveni claimed that he was a descendent of Mohammed and presented himself as the messenger of his brother Joseph who supposedly was the king of the Jews dwelling near the fabled Sambation River. According to Yerushalmi, the David Reuvani episode certainly reflects the vigorous messianic speculation and activity among Jews of the period.

Moise Baruch Almosnino was a prominent rabbi of the mid sixteenth century from Salonika with vast erudition on religion and philosophy.<sup>167</sup> Among his other literary works, he also wrote a book of historical essence on Constantinople, with the title *Extremos y Grandezas de Constantinopla* – Contrasts and Greatness of Constantinople. In 1565, during the reign of Sultan Selim II, Almosnino visited Constantinople with a diplomatic mission to procure the confirmation of the privileges and exemptions granted earlier by Suleiman the Magnificent. His work, written in the Spanish language with Hebrew characters, and still extant in manuscript form, conveys the experiences and inspirations that he had during his stay in the capital city of the Empire. Besides his description of astonishing wealth and terrible poverty, exaggerated piety and callous indifference of Constantinople, Almosnino also described the power and development of the Turkish Empire through his chronology of sultans.<sup>168</sup>

Samuel Ben Joseph Algazi, also from the island of Crete, can be seen as a chronicler type of historian whose work is an example of the “chain of tradition” genre. Typical of all chain of tradition chroniclers, his work, *Toledot Adam – The Generations of Adam*, contains the longing for the expectation for an imminent messianic era. It appears that for Algazi the year 1583 had a special messianic significance. According to Algazi, the birth of Mohammed and the conquest of Constantinople were the most important events and turning points in the persecution of Jews and of their literary history.<sup>169</sup> This approach of Algazi reflects the prevalent intellectual mind-set of his age. As for Joseph ha-Kohen, so too for Algazi, the establishment of a new religion by

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<sup>167</sup> Goodblatt, *Jewish Life in Turkey in the Sixteenth Century* p. 17.

<sup>168</sup> There is no a study on this work. All references that are given to Almosnino’s work are similar in character without any insight. Yerushalmi’s classification of the work as nothing more than travel literature certainly needs clarification. Yerushalmi, “Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen.” p. 460. For example, like Capsali, Almosnino also attributes great significance to Suleiman’s being the tenth Sultan. According to Capsali the sultan who was the conqueror of Rhodes [meant the fall of Rome next] was also the tenth king of the Turks, and the “tenth shall be holy unto the Lord” [Lev.27:32]. See Berlin, p.44n- 125.

<sup>169</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Algazi, Samuel Ben Isaac ben Joseph of Candia.”



Muhammad, its rise and its conflict with Christian Byzantium were seen as divinely ordained incidents of a divine plan. As stated by Yerushalmi, “The cataclysmic events that had begun with the Turkish conquest of Constantinople, and had climaxed for Jewry with the Iberian expulsions at the end of the fifteenth century, had also set the stage for an accelerated messianic fervor in the sixteenth century.”<sup>170</sup>

Samuel Sullam (Shulam), another exile from Spain, and Judah Vega, a rabbi who came to Constantinople from Amsterdam are other writers of the period about whom we have very limited information. The first one published *Sefer Yuhasin* of Abraham Zacuto in Constantinople in 1566 with abbreviations and changes, as well as translated and published *Contra Apionem* of Josephus again with many notes.<sup>171</sup> Vega was also interested in the life of the Jewish people beginning from the second temple period. However, we do not have any copy of his only historical work that is said to have been written under the title *Josania*.<sup>172</sup>

Much historical information on the period can be traceable from the rich responsa literature and commentaries of the period. For example, our only knowledge of the blood libel of Ankara stems from Hayim ben Israel Benveniste’s seventeenth-century book *Kneset ha-Gedolah*.<sup>173</sup> Indeed, two biographical studies written with the analysis of the responsa of the period’s two important rabbis, David Ibn Zimra of Egypt and Samuel De Medina<sup>174</sup> contain similarly important historical information. Nevertheless, our study focuses on scholars who particularly and

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<sup>170</sup> Yerushalmi, “Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen” p. 468.

<sup>171</sup> Franco, *Essai sur L’Histoire des Israelites de L’Empire Ottoman*. p. 76.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 89. Also, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Vega, Judah.”

<sup>173</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Purims Special- Purim of Angora.”

<sup>174</sup> Goodblatt, *Jewish Life in Turkey in the Sixteenth Century, as Reflected in the Legal Writings of Samuel De Medina*. M. Goldman, *The Life and Times of Rabbi David Ibn Abi Zimra* .

intentionally focused on the subject of history and whose work was consciously historical in nature.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

#### **3.4.1. The Main Characteristics of this Period in the Jewish Historiography on the Ottoman Empire**

##### **3.4.1.1. Jewish Interest in History**

As noted earlier, Jews generally showed little interest in analyzing and interpreting the ongoing historical and political events of their own day. For them time was as if frozen or history was halted, first with the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 and then with the suppression of the Bar-Kochba revolt in 135. In accordance with the rabbinic tradition, the Jewish people usually acted as if they were outsiders or spectators of mundane events. However, they persisted in their confidence of the ultimate end, i.e., in the messianic era when their return will come and “they will take captive those who were their captors, and take over those who opposed them.”<sup>175</sup>

In the beginning of the sixteenth century with the effect of the accumulated memories of torture from the earlier centuries and particularly with the sufferings associated with the recent Spanish expulsion, a heightened expectation of imminent messianic redemption surfaced and made itself felt. In *Divrey ha-Yamim* Joseph ha-Kohen expresses himself:

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<sup>175</sup> Isaiah 14:2.

Joseph ha-Kohen declares: The expulsion from France and this expulsion [from Spain] roused me to compile this book, so that the children of Israel may know what they did to us in their lands, their courts and their castles, for behold, the days approach.<sup>176</sup>

According to ha-Kohen those days approaching will be the divine days where “the lame shall leap like a hart and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.”<sup>177</sup> On the same point in *Seder*, Capsali writes:

...for who knows, we may have attained at this time the kingdom [of the messiah], and salvation may have begun ‘when the morning stars sang together’... for the Gatherer of the Dispersed of the exiles...<sup>178</sup>

For Capsali the year 1490 would be the year of redemption as written in *Sefer ha-Peli’ah ve-ha Kanah*.<sup>179</sup> According to Algazi, this year appears to be 1583. All these aroused messianic expectations served as strong stimuli for Jews to become more closely interested in the political and historical events of the gentiles of the Renaissance-Baroque period. As pointed out by Yerushalmi:

When we find Jews in bygone ages expressing a sudden and keen interest in the conflict of nations, we may well expect that the interest is primarily messianic. . . . . Jews who are ordinarily indifferent to world events, have been roused by a major international struggle to heightened expectations of an imminent messianic advent.<sup>180</sup>

Actually, each time, we see the emergence of an interest in history, it was accompanied by an interest in the political developments of the age with the expectation that these would conform

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<sup>176</sup> *Divrey ha-Yamim*, fol. 113v. from Yerushalmi, “Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen,” p. 463.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 462.

<sup>178</sup> Berlin, p. 31.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> Yerushalmi, “Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen” p. 467.

to the pre-messianic and eschatological scenarios depicted in the books of Daniel, Ezekiel or Isaiah of the Hebrew Bible. Concomitantly, the awakening of interest in history and the passion to represent the political struggles of the age as if they were in accordance with Daniel's oracles or the prophets' sayings reflected the fervor of the period and contributed to the emergence of the historical works of the period. In these scenarios the Ottoman-Turks played a major role. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 was a dramatic event that could easily be interpreted eschatologically as an overture to the war of Gog and Magog. Indeed, For Joseph ha-Kohen the struggle between the French Kingdom and the Ottoman Empire was nothing more than the fight between Gog and Magog which will end with the messianic days as depicted in Book of Ezekiel.<sup>181</sup> In this reading of the book of Daniel the Ottoman-Turks represented the fourth beast of Daniel's apocalyptic dream, while the tenth king was Sultan Suleiman, the Magnificent.<sup>182</sup>

All the historians of this period were involved with these messianic-apocalyptic speculations, and although these views were mostly concealed, these apocalyptic sentiments emerge as the actual driving motif in the works of all these writers. Therefore any study analyzing these works on the Ottoman Empire and its Jewry must take into consideration the vague or concealed hints aiming to reflect the omens of the supposedly emerging messianic era.

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<sup>181</sup> Ezekiel [38:1-29]

<sup>182</sup> Verses [7:23-27] from the book of Daniel document the role attributed to Turks in messianic scenario. "As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth/ that shall be different from all the other kingdoms;/ it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces./ As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise,/ and another shall arise after them./This one shall be different from the former ones,/ and shall put down three kings./ He shall speak words against the Most High, shall wear out the holy ones of the Most High,/.../Then the court shall sit in judgment,/ and his dominion shall be taken away, / to be consumed and totally destroyed./ The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High,/ .../ and all dominions shall serve and obey them."

The only exemption to this statement was Ibn Verga. His stature is significant, and he is an interesting example showing how Jewish history can be written without rabbinic influence and messianic impulses. His work, *Shevet Yehuda* does not contain traditional rabbinic attitudes nor any trace of a messianic idea. However, according to Yerushalmi, Verga's use of secular/philosophical approach "by no means precludes or contradicts the notion of divine providence." Yerushalmi asserts that Verga was still carrying the Hispano-Jewish aristocratic attitude of pre-expulsion and no longer corresponded to the historical realities of his time.<sup>183</sup> In fact, Verga had an exceptional personality and his work was distinct in its distancing itself from the edifice of classical rabbinical Judaism.<sup>184</sup>

#### **3.4.1.2. Attribution of a Divine Role to the Ottoman Empire**

One of the characteristics of these historians was in assigning a divine role to the Ottoman Empire in their messianic scenario. For them, the emergence of the Ottoman Empire from the steppes of Anatolia, the rapid expansion of its borders, its victories against Christendom and the conquest of Constantinople were divine events. Indeed, in *Divrey ha-Yamim* Joseph ha-Kohen presents this fall as a divine intervention; "In those days the Lord raised up Ottoman ben Ziah and his young dynasty."<sup>185</sup> Joseph ha-Kohen reflects the conquest of Constantinople as another will of the divine and he concludes:

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<sup>183</sup> Yerushalmi, *Zakhor, Jewish History and Memory*. p. 65.

<sup>184</sup> As stated before, Verga had an antagonistic character. See page 57 of the study.

<sup>185</sup> *Divrey ha-Yamim*, fol. 65r. Quoted by Yerushalmi "Messianic Impulses in Joseph-ha Kohen" p. 472. In this sentence ha-Kohen erroneously shows Ottoman (Osman) as son of Ziah. The correct name must be Ertugrul.

At that time the Lord fulfilled the word that he spoke through the prophet Jeremiah, saying – Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you that live in the land of Uz; but to you, the cup shall pass; you shall become drunk and strip yourself bare [Lam. 4:21].<sup>186</sup>

For these writers, the Ottoman sultans Mehmet II, Selim and Suleiman were viewed as messianic figures. They were seen as the Persian king “Cyrus” or the Macedonian king “Alexander the Great” of the sixth and fourth centuries B.C.E. In *Seder*, Capsali writes about Selim, referring to the conquest of Egypt and redemption:

And the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence; after Selim will rule over Egypt, “the idols shall utterly pass away” (Isa.2:18) and the idols in it (i.e. in Egypt) will be cut off, and this will be the time of Redemption. Therefore, according to this, “the time of singing is come, And the voice of the great turtle is heard in our land” (Cant. 2:12); for the Messiah, our righteousness, will swiftly come to us, because from the time of the Expulsion the Lord began to gather the dispersed of Israel ...<sup>187</sup>

Usque in *Consolaçam* refers also to Biblical Egypt and presents the Ottoman Empire as a divine agent similar to the sea which swallowed the enemies of Israel:

You will rise to a higher degree of consolation in the great nation of Turkey. This country is like a broad and expansive sea which our Lord has opened with the rod of His mercy, as Moses did for you in the Exodus from Egypt, so that the swells of your present misfortunes, which relentlessly pursue you in all kingdoms of Europe like the infinite multitude of Egyptians, might cease and be consumed in it.<sup>188</sup>

As for the conqueror of Rhodes, Sultan Suleiman, Capsali writes:

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<sup>186</sup> *Divrey ha-Yamim*, fol. 97r. In these verses of Lamentations punishment is enounced on Edom which is here Byzantium Empire. The verse *Rejoice ... daughter of Edom* is ironic. Anatolia presented as the land of Uz in the Jewish Bible.

<sup>187</sup> Berlin, p. 34.

<sup>188</sup> Usque, *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, tr. Martin A. Cohen p. 231.

He is the tenth king of the Turks, and “the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord” (Lev. 27:32); and in his days Judah and Israel shall be saved” (cf. Jer.23:6), “and a redeemer will come to Zion” (Isa.59:20)<sup>189</sup>

As can be seen, the Ottoman-Turks were viewed by these historians as playing a saintly and major role in this assumed near messianic age. These works were filled with apocalyptic speculations. They visualize the emergence of the Ottoman- Turks, the conquest of Constantinople and the expansion of the Empire as divine interventions. According to them, the Ottoman realms that Jews may now take will be “the first step toward their belated repentance.”<sup>190</sup> For them, the Ottoman-Turks are the symbol of Islam, the agent of God used to punish the oppressive torturing Christendom. The conflict between Islam and Christendom was thought to be nothing more than the herald of the apocalyptic final end of days. It is to end in a war between Gog and Magog “which doubtlessly was understood to be the impending struggle between the Ottoman Empire and Christian Europe,”<sup>191</sup> that all enemies of Israel will be destroyed, lost tribes will be found, her dead resurrected and her unity restored under a Davidic king.

As a matter of fact, by attributing a divine role to the Ottoman Turks, these writers were indeed reflecting the current common sentiment existing among European Jewry, particularly Jews of Iberian origin. The confessions of the Marrano physician Felipe de Nájera in 1607 during the Inquisition can be seen as an exemplary episode illustrating the hopes that, the enigmatic Turks of the East would be the key to opening the miraculous age, where the fulfillment of divine expectations would be realized. According to de Nájera’s avowal “nine and one half tribes whom

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 481.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>191</sup> Martin A. Cohen , “Introduction” in *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, tr. Martin A. Cohen (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1965), p. 27.

Shalmanessar exiled are still living in the empire of the Grand Turk, together with the prophets Enoch and Elijah, ready for the advent of the Messiah.”<sup>192</sup>

### 3.4.1.3. Exaggerated Praise of the Turks

An important characteristic of this Jewish historiography on the Ottoman Empire of this period is the presence of a highly exaggerated praising of the Turks. This fact is actually the consequence of the previous point. The historians depicted the Turks admiringly, without expressing any criticism either of their deeds or of their relationship to the Jewish community of the realm. All enemies of the Ottomans were portrayed as sinners, scoundrels and cheats. In contrast, the Turks were saintly, good, just, sincere friends and lovers of the Jews. For example, according to Capsali's *Seder*, Sultan Mehmet II frequently visited the Jewish quarter of Constantinople, attended a Passover *Seder* ceremony and even wanted to learn the Hebrew language.<sup>193</sup> According to Joseph Sambari, Mehmet II, in his *Divan-i Hümayun*, (royal government council) reserved a special place for Moses Capsali, the new Chief Rabbi of Constantinople, beside the *mufti*.<sup>194</sup> Moses Capsali's nephew, historian Elijah Capsali writes with admiration:

Had he [Mehmet II] lived a little longer, he would have conquered Egypt and its king; probably, [nay] almost certainly – for he had unlimited power. But what he did not have enough time for because of death, ..... there came his grandson Selim, the great king, who was like him in his splendor, and did it and enlarged the kingdom of Turkey ten times greater than in his [Mehmet's] reign...<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1971), p. 306.

<sup>193</sup> Berlin, p. 28.

<sup>194</sup> Without doubt this assertion together with the former one is without substance and contains exaggeration. See note 161. See also Hacker, "Ottoman Policy toward the Jews and Jewish Attitudes toward the Ottomans during the Fifteenth Century," p. 119.

<sup>195</sup> Berlin, *Seder*, p. 139.



Capsali explicitly presents Sultan Selim as the King Solomon of the Turks, as if he were also deeply interested in the welfare of Jews as had been Mehmet II. Capsali claims that Selim “loved the Jews very much because he saw that by means of them he would beat the nations and kill great kings, for they made for him cannons and weapons.”<sup>196</sup> Indeed there are several favorable anecdotes showing how Sultan Selim as a virtuous judge punished his officers because of their maltreatment of Jews. In reality Sultan Selim is actually known for his aggression and his cruelty.<sup>197</sup> However, for Capsali these traits of the Sultan were understandable and they did not distort the righteous and compassionate image of Selim drawn by him. The reconstruction of the city walls of Jerusalem by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent between 1536 and 1542 further aroused and strengthened these messianic expectations more and they generated among the Jews sentiments of gratitude toward the Ottoman state.<sup>198</sup> In *Divrey*, Joseph ha-Kohen wrote:

God aroused the spirit of Suleiman ... and he set out to build the walls of Jerusalem, the Holy City in the land of Judea. He sent officials who built its walls and set up its gates as in former times.... And his fame increased throughout the land for he had done a great deed.<sup>199</sup>

The complimentary approach of these historians to the Ottoman Sultans as “gracious kings” is more striking when we see Capsali in *Seder* referring to king Manuel of Portugal as “Bela son of Be’er”, “Pharaoh”, “Haman”, “The Worthless One” or Queen Isabel of Spain as “wicked queen who had swayed the king Ferdinand with her glib mouth.”<sup>200</sup> The positive depiction of the

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<sup>196</sup> Berlin, *Seder*, pp. 332-335.

<sup>197</sup> Epstein, *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, p. 82.

<sup>198</sup> Avigdor Levy, *The Sephardim in The Ottoman Empire* (New Jersey, Princeton: The Darwin Press Inc., 1992), p. 21.

<sup>199</sup> Joseph ha-Kohen, *Sefer Divrei ha-Yamim le-Malkhei Tzarefat u-Malkhei Beit Ottoman ha-Toger* (Sabionetta, 1554), pp. 261-262.

<sup>200</sup> Yerushalmi, *The Lisbon Massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yehudah* (Cincinnati Hebrew Union College Annual Supplements, Number 1, 1976) p. 35,55. In general, throughout their history, Jewish tendency was to exalt kings or rulers even when they were under persecution. The rulers were presented as protectors of Jews even in the absence of special regulations regarding them as “*servi camarae*”. Yerushalmi illustrates this positive

Muslim Ottoman-Turks is clearly contrasted to the negative attitude adopted towards the Christians in the Crusade Chronicles. For example, in the Chronicle of Solomon bar Simon, the Christian mob is portrayed as “the arrant, uncircumcised ones in rage tumultuously in the name of the crucified one, who is of abominable stock, bastard son conceived by a menstruating and wanton mother.”<sup>201</sup> Their leader Count Emicho is presented as “the oppressor of all the Jews – may his bones be ground to dust between iron millstones”<sup>202</sup> and the Pope as “Satan-the Pope of evil Rome.”<sup>203</sup>

#### **3.4.1.4. Biased History**

This slanted and biased historical narrative is the logical consequence of the previous two conclusions. As can be seen from the highly praising and sycophantic depictions presented here, these historians were completely biased and did not offer an objective or critical account to their readers. Therefore, one should not look to them for an objective and realistic analysis of the Ottoman Empire and its Jewish communities. As an outcome of this flattering, admiring and grateful attitude, Jewish life in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was presented as being peaceful and harmonious co-existing with other ethnic and religious groups in the Empire.

The same attitude also created a positive image of Sultans and the Ottoman authorities especially

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portrayal of rulers as “The Myth of Royal Alliance”. *The Lisbon Massacre ...* p. xiii. Michael Stanislawski also points out the same Jewish behavioral attitude in relationship to Tsar Nicholai I, who was known for his anti-Jewish feelings and policies (conscriptio, etc.). Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), p. 119. Capsali’s condemning Queen Isabel but not Ferdinand (like Herodios or Salome but not Herod the Tertarch) is consistent with classical Jewish historical discourse bringing to mind the different (intriguing-schemer) reflections of “woman” in Judaic religion and literature (Franz Kafka in *Trial*, Elias Canetti in *Die Blendung-The Tower of Babel*). Jewish mysticism also had a masculine character and “appears rather to be connected with an inherent tendency to lay stress on the demonic nature of woman and the feminine element of the cosmos.” See, Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 37.

<sup>201</sup> Solomon Bar Simon, “Chronicles” ed. by Shlomo Eidelberg *The Jews and the Crusaders* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), pp. 28-36.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

in respect to their relationship to Jews. This type of approach to the dominant majority culture and the merry image of a Jewish minority are quite uncommon and unique in medieval Jewish historiography. This “pleasant” depiction of Ottoman Jewry is just the opposite of the “lachrymose” image, often used to characterize life in Christian Europe thereby creating an image of the Ottoman Jews as the inhabitants of a large “Pleasant Ville”.

### **3.4.2. Discussion**

The mentioned “fairy-pleasant” image is much exaggerated, unrealistic and does not reflect a correct picture of the era. Indeed recent research has provided new insights into this period.<sup>204</sup> Newly found manuscripts show that in the fifteenth century among the Romaniot Jews there was an anti-Ottoman attitude towards the Ottoman Empire. According to these documents during the expansion of the Ottoman Empire into these new lands, the fate of the Jews was not at all different from that of the Christians. Many were killed; others were taken captive, and even children were taken to the *devşirme*, the manpower source of the Ottoman infantry, the Janissary troops.<sup>205</sup> The policy of the forced deportation, *sürgün* and the compulsory settlement of more than forty Jewish communities<sup>206</sup> after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 of course created sufferings among the Jews. For instance, the absence of a Jewish population in Salonika according to the census of 1478 shows that the whole Jewish community of that city, one of the big metropolises of its time, was completely deported and exiled to Constantinople after the

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<sup>204</sup> Hacker, “Ottoman Policy toward the Jews and Jewish Attitudes toward the Ottomans during the Fifteenth Century” p. 120.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Levy, “The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire” pp. 6.

conquest of the city.<sup>207</sup> According to the detailed analysis of these new sources, Byzantine scholars and philosophers like Mordechai Comitiano and Shalom Anavi were held in captivity, others were killed during the conquest of Constantinople and several were sold into slavery.<sup>208</sup> On the other hand during the reign of Beyazit II (whose nickname was *sofi*, which means pious) there is evidence that the Jews had difficulties in practicing their religious life due to strict restrictions. Even Capsali in his account mentioned the sultan's policy of closing the new synagogues, of course in a manner accepting the existence of extenuating circumstances.<sup>209</sup> Bernard Lewis also points out this exaggerated and deteriorated image:

The Turkish attitude, though generally tolerant, was not quite as warm and welcoming as depicted in some of these more enthusiastic commendations. Turkish documents of the late sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries show that from time to time resentment grew among the Muslim populace and *ulema* at what was perceived as the excessive freedom or opportunity enjoyed by the non-Muslim communities.<sup>210</sup>

The resentment among the Muslim population mentioned above or similar negative attributions to Jewish subjects of the Empire can be found in rare Turkish documents. However, almost in all cases, their counterparts are never reflected in Jewish sources. For example, Lewis, in his book, refers to some accounts of Turkish historians on Jewish harassment, none of which appeared in a Jewish account. According to Lewis, Rashid in his chronicles for the year 1666-1667, depicts the execution of a Jew and a Turkish woman for fornication. In another instance (1716) Rashid describes the execution of three Jews for beating a Turkish boy. Çelebizade, in his accounts

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<sup>207</sup> Heath W. Lowry, "When Did the Sephardim Arrive in Salonica? The Testimony of the Ottoman Tax – Registers, 1478-1613" in *The Jews of The Ottoman Empire*, ed. Avigdor Levy (Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc. 1992), pp. 203-213.

<sup>208</sup> Hacker, "Ottoman Policy toward the Jews and Jewish Attitudes toward the Ottomans during the Fifteenth Century" p. 125.

<sup>209</sup> Shmuelevitz, *Ottoman History and Society* p. 14.

<sup>210</sup> Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984) p. 137.

refers to the removal of Jewish dwellings to make room for the *Yeni Jami* mosque (1726-1727) and on the execution of several Jews for assaulting a Turk (1746).<sup>211</sup> Actually the Ottoman-Turkish historians rarely wrote about *dhimmi*s – Jews and other non-muslims – because they considered them to be unimportant and therefore there was no need to devote any attention to them.<sup>212</sup> The rich Ottoman rabbinic responsa, which still needs to be investigated, will be an important source for analyzing the real situation of the Jewish community. For example a response from the sixteenth century notes that “the Janissaries who molested and robbed Jews frequently e.g. in the days of Murad III (1574-1595).”<sup>213</sup> Rabbi Samuel de Medina, a well-known rabbi of Salonika in his various responsa reflects how government officials frequently became accomplices in ill-will and violence committed against Jews.<sup>214</sup> According to these responsa the Turkish courts were shown as institutions to be avoided since “Judges and other court officials were known to be unfair, greedy and susceptible to bribery.”<sup>215</sup>

A recent study by Marc David Baer gives a more realistic picture and especially exposes the unfavorable conditions of the Jewish community in Constantinople during the reign of Mehmet IV in the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>216</sup> Baer challenges the image of the tranquil Jewish life within the Ottoman Empire. A massive fire in the Jewish district of Eminönü, in Constantinople ruined two-thirds of the Jewish residences in the summer 1660. The Ottoman dynasty took advantage of the fire to clear the neighborhood of the Jews and completed the construction of a half built mosque, later named *Yeni Jami*, and enlarged its environment. The

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>213</sup> Jacob M. Landau, “Hebrew Sources for the Socio Economic History of the Ottoman Empire,” *Der Islam* 54 (1977).

<sup>214</sup> Goodblatt, p. 125.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 122. It is also possible to interpret the aim of the responsa as to encourage Jews to use rabbinic courts.

<sup>216</sup> Marc David Baer, “Honored by the Glory of Islam: The Ottoman State, Non-Muslims, and Conversion to Islam in Late Seventeenth-Century Istanbul and Rumelia” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, June 2001).

Ottoman regime also prohibited Jews from resettling in that area. The Sultan blamed the fire on the Jews and as can be seen from the description of the official history of the mosque, the fire was perceived as a divine punishment of the Jews:

By the decree of God the exalted, the fire of divine wrath turned all the neighborhoods of the Jews upside down. The effect of the flames of the wrath of God made the homes and abodes belonging to that straying community resemble ashes. Every one of the Jewish households was turned into a fire temple full of wickedness. Since the residences and dwellings of Jews, who are the enemy of Islam, resembled the deepest part of one of the seven pits of hell, the secret of the verse which is incontrovertible, “those that do evil shall be cast into the fire,” (32:20) became clear, and in order to promise and threaten those who deny Islam with frightening things, the verse, “woe to the unbelievers because of a violent punishment,” (14:2) also became manifest.<sup>217</sup>

It is also interesting to note that inside the mosque, Arabic writings were placed on the walls, which justified the construction, and compared the expulsion of local Jews to the expulsion of the Jewish Banu Nadir tribe during the Prophet Muhammad’s time.<sup>218</sup> Again our sources describing this affair are all of Turkish origin. We do not have any Jewish data or any trace of collective memory reminding us of this special event. Sambari who wrote his book *Divrei Yosef* in 1672 just twelve years after the fire and seven years after the opening ceremony of the mosque, mentioned the fire briefly<sup>219</sup> and described its devastating effect on Constantinople Jewry but wrote nothing on the anti-Jewish sentiments at the time of the construction of *Yeni Jami*.

As stated by different scholars, additional research needs to be undertaken on these subjects to gain new understandings, especially with the help of new archival material to evaluate legal

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<sup>217</sup> Nasuh Paşazade Ömer Bey, “Turhan Valide Sultan Vakfnamesi” fols. 17b-18a, quoted in Baer, “Honored by the Glory of Islam:...” p. 126.

<sup>218</sup> Baer, “Honored by the Glory of Islam:...” p. 148.

<sup>219</sup> Sambari, *Divrei Yossef*, p. 86. Quoted by Franco, p. 89.

status, taxation, demography, communal organization and other aspects of the social history of Ottoman Jewry. As noted by a modern historian:

The new research on the Ottoman Jewry challenges some long-held views as functional myths, for example, the notion that the Jews were part of the so-called *millet* system under the jurisdiction of a chief rabbinate. Concomitantly, the uncritical glorification of another alleged golden age was replaced with a more realistic portrayal of this immigrant society in which Romaniots, Ashkenazim, Italiani, and Sephardim struggled to coexist through bitter factionalism and communal tension.<sup>220</sup>

Feridun M. Emecan is another scholar who points out the necessity of a new and more objective approach in analyzing the Ottoman Jewish history. According to Emecan, “Apart from a few exceptions, the studies on the history of Ottoman Jews remained outside the interest of Turkish historians and have not been based on primary [archival] sources. These studies were generally monopolized historians of Jewish origin, and turned out to be a literature full of constantly repeated, general information.”<sup>221</sup> Indeed, Emecan’s work on the Jews of Manisa is unique and exemplary in this field. It was the only study prepared by a non-Jew where the documents as primary sources from Ottoman Archives bring forth the essence of the study. With its unbiased, scholar and meticulous character, the work brings out completely new, fresh information and mostly depends on new archival material and its interpretation, rather than re-evaluation of the usual well-known knowledge from Jewish sources. Interestingly, Emecan’s depiction reflects not a rosy but an arduous Jewish existence and the archival documents that were presented for the first time by him illustrate the existence of frequent friction between the Muslim inhabitants of

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<sup>220</sup> Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, “Response” in *The State of Jewish Studies*, ed. S. Cohen and E. Greenstein (Detroit, 1990), p. 133.

<sup>221</sup> Feridun M. Emecan, *Unutulmuş bir Cemmat, Manisa Yahudileri* [A Forgotten Community, Jews of Manisa]. (Istanbul: Eren Yayinlari, 1997), p. 10.

the city and the Jewish minority mostly aroused due to the complains on habitation, clothing and economic activities of the Jewish community.

Joseph Hacker offers two factors as explanations for the biased, one-sided, exaggerated appraisal of the Ottoman regime: the protecting and tolerant policy of Mehmet II towards the Jews that settled in Constantinople, and Beyazit II's favorable attitude towards the Sephardic immigrants<sup>222</sup>. However, these two factors appear to be insufficient and deficient to reflect the entire picture. As can be seen throughout this study the holy, messianic and divine role ascribed by Jewish writers to the Ottoman-Turks can be shown as a major factor alongside of Hacker's two factors in explaining the highly praising uncritical and biased approach.

As a final point, in concluding this period we have to emphasize that these historians influenced to a great degree later historians by their own "pleasant-merry" approach to the presentation of Jewish life in the Ottoman Empire. As will be seen in the analysis of subsequent periods, we are not able to identify any important and original work of history on the Ottomans and its Jewry until the second part of the nineteenth century. Beginning with Graetz and Dubnow, the Ottoman-Turkish Jewish historians Rosanes, Galanti and even more recent historians of the twentieth century used the works of this first group of historians directly or indirectly as one of their main sources in their studies. In the 1930's, about sixty years after Graetz's *History of the Jews* appeared, Dubnow was still introducing Elijah Capsali as the only source for the new center of Turkish Jewry for the second half of the fifteenth century.<sup>223</sup> More accurate is the judgment of

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<sup>222</sup> Hacker, "Ottoman Policy toward the Jews and Jewish Attitudes toward the Ottomans during the Fifteenth Century," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Braude and Lewis. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982), pp. 123-124.

<sup>223</sup> Dubnow, *History of the Jews*, Volume 3, p. 439.



modern historians who identify these historians as no more than “primitive and credulous gossip writers,”<sup>224</sup> Capsali, Joseph ha Kohen, and others of the era have had an enormous role in the shaping of Jewish Turkish historiography. More particularly, without being aware of the fundamental and profound causes of their way of thinking and how they were energized by an active messianic fervor, we see the inheritance of their uncritical approach in historians of a later period. A similar judgment can also be seen in a recent work:

The fact remains that all Jewish historiography would be influenced by this idyllic vision, putting the Ottoman sovereigns on a pedestal and mythifying the welcome given the Sephardim, without identifying the larger political and economic picture.<sup>225</sup>

The famous statement attributed to Beyazit, portraying the Spanish king Ferdinand as unwise since he impoverished his country and enriched the Ottoman Empire by expelling his Jewish subjects,<sup>226</sup> is an example that reflects the inheritance of an exaggerated attitude throughout the ages. A simple survey shows that there are no solid documents in the Ottoman archives or a record in any work of a historian that can be used to support the authenticity of this statement. Our only source is Capsali. Even in *Seder*, as pointed out by Epstein, the statement is not attributed directly to Beyazit himself.<sup>227</sup> However, the statement attributed to Beyazit, appears in almost all subsequent historical works on Turkish Jewry.<sup>228</sup> A similar case can be shown with regards to a statement which was attributed to Mehmet II. This specific proclamation also

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<sup>224</sup> Lewis, *History Remembered, Recovered, Invented* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1975).

<sup>225</sup> Esther Banbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans, The Judeo-Spanish Community, 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), p. 8.

<sup>226</sup> On this statement see notes 122, 123.

<sup>227</sup> Epstein, p. 60.

<sup>228</sup> The list to show all historical works that used the statement without comment will be too lengthy. Just some of them: Graetz, vol. 4, p. 356, Dubnow, vol. 3, p. 471. Franco, p. 37. Galante, *Histoire Des Juifs De Turquie*, vol. 1, p. 123. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of Jews*. (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983) Vol. 18, p.37, Shaw, p.33., Naim Güleriyüz, *Türk Yahudileri Tarihi*. (Istanbul:Gözlem Gazetecilik Basın ve Yayın A.Ş., 1993).

appears only in Capsali's *Seder* and is quoted very frequently in historical studies. According to *Seder*, Mehmet II invited Jews from all over Europe to Constantinople: "This is the word of Mehmed King of Turkey, ....Let each one with his God come to Constantinople the seat of my kingdom and sit under his vine and under his fig tree with his gold and silver, property and cattle, settle in the land and trade and become part of it." It is noteworthy to point out that the last part of this proclamation is from Genesis 34:10. It appears that Capsali, who in his work described Mehmet II's attendance at a Passover *Seder* and his enthusiasm to learn Hebrew, also wanted to show the Sultan's deep knowledge of Hebrew Scriptures, verse by verse! Mehmet II proclaimed a *ferman* -imperial edict- after he conquered Constantinople where he bestowed religious autonomy on to his Jewish subjects.<sup>229</sup> As can be observed from the copies of this edict available in the archives, the style is completely different and as can be expected there is no quotation from the Scriptures. On the other hand, the resemblance of this proclamation in style and wording to the letter attributed to Rabbi Sarfati invites additional attention.<sup>230</sup>

The influence of this idealization and extravagant praising can also be seen as still being alive after five hundred years in our own time. It gained even new strength in the celebrations of the quincennial anniversary of the Jewish immigration from Spain to Turkey. Indeed, the two statements which were mentioned above were used frequently as mottos in every occasion of the commemoration,<sup>231</sup> showing the living evidence of "their diffusion, their incidental character and the errors which accompanied their transmission from one generation to the next."<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> See Galante for the full text of the decree. Galante, *Türkler ve Yahudiler* (Turks and Jews) (Istanbul: Gözlem Gazetecilik Basın ve Yayın A.Ş., 1995), p. 41-43. The original copy of this imperial edict is not existent. However, in 1604 Sultan Mehmet III in his own edict quoted this text.

<sup>230</sup> See note 106.

<sup>231</sup> These statements take place in different publications of the Quincennial Foundation. For example see the publication of the foundation: *The Quincennial Foundation, A Retrospection.* p. 12. In this publication there was

Our conclusion of this chapter highlights the following points:

1. The critical assessment of the period as presented by modern historians like Hacker, Benbassa/Rodrigue, Lewis and Baer has challenged some long-held views as mythical presentations of the conditions of Ottoman Jewry. As the findings of new research note, the conditions in the Ottoman Empire were not as ideally wonderful as originally presented. Indeed, it is not realistic and reasonable to think that neither for Islam,<sup>233</sup> nor for Christianity in the medieval world, did tolerance, as we understand it today, constitute a virtue.<sup>234</sup> As G.R. Elton points out: “Religions spring from faith, and faith, endeavoring to maintain its own convictions, cannot permit the existence of rivals or dissenters. Thus religions ... tend to regard toleration as a sign of weakness or even wickedness towards whatever deity they worship.”<sup>235</sup>
2. In almost all other places where Jews lived, Jewish men of letters or historians did not fall short of reflecting the unfavorable conditions and harshly criticizing the administration or their policies. In contrast to other places, such an attitude did not appear in the Ottoman lands. Instead, an idealized image of the Ottoman Turks reflected an exalted Jewish perception towards the Ottoman government.
3. According to Hacker, the relatively good policy of the Ottomans towards non-Muslims was the reason for this positive Jewish attitude. Hacker asserts that the protecting and tolerant policy of Mehmet II towards Jews in settling them in Constantinople, alongside Beyazid II’s favorable

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also the speech of Turkish President, Turgut Özal which was given at the gala night of July 16, 1992. In his speech, Özal quoted the particular statement that was attributed to Sultan Beyazid II. p. 85.

<sup>232</sup> Hacker, “The *Sürgün* System and Jewish Society in the Ottoman Empire during the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries,” p. 1.

<sup>233</sup> Particularly beginning from the first decades of the sixteenth century there was growing tendency towards religious conservatism in Istanbul and a concentrated effort to emphasize the Islamic nature of the society. See, Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands – A History Source Book* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), p. 93.

<sup>234</sup> Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. xviii.

<sup>235</sup> G.R. Elton, *Persecution and Toleration: papers Read at the Twenty-Second Summer Meeting and the Twenty-Third Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. W.J. Sheils (Oxford, 1984), xiii. Quoted by Mark R. Cohen, p. xix.

attitude towards Sephardic immigrants were the two factors that gave use to the flattering attitude of Jews towards the Ottoman Empire.<sup>236</sup>

4. The Jewish approach attributed an eschatological significance to the Ottoman Turks. Jews indeed recognized the Ottoman Turks as a divine force against their main foe, Christians. Creating associations with the Bible, Turks were conceived as the final fourth kingdom on earth which would hasten the final days of the redemption (Daniel, 7:23-27), the Godly oriented people in *Uz* which would end the evil kingdom *Edom* (Lamentations, 4:21), and the warriors of the war between Gog and Magog (Ezekiel, 38).
5. Hacker's conclusions offering reasons for the Jewish attitude towards the Empire is incomplete and missing the crucial religious dimension. The increased messianic aspiration of the period rather than actual events is proposed here as the fundamental factor in the emergence of the highly elevated and saintly image of the Ottoman Turks.
6. As presented in Chapter II, the messianic expectations that were rooted in the Second Temple period have been influential in shaping the historical perspective and reflections of the period. Later generations were influenced by both the mood and style of the sixteenth century historiography without realizing the real motivations of messianic character hidden under the surface layer.

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<sup>236</sup> Hacker, "Ottoman Policy toward the Jews and Jewish Attitudes toward the Ottomans during the Fifteenth Century," p. 124.

**JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY ON THE OTTOMAN JEWS**  
**(EIGHTEENTH, NINETEENTH AND FIRST DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY)**

<u>No.</u>	<u>PERIOD</u>	<u>HISTORIAN</u>	<u>MAIN PUBLICATIONS IN THE PERIOD</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>AFFIL.</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>
1	18TH.	HAYIM JOSEPH DAVID AZULAI 1724 JERUSALEM-1807 LEGHORN	SHEM HA-GEDOLIM NAME OF GREAT ONES VA'AD LA-HAKHAMIM ASSEMBLY OF THE WISE	1774/1786  1796	B  B		BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CONTENT  BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CONTENT
2	19TH.	SALAMON HAZAN ?ALGERIA-1857 EGYPT	HA MA'A LOT LI SHELOMOH	1889 PUBL.			BIBLIOGRAPHER
3	19TH.	ISAC BEKOR AMARAGI SALONICA	SHEBILA OLAM	1853-57			TRANSLATOR AND HIST. WRIT. ON NAPAELON
4	19TH.	HEINRICH GRAETZ 1817-1891	HISTORY OF THE JEWS	1894 1949			GENERAL HISTORY
5	19TH.	SIMON DUBNOW 1860-1941	HISTORY OF THE JEWS	1925			GENERAL HISTORY
6	19TH.	JUDAH NEHAMA 1825-1899 SALONICA	1)HISTORIA UNIVERSAL POR EL USO DE CHICOS 2)ZIKARON TOB-BIOGRAFIA DEL MUY AFAMADO SABIDO y FILANTROPO DR. ALBERT COHEN 3)KOL ANOT 4)MIKTEBE DODIM	1861 1877 1888 1893	BIOG.  BIOG.	MAS.	POST BIBLICAL JEWISH HIST./LADINO  BIOG. OF MOSES ALATINI LETTERS+HIST. OF THE JEWS OF SALONICA
7	19TH.	MOIZ FRANKO 1864 ISTANBUL-1910 GELIBOLU	1)ESSAI SUR L'HISTORIE DES ISRAELITES DE 2)L'EMPIRE OTTOMAN DEPUIS LES ORIGINS JUSQU'A NOS JOURS 3)HISTOIRE ET LITTERATURE JUIFS, PAYS PAR PAYS	1897 1891		FR.	ALL HIS WORKS ARE IN FRENCH
8	19TH.	R.ABRAHAM DANON 1857 EDIRNE -1925 PARIS	1)TOLEDOT BENE ABRAHAM (L'HISTOIRE DES ISRAELITES) 2)YOSEF D'AT/EL PREGRESSO ABOUT 38 ESSAYS ON HIST. OF TYRKISH JEWRY	1887 1888 1895-1925			MAS.-W TRANSLATED FROM THEODORE REINACH
9	19TH.	SALAMON ABRAHAM ROSANES1862 RUSCUK - 1938 SOFIA	DIVREY YEMEI ISRAEL BE TOGARMAH KORAT HA-YEHUDIM BE TURKIYAH VE ARZOT HA-KEDEM	1907-1914 1930-1945	B B		6 VOLUME DETAILED FOUNDING OF OTTOMAN EMPIRE-MID 19TH. CENTURY
10	19TH.	JOSEPH NEHAMA 1880-1971	THE JEWS OF SELONIKA			FR./	
11	19TH.	ABRAHAM GALANTE 1873 BODRUM - 1961 ISTANBUL	TURKLER VE YAHUDILER TURCS ET JUIF LES SYNAGOGUES D'ISTANBUL HISTOIRE DES JUIFS D'ANATOLIE HISTOIRE DES JUIFS D'ISTANBUL	1927, 1947 1932 1937 1939 1941			HE HAD ABOUT 60 BOOKS AND MORE THAN 100 ESSAYS AND EDITORIAL COMMENTS ON HISTORY.

B: BOOK  
E: ESSAY

BIOG.: BIOGRAPHY  
TR.: TRANSLATED

**Table I Jewish Historiography on the Ottoman Empire and its Jewry –First Period**

#### 4. JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY ON SABBATIAN MESSIANISM AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

##### 4.1. The Sabbatian Messianic Movement

The Sabbatian Messianic movement, one of the important episodes of the early modern period of Jewish history, was felt deeply throughout the entire Diaspora, creating an emotional upheaval of immense force even in far flung communities. The movement, with its messianic aspirations and nationalistic character, stimulated historical interest and awareness among the Jewish people and produced a new surge of history writing reminiscent of the comparable resurgence observed after the Spanish expulsion.

It is widely accepted that Sabbatai Sevi's pseudo-messianic activity began in 1648 when he pronounced, for the first time, God's forbidden, ineffable name<sup>237</sup> in a synagogue in Smyrna. Indeed, according to the Kabbalistic tradition, there was a belief that the year 1648 would be the year of Israel's redemption by the Messiah.<sup>238</sup> In the Sabbatian tradition, another year, 1658,

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<sup>237</sup> According to rabbinic tradition pronouncing of the Tetragrammaton in Hebrew was permitted only to one person, the high priest; only in one place, the Sanctuary of the Temple in Jerusalem and only once per year, on the Day of Atonement.

<sup>238</sup> See Abraham Galante for the several ways in which cabbalists of Lurianic school arrived at the figure 1648 in their calculations based on *Gematria*, -numerical values of Hebrew letters. Thus, in this way they attributed a special meaning to the year 1648, as year of redemption. *Sabatay Sevi ve Sabataycilarin Gelenekleri* (Istanbul: Zvi-Geyik Yayınları, 2000), pp. 24-32.

signified a further important turning point. Sabbatians believed that, in that specific year, Sabbatai Sevi repudiated the authority of rabbinic law in Constantinople, by celebrating the three pilgrimage festivals in one week, claiming that it was God “who permits that which is forbidden.” According to the Sabbatian tradition, in Kabbalistic terms, the first date was considered to be the date of the anointment of Sevi by the prophet Elijah during which he “began to lift up the *Shekinah*,” whereas the second one corresponded to the proclamation of “a new law” and at that time he “uplifted the *Shekinah*”.<sup>239</sup> Nevertheless, these two incidents and Sabbatai’s other eccentric behaviors did not get much attention outside of local Sephardic communities and even in his close circles, these were seen as strange or even immature, foolish acts.<sup>240</sup> Indeed, in his memoirs, Sabbatian Abraham Cuenque implicitly illustrated how no one took Sevi seriously even in his close circle, by calling him “a fool” and how he brought grief and scandal to his family: “His brothers were grieved by his behavior and were greatly ashamed but could not prevail upon him to change his ways... Being wealthy, they felt *disgraced* by his behavior.”<sup>241</sup>

The drastic change in Sevi’s life occurred during his visit to Palestine in the spring of 1665. In Gaza, he met with a young rabbi, Nathan Benjamin Levi, known for his competence in spiritualist Kabbalistic analysis and as reflected in a report of the time, was seen as “worthy of being called a man of God.”<sup>242</sup> It was Nathan who proclaimed the messianic mission of Sabbatai

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<sup>239</sup> M. Attias, G. Scholem and I. Ben-Zvi, *Sabbatian Hymns* (1948), p. 177. As quoted by Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi...* p. 165.

<sup>240</sup> Psychological analysis of Sabbatai Sevi’s behavior reveals its manic-depressive character which usually develops with puberty. Pathological symptoms generally appear between the age of fifteen and twenty five. See, Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi ...* pp. 125-138.

<sup>241</sup> Abraham Cuenque’s memoirs, in Emden, pp. 34-35. Quoted in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi ...* p. 138.

<sup>242</sup> This argument reflects the impression of an anonymous emissary who was sent from Egypt to Gaza in early spring 1665 to investigate the news of appearance of “apparition of the man of God” in Gaza. Consequently several more emissaries were sent to Gaza with the same mission. All of these were emissaries affected by the talents and

Sevi. More interestingly, Nathan even confidently convinced a hesitant or according to some sources even a reluctant Sabbatai, of his divine role.<sup>243</sup> According to Scholem, with “tireless activity, originality of theological thought, and abundant productive power and literary ability,” Nathan can be seen as “at once the apparition John the Baptist and the Paul of the new Messiah.”<sup>244</sup> With Nathan’s well respected reputation and persuasive efforts, the movement rose swiftly and spread like a bush fire throughout the entire Diaspora in the early autumn of the year 1665.<sup>245</sup> According to Scholem, the wide dissemination of the Lurianic kabbalistic doctrine with its strong messianic elements, served as a “fertile ground of Sabbatianism.”<sup>246</sup> Nevertheless, the active, galloping, period of the movement had a rather short life. Almost in one year, with the

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kabbalistic approach of Nathan and reported positively illustrating him as “truly filled with the spirit of God.” Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi...* p. 213.

<sup>243</sup> Here Scholem’s analysis diverges completely from other sources (particularly earlier ones like the *Jewish Encyclopedia*.) According to Scholem, Sabbatai came to Nathan after he heard about Nathan’s reputation as a healer having spiritual powers. Thus, he visited Nathan “not as the Messiah or in accordance with some secret understanding” but just as a suffering patient who was looking for an actual remedy to ease his psychologically troubled soul. Indeed, anonymous sources of those years confirm that Nathan was frequently visited by penitents seeking the *tiqqun* of their souls. Gershom Scholem, “Sabbatianism and Mystical Heresy” in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), p. 295.

<sup>244</sup> Scholem, “Sabbatianism and Mystical Heresy” in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 295.

<sup>245</sup> Nathan’s initiative was so effective that even people who had known Sabbatai since his childhood and regarded his behavior as being weird became followers of the movement after Nathan’s prophecy.

<sup>246</sup> Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, p. 67-68. On this point, Scholem underlines that “by the middle of the seventeenth century the movement [Kabbalistic] emanating from Safed, and Lurianism in particular, had spread to all parts of the Diaspora.” p. 77. Israel Zinberg also states that “Sabbatai Sevi had been engrossed in the Kabbalah of Rabbi Isaac Luria from his early years.” See, Israel Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, Volume V. p. 137. On the other hand, Moshe Idel opposes Scholem’s assertion and claims that the Lurianic Kabbala did not have wide dissemination before the Sabbatian movement and there was no special emphasis of a messianic element in Lurianism, thus these two factors did not serve as “ideological substratum for the emergence and acceptance of Sabbatian messianism in further circles.” Furthermore, Idel blames Scholem for creating an over emphasized impression of the role of Lurianic kabbala and its messianism in the spread of Sabbatianism by using the historical texts in a “selective and biased way.” Moshe Idel, “One from a Town, Two from a Clan”- The Diffusion of Lurianic Kabbala and Sabbatianism: A Re-Examination.” *Jewish History*, Volume 7, No.2 Fall 1993. Hacker also asserts that the Kabbala did not “captivate wide circles of educated people, but rather remained the domain of a few scholars and other individuals” in the Ottoman lands in the end of the sixteenth century and all through the seventeenth. See, Hacker, “The Intellectual Activity of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.” Nevertheless, in general the Lurianic influence on the shaping of Sabbatian ideology was certain as can be seen from the letters written by Nathan of Gaza to Raphael Joseph, *chelebi*, an important leader/*messen* of the period who himself was a “student of Lurianic writings,” living in Cairo. See for example, Nathan’s letter of summer 1665, where he proclaimed Sabbatai’s messianic mission. Gerbern S. Oegema, p. 340. On this point, see also Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi...* pp. 270-281. Here, Scholem analyzes this particular letter of Nathan and with elaborated analysis claims Nathan developed a deviated doctrine of messianism from Lurianic kabbalah by using Lurianic premises.



conversion of Sabbatai Sevi to Islam in September 1666, the movement lost its broad national, mystical and political character and took on a limited and narrow sectarian form.

#### **4.2. Historiography on the Movement and its Suppression**

Before long, the movement produced a sudden awakening of awareness, a massive enthusiasm and an unseen vibrant stir in Jewish communities. With enormous interest and ardor, the Jewish world, with a “mass psychosis” or epidemic of madness, concentrated on glad tidings coming from Palestine and Smyrna. Interestingly, in a short time, a brisk and highly dense correspondence between Europe and the Orient, which was probably never seen before in such an intense way, came out, after the stimulation of the emanating messianic tidings.<sup>247</sup> The Jewish masses, in their letters, were trying with great interest and enthusiasm to learn more from their relatives or acquaintances who were living in important centers close to the movement about the miraculous acts of the revealed messiah and the movement. Especially, scholars and rabbis of the time, from both sides, i.e., the ones who appropriated the movement and felt themselves close to the movement, and while fewer in number, the others, on the opposite side, who rejected, even cursed Sabbatian messianism, were in a continuous quest to obtain more details and comments from their colleagues in the Orient in their desire to confirm their stance. In a letter to Venetian rabbis, Rabbi Abraham Yachini, one of the followers of Sevi in Constantinople, reflected the sentiment of the period, in a disguised allegoric manner;

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<sup>247</sup> A letter from Amsterdam mentions that on March 13, 1666, a date when the emotions about the movement was at its peak, the Jews of Amsterdam received thirty letters alone from Smyrna. (Aescholy, *Dinaburg Jubilee Volume*, p.228. Quoted by Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* ...p. 418.)

You seek information and inquire about the little goat that Israel Yerushalmi the son of Abraham purchased in Istanbul. Among those near to him there is a difference of opinion, for some think that the purchase is an erroneous purchase and they will lose their money. Therefore, know that we have thoroughly investigated and searched out this purchase, and we have become firmly convinced that the merchandise is of the highest quality and is current in all lands, and that whoever utters a slander against it will have to give account therefore. Competent merchants believe that this business will bring great profit. One must wait for the great fair which will take place, God willing, a year hence.<sup>248</sup>

An interesting portrayal of the impatient mood of expectation of the “great fair” and the function of those letters in the build up of this sentiment can be seen in the memoirs of Glückel of Hameln who lived at that time in Hamburg:

Our joy, when the letters arrived [from Smyrna] is not to be told. Most of them were addressed to the Sephardim who, as fast as they came, took them to their synagogue and read them aloud; young and old, the Germans too hastened to the Sephardic synagogue. The Sephardic youth came dressed in their best finery and decked in broad green silk ribbons, the gear of Sabbatai Sevi, “With timbrels and with dances”<sup>249</sup> they one and all trooped to the synagogue, and they read the letters forth with joy like the joy of the Feast of Water-Drawing.<sup>250</sup>

Reflecting this strong reverberation among the people, a flow of emissaries representing different communities and travelers from all over the Diaspora poured first into Smyrna and then to Gelibolu,<sup>251</sup> without regard to the difficulties and dangers of the traveling routes. With great interest and fervor, the intention of all these visitors was to witness the coming miraculous era and to express their submission and great enchantment to their “Lord and king of kings.” As a

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<sup>248</sup> Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature* p. 146.

<sup>249</sup> Exodus 15:20. This verse which takes place just after the drowning of Pharaoh presents the singing and dancing of Miriam with the joy of salvation from Egyptian bondage.

<sup>250</sup> *The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln*, translated by Marvin Lowenthal. (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), p. 46.

<sup>251</sup> Sabbatai Sevi proclaimed himself once more as messiah in Smyrna in October of 1665 and later between mid April and mid September of the year 1666, was kept in a castle near to the shore village of Gelibolu before his apostasy.

consequence of this highly emotional fervent awakening, a huge quantity of writing consisting of letters, reports, proclamations, queries, travel notes, poems and hymns possessing a good deal of historical value accumulated in a short time. These sentiments sharpened the historical awareness of contemporary writers and stimulated them to write histories related to the movement, as well as to collect and to edit vast amounts of historical documents of the day. As can be seen from Table II, although the messianic movement had an extremely short duration<sup>252</sup>, it stimulated the production of a considerable amount of historical work, reminiscent of the resurgence of historical creativity of the earlier century.

While Table II illustrates a relatively rich historiography on the messianic movement, it is still very difficult to claim it as a complete list. The policies of suppression that were established right after the apostasy, the orders to destroy all documents related to the movement and the purpose of obliterating all testimony to this shameful period were the central reasons for this incompleteness. Indeed, we do not have copies of some of the works listed in the table<sup>253</sup> although we know of their existence from different sources. Apparently the Jewish establishments in the Diaspora, after the apostasy of Sevi, in order to avoid further apostasies, schisms, strife and friction, preferred to hush up the messianic awakening and to repress the remnants of the movement. As a result, the rabbis and their entourage very diligently wiped away and destroyed all the books, manuscripts and other traces of the phenomenon so that nothing would be left to show that the movement ever existed. As a matter of fact, this cover up was instrumental in easing the return of many adherents of the movement back to classical

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<sup>252</sup> The movement lost most of its steam in September 1666 with the apostasy of Sabbatai Sevi to Islam. Nevertheless, though in less fervor, the movement continued for a while. After the death of Sabbatai in 1678 and Nathan in 1680, the movement gradually transformed itself into a secret sect with its own traditions of an enigmatic character.

<sup>253</sup> They are marked as L/S in the “Type” column of the Table 2. They were either lost or suppressed.

rabbinic Judaism by simply repenting of their grievous error. As stated later by a rabbi in Smyrna, the best way to accomplish this policy was “not to speak either for good or evil of the affair of Sabbatai Sevi, ‘neither curse them nor bless them!’”<sup>254</sup> Rabbi Samuel Aboab’s responsum, written about eight years after the event, reflects the order given to all the congregations in the Holy Land, Ottoman Empire, Germany, Holland, Poland, and Russia for a large-scale suppression, that is, internal censorship as well as destruction of records, documents and writings of the episode:

...they burned all the records and writings in which his name was mentioned, in order that it should not be remembered. ... Also the rabbis of Constantinople ... sent orders to the communities near and far ... [to do away] with everything that had been written about the deceitful affair ... that it should be forgotten and mentioned no more.<sup>255</sup>

Another illustrative example on the same point can be seen in Egypt as early as the end of December 1666. Contrary to the rabbis in the other regions of the Ottoman Empire, the Egyptian rabbis dared to proclaim a ban of excommunication extending to all literal products related to the movement. According to the ban: “who incited and instigated and abetted the evil, ... wherefore we have resolved to search for their rules, devotions, *and other writings* ... and to destroy them from the face of the earth ... and to excommunicate everyone who studies or follows them.”<sup>256</sup> Apparently, the ban had been put into practice in a strict manner. As noted by Scholem, the pages on the Sabbatai Sevi affair were torn out from both of the only two extant manuscripts of Sambari’s historical work, *Divrei Yosef*, much like the fate of many other historical documents

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<sup>254</sup> R. Haim Palachi, *Kol ha-haim* (All the living) (Izmir: Roditi, 1874), p. 18. The biblical quotation is from Num. 23-25. Quoted in Jacob Barnai, “From Sabbatianism to Modernization” in *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries*, ed. by Harvey E. Goldberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

<sup>255</sup> R. Samuel Aboab, *Debar Shemu’el*, fol. 97a. Quoted by Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* ... p. 763.

<sup>256</sup> Jacob Sasportas, *Şiṣath Nobel Sevi* Amsterdam 1737, p. 198. Quoted by Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* ... p. 750.

that “have fallen victim to the censorship of later anti-Sabbatian zealots.”<sup>257</sup> In a similar manner, another Egyptian historian of the period, David Conforte, did not dare give place to the movement in his work and consciously omitted the whole affair as if it had not happened.

Apart from the ban, some of active followers of Sabbatai Sevi who turned against him after his apostasy also wiped out all traces providing evidence for their support of the movement. For example, Moshe Galante<sup>258</sup>, a well-known rabbi from Jerusalem whose connection to Sevi was certain, traveled as an emissary of the Jerusalem community throughout the year 1666. He could not avoid appearing as an adherent of the movement in the heyday of the movement. However, later Galante removed and destroyed the records of this period in his career in order to create the impression that he had been in Jerusalem all the time.

Table II also lacks the type of historical documents of a single or even several pages which were left unnoticed for a long time in personal belongings or library collections. A good number of these documents were brought to light in later years and took their place in various edited books that were published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>259</sup> The table does not contain the prolific accounts created by the Christian observers of the period, written mostly by European clergymen and diplomats who were residing in Smyrna and Constantinople. As outsiders, these observers reflected in their detailed memoirs interesting episodes of the movement in a

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<sup>257</sup> Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* ... p. 179.

<sup>258</sup> Rabbi Moshe Galante was the grandfather of Rabbi Moses Hagiz, an ardent anti-Sabbataist of the eighteenth century. See Elisheva Carlebach, *The Pursuit of the Heresy- Rabbi Moshe Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

<sup>259</sup> *Inyeny Shabbat* (edited by Alfred Freimann in 1913) is an example of such an edited work of a much later period which is significant with its content of original documents and sources on Sabbatai Sevi and his messianic mission. This edition includes the writings of Moses Pinheiro, who had been Sabbatai's friend during his childhood in Smyrna. Pinheiro wrote his accounts just after Sabbatai's apostasy in Leghorn (Livorno) where he later settled.

systematic style, from a relatively objective angle.<sup>260</sup> Nevertheless, since they were unaware of the internal conflicts and difference of opinions within the Jewish community, their accounts “did not go beyond the more visible manifestations and public expressions of fervent belief.”<sup>261</sup> As Christians, these observers’ theological anti-Jewish attitudes are noticeable in their works.<sup>262</sup> Similarly, especially after the conversion of Sabbatai, a sarcastic folk literature appeared among the Christian subjects of the Empire.<sup>263</sup> Interestingly, historical sources do not show the existence of this kind of literature in the Turkish language written by the members of the Muslim population.<sup>264</sup>

Among those contemporary writers who wrote on the Sabbatian movement, several merit special attention since their works, with their personal observations and original documents, shed light

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<sup>260</sup> The most important Christian writer whose memoirs had a great role in analyzing the period was Thomas Coenen, the Protestant minister serving the Dutch congregation in Smyrna. Thomas Coenen, *Ydele verwachtinge der Joden ...*, Amsterdam, 1669. Jacob Becherand who was in Constantinople in 1666, was another clergyman of the Catholic order who wrote a pamphlet on the movement. Jacob Becherand, *Relation de la Veritable Imposture du faux Messie des Juifs, nommé Sabbatay Sevi*, Avignon, spring 1667. Another interesting contemporary account belongs to a Jesuit priest whose name was unknown. Paul Rycout, British consul in Smyrna was also interested in the movement; Paul Rycout, “History of Sabbatai Sevi” in *The History of the Turkish Empire from 1623-1677* (London, 1680) Another important Christian sources worth mentioning is; Chevalier De la Croix, *Memoire ... contenant diverses Relations très curieuses de l’Empire Ottoman*. Vol. II, pp.259-398.

<sup>261</sup> Scholem, *Sabbatai ...* p. 471.

<sup>262</sup> For example, Coenen in the beginning of his work introduces Sabbatai Sevi as “the last of a considerable number of Pseudo-Messiahs, who nevertheless have brought only misfortune, misery and destruction to the Jewish people throughout their history, as they kept on refusing to believe in the Christian saviour, the true Messiah.” Gerbern S. Oegema, “Thomas Coenen’s “Ydele Verwachtinge der Joden” (Amsterdam, 1669) as an important source for the History of Sabbatai Şevi” in *Jewish Studies Between the Disciplines- Papers in Honor of Peter Schafer on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, eds. Klaus Herrmann, Margarete Schluter, Giuseppe Veltri (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Scholem underlines the violent anti-Semitism of the Jesuit.

<sup>263</sup> See Galante, *Histoire Des Juifs de Turquie* (Istanbul, Isis, 1989), pp. 250-277. In his book, Galante introduces two Armenian documents, a poem and a historical essay, as well as a passage from a historical work of a Greek minister. The ridiculing attitude can be seen in these documents; “Sabbatai se vantait, autrefois, parce qu’il aller monter au ciel; mais à present, il est descendu à làbîme.” A Turkish translation of the poem was published in *Tarih ve Toplum*, Istanbul, December 1991. Vol. 16, 96. pp. 44-49. A Turkish article giving insight on the Armenian poet was written by Kevork Pamukciyan, “Sabetay Sevi hakkında Ermenice şiirin muelifi kimdir?- Who was the writer of the Armenian poem on Sabbatai Sevi?” *Tarih ve Toplum*, Istanbul, March 1992, V.17, 99 p. 2.

<sup>264</sup> An English traveler, Edward Browne, who passed through Larissa in 1669, was the only person who in his diary mentioned some Turkish songs on Sabbatai Sevi. However, there is no other source on this subject and there is no song that can be traced to Browne’s notes in later centuries. Edward Browne, *A Brief account of some Travels in Hungaria . . . Thessaly ... and Friuli* (London, 1673), p. 58; quoted by Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi, ...* p. 676.

on different aspects, periods and centers of the movement. These works complement each other like building blocks and help the researcher to comprehend the profound dimension of the Sabbatian messianism. Indeed, they are often referred to by historians writing in a later period and influenced them in their efforts to create comprehensive analyses of the movement. In the background, these contemporary works reflect the oppressive and controversial character of the aroused powerful messianic/nationalist sentiments, its threat to the traditional rabbinic establishment and the conflict between the believers and unbelievers. In the following section, we will concentrate on Jacob Sasportas and the Frances brothers, Jacob and Emanuel, as antagonists of the movement, and on Abraham Cuenque and Baruch Ben Gershon of Arezzo, as devoted adherents of the movement. Among the figures of this period, Jacob Emden was also significant, reflecting the suppressive intolerant character of mainstream rabbinic Judaism that surfaced in the last decades of the seventeenth century and continued into the eighteenth century. The analysis of these authors and their works will be useful in delineating some of the main characteristics of the historiography of this period.

In analyzing the works of all these writers, we will use the definition of historiography in its broadest meaning as a body of historical literature and we will not confine ourselves in strict boundaries. Indeed, as introduced earlier,<sup>265</sup> in its broadest sense, historiography, encompasses every, more or less systemized, collection and presentation or recording of historical events and individuals in any form that can serve as a source from which we can learn about the past and its “sense of the past.” Thus, as an example, Sasportas’ work which presented the Sabbatian movement and the period following Sabbatai’s apostasy mostly through chronologically organized letters is considered in this study as a historiographic work. By the same token,

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<sup>265</sup> See, the definition of historiography as developed in Chapter II, p. 9.

Abraham Cuenque's memoir with its high level of historical content is also introduced as another example of historical writing. In fact, as stated by Michael Stanislawski, memoirs in general as a genre can be seen as a different style of history writing:

Autobiographers and memoirists implicitly and explicitly are writing histories of their times, and it is a truism – noted long before the spread of postmodernism- that all historians bring their own autobiographical experiences to their history writing. Even those of us who stubbornly persist in believing that historians can and must strive for “detachment” in their history writing, if not pure objectivity, understand that historical interpretation is intimately and inextricably linked to and affected by our lives, experiences, and the interests and obsessions of our culture.”<sup>266</sup>

#### 4.2.1. Jacob Sasportas

Rabbi Jacob Sasportas was one of the most important figures of the period who in his writings and in his numerous letters appears as a fierce opponent of the movement even in its heyday. He was born and received his rabbinic education in Oran, North Africa and after an adventurous life in 1665, at the age of 55, settled in Hamburg. Sasportas, a mystic, a Cabbalist and a scion of a Spanish family of rabbis and scholars, was one of the rare rabbis in Europe who as a staunch defender of the rabbinate did not lose his head and kept raising his warning voice courageously:

“And I, in my distress, saw how the leaders of the people were wandering in error.”<sup>267</sup>

According to Sasportas, the Messiah's credentials as inscribed in Scripture would have to be very different from those offered by Sabbatai Sevi. During the time when messianic frenzy was

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<sup>266</sup> Michael Stanislawski, *Autobiographical Jews: Essays in Jewish Self-Fashioning* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004) p. 7. On the other hand, Marcus Moseley introduces a strict distinction between autobiography and memoir. However, his approach also highlights the historical character of memoir. According to Moseley, perceptions and emotional responses of the self assume, in autobiography, the roles assigned for deeds and events in the life of the other in the biography and the memoir. Moseley asserts that “parents, teachers, schoolmates and domestic staff may thus achieve a prominence in the autobiography that would, in the memoir, be reserved for generals and prime ministers, renowned men of letters and so on.” See, Marcus Moseley, “Jewish Autobiography: The Elusive Subject” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 95, No.1 (Winter 2005), p. 16-59.

<sup>267</sup> *Kitzur Şişath Nobel Sevi*, 4b (1867 edition) quoted by Israel Zinberg, p. 172.



at its peak, Sasportas wrote many letters to various communities in Europe and Orient,<sup>268</sup> exhorting them to unmask the impostors and warn the people against them. Sasportas, as a Kabbalist, who had a conservative approach, regarded the Sabbatian movement as a great threat to the old mystical tradition of “secret wisdom.” In his writings he branded adherents of the movement as immoral heretics and dangerous impostors: “These wicked men sully the words of the *Zohar* with falsehood.”<sup>269</sup> Throughout his disputations with Sabbatians, he collected, with great diligence, all the polemical correspondence and original pamphlets regarding the movement that were mostly of West European and Italian origin. After his death in 1698, his son, Abraham Sasportas, organized his rich collection in chronological order and in 1737, published it with his own preface in Amsterdam under the title *Şişath Nobel Sevi (The Fading Flower of Sevi)*. However, the work became better known afterwards under the title, *Kizzur Şişath Nobel Sevi* when Jacob Emden abridged it in his edited book in 1757. The full version of Sasportas’ work was published in 1954 by I. Tishby.

*Şişath Nobel Sevi* is one of our major sources on the Sabbatian movement. It is arranged chronologically in four parts. The first part, which is the longest part of the work, contains the collection of the letters Sasportas received and wrote between the years 1666 and 1667 and reflects the most active period of the movement. The second part describes the period 1667-1668, the failure of the movement and events after the conversion of Sevi. The third part consists of letters written in 1668-69 and contains Sasportas’ attack against renewed Sabbatian arguments. In those years, in their letters and efforts, Sabbatians endeavored to explain Sevi’s conversion by attributing some special divine meanings to his actions and presented his situation

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<sup>268</sup> In his writings Sasportas informs us that he “sent letters to Germany, Poland, Italy, Turkey, Egypt and Syria.” Quoted in Zinberg, p. 173.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

as a stage in the fulfillment of a divine scenario. The fourth and shortest part of the work refers to the period between 1673 and 1676, and reflects some of the main events of the period related to Sabbatians.

Sasportas' letters that were brought together in *Kizzur Şiṣath* portrays him as a fully determined, courageous and persistent defender of traditional Judaism. In these letters he accuses Sabbatians of being liars and reflects his concern that the new movement with its antinomian, revolutionary elements would harm the traditional, well-defined concepts and established institutions of Judaism. Indeed, his letters convey his fear of a schism that he believed would surface again in Judaism, similar to what had occurred during the emergence of Christianity in antiquity. However, recent scholarship by I. Tishby and R. Shatz reveals that during the most active period of the movement, Sasportas actually had a less certain attitude.<sup>270</sup> Those scholars demonstrate that Sasportas' letters, in their original form, contain a more vague approach towards the Sabbatian movement. Apparently, after the conversion, Sasportas himself changed most of his letters by altering some passages and adding others "to show that his opposition was far more thorough and resolute from the beginning than it really was, and he glossed over his own hesitation and half-belief in Sabbatai Sevi during the months in which the movement reached its peak."<sup>271</sup> This behavior of Sasportas is particularly meaningful in that it illustrates the highly influential and oppressive atmosphere of the movement such that even the people who were known as ardent antagonists were hesitant and cautious in their criticism during the height of the movement.

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<sup>270</sup> According to Scholem, there was even a brief period where Sasportas was inclined to accept Nathan's prophecy. A letter sent to Salé in autumn 1665 by Sasportas attests to this inclination. Of course this letter did not find a place in his work. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* ... p. 569, 650.

<sup>271</sup> Joseph Dan, "Sasportas Jacob" in *Encyclopedia Judaica-CD-ROM Edition*.

#### 4.2.2. Jacob and Emmanuel Frances

Jacob and Emanuel Frances were two other intellectuals whose protesting voice deserves to be noted in the Jewish history writing of the period as an exceptional example of conscious and persistent opposition towards the movement. Being raised and educated in a city like Mantua, which was an important Jewish center in the Renaissance and Baroque period, both brothers were influenced by the rationalist currents of the era. Jacob Frances, a well educated Talmudist, became known as an obstinate opponent of mysticism, i.e., Kabbala. To him “The Kabbalists occupy themselves with foolishness”<sup>272</sup> and as he publicly declared, the *Zohar* disgusted its readers with its “vile language,”<sup>273</sup> and was a forged book not written by R. Simeon ben Yohai as the Kabbalists claimed. Contrary to other opponents of the Sabbatian movement, Jacob Frances always remained an uncompromising opponent of the movement even in its most frenetic peak stage. In spite of all the assaults against him, including physical, he courageously continued to challenge his opponents; “You will not silence me! Even if you shed my blood.” His satirical poems and writings reflect the decisive and stubborn manner he used in criticizing the followers of the movement:

...[I am convinced] that Sevi’s defeat is unavoidable. He is the certain victim of Ashmodai. I would laugh over his doglike downfall, but I am distressed by the fate of my people. I fear that this plague of a deer will bring upon my people ruin after ruin and exile after exile. Some he will bring to heresy, others he will lead to apostasy. I mourn for my people. This false messiah will be a stumbling block for them. He will not bring redemption but make their chains even stronger.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> *Emmunat Hachamim* (Johannesburg edition, p. 34). Quoted by Zinberg, p. 173.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> Joseph and Emanuel Frances, *Sevi Muddah*, p. 105, in *Qobez Al Yad*, re-publication by M. Mortara in 1885.

In his poems, using a sarcastic style, Jacob Frances, presented Sabbatai Sevi as a petty impostor: “This man who is like a prickly thorn- will he be the redeemer of the whole generation? This petty man, this shameful pygmy- is he God’s chosen?... This deer is a fly, not a lion.”<sup>275</sup> Like his brother, Emanuel Frances wrote lampoons against Sabbatai Sevi and his followers. In these poems he illustrated Sevi as a fornicator and his adherents as foolish people:

Is he the Lord’s anointed or a traitor,  
A wicked sinner and a fornicator?  
.....  
The foolish people, gaping as spellbound,  
Affirm: This is a mystery profound.<sup>276</sup>

Emanuel also wrote a short but condensed history of the movement with the title; “The Story of Sabbatai Sevi” and published it as an introduction to his book of poetry, *Sevi Muddah*. His history based on rich original documents gives insight to the repercussions of the movement especially in Italy. *Sevi Muddah* was published in Leghorn in 1667 by Emanuel after the death of his brother and as literary form it was largely a compilation of the satiric poems of both brothers. It was the ongoing affinity of Italian Jews to Sabbatai Sevi, even after his apostasy that prompted Emanuel Frances to publish his book. Other than the satirical message of the poems, the introduction that reflects the history of the Sabbatian movement in a condensed form and a large

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<sup>275</sup>Ibid., p. 101. Sevi in Hebrew means deer. Here Jacob Frances plays on the Hebrew meaning of the name “Sevi.” Jacob Frances “made skillful use of all the possibilities of punning on the Hebrew word *sevi*, which frequently occurs in the Bible in the senses of ‘splendor’ and of ‘roe’ or ‘hart.’ ” See Scholem *Sabbatai Sevi* ... p. 516. One of the names attributed to Sevi was “Lion.” In spring 1666, in Smyrna, instead of the traditional prayer that should be dedicated for the ruler of the land, a new text was adopted indicating Sultan Sabbatai Sevi as King of kings and “Messiah, the Anointed of the God of Jacob, the Celestial Lion ...” See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* .... P. 424. The substitution of Sevi for the Ottoman Sultan’s name in such a prayer had a significant political meaning as pointed out in the study. In Islamic tradition a similar prayer *hutbe* was of great importance showing the sovereignty of the rulers.

<sup>276</sup> Frances, *Sevi Muddah* p. 125. Quoted by Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* .... p. 404.

number of explanatory notes attached to the poems makes *Sevi Muddah* an important, in some cases the only document describing various historical episodes of the Sabbatian movement.<sup>277</sup> However, in some cases where the “Story of Sabbatai Sevi” is based on hearsay and upon doubtful or exaggerated documents, the account abounds in misrepresentations and distortions.

#### 4.2.3. Jacob Emden

As a German Talmudist and anti-Sabbatian, Jacob Emden also has an important place in the historiography on the Sabbatian movement. Seeing himself as a guardian against *hillul ha-Shem* (desecration of the sacred) and a defender of an orthodox version of *halakhah*, Emden was a relentless opponent of the Sabbatean movement and its existing open and crypto followers. Like Sasportas, Emden considered Sabbateanism a heretical movement which in its remnant disguised form could still give great harm to rabbinic Judaism. With the private printing press which he founded in Altona, he disseminated his strict, rabbinic views, and as a persistent “witch hunter,” mercilessly attacked anyone whom he suspected of supporting or showing affinity to Sabbatianism.<sup>278</sup> Among his numerous polemical and rabbinical works *Zoth Torah ha-Qena’oth* (1<sup>st</sup> edition in Altona, 1752; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition in Lvov, 1870) had special importance for our subject matter since it contains four different accounts of Sabbatai Sevi: (a) a shortened Hebrew version

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<sup>277</sup> See for example Gershom Scholem *Sabbatai Sevi* ... p. 353 and 267.

<sup>278</sup> Jacob Emden, in his most famous controversy from 1750 until he died in 1764, accused Jonathan Eybeschuetz, rabbi of the three communities of Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbek of being a crypto Sabbataist, claiming his literary works contained secret hints of the doctrine. See, Jacob J. Schacter, “History and Memory of Self: The Autobiography of Rabbi Jacob Emden,” in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, eds. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron and David N. Myers. (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998), pp. 428-453.

of Leyb b. Ozer's *Beshraybung Fun Shabsai Zvi*; (b) an altered and expanded Hebrew version of Coenen's Dutch account *Ydele...*;<sup>279</sup> (c) Abraham Cuenque's memoir with critical notes by Moses Hagiz; and (d) Tobias Kohen's account of Sabbatai Sevi, *Ma'aseh Tovyah* (Venice, 1707). Table II also lists two other works that were edited and printed by Emden in his own printing house. Emden's version of Rabbi Moses b. Habib's *Testimony* has particular historiographic importance since the original is no longer extant.

#### 4.2.4. Abraham Cuenque

We owe another comprehensive Sabbatian legend to Abraham Cuenque who was born and got his rabbinic education in Hebron. Cuenque joined the Sabbatian movement at a young age in Hebron and remained among the followers even after Sevi's conversion to Islam. Contrary to Sasportas and the Frances brothers, Cuenque was a devout Sabbatian. His work, *Memoir on Sabbatai Sevi*, written in 1689, is described by Graetz as "a kind of Sabbatian gospel, an excellent example of how in the field of religion history takes the shape of myth and myth again transforms itself into history."<sup>280</sup> An abbreviated Hebrew version of *Memoir* was published in 1752 by Jacob Emden under the title of *Tofes Shelishi* in his edited work, *Torath ha-qena'oth* where he collected together several other works that were written on Sabbatai Sevi. Among the writers on Sevi, Cuenque was the only one who personally met with Sabbatai Sevi when he was a young boy and in his memoir he described how he was impressed by Sevi's appearance. His portrayal offers us a depiction of Sevi in a typical manic illumination stage:

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<sup>279</sup> See note 258 on Thomas Coenen.

<sup>280</sup> Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, Volume V (Illinois, Verda Books, 2002), p. 212.

I did not take my eyes off him from the moment of his arrival ...He recited psalms with a mighty voice, 'the voice of joy and the voice of gladness,' a most agreeable and pleasing voice, ... his demeanor was awe-inspiring, different in every aspect from that of men... While he was among us, he neither ate nor drank, nor did he sleep at all. <sup>281</sup>

Abraham Cuenque's memoirs are especially significant as he was a first hand witness of the devotional and penitential atmosphere in Palestine just after the proclamation of the messianic mission of Sabbatai Sevi. His memoirs reflect also the conflicts and the clash of opinions among the rabbis of Hebron and Jerusalem related to the authenticity of the messianism of Sabbatai Sevi. However, as an ardent and persistent believer, writing twenty five years after the pseudo-messianic event, Cuenque transformed or did not mention at all many facts that could be detrimental to the Sabbatian legend; thus, his account contains exaggerations and conscious distortions. For example, Cuenque presented Sabbatai's conversion to Islam as the messiah's success "in warding off danger from Israel."<sup>282</sup> The conversion was portrayed as a conscious sacrificial act of Sabbatai on behalf of the Jewish nation as otherwise "no Jew will escape or remain in the whole kingdom of the Turk, and the other kingdoms will see and do likewise."<sup>283</sup>

#### **4.2.5. Baruch Ben Gershon of Arezzo**

Baruch Ben Gershon of Arezzo was another supporter of the Sabbatian movement from Italy. His chronicle *Zikkaron Li-Beney Yisrael* was published by A. Freiman in Berlin, in 1913 as a section of the book, *Inyeney Shabbetai Sevi*, edited by Freiman. As a devoted Sabbatian, who kept a close attachment to his "Lord" after the conversion, his chronicle reflects the movement

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<sup>281</sup> Abraham Cuenque, *Memoir on Sabbatai Sevi* edited by Jacob Emden, as cited by Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi ...* p. 188.

<sup>282</sup> Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi ...* p. 684.

<sup>283</sup> Cuenque, *Memoir on Sabbatai Sevi*, edited by Jacob Emden in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi ...* p. 684.

from the perspective of a believer. For example, in line with the general acceptance among the believers of the movement, Sabbatai's manic-depressive disease was not illustrated in his chronicle as an illness or a flaw but as "divine dispensations." Baruch of Arezzo, by coining new mystic terms, portrayed the manic phase of the illness as "illumination" and the depression phase as "hiding of the face" or "alienation from God." Indeed, the discourse of *Zikkaron* contains many examples of legendary, miraculous and impossible motifs in describing the deeds of both Sabbatai Sevi and his prophet Nathan. According to Baruch of Arezzo, when the unbelievers complained of Sabbatai in Smyrna, the Turkish *kadı* (judge) summoned him, beheld Sabbatai, and "was seized by trembling, and rendered him great honor. He sent for the men who had slandered him, but they were afraid and fled into hiding."<sup>284</sup> In another instance, he depicted Sabbatai as having mastery of different languages so that his perfect and elegant Arabic influenced the vizier who had summoned him for interrogation.<sup>285</sup> Nevertheless, although Baruch of Arezzo was a devoted Sabbataist, and his accounts contained exaggerations particularly in praising Sabbatai and Nathan, still in concurrent to typical trait associated with the writers of the period, his descriptions and interpretations were also based mostly on the information he gathered from the contemporary documents including letters, reports and travelers' accounts. Baruch of Arezzo's chronology becomes a particularly valuable and reliable source for the period after the conversion of Sabbatai Sevi, of the period about which most other sources offer no information. His account reflects the approach of Nathan and other members in the immediate proximity of the movement for establishing the Sabbatian doctrine to justify the

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<sup>284</sup> Here Baruch of Arezzo inserted his own interpretation to Samson Bacchi's report. (Freimann, p. 49.) Quoted in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi...* p. 411. According to another source, Coenen, Sabbatai whose Turkish was poor, stood speechless and confused in front of the *kadı* and the Turkish officer let him go because he considered him a fool or madman.

<sup>285</sup> According to another source, Leyb b. Ozer, Sabbatai not only had a poor knowledge of the Turkish language he also had no command of Arabic. Ozer quoting his sources informs us that Sabbatai communicated with the vizier through the translation of his brother, Joseph Sevi. p. 450-451.



apostasy and their strategies in conveying them to their adherents. A copy of Nathan's letter which was introduced in Arezzo's chronology is significant in illustrating the new reasoning which was used to make adherents feel relieved:

Know therefore ... that [it is] he and no other, and besides him there is no Savior of Israel. And although he has put the fair miter [the turban] on his head, his holiness is not profaned, for God has sworn with His right hand and He will not deceive. This is one of God's mysteries, and no one who has any knowledge of the mysteries of the Torah will consider it strange. For although nothing of the kind is indicated in the plain sense of Scripture, yet we have seen that the sayings of ancient rabbis on these [eschatological] matters are obscure and utterly inexplicable, ...<sup>286</sup>

Arezzo portrayed Sabbatai as a disguised Jew after his conversion who had "devoted himself to Torah and to kabbalistic meditations while he was trying to ingratiate himself with the Turks by spending most of his day in the mosque."<sup>287</sup> Baruch was also a first hand source describing Nathan's mystical travel to Rome and probably he was an eye witness to the tense relations that occurred during Nathan's visit to Italian Jewish communities in cities like Venice and Livorno.

Among the historical accounts listed in Table II, *Gey Hizzayon*, the Yemenite version of the Sabbatian apocalypse, is particularly interesting because it shows the wide spread nature of Sabbatianism even to far-flung communities of the Diaspora. Written in the late summer of 1666 in Sana'a, the capital city of Yemen, by an unknown author, *Gey* was "indebted for its facts as well as for most of its legendary material to letters received from Egypt,"<sup>288</sup> in the very early days of the messianic awakening. The different version of the messianic discourse of the work

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<sup>286</sup> Baruch of Arezzo, pp. 59-61. Quoted in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* ... p. 741.

<sup>287</sup> Baruch of Arezzo (*ap.* Freimann, p. 63). Quoted in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* ... p. 726.

<sup>288</sup> Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* ..., p. 438. *Gey Hizzayon* which was extant in several manuscripts brought to light by Scholem in 1949. Scholem, *Qobes 'al Yad*, IV, New Series (1949), pp. 105-41.

interestingly shows Yemenite believers' freedom to elaborate their own interpretations according to their traditions and kabbalistic understanding.<sup>289</sup>

### 4.3. Conclusion

The Sabbatian movement ended with an abrupt and swift interference by the central Ottoman authorities and court. Apparently, increased complaints about Sabbatai Sevi, emerging from different origins and ongoing fervent activities in Gelibolu,<sup>290</sup> finally attracted the attention of the authorities and forced them to act. On September 12, 1666 under the orders of the Sultan Mehmet IV, the messengers sent by the court put Sabbatai Sevi into a carriage and instantly transported him from Gelibolu to Adrianople. Without delay, on the next day, right after his arrival, Sevi was brought to the Sultan's court for interrogation. To the astonishment of his adherents, who with great excitement had prepared themselves to witness a victorious final hour, Sevi denied all messianic pretensions ascribed to him and chose to embrace Islam. Their messiah, the people's redeemer, "the divine emanation, the corporal revelation of God's *Shechinah*, the incarnate . . . six angled *sefirah* known as *Tiferet* (Beauty), and the human form

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid., p.p 651-657. Here Scholem explains in detail the Yemenite interpretation of the Sabbatian movement.

<sup>290</sup> Among the complaints, most probably Rabbi Nehemiah's denouncement of Sabbatai for fomenting sedition, which took place just before the arrest of Sabbatai, was the most influential. Rabbi Nehemiah, a rabbi from Poland, converted to Islam in Adrianople after he ran away from a harsh three-day debate with Sabbatai. There were also increasing number of complaints from local Muslim authorities because of Sabbatai's way of living and the rowdiness created by his visitors. These complaints about Sabbatai even included immoral relations with women. Galante, *Histoire de Juifs de Turquie*, p. 273.

of the third letter of the Ineffable Name of God,”<sup>291</sup> who was supposed to take the Sultan’s crown and place it on his own head, instead threw his “Jewish hat” down and put the “white turban on his head.”<sup>292</sup>

The time period between the rise of the messianic movement with the proclamation of the messianic mission and its failure with the apostasy lasted all of 16 months.<sup>293</sup> This relatively short time period has been one of the most interesting episodes in early modern Jewish history and as a consequence attracted the interest of many scholars. In the middle of the twentieth century, Gershom Scholem gave new impetus and perspective to the studies of the movement through the publication of his monumental work.<sup>294</sup> Scholem elaborately reflected and analyzed different aspects of the Sabbatian messianic movement in a comprehensive way. According to Gershom Scholem, messianism has an enormous significance in Judaism and it is a pivotal factor in shaping Jewish spirituality, history and historiography.<sup>295</sup> Beside Scholem, the movement has been elaborately analyzed by different “masters of Jewish historical and intellectual inquiry” and with their collective endeavor a “scholarly edifice”<sup>296</sup> of outstanding value has been built to shed light on the most obscure features of the movement. In the following sections, a few brief remarks will be offered to highlight some of the features of the movement from the point of view of historiography.

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<sup>291</sup> Those descriptions were some of the different attributions given to Sabbatai Sevi. See, Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature* Vol. V, pp. 161-163.

<sup>292</sup> De la Croix, *Memoire . . . contenant diverses Relations tres curieuses de l’Empire Ottoman*. Vol. II, p. 374, quoted by Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* . . . p. 682.

<sup>293</sup> The messianic movement began in Gaza with Sabbatai’s proclamation of himself as messiah on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1665 (Seventeenth of Sivan) and ended on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 1666 with his apostasy in Adrianople.

<sup>294</sup> Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi, The Mystical Messiah, 1626-1676*, trans. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, Bollingen Series XCIII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

<sup>295</sup> See two major works of Scholem on this subject. *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1955) and *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946).

<sup>296</sup> Elisheva Carlebach, review of the *Sabbatianism: Social Perspectives*, by Jacob Barnai, *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 94, No.1. (Winter 2004), pp. 202-204. In addition to Scholem, Carlebach points to Moshe Idel, Isaiah Tishby, Yehuda Liebes, Abraham Elqayam, and Eliot Wolfson as prominent scholars on Sabbatian messianism.

#### 4.3.1. A Surge of Letters and a Snowballing of Messianic Awakening.

One of the salient features of the messianic movement was its astounding rapid diffusion even to far flung corners of the Diaspora. Two major factors, one religious and the other social in character, appear to have been influential both in the rapid spread of the news on the movement and in the effective dissemination of the movement itself. In the first decades of the seventeenth century, the existent popular messianic expectation, that was common and vibrant in all Jewish communities,<sup>297</sup> was further exacerbated with the newly developed Palestine-centered Safed Kabbalism.<sup>298</sup> This powerful spiritual and dogmatic base served as the fertile ground for effective dissemination of messianic enthusiasm. In addition to this religious factor, the firm and active attachment that existed between greatly dispersed Jewish communities, and their conscious interest in each other, acted as a driving force for the wide dissemination of these views. Existing powerful and efficient channels of communication played an enormous role in building up close contact between separated communities and in activating inter-relations between them. Indeed, during the Sabbatian frenzy, commercial, diplomatic, family, rabbinic and charitable networks functioned effectively and made possible the spread of a record amount of news and information in a short time to the most distant corners of the Jewish world.

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<sup>297</sup> See note 236 about Jewish messianic expectations. Interestingly in the mid-seventeenth century there was a similar messianic fervor in Christianity. For messianic expectations in Christianity and millenarianism see Jacob Barnai, "Christian Messianism and the Portuguese Marranos: The Emergence of Sabbateanism in Smyrna" *Jewish History* Volume VII, No.2 Fall, pp.119-126. In Islam also we see an emergence of a *mehdi* in Anatolia in the fourth decade of the seventeenth century. Galante, *Sabetay Sevi ve Sabetaycılarının Gelenekleri*, p. 27.

<sup>298</sup> Throughout his work, Scholem points to Lurianic Kabala as the most influential spiritual and dogmatic base in the dissemination of the movement. Idel does not reject the role of kabbalah in general but claims the kabbalistic teachings of Moses Cordovero, an earlier kabbalist from Safed, were more popular during the movement. According to him, "the greatest part of the kabbalistic literature which was disseminated and influential at the end of the sixteenth and in the beginning of the seventeenth centuries was derived from Cordoveran sources." Moshe Idel, "One from a Town, Two from a Clan .." p. 83.

As Scholem stated, in the absence of organized missionary activities, “letters and rumors”<sup>299</sup> were the only means of spreading news and information. In fact, in the early stages of the movement, i.e. in the late spring of 1665, it was Nathan’s letters sent to important Jewish centers close to Gaza like Aleppo and Alexandria, proclaiming Sabbatai as messiah, ignited the first sparks of the messianic awakening. Sabbatai’s stays in Safed, Damascus and Aleppo in July 1665, on his return to Smyrna, just after his proclamation of a messianic mission also created a stir among the Jewish communities of these cities. Letters, carrying the glad tidings dispatched from these cities to bigger centers like Constantinople and Alexandria testify to the early charisma associated with Sabbatai. Chevalier De la Croix’s summary and comments on a letter from Aleppo reflect the wave of messianic enthusiasm and the nature of disseminated sentiments:

The messiah dwelt among them, and thus they depended no longer on Nathan’s letters, for they saw with their own eyes and heard with their own ears, and signs were brought to them... At the end of their letter they added that since they believed in the prophecy of Nathan, they had decided to cease all business, to put on sackcloth and ashes, and to devote themselves to penitence, charity, and prayer so as to be worthy to behold the fulfillment of the prophecy... Finally they called on their friends [in Constantinople] to follow their example.<sup>300</sup>

Beginning from October of 1665, these letters and reports of Levantine origin began to appear increasingly in Western Jewish centers. With their mixture of facts and legends, these letters served as a major medium for transmitting messianic awakening, which in a short time snowballed to a powerful mass movement first in the Ottoman Empire, then in the whole of the

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<sup>299</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* ....., p. 468.

<sup>300</sup> De la Croix, Chavalier. pp. 290-92. Quoted by Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, p. 258.

Diaspora. There was no other event in the whole of Jewish history in the post-Temple period which stirred the spirits of the Jewish people and disclosed their longing for redemption so powerfully. As an outcome of this unique and shocking event:

the flood of letters and proclamations literally inundated Jewish communities . . . All of Jewry . . . was waiting for new information, impatiently expecting the command to set out on the way to welcome the Messiah. The distant communities pelted the leaders of the communities in Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Smyrna with letters.<sup>301</sup>

Venice, Leghorn, Vienna and Amsterdam, the most important centers of European Jewry also became active information centers in transmitting news to other Jewish communities of Europe. New enthusiastic letters composed in these centers by assembling “Three lines from a letter received from Venice, five from a letter from Leghorn, some brief reports passed on from one or more of the small cities in Italy, and a few lines from a letter from Vienna or Paris,”<sup>302</sup> further inflamed the enthusiasm and spread of the movement.

It is noteworthy that an important fraction of these letters did not reach our day; we know them only by way of quotations. Like some of the historical works, these were either lost or deliberately destroyed after the Sabbatian movement collapsed. However, even in their reduced amount, these letters are of a unique character and they constitute an important historical source on the history of the movement. With the addition and interpretation of newly found documents, obviously these letters will continue to shed light on interesting aspects of the movement even in our days.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Zinberg, *A History* ... p. 146.

<sup>302</sup> Scholem, *Sabbatai* . . . p. 470.

<sup>303</sup> Interestingly, an important number of letters and documents were found in Abraham Albert Amerillos's archive in 1960, after Scholem's first edition of his book. This archive which survived the Nazi occupation of Greece

#### 4.3.2. A Novel Approach and Form in Jewish Historiography

The aforementioned vast number of letters and reports written during the Sabbatian movement were collected, preserved and used as important original documents by the writers under investigation here in their historical accounts. These documents, together with the information gathered from travelers and visitors, formed the gist of almost all accounts on the Sabbatai Sevi messianic movement and were widely used both by the opponents and the supporters of the movement to defend their point of view. Thus, in contrast to historical treatments of earlier periods in Jewish history, the historiography on the Sabbatai Sevi messianic movement has been based on original documents and eyewitness reports, i.e. *primary sources*. This was a novel approach in Jewish historiography and it can be claimed that the work of these historians represents the first examples of Jewish historiography where primary sources have been extensively used and quoted.<sup>304</sup> Furthermore, there is another factor which makes this historiography unique and distinguishable. All the historical works listed in Table II can be shown as the first examples of their kind where the subject matter and content were not

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belonged to Donmeh in Salonika and was “thought to have been lost, especially after the great fire of 1917.” See Scholem, *Sabbatai* . . . p. xiii.

<sup>304</sup> The three Hebrew narratives written in the early twelfth century shortly after the events of the first crusade are also based, in part, on eye witness and other oral and written reports. However, in these narratives there was no explicit or implicit reference to primary sources like written or oral documents as in the historiography on the Sabbatian movement. For example in the Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson, the narrator frequently begins an account in the third person and continues in the first. See, *The Jews and the Crusaders*, translated and edited by Shlomo Eidelberg (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1977). Although elusive, there is a strong theological theme in the Crusade Chronicles. As “theological justification for the innocent” (Michael A. Meyer, p.17) like Babylonians and Rome, the crusaders were shown as agents of God’s will, punishing the Jewish people because of their sins. Once more, the crusade chronicles reflect one of the main theme of Jewish historiography, i.e., the sins of the past affecting the present; “but the Lord did as He had spoken, for we have sinned against Him.” (Salomon Bar Simeon, “Massacres in Rhineland” in *Ideas of Jewish History*, p.98) Furthermore, the death of people was presented as martyrdom with a special divine meaning; “For God had chosen all that good generation to be His portion in order to bring merit through them upon succeeding generations.” (Ibid.)

traditional historical issues of the Jewish past embedded in a theological frame work but were *limited only to a reflection of a contemporary event*, i.e. the Sabbatian movement.<sup>305</sup> On the basis of these two points, Jewish history writing became for the first time closer in form to the contemporary prevailing Christian understanding of historiography. As discussed in the first chapter, the political character of the messianic movement can be shown as the main reason for the emergence of such a different and novel historiography.<sup>306</sup>

As can be expected, the manner in which writers handle and quote letters and reports obviously reflects their own attitudes towards the movement. For example, reflections of Sasportas' anti-Sabbatian stance are evident in his quotations. In his work, Sasportas referred to pro-Sabbatian letters quite frequently. However, as can be seen from his allusions, he did not reproduce the texts of these letters and carefully avoided verbatim quotations. Nevertheless, he enthusiastically and widely used the letters of the opponents as evidence and offered their full texts, even if, as he stated, they contained fraudulent and baseless information. His reference to a letter fictitiously describing Sabbatai's descent is a typical example of his biased attitude: "his father would sell himself for a pair of shoes, and his mother would prostitute herself to get her food."<sup>307</sup> A similar approach, but in the opposite direction, can be seen in the accounts written by believers. For example, Arezzo quoted pro-Sabbatian letters of a highly legendary character much more

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<sup>305</sup> The four Hebrew Crusade Chronicles from the twelfth century also had a more limited and contemporary subject matter. However, these chronicles with their stylistic modalities, rich symbolism and as "fictions of a particular Jewish religious imagination" had a dirge character rather than a concern for historical reflection of an episode. Indeed, to this day, different sections of the Crusade narratives became part of the Jewish liturgy in commemorating the persecutions and martyrdoms of the Rhenish communities during the Crusades. See, Ivan G. Marcus, "From Politics to Martyrdom – Shifting Paradigms in the Hebrew Narratives of the 1096 Crusade Riots" *Prooftexts 2* (1982) 40-52. Yerushalmi also regards the Crusade Chronicles as martyrologies that attracted Jewish interest not due to their historical content but due to their ritual and liturgical use. According to him, the Chronicles "never served as a vehicle" for an actual inquiry into the Jewish past. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, pp. 37-45. Marc Cohen criticizes Yerushalmi's approach as overly categorical. Marc Cohen, p. 178.

<sup>306</sup> See pages 20-22, for a short analysis on the political aspects of the Sabbatian movement.

<sup>307</sup> Sasportas, p. 92. Quoted by Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, p. 107.



frequently than critical ones. Among the writers, only the account of Leyb B. Ozer was based mostly on eye-witness testimonies. His main source was the “testimony” of a servant in particular, who was supposedly in service to Sabbatai during his entire messianic mission. However, other sources, including eye witnesses like Abraham Cuenque, who were close to Sabbatai, did not mention in their memoirs the existence of such a servant. Indeed, according to Scholem, Ozer’s account is either useless for most instances or needs special care in order to detect authentic details due to its “semilegendary character.”<sup>308</sup> On the other hand, Abraham Cuenque’s historical account has a unique character. It mostly depends on his personal memories. Particularly, presentation of historical events and historical figures makes Cuenque’s *Memoir*, as a genre, *one of the first examples* of its kind in Jewish historiography.<sup>309</sup>

In analyzing the historiography on the Sabbatian movement, it is important to distinguish between the accounts written after the event and the early letters or testimonies that were written during the movement. Another differentiation must be made between the pro-Sabbatian accounts and the negative ones. A common feature of all this is that all writings suffered from similar oppressive public repression in different stages of the movement according to their tendency, but from diametrically opposite directions. During the height of the movement, as reflected

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<sup>308</sup> Scholem, *Sabbatai* ... p. 175, 407.

<sup>309</sup> Memoirs as a genre was very rare before the eighteenth century. As a special feature, in medieval Germany a distinctive tradition was developed in transmitting the copies and compilation of “cultural icons and archetypes,” to posterity through family chain of transmission. The compilation of Eliezer ben Asher Halevy from the fourteenth century is one of the most known and enhanced examples of this tradition. Josel of Rosheim’s compilation was distinguished from most of the others by the “inclusion of his own composition, *Sefer Ha-Miknah*.” Josel who was a prominent figure from the early sixteenth century German Jewry wrote *Sefer* again as a “family keepsake.” The *Sefer* with its rich content of the author’s own life and relations is *unique* as a *memoir*. See, Elisheva Carlebach, “Between History and Myth: The Regensburg Expulsion in Josel of Rosheim’s *Sefer Ha-miknah*,” in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory* ed. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron and David N. Myers. Although they do not present their author’s personal experiences, as a “*diary*” two anonymous chronicles are also noteworthy to mention. See, *A Hebrew Chronicle from Prague c. 1615* ed. Abraham David (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1993) and Aryeh Shmuelevitz, “Ms Pococke No.31 As a Source for the Events in Istanbul in the Years 1622-1624” in *Ottoman History and Society- Jewish Sources* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1999), pp. 55-72.

colorfully in different accounts, a clamorous and stormy ecstatic atmosphere was dominant. For the small minority of the stubborn opponents who were surrounded by the majority of enthusiastic believers and felt the fear of the rabble, an expression of anti-Sabbatian ideas was very difficult if not impossible. They were the “only sober ones in a sea of psychotic mass intoxication; to sit like ‘mourners among bridegrooms.’”<sup>310</sup> Thus, pens like Sasportas or the Frances brothers were physically harassed, silenced and forced to guard their language. However, after the movement ended, this trend turned upside-down. Through the efforts of opponents like Sasportas, Moses Hagiz and Emden, concomitant with the typical attitude of rabbinic historiography, Sabbatianism was presented “as an exemplar of the most vile and subversive Jewish messianism and heresy since the birth of Christianity.”<sup>311</sup> These writers and their close circle of pious rabbis and orthodox leaders declared a bitter struggle against the remnant of Sabbatians. The followers, who developed a new version of the Sabbatean Kabbalah, were obliged to hide themselves and accustomed themselves “to introduce hints of their secret doctrine into their literary works, particularly into the field of kabbalah.”<sup>312</sup> Anti-Sabbatian polemicists like Jacob Emden and Moses Hagiz obstinately attacked these crypto-Sabbatians with their developed sharp critical faculties to uncover such allusions and hidden meanings. Thus, to write a letter or work supporting Sabbatai and the messianic movement in an open or even allusive manner became difficult and almost impossible. Concomitantly, as can be seen from Table II, with the beginning of the eighteenth century, historical works were mostly written by the opponents of the movement. Sabbatian discourse and documents of historical substance were again published, but this time by non-believers, as parts of their edited works, obviously with critical notes.

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<sup>310</sup> Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature* Vol.V, p. 168.

<sup>311</sup> Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy*, p. 14.

<sup>312</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CD-ROM ed., s.v. “Emden, Jacob.”

### **4.3.3. The Non-existence of the Sabbatian Historiography in the East and its Possible Causes**

An analysis of Table II reveals that in the lands under Ottoman rule, although there was a vivid activity of letter and report writing during the Sabbatian movement, all of this hustle and bustle did not produce any significant historical work. Indeed, all the writers listed in the table wrote their works in Europe and published them in European Jewish printing centers. The only exception was Abraham Cuenque who was from Hebron. However, his memoir was not published in the Ottoman Empire but in Frankfurt. While the cradle of the Sabbatian movement was in Ottoman lands and despite the fact that there was some history writings on the movement even in such far and isolated places like Yemen, the absence of any written history from Ottoman lands and the absence of any publications on the Sabbatian affair by Turkish Jewish printers merit serious inquiry and analysis. Why did such a rich historiography flourish in the West but not in the East? And what was different among Ottoman Jewry in comparison to the West in order to produce such an outcome? These crucial questions have to be answered.

Actually, by the end of the sixteenth and in the beginning of seventeenth centuries, there was still a common, similar base of Jewish communal life based on rabbinic structures, and there were no salient differences in perceptions and ways of thinking between the Jewish communities of the East and the West. In fact, Jacob Katz illustrates the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as unique in Jewish history due to the existence of strong bonds between different communities and he claims that particularly in this period the intensity of the contacts between different parts of

world Jewry reached its highest level since the declining days of the Roman Empire.<sup>313</sup> Indeed, as testified eloquently by the effective dissemination of Sabbatian ideology, there was a rapid and wide spread dissemination of ideas in this period, which in turn produced a uniform Jewish ideological perception throughout the entire Jewish world. Furthermore, in this time period frequent travel or the movement of sages and rabbis from East to West or vice versa was very common. Thus, there was a continuous flow and propagation of ideas through these scholars who were all trained in different *yeshivot* of the Jewish Diaspora. For example, Sasportas was a rabbi from Oran, North Africa and had all his rabbinical education in this Sephardic center. He moved to Hamburg at the age of 55 and wrote all of his works in the West. Rabbi Elisha Hayyim b. Jacob was another example, this time, from the West, Poland or Germany, who settled in Jerusalem and received the surname Ashkenazi.<sup>314</sup> R. Elisha traveled a lot as an emissary of the Jerusalem community and most important for our subject, was most influential on Nathan of Gaza as his father. Thus, in the early modern period, there was a high fluidity of intellectual and religious doctrines, and the minor degree of intellectual or religious differences that still existed between the West and East Jewish communities were not big enough to explain the gap in historiography between them.

In other words, the internal dynamics of Jewish communities alone could not be the answer to our questions and we have to look at other factors. Once more, the political character of the messianic movement and the delicate position of Jewish communities against the Islamic faith under Ottoman rule could be the main reasons of the non existence of published historiography in the East in contrast to those that flourished in the lands under Christian influence.

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<sup>313</sup> Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), p. 7. Katz also underlines “the unity of the Jewish people during this period.” p. 8.

<sup>314</sup> Scholem, *Sabbatai* p. 200.

We already pointed out the political substance of the messianism and how Ottoman documents reflected the perception of the Sabbatian movement as a political threat to Ottoman sovereignty.<sup>315</sup> Accordingly, any publication supporting the zealous aspirations of the movement would be conceived by the Ottoman authorities as politically seditious and certainly would not be allowed. In fact, as an Armenian document attests,<sup>316</sup> Ottoman authorities were closely watching the movement and the court's chief translator was promptly translating proclamations or documents of significance into Turkish.<sup>317</sup> Thus, it appears that a pro-Sabbatian historiography could not be acceptable and possible under Ottoman rule. Moreover, from an Islamic point of view, contrary to Christian beliefs,<sup>318</sup> an idea of messiah or a new prophet could not be possible since in Islamic tradition Muhammad is viewed as the final prophet.<sup>319</sup> On the other hand, a literary treatise or a work condemning the Sabbatian movement and particularly Sabbatai Sevi, after his apostasy as appeared in the West, seems to be even more problematical. Such a work, or any public proclamation or a campaign against Sevi, who was now a Muslim, would be understood as an insult to Islam. There can be no doubt that such careless behavior

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<sup>315</sup> See pp. 29-30. of the thesis on this subject.

<sup>316</sup> According to this Armenian document, at the initiative of the chief translator, the original Sabbatai's Hebrew proclamation was first translated to Greek and then from Greek to Turkish. "cette circulaire fut traduite de l'hebreu en grec at du grec en turc, par l'entremise de l'intelligent at grand drogman." See, Galante, *Histoire ...* p. 270-271.

<sup>317</sup> Scholem also points out this issue. Scholem, *Sabbatai ...* p. 617.

<sup>318</sup> According to early Christian messianic belief, Jesus will come for a second time in the final days, this time not as suffering servant but as victor and judge of the world. The eloquent millennial sectarianism of Christianity (or in other words chiliasm, coined from the Greek *chilias* which means thousand) believed the realization of the second coming would be an earthly appearance with earthly characteristics, and a divine kingdom would be established where saints will rule together with the messiah in a period in which Satan has no power. Chiliasm sectarians, like Peter Serrarius of the sixteenth century, were among the first to defend in public the rights of the Jews and to proclaim the restoration of the kingdom of Israel as an essential part of millennium fulfillment. According to their calculations the year 1666 will be the year of conversion and redemption of Jews. Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi ...* pp. 94-102. Jacob Barnai also asserts that in the mid-seventeenth century, while Christian theologians intensified their interest in Judaism, there was also an intense messianic hopes among many Christians in England, Portugal, France, Sweden and elsewhere. Jacob Barnai, "Christian Messianism and the Portuguese Marranos: The Emergence of Sabbateanism in Smyrna." pp. 119-123.

<sup>319</sup> Waines, p. 14.

would attract the furious reactions of the conservative/religious circles of the court and would have severe and dangerous consequences for all the Jewish communities of the Empire particularly in its capital city, Constantinople.<sup>320</sup> Indeed, a letter referred to in Leyb's memoir reflects the awareness of rabbis of Constantinople to the dangers associated with the Sabbatian movement: "As for Sabbatai Sevi, ... we do not wish to expatiate at present on the details of the affair. Let it suffice to say that we and our children should render infinite praise and thanks to God who has saved us from the sword to which our lives would have been forfeited."<sup>321</sup> The same anxiety and fright can be seen in a letter sent again by rabbis of Constantinople to Smyrna in the first week of December, 1666. The letter aimed to attract the attention of religious and lay leaders of the possible dangers if they accepted the visit of Nathan of Gaza who was believed to be on his way to Smyrna:

For we would have you know that at his Coming he will begin again to move those tumults ... And miracles are not wrought every day. God forbid that by his Coming, the People of God should be destroyed in all places where they are .... For in this Conjunction every little error or fault is made Capital; you may remember the danger of the first Combustion, and it is very probable that he will be an occasion of greater, which the tongue is not able to express with words.<sup>322</sup>

Other than not to disturb Islam, there was another factor which forced Ottoman rabbinic authorities and lay leaders especially in Constantinople and Smyrna to be cautious in their relations with Sabbatian followers. A harsh intolerant policy might push the adherents of Sabbatianism to follow the example of their spiritual leader, this thus, might pave the way for a massive Jewish conversion to Islam. Contrary to the policies in the West, rabbis and lay leaders

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<sup>320</sup> Although there was no official chief rabbinate in the Empire, the senior rabbis in Constantinople *defacto* appear to be the most respected Jewish authorities in the Empire.

<sup>321</sup> Leyb b. Ozer, *Beshraybung* ...quoted by Scholem, *Sabbatai* ... p. 699.

<sup>322</sup> Sir Paul Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire from 1623-1677*. London, 1680. pp. 217-18. Quoted by Scholem, *Sabbatai* ... p. 713.

avoided acting in a strict authoritative manner with bans and excommunications to prevent further exacerbation in the communities, and preferred to be silent as if ignoring “the whole matter as far as possible, and hoping that the time and oblivion would heal the wound.”<sup>323</sup> As quoted several times by contemporary rabbis, a verse from the Scriptures describes best the atmosphere and policy of religious authorities in the lands of Ottoman rule. This policy which outwardly pretended to be indifferent and tolerant to the Sabbatians’ faith, actually assumed that Sabbatianism would gradually die out in time and its adherents would return to their normal Jewish life. This compromising policy can be offered as one of the causes of the non- appearance of inimical literary works, as well as historiographies on Sabbatian ideology in the Ottoman Empire. On this point the rabbinical authorities in the West were straight forward in their condemnations since they did not have to concern themselves either with losing Sabbatian followers to Islam or to the consequences of defaming Sevi, a convert to Islam.

#### **4.3.4. After the Sabbatian Movement**

The abrupt failure of the Sabbatian movement created a traumatic and disastrous effect on Ottoman Jewry. The breakdown was one of the main factors in triggering social, economic and political decline that appeared immediately in the wake of the movement. The intellectual and literary creativity of Jewish communities also took its share from this deterioration. The vivid, intellectually productive centers of the Empire –Constantinople, Salonika, Adrianople and Smyrna- fell into the crisis and lost most of their cultural charm. With the general change in the spiritual/intellectual climate, philosophic endeavor, as well as study and teaching of non-Jewish sciences which was prevalent until the end of the sixteenth century lost its elevated status and

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<sup>323</sup> Scholem, *Sabbatai*...p. 704.

were abandoned.<sup>324</sup> Intellectual creativity was limited only to Talmudic commentary and halakhic *pilpul* (casuistry) prevailed. As Hacker pointed out with the changing taste of people, the religious values also change; “Halakhah and Rabbinic literature became as the only important thing.”<sup>325</sup> In parallel to the lukewarm attitude towards philosophy and science, the interest in history in the Ottoman lands also diminished. With the fading of Sabbatian messianic frenzy, the vibrant link between the Jews of the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe also dwindled. For almost two centuries until the second half of the nineteenth century, the interest of Western Judaism in their co-religionists of the Orient stayed at a minimum level.

The further effects of the Sabbatian movement in the intellectual world of Ottoman Jewry and the associated historical writing in the following centuries is the topic of next chapter and will be analyzed in detail in the next section of this thesis.

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<sup>324</sup> Hacker, “The Intellectual Activity of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries” p. 128.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.



**JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY ON SABBATAI SEVI MESSIANISM**  
(SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES)

<u>No.</u>	<u>HISTORIAN</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>STATU</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>
1	JOSEPH HA-LEVI	UNKNOWN	1667	L/S	ANTI	PREACHER IN LEGHORN/ACC.ON THE MOV.
2	SOLOMON B. LEYB KATZ	UNKNOWN	1671	L/S		RABBINIC JUDGE IN BUDA/BIOGRAPHY
3	YA'IR HAYIM BACHARACH	COLLECTIONS ON THE AFFAIR OF SABBATAI SEVI	1666	L/S		EDIT COLLECTION OF DOCUMENTS
4	JOSEPH BEN ISAAC SAMBARI 1640-1703	DIVREI YOSEF	1676	S		PART IN THE BOOK
5	JACOB SASPORTAS	SISATH NOBEL SEVI THE FADING FLOWER OF SEVI	1737 PUBL.		ANTI	HAMBURG ANTI-SABBATIST RABBI
6	BARUCH BEN GERSHON OF AREZZO	ZIKKARON LI-BENEY YISRAEL A MEMORIAL UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL			PRO	
7	LEYB BEN OZER	BESHRAYBUNG FUN SHABSAI ZVI ACCOUNT OF SABBATAI SEVI				YIDDISH/ACCOUNT OF MOVEMENT
8	ABRAHAM CUENQUE (OR CONQUEO)	MEMOIR ON SABBATAI SEVI (PUBL. BY JACOB EMDEN)	1689		PRO	WRITTEN IN FRANKFURT
9	JACOB EMDEN	ZOTH TORAH HA-QENA'OTH	1752		ANTI	EDIT COLLECTION OF 4 ACCOUNTS OF SEVI/ A BIOGRAPHY/PUBLISHER
10	JACOB AND EMANUEL FRANCES	SEVI MUDDAH CHASED ROE	1666-7		ANTI	STORY OF SEVI APPEN. TO SATIRICAL POEMS LEGHORN
11	SOLOMON JOSEPH B. NATHAN CARPI	ELEH TOLEDOTH PAREŞ HISTORY OF SABBATAI SEVI	~1725		ANTI	VARIOUS DOCUMENTS FROM 1666-67
12	UNKNOWN / ANONYMOUS	GEY HIZZAYON THE VALLEY OF VISION	1666		PRO	SABBATIAN APOCALYSE FROM YEMEN
13	TOBIAS ROFE HA- KOHEN	MA'ASEH TOVYAH	1707			VENICE
14	ABRAHAM BEN MOSES OF TISMENITZ	ŞEMAH DAVID (ADOPTATION OF THE CHRONICLE TO CURRENT DAY)	1669			PODOLIA, ISH, CONTAINS SABBATIAN SPIRIT
15	SOLOMON BEN MAIR	A SONG OF PRAISE	1673			FRANFURT ON THE MEIN INTRODUCTION HAD HISTORICAL VALUE
16	R. MOSES B. HABIB OF SALONIKA	TESTIMONY (PUBL. BY JACOB EMDEN)	~1700			REPORTS TRADITIONS CONCERNING SABBATAI SEVI
17	RABBIS OF VENICE	ZIK-KARON LI-BENEY YISRAEL (PUBL. BY JACOB EMDEN)	1668			DECLARATION RABBIS OF VENICE OF 1668 AGAINST NATHAN OF GAZA

L: LOST  
S: SURPRESSED

PRO: PRO-SABBATIAN  
ANTI: ANTI-SABBATIAN

**Table II Jewish Historiography on the Sabbatian Messianic Movement**

## 5. JEWISH CULTURAL STAGNATION IN THE WAKE OF THE SABBATIAN MOVEMENT AND THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The short termed Sabbatian movement and its abrupt failure constituted one of the important turning points in Turkish Jewish history. As the news of the conversion of Sabbatai Sevi spread, all of the joyful excitement of the Jewish people left and was replaced by a feeling of distress and shame. Michel Fèvre, a Capuchin friar, describes this shift in sentiment in his book of recollections of his lengthy stay in the Ottoman Empire:

This fact mortified and humiliated the poor Jews to such an extent that the majority stayed for days shut up in their Houses, ashamed, not daring to appear in public. As soon as they ventured outside their homes, they were mocked by everyone and insulted, especially by the common people, who kept running after them, shouting and raising horrible clamor....Turks as well as Christians did not miss the opportunity to remind them on every occasion of this story and their facility in letting themselves be, so stupidly, misled by a scoundrel.<sup>326</sup>

The negative effect of the crisis brought about by the Sabbatian movement was particularly strong in the Jewish cultural centers of the Empire where the movement emerged and flourished. Jacob Barnai illustrates the distressing after effects of the messianic movement as the second important factor, other than the economic decline, for the religious, cultural and social stagnation and paralysis into which Ottoman Jewry sank.<sup>327</sup> This backwardness was sustained for a long period beginning from the last decades of the seventeenth century, and prevailed throughout the whole eighteenth century. Indeed, Solomon Abraham Rosanes, who wrote the most

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<sup>326</sup> Giacomo Saban, "Sabbatai Sevi as Seen by a Contemporary Traveler," *Jewish History*, 7, No.2, (1993). Apparently, in 1680, Michel Fevre presented his book of recollections to the Lord General Inquisitor of Milan, at the request of Pope Innocent XI. The first part of the paragraph portrays the sadness of Jews after the imprisonment of Sabbatai Sevi in his arrival from Izmir to Constantinople.

<sup>327</sup> Jacob Barnai, "From Sabbatianism to Modernization," p. 79.

comprehensive history of Ottoman Jewry, points out the same decline with an eloquent expression:

Then all the glory was taken away from Turkish Jewry, never to return, and then the end came for high ethical and material standing of the Jews in the capital and the other cities .... On all sides there was retrogression and a change for the worse in the social and political life of the Jews. ... All these scenes were caused by the false messiah Sabbatai Zevi and his band of prophets, [yet] they did not suffice to bring the leaders of the generation to their senses, ... The people were so sunk in ignorance that they could not distinguish between good and evil. ... In truth, it may be said that the situation of the Ottoman Empire was so bad that conditions necessary for the development of normal Jewish social life were lacking.<sup>328</sup>

### **5.1. Two Bibliographers: Hayim Joseph David Azulai and Salamon Hazan**

As a consequence of the deep intellectual and social decline of the Empire and the faded interest among European Jewry in their co-religionists in the Orient, there was almost no work on the history on Ottoman Jewry both in the Empire and abroad for a period of two centuries. In this period, Hayyim Joseph David Azulai can be identified as the only person whose work has some historiographical content. As a leading and esteemed scholar of his generation who possessed great intellectual powers and many-faceted talents, Azulai was chosen as *meshullah* – emissary-to represent the communities in the Holy Land and to collect the funds necessary to maintain the academies and scholars particularly in his home town Hebron. As a requirement of his mission, Azulai frequently traveled to Italy, Germany, Holland, France and England. Everywhere he went, he noted down his general impressions<sup>329</sup>, and visited libraries as well, taking notes on

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<sup>328</sup> Solomon Abraham Rosanes, *History of the Jews in Turkey* (in Hebrew), vol. V (Sofia: Hamisphat, 1937-38) pp. 1-2. Quoted by Jacob Barnai, "From Sabbatianism to Modernization" p. 79.

<sup>329</sup> For first hand travel accounts of Azulai see, Elkan Nathan Adler, *Jewish Travellers in The Middle Ages* (New York: Dover Publications, 1987), pp. 345-368.

early Hebrew printed books and manuscripts that he examined there.<sup>330</sup> His works, *Shem ha-Gedolim* (The Name of the Great Ones – published in 1774) and *Wa'ad la Hakhamim* (Assembly of Wise – published in 1796), contain a rich list of names of rabbinic authors and information on their works and so were among the first original works in a bibliographical form on Jewish literary history. Thanks to his work, which was systematically re-organized in 1852 by Isaac Benjacob, valuable information that could have been lost was preserved for the future. Azulai's work was indeed an indispensable source used frequently by later historians for their bibliographical research on rabbinic literature.<sup>331</sup>

Salamon Hazan was another bibliographer whose work *Ha-Ma'a lot li Shelomoh*, written in the 1840s had the same character as that of Azulai. Indeed, with the inclusion of Sephardic writers who were contemporaries of Azulai as well as those living half a century after him, Hazan's work can be viewed as the continuation of Azulai's *Shem ha-Gedolim*. Hazan, who became chief rabbi of Alexandria in 1832, also added an appendix to his work, identifying the chief rabbis of Alexandria.<sup>332</sup> In Jewish historical writing the three bibliographers - Conforte in the seventeenth century, Azulai in the eighteenth and finally Hazan in the mid nineteenth- complete each other in chain-like fashion. Their data, particularly on Sephardic sages, and their works in some cases are our only source of knowledge on them. Indeed, as can be seen by a short survey, these three bibliographers were widely used by Jewish encyclopedias as a source for many preceding rabbis and writers.

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid., pp.356-354. Azulai describes his several visits to the "Bibliotheque" in Paris and his enthusiasm in being allowed to take away a rare manuscript to copy.

<sup>331</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CD-Rom ed., s.v. "Azulai, Hayyim Joseph David."

<sup>332</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Salamon Hazan."

## 5.2. The 1840 Damascus Affair: The Awakening of Western Jewish Interest in Oriental Jewry

The turning point that ended the isolation of the introverted Ottoman Jewish community and attracted the attention of Western Jewry occurred in 1840. The blood libel accusation in Damascus in that year known as “The Damascus Affair” and its wide reporting in the press, gave rise to a sudden interest among the Jews of Western Europe in their Eastern Sephardic co-religionists. The libel alerted the Jews in the West to the unfavorable, backward, even miserable conditions of Eastern Jewry and illustrated for them how through an unseen cohesive bond, an accusation against Judaism even in a distant place could endanger their tranquility in the West.

As with other ritual murder accusations that had taken place throughout Ottoman history, so too, the Damascus libel also had a sociopolitical background and was provoked by the envious indigenous Christian-Greek communities.<sup>333</sup> The usual attitude of the Ottoman regime in previous situations was always to suppress those types of imaginary accusations in a quick and complete manner.<sup>334</sup> Indeed, in the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman II issued his well-known *ferman* prohibiting provincial officers and judges from being involved in such blood libel cases. In particular, the Sultan was forbidding his officials to punish or torture Jews because of ritual murder accusations.<sup>335</sup> However, this time, the region was under the control of

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<sup>333</sup> The Prussian Consul in Damascus, in a letter to his ambassador in Constantinople, portrays “covetousness” as the chief cause of misbehavior of local Christians of the Greek rite. See, “The Prussian Consul tries to intercede for the Jews of Damascus” in *The Jews of Arab Lands – A History and Source Book* ed. Norman A. Stillman (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), p. 401-402.

<sup>334</sup> Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*, p. 84.

<sup>335</sup> Galante, *Historie Des Juifs de Turquie*, p. 15.

Muhammad Ali Pasha, the rebellious *hidiv* of Egypt, rather than the Ottoman court directly. With the provocation of the French consul in Damascus, the accusations of the murder of a Capuchin monk and his servant who had disappeared were taken seriously.<sup>336</sup> A number of Damascene Jews were arrested and under most cruel torture were forced to confess their crime.<sup>337</sup> The affair created a lot of fanfare, especially in the right wing of the French press, who used this imaginary event and its false accusation as an opportunity to defame Jews, to attack the Talmud and Judaism once more, and to expose their own anti-Semitic sentiments. The affair and its repercussions show how delicate were the roots of Western emancipation, even in France. This event stimulated a new consciousness for a need of an alliance among the intellectuals of European Jewry in order to fight against the bigoted accusations.<sup>338</sup> Pervasive attacks that appeared in the press against Jews in France, Germany and Italy, clearly showed that no Jewish community could isolate itself from other communities in different parts of the world, whose fate, in time, would certainly have an impact on them.

The sense of Jewish unity, increased curiosity and interest in the Jewish world and the need for action which gained a new impetus with the Damascus Affair also contributed to the emergence and rapid growth of the Jewish periodical press. Indeed, 53 Jewish periodicals, almost triple in

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<sup>336</sup> France was the only country in the Western World supporting Muhammad Ali Pasha in his rebellion against the Ottoman Empire. One of the motivations of Ibrahim Pasha, the governor of Syria, in his harsh attitude was to please Count Ratti-Menton, the French consul in Damascus.

<sup>337</sup> A report in Public Records Office in London, which seems to have been prepared just after the settlement of the Damascus Affair, as a first hand source, illustrates the cruel punishments and tortures exerted on the accused Jews under arrest. "A Report on the Treatment of Jewish Prisoners in the Damascus Affair," in *The Jews of Arab Lands – A History and Source Book* ed. Norman A. Stillman. p. 396-398.

<sup>338</sup> Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair- "Ritual Murder," Politics, and the Jews in 1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 109.

quantity were published just after 1840, reflecting the eloquent effect of the Affair.<sup>339</sup> Furthermore, more than its quantitative increase, the newly emergent Jewish press could be seen in a wide geographical expanse, with the appearance of new Jewish periodical publications in Austria, Italy, Gibraltar and the United States. Particularly, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* in Germany, *Archives Israelite* and *L'Univers Israelite* in France, and the *Jewish Chronicle of London* and *The Voice of Jacob* in England became very influential in the second half of the nineteenth century, in disseminating news to distant Jewish communities, in shaping Jewish public opinion, and having important roles in the making of a secular Jewish solidarity between members of different communities.

### **5.2.1. The Lack of Period Historiography on Ottoman Jewry**

In the wake of the Damascus Affair, with the new aroused interest, articles and reports describing conditions of Ottoman Jewry began to appear frequently in the Jewish press. In 1841, as an innovation, *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* began to publish letters from its correspondent in Istanbul. In the following years, these letters which described Eastern Jewry in detail, but in dismal tones, were repeatedly translated into other languages and published in various European Jewish news papers. These letters and frequent reports were instrumental in nourishing the aroused interest in the West and for the first time European Jews realized the backward and poor conditions of Oriental Jewry. In these publications Ottoman Jewry was presented as being: “Ignorant, superstitious, and intolerant, and under the undue influence of

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<sup>339</sup> Benbassa and Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) p. 73. Historian Baruch Mevorah also pointed to the awakening of communal consciousness with the Damascus Affair as the reason for the increase in the number of journals. He also noted that the subscription list of *Archives Israelites* doubled in the latter half of 1840. See Frankel, *The Damascus Affair*, p. 404.

rabbis, practicing early marriage, and bereft of any education worthy of the name, the nonexistence of craftsmen, and the lack of knowledge of foreign languages”<sup>340</sup>

In addition to the articles in the newly flourishing press, a rich Jewish literature aiming to reflect the blood libel incident was also written in the wake of the affair.<sup>341</sup> However, articles in the periodicals, even the ones describing the conditions of Ottoman Jewry and the books written on the Damascus Affair did not contain much insight on the Jewish communities of the Empire and so have limited historiographic content in terms of the historiography of Ottoman Jews. Rather, all these publications focused on the account of the event itself, its repercussions in Europe, the Jewish activities in Europe aimed at coping with the threatening situation, the power struggle among the consulates in the region, and finally the victorious visit of Adolphe Crémieux, Moses Montefiore and their collaborating team to Egypt where they convinced *hidiv* Muhammad Ali to recognize the innocence of the nine prisoners who still remained alive and to grant them an unconditional release. Thus, all these reports and books lack an explicit interest in and the effort to deal with the social, cultural, religious and historical background of the Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire as if these issues were not worth scrutinizing. In these literary works, characterized mostly by the spirit of the Haskalah and the emancipation, it is possible to see the influence of the prevalent idea in the Western World of that particular age. The West was attributing to itself an ideal image as having an advanced, superior civilization and culture, in

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> The books published by Jewish writers on the Damascus Blood libel in the years following the affair indeed makes a long list: 1) Lipman Hirsch Löwenstein, *Damascia*, 1840. 2) David Salomons, *An Account of the Recent Persecution of the Jews at Damascus*, London, 1840. 3) Louis Loewe, *Efes Damim*, 1841. 4) Marcus Jost, *Gesch. Der Israeliten*, xi. 345-381, 1847. 5) *Oberdorf Megillah*, Württemberg, 1841. 6) Yehuda Alkalai, *Minhat Yehudah* (Judah's Offering), Sarajevo, 1843. 7) Isaac Erter, *Megilat Damesek*, Galicia, 1845. 8) Mordechai Aaron Gintsburg, *Sefer Hamat Damesek*, Vilna, 1846. Published in 1860. 9) Nathan Friedland, *Sefer Kos Yeshu'ah Unehamah*, Breslau, ~1850. 10) Golstoff, *Megilat Damesek*, Vienna, 1865. 10) Menahem Mendel Mohr, *Sheerit Yisrael* (The Remnant of Israel), Lvov, 1846. 11) Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, v. 632-66, ~1865.



contrast to the inferior, indolent, superstitious and backward Eastern culture. As one of the many examples, in his article in *Me'assef* (the Hebrew journal of the German Haskalah) Josef Baran, a *maskil* (an adherent of the Haskalah) from Berlin reflected this extolling attitude of Europe: “To our joy! ... The king’s scepter shall govern with clemency ... How goodly is our lot, the era ... replaced by a happier time for all humanity – an era of religious tolerance”<sup>342</sup> and the negative image of the East by a sharp contrast pointing out Africa to be peopled by “very stupid men” and Asia by unlettered “boors.”<sup>343</sup>

Although the Damascus Affair itself did not lead to the publication of a historical work in the West on the Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire, it certainly triggered a new era in Oriental Jewry by restoring the broken relations between Eastern Sephardic Jewry and Western Ashkenazic Jewry. As a result, a new process of social interrelation and acculturation emerged. The Western intellectual movements like the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment), *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Scientific approach to Judaism), and nascent Jewish nationalism, which hitherto were absent or very weak in the Ottoman Empire, began to affect Jewish communities there too, and found fertile ground in the second half of the nineteenth century. Under the influence of these new movements, in parallel with an intellectual awakening, we will witness for the first time in Ottoman Jewish history, the first examples of native Turkish Jewish history written by Turkish Jews themselves.

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<sup>342</sup> Joseph Baran, “Divrei hayamim vehakorot leha’ir kartago” 344-8. Quoted by Shmuel Feiner, in *Haskalah and History* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002), p. 40.

<sup>343</sup> Id., “Divrei hayamim lemamlakhot,” pp. 369-85.

### 5.3. The Presentation of Ottoman Jewish History in Two Comprehensive Histories

Although it was in an intellectual elitist level, the first signs of European Jewish interest in Jews of other parts of the world and especially in the Jewish past emerged in the last decades of the eighteenth century as a consequence of the Jewish Enlightenment, the Haskalah. Particularly, from the second decade of the nineteenth century, in their quest for emancipation, and in order to gain a higher self-esteem in their search to acquire a respectable and legitimate existence in the modern state, European Jewry generated a new Jewish awareness of the past. As stated by Feiner, these needs and searches produced “mature Jewish historiography and the historiography employed by advocates of religious reform, or in the formulation of a new Jewish identity.”<sup>344</sup> In the 1820s Isaac Marcus Jost was the first Jewish historian with formal and systematic academic training, to attempt a comprehensive Jewish history based on the principles of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.<sup>345</sup> However, it was the *History of the Jews* written by Heinrich Graetz, a multi-volume history that reflected Jewish existence from its earliest days to his own age, that became the most popular, and well-known historical work of the period. Indeed, *History of the Jews* came to be reprinted many times and translated in many different languages including Judeo-Spanish.<sup>346</sup> In a short time, it became a frequently referred to source book for the enthusiasts of

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<sup>344</sup> Shmuel Feiner, *Haskalah and History: The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness*. (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004) p. 61. Interestingly Heinrich Graetz also describes the feelings in the emergence of Jewish historiography in the sixteenth century, after the Spanish expulsion with a very similar expression: “They [historians] considered history a comfort to that portion of mankind [Jews] which had been overthrown, overridden, and downtrodden by the tumultuous course of events. ... The spirit ... had come upon them, incontestably showing that Jews even in their degradation are not like gypsy rabble, neither having nor knowing history; that, in fact, they stood higher than those who wielded the scepter and the sword...” Graetz, *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America) vol. 4, p. 554-555.

<sup>345</sup> Jost’s history was overshadowed by the historians after him. His works were never translated from German to another language never reprinted and little read today. See Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History*, p. 175.

<sup>346</sup> Shmuel Ettinger, “Heinrich Graetz.” *Encyclopedia Judaica* – CD ROM Edition.

Jewish history. Simon Dubnow's same titled work *History of the Jews* was another comprehensive Jewish history, written more than sixty years after Graetz's work, which can be seen as the first Jewish history reflecting Jewish identity not only in religious terms but also in its national, social and secular character.

Turkish Jewish history was also presented in these two comprehensive histories and was assessed via the same general approach taken by these writers to the writing of history. Furthermore, as the first examples of scientific and sober historical analysis on Turkish Jewry, these works filled an important gap and became very important models for historians working in later periods. A short analysis of the accounts of Ottoman – Turkish Jewish history in these two works will be useful in order to shed light on the existing common perceptions among period European scholars on the past of Ottoman Jewry.

### **5.3.1. Heinrich Graetz**

Graetz (1817-1891) was born in Poznan, Poland, studied in Breslau University in Prussia and for many years worked as a professor in the newly created Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau. His life work, eleven volumes, *History of the Jews* was published between 1856 and 1870, and was widely read because of its easy reading form, lively metaphorical and rich literary style, and coherent, clear chronology. In the work, detailed information on the Ottoman Empire and its Jewish populace can be found in different chapters of volumes four and five. Turks are first mentioned in the work with Mehmet II and his conquest of Istanbul in the year 1453. Graetz

presented the Byzantine Empire as a “sin-laden and rotten empire,”<sup>347</sup> and depicted its emperor as well as Pope Nicholas V as “faithless” whose “sole idea was to squander upon themselves the money they might collect.”<sup>348</sup> In Graetz’s eyes, the Turks were the “heavy but deserved judgment descended on Christendom.”<sup>349</sup> The “perfidious and corrupted papacy”<sup>350</sup> and Christian rulers were portrayed as desperate to stop the Turkish expansion and their forces were shown as condemned to be “vanished before the dawn of a new day.”<sup>351</sup>

Even a short glimpse reveals to us the influence of the medieval Jewish historians, Elijah Capsali and Joseph Ha Cohen, on Graetz’s presentation. Indeed, Graetz’s work carries the dubious claim which was first asserted at the end of the sixteenth century by Sambari. According to this account, both Moses Capsali and his successor Elias Mizrachi were presented as the first chief rabbis of the Ottoman Empire, had a special seat in the sultan’s *divan*, “next to the mufti, the Chief Ulema of the Mohammedans, and precedence over the [Greek] patriarch.”<sup>352</sup> Modern historians regard a place for the chief rabbi in the *divan* as unlikely, and reject this assertion as an exaggeration.<sup>353</sup> Furthermore, according to modern historians, even the *mufti* who was representing the Islamic institution, *Ulema*, was not a member of Mehmet II’s *divan*.<sup>354</sup> Salomon Usque was another medieval historian whom Graetz frequently quoted at length in his descriptions of the favorable conditions for Jews in the Ottoman Empire. In these accounts the

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<sup>347</sup> Graetz, Vol. IV, p. 267.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid. For Elias Mizrachi see p. 402.

<sup>353</sup> For example, see Epstein, *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and Their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, p. 56. Hacker, “Ottoman Policy toward the Jews and Jewish Attitudes toward the Ottomans during the Fifteenth Century,” p. 119.

<sup>354</sup> See Gibb and Bowen, p. 86., Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age 1300-1600*, p. 103. Also AnaBritannica, s.v. “Divan-ı Hümayun.”

Empire was shown as a divine realm where Jews, with boundless liberty, reached their final redemption.<sup>355</sup> Indeed, Graetz himself also conceives history as being driven by Divine Providence and as a “drama of Divine reward and punishment.”<sup>356</sup>

Other than the possible influence of the medieval Jewish historians, Graetz’s intension to portray the Ottoman Empire as a Muslim country with superior traits against Christendom could be another important but implicit factor in his highly favorable portrayal of the Empire and its Jewry. Indeed, Graetz had little regard for Christianity which he defined as the “arch-foe” of Judaism.<sup>357</sup> Graetz’s anti-Christian attitude was particularly apparent throughout his comparison of the living conditions of Jews between the Ottoman Empire and Christendom.

In Graetz’s accounts there are recurrent exaggerations in the depiction of Ottoman Jewry. For example, the presentation of the population of Ottoman Jewry as amounting to one million in the middle of the sixteenth century is far from the actual figure.<sup>358</sup> The presentation of Jews as having an absolute freedom to clothe themselves even in silk and gold<sup>359</sup> or to move or settle without limitations does not fit with known historical facts, and are some of the examples that reflect Graetz’s exaggerations. Clearly, Graetz, used the unreliable and overstated assertions of

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<sup>355</sup> Graetz, Vol. IV, p. 400.

<sup>356</sup> Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History*, p. 29.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., p. 32. In 1880, the German historian Treitschke who was known for his anti-Semitic attitude accused Graetz of hatred of Christianity. See, Heinrich Von Treitschke, “A Word About Our Jewry,” in *The Jew in the Modern World*, ed. Paul Mendes –Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 343-346.

<sup>358</sup> See note 108.

<sup>359</sup> According to Epstein, Jews were assigned certain colors and styles of clothing and footwear. Epstein, p. 32.

medieval Jewish historians, and it was via his popular history that the exaggerated and rose colored version of Ottoman Jewish history found its way into the later historiography.<sup>360</sup>

From the historiographic point of view, *History of the Jews* was a great and impressive achievement. Particularly, chapter sixteen of volume four, with its title “The Jews in Turkey: Don Joseph Nassi” is written in an easy reading literary style describing the sixteenth century historical events of Ottoman Jewry with a special emphasis on those court Jews of Marrano origin who were presented as having an important role acting as agents for the welfare of the Jewish community. In Graetz’s presentation, the social and economic aspects of Ottoman Jewish history were not described extensively; rather the political and historical events were narrated in an episodic, colorful and appealing story telling style. In his description of Ottoman Jews, Graetz highlighted the internal dynamics of the community and its contacts with the Ottoman court. And Graetz did not pay much attention to contemporary developments within the Empire and world events as a background to his narrative on Ottoman Jewish life.

### **5.3.2. Simon Dubnow**

Simon Dubnow was the second historian who wrote a comprehensive world history of the Jewish people from ancient to modern times.<sup>361</sup> Born in 1860 in Byelorussia, after a period of being a “cosmopolitan universalist” in his early age, Dubnow became an ardent Jewish nationalist. He

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<sup>360</sup> Hacker, “Ottoman Policy toward the Jews and Jewish Attitudes toward the Ottomans during the Fifteenth Century,” p. 119.

<sup>361</sup> According to Robert Liberles, there are only three modern masters who were successful in writing multivolume sets of Jewish history. Other than Graetz and Dubnow, Liberles portrays Salo Baron as the third historian. See, Robert Liberles, *Salo Wittmayer Baron, Architect of Jewish History* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), p. 4.

actively worked in St. Petersburg as a teacher in Jewish studies, as the founder and director of several Jewish societies and as the editor of a number of Jewish journals. His tragic death occurred in 1941 in Riga at the age of 81, when a Gestapo officer, a former pupil of his, recognized and murdered him. Dubnow published his comprehensive history, *History of the Jews* in German between 1925 and 1929 in ten volumes, in Berlin.<sup>362</sup> The salient feature that differentiates Dubnow from his predecessors was his secular conception of Jewish history. His historiographic methodology i.e., proceeding sequentially from the political conditions under which the Jews lived, to their organs of self-government and finally to their intellectual life and literature, is closer to the suppositions of the historical writing of our days.<sup>363</sup>

Dubnow's account of history starts from an earlier period than offered by Graetz, with Sultan Orhan (1360-1389), and after a brief introduction the reign of Sultan Mehmet II was depicted more broadly. Dubnow was more methodical, solemn and critical in evaluating Ottoman Jewish history than was Graetz. In his accounts, Dubnow was cautious in avoiding exaggerations. For example, according to Dubnow the total number of Jews arriving after the Spanish expulsion was set as 100,000. Graetz gave this figure as 300,000. According to modern historians who had investigated the census results in the Ottoman archives, Dubnow's figure appears to be more reasonable.<sup>364</sup> Dubnow also presented the picture of Ottoman Jewry in a less idealized idyllic character. The sixteenth century particularly was described as the socio-economic full bloom of the Jewish center in the Ottoman Empire. Special emphasis was given to Jewish courtiers like

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<sup>362</sup> Joseph Meisl, *Encyclopedia Judaica* – CD ROM Edition, s.v. "Simon Dubnow."

<sup>363</sup> Meyer, p. 36.

<sup>364</sup> Benbassa and Rodrigue, referring to the census results estimate the total number of Jews arrived in the Ottoman Empire after 1492 as 60,000. See, Benbassa and Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans*, p. 8. Jonathan I. Israel presents this figure in parallel to Dubnow as 100,000. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism 1550-1750*. (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003), p. 5.

Joseph Nasi, whose economic and diplomatic achievements as well as his close relationship with the court covered a lengthy part in the accounts.<sup>365</sup> The Ottoman Jews of the period were described as living in isolated *kahals*, i.e., communities with their own *takkanot*, customs and traditions. These communities were portrayed as having a secluded life with very little connections to the surrounding Moslem population.<sup>366</sup> Probably due to the scarcity of historical sources, Dubnow's history does not contain much information for the period after the eighteenth century. Indeed, according to Dubnow, the Ottoman Empire lost its charm and importance as the hegemonic center of attraction in the middle of the seventeenth century with the arduous strain and decadence brought about by the Sabbatai Sevi movement. The internal decay of the Ottoman Empire beginning with the end of the sixteenth century was also suggested as the cause for the deteriorating situation in Jewish communities. Dubnow, especially in his early stages, shared Graetz's idea that "contemplating and suffering" was the salient common feature of history of Jews in the Diaspora.<sup>367</sup> Indeed, he presented the Jew in Christian Europe under the oppression of harsh law, and the Jew in the Ottoman Empire after the mid seventeenth century as "lorded over by lawlessness, arbitrariness, and the whim of the ruler."<sup>368</sup>

Although Dubnow's attitude in his analysis of history was more critical, still his work contains repetitions of dubious material from the Jewish historians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Again, the embroidered assertion of the existence of a chief rabbi who held a permanent place in the royal *divan*, "beside the *mufti*, as a favorite of the sultan,"<sup>369</sup> can be seen in his work, too. According to Dubnow, "this recognition of the Jewish representation in the

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<sup>365</sup> Dubnow, *History of the Jews* (South Brunswick: Thomas Yoseloff Ltd., 1969) Vol. III, p. 484-492.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>367</sup> Meyer, p. 33.

<sup>368</sup> Dubnow, Vol. III, p. 493.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395.



highest government institution was evidence of the new order of the Ottoman Empire.”<sup>370</sup> Dubnow’s generalization on the policy of the Ottoman Empire based on this unjustified statement is a good example showing how without being aware of the hidden messianic flavor, the assertions of medieval Jewish historians were re-used in later ages as undisputable facts. Indeed, Dubnow pointed to the chronicle of Elijah Capsali as “the only source for the new center in Turkey in the second half of the fifteenth century.”<sup>371</sup> He frequently cited the work assertively without taking a critical approach to it. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that, Dubnow was also mistaken in attributing the statement of “chief rabbi’s membership of *divan*” to Capsali, since this view is actually to be found in Sambari. In addition, Dubnow raises doubts as to his familiarity with Capsali’s historical work, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, since Dubnow also erred in presenting the family relationship between the rabbi Moses Capsali who was introduced as the chief rabbi<sup>372</sup> during the period 1453-1491, and the historian Elijah Capsali.<sup>373</sup>

As opposed to Graetz, Dubnow gave much more importance to world history and to the historical events happening in the external world with their impact on Jews. He particularly tried to show the close relationship between world history and Jewish history. Indeed, Dubnow methodically illustrated the world affairs of each specified period, under the title “General Survey,” in the opening sections of each part of his work. For example, in the “General Survey” of his part on the “Dispersal of the Sephardim,” Dubnow described the political and economic developments in Europe as these factors influenced the shifting of the centers of the Jewish

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., p. 439.

<sup>372</sup> Hacker claims that the institution of the chief rabbinate by Mehmet II, as cited both by Graetz and Dubnow had no basis and was made-up of Sambari. Hacker, “Ottoman Policy toward the Jews and Jewish Attitudes toward the Ottomans during the Fifteenth Century,” p. 119.

<sup>373</sup> Dubnow, p. 397.

Diaspora. According to him, external factors such as the discovery of America and of new Ocean lanes, the shifting economic centers first to Spain and Portugal then to England and Holland, and finally the expansion of the Ottoman Empire had important socio-economic roles in the emergence and formation of new Jewish centers.

As another innovation, Dubnow explained the sources he used at the end of each volume with a brief chapter of “Survey of Sources and Literature” and methodically listed them in a separate “Bibliography of Sources and Literature” section.

#### **5.4. The Western Jewish Intellectual and Social Movements that Affected the Ottoman Jewish Society**

Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue in their description of “Westernization” in the Oriental Sephardic world point out its “polyvalent” character.<sup>374</sup> According to them, “modernization”<sup>375</sup> movements emerged and shaped in diverse ways in different Sephardic Jewish communities of the East.<sup>376</sup> Different than this fact, in each Sephardic Jewish community, particularly in the Ottoman Empire, the modernization movement itself also consisted of polyvalent elements. This was an expected consequence of modernization in the Empire as it came as an import through the

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<sup>374</sup> Benbassa and Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans*, p. 67.

<sup>375</sup> Modernization can be defined as the process of change aiming to reach a specific type of civilization which originated in Europe and spread throughout the world in various political, ideological and economic forms. See Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), chapter 1. Quoted by Benbassa, “The Process of Modernization of Eastern Sephardic Communities,” [www.ceu.hu/jewishstudies/pdf/02\\_benbassa.pdf](http://www.ceu.hu/jewishstudies/pdf/02_benbassa.pdf)

<sup>376</sup> The Eastern Sephardic World can be defined as the specific Judeo-Spanish culture area, which emerged and flourished as the core area of settlement after the expulsion and encompasses the Jewish communities of the Ottoman Balkans (that is, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Bosnia), Asia Minor and partly Palestine. See, Benbassa and Rodrigue, p. xvi.

adoption of numerous already-existing social and intellectual models developed in the West. In fact, in the 1840s a number of different Jewish intellectual movements and reform activities existed side by side in Europe. Thus, the inter-relation and amalgamation of these multiple parallel movements, all emerging from diverse Western Jewish centers, played an important role in activating and shaping the emergence of new trends among Ottoman Jews. At the same time, the inherited Sephardic traditions from earlier centuries, as well as the evolving Ottoman political posture towards her non-Muslim *millet* subjects sparked by new reform movements, also had an important contributing role in the outcome of the modernization process of Ottoman Jewish identity.

At this point, it is necessary to illustrate the different types of Jewish intellectual movements in the Western Jewish world, which emerged in the last decades of the eighteenth century and continued in effect for almost one hundred years. It is true that there was a high level of interaction between these movements, and in some instances it is even difficult to differentiate them from each other, however, each of these movements had its own distinctive approach to history and their respective historical writings carry the characteristics of their different perspectives. Thus, in our work, the salient differences between the ideologies of these movements will be of special interest. The analysis of all these movements, their characteristics and differences will be useful to create a kind of “gauge” or “pattern” that can be used as a key-stone in evaluating the influence of these movements on Turkish Jewry and on the writing of Turkish Jewish history. Indeed, the reflections and interaction of all these movements began to show themselves in the Ottoman Empire by the middle of the nineteenth century, and became

influential in varying degrees in the emergence of a resultant Sephardic intellectual identity in the Empire.

#### **5.4.1. The Emancipation – “Regeneration” Movement of French Jews and its Influence on Ottoman Jewry**

##### **5.4.1.1. Overview**

*Haskalah* is a word in Hebrew that can be translated as “Jewish Enlightenment”, used in a broad sense to define all versions of Jewish modernization movements and ideologies, which began to emerge in the 1770s within European Jewish society, and continued to be influential until the 1880s. However, it will be erroneous to consider the Haskalah as a uniform movement; and the French variant of the Haskalah certainly had its own characteristics. First of all, the legal status of Jews in France was totally different from that of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe. The principles of the French Revolution implied equality to all French citizens without making distinction on the basis of their religions. Starting from 1791, Jews in France enjoyed equal rights which after some slippage in the post 1810 period were restored once more in 1830. However, from its first inception, as its necessary condition, this legal emancipation needed to go hand in hand with the social and moral “betterment” of the French Jewish community. As stated by Aron Rodrigue, Jews were seen as “being outcasts in society, a position that encouraged all their ‘bad habits’ such as superstitions, exclusiveness, and an excessive predilection for commerce and usury.”<sup>377</sup> So, in the aftermath of emancipation they were expected to become a radically different community integrated into the society through “regeneration.” The aim was to

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<sup>377</sup> Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, p. 6.

abolish the existence of “a nation within a nation,”<sup>378</sup> and to transform Jews into useful citizens, virtually indistinguishable from others. This process of assimilation should be accomplished not only under the supervision of the state, but by Jews themselves through their elites who were highly eager to be cooperative. The central and regional consistory system instituted by Napoleon in 1808 reflects the strong intervening role and agenda of state policy in restructuring Jewish life. According to this policy, Jews, as individuals, would enjoy the advantage of being incorporated into the society but would no longer form a separate people. The declaration of the Parisian Sanhedrin in April 1807, which claimed to be the first assembled Sanhedrin “since the dispersion of Israel,” clearly shows the eagerness of the Jews to comply with this new policy and their denial of their national identity:

We, learned men and leaders of Israel, to the number of seventy one, ... declare that the divine Law, the precious heritage of our ancestors, contains within itself dispositions which are religious: that the religious dispositions are, by their nature, absolute and independent of circumstances and of the age; that this does not hold true of the political dispositions, that is to say, ... these political dispositions are no longer applicable, since Israel no longer forms a nation.<sup>379</sup>

State-driven Jewish awakening and denial or debasing of any nationalistic dimensions of Judaism appears to be the two salient corollaries of the Jewish emancipation and regenerative movement in France. Indeed, a letter sent by the representative dignitaries of the Metz community rejecting a contribution to the mission to the East during the Damascus Affair reflects the double loyalty concerns:

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<sup>378</sup> Stated by Comte de Clermont-Tonnerre, in Dec. 23, 1789, during his discourse he gave in the French National Assembly. For his discourse, see, “2. Debate on the Eligibility of Jews for Citizenship” in *The Jew in the Modern World*, eds. Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz. P. 114.

<sup>379</sup> The Parisian Sanhedrin, Doctrinal Decisions (April 1807) in *The Jew in the Modern World, A Documentary History* eds. Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 135. In Jewish terminology “Israel” is often used for “Jewish people.”

[The mission] did not win general support among the enlightened Jews of our city. ... [the bold initiative taken by the Central Consistory to be] by its nature of the kind to revive the all too frequent accusation that the Jews, as a religious sect, are so dominated by sentiment for their own nationality that they cannot sincerely, and on principle, adhere to the nationality of their country.<sup>380</sup>

The absence of a nationalistic element in French Jewish regeneration was also reflected in the Jewish literary creations in the country. As an example, Hebrew, the historic language of the Jewish people was confined mostly to the religious realm and was very rarely used in literary works. At the same time, contrary to developments in Central and Eastern Europe, it appears that interest in the Jewish past was not appealing to French Jewish intellectuals. As a consequence of this indifferent attitude, we do not see works of critical historical character among French Jews until the last decades of the nineteenth century. Solomon Munk and Joseph Derenbourg were the only two historians of the modern period in France who were known for their serious historical work on the Jewish past. However, both of them were German in origin and they arrived in France after studying at German universities such as Berlin and Bonn.<sup>381</sup> Indeed, the *Société Littéraire pour la Science du Judaïsme*, the French Jewish institution which aimed to deal with the scientific analysis of Judaism was only established in 1879, about sixty years after the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden*, its German counterpart. Michael Graetz asserts that the

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<sup>380</sup> Quoted in different context by Frankel, *The Damascus Affair*, p. 237.

<sup>381</sup> Michael Graetz, "The History of an Estrangement between Two Jewish Communities: German and French Jewry during the Nineteenth Century" in *Toward Modernity- The European Jewish Model* ed. Jacob Katz (Oxford: Transaction Books, 1987) p. 161. According to Aron Rodrigue, Léon Halévy was the only French historian in the first part of the nineteenth century. Since Halévy did not know Hebrew (and most probably also German) his historical work strongly relied on earlier works of Hebraists such as Jacques Basnage and Arthur Bengnot, and shaped by the Saint-Simonian "universalist theological perspective that was pointing to the centrality of emancipation and citizenship as granted to the Jews during the French Revolution." Moïse Schwab, Alie-Aristide Astruc, James Darmesteter and Théodore Reinach were other historians who had almost the same philosophical/theological approach and they all wrote their histories in the last decades of the nineteenth century. See, Aron Rodrigue, "Léon Halévy and Modern French Jewish Historiography" in *Jewish History and Memory* eds. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron and David N. Myers, pp. 413-427.

real awakening of the French to an interest in Jewish history emerged, in the 1870s as a consequence of the translation of the works of the Wissenschaft historians, particularly of Heinrich Graetz:

The translation of *Sinai and Golgatha* as well as the remainder of Graetz's *History of Jewish People* were intended to change the attitude of French Jewry toward their past so that they would view it not only as the spiritual heritage of a religious denomination, but as the history of a nation even after the destruction of the Second Temple and the worldwide dispersion of the Jews.<sup>382</sup>

It was the Damascus Affair in 1840 that served as a turning point in French Jewish history and stimulated French Jews to reappraise their situation and establish links with their co-religionists in other parts of the world.<sup>383</sup> The *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, which was founded in 1860 mostly at the initiative of the French Jewry, was a result of this awakening of a Jewish sense of consciousness among the Jews of France. Indeed, throughout its life time, French culture, ideology and the experience of regeneration were the dominant elements in the ideology, politics and administration of the Alliance.<sup>384</sup> The institution became active in the Ottoman Empire particularly after the 1870s by establishing new schools, and it would have great importance as one of the most influential factors in shaping the intellectual formation of Ottoman Jewry.

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<sup>382</sup> Michael Graetz, p. 162.

<sup>383</sup> The Mortara Affair, a seizure of a Jewish boy of seven years old, in 1858, by Church authorities as a consequence of his being secretly baptized while he was a baby, was another event which created distress and intensified the need for solidarity among French and Western Jewry. For Mortara Affair, see David Kertzer, *Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1997).

<sup>384</sup> *Alliance Israélite Universelle* was actually an international organization having members from France, Italy, Holland, Belgium, England and Germany. However its centre was in Paris and from its early days "the French leadership put its stamp on the whole organization which expressed the politics, ideology, and culture of French Jewry." See Rodrigue, p. 23.

#### 5.4.1.2. The French Influence on Ottoman Jewry through the Alliance

An institution founded principally by French Jews and imbued with the ideology of the French-Jewish path to modernity, the Alliance aimed to raise up a new educated Jewish generation having marketable skills and intellectual capabilities who would become productive, useful and loyal citizens. According to this approach, Jews would regenerate themselves so that they would not be a distinctive minority in their own country as a consequence of language, physical appearance and cultural traditions. Furthermore, as part of their nation they would share and work for common ideals together with their compatriots. According to the Alliance's ideology, Jews would have the right to demand legal emancipation only if they themselves would sincerely engage in the endeavor of realizing their social emancipation. Thus, following the same path taken by French Jews, for Ottoman Jewry legal and social emancipation, leading to full integration, had to proceed in tandem.<sup>385</sup>

From the beginning, during the establishment of Alliance committees and schools in the Orient, it was realized by all sides that this vision of the Alliance was unrealistic and could not be applicable to the Ottoman Empire. First, the indigenous Sephardic Jews of the Empire were keen on keeping their traditions and eager to pick from the new ideas, only those that would benefit them economically. Even the intellectual elites, including those among the "*Francos*," the Ottoman Jews of Italian origin and the very few *maskilim* of the Empire were reluctant to go that far, fearing that complete regeneration and transformation could end up in the losing their Judeo-Spanish traditional heritage. Secondly, contrary to the nationalist and imperialist state policies in the West, the Ottoman Empire did not have expectations of the Jews regarding social

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<sup>385</sup> Benbassa and Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans*, p. 83.



assimilation at all during the nineteenth century, even during the reform movements of 1839 and 1856. Indeed, until 1908, the Ottoman Empire adhered to a multi-national character and never had a “melting pot” policy. On the other hand, the Alliance itself tended to contradict its original goals. As a product of the imperialist West, some members of the Alliance came to the conclusion that Western especially French civilization and culture was the only one that was worthy of being integrated into.<sup>386</sup>

Thus, the initial policies of the Alliance promoting emancipation derailed when applied to Ottoman Jewry. Instead of being integrated into or assimilated by the major national culture, the Ottoman Jews became an even more distinct, isolated and distant community under the enormous influence of French culture. An elite class emerged, imbued with French values, culturally reoriented and Francophone, who believed in the superiority of French civilization. The historians, Moise Franco and Joseph Nehama, whom we will study in a later part of this chapter, were typical examples of such an orientation.

Consistent with the character of French interest in general Jewish history, post-biblical Jewish history was not included in the curriculum of the Alliance schools in the Empire until the relatively later date of 1892-1893. Actually, the teaching of Jewish history gained importance as a “pivotal” subject only later with the syllabus change of the year 1897.<sup>387</sup> It was an odd result for the Alliance. Her graduates, now equipped with adequate historical consciousness, would become more attracted to Jewish nationalist ideas that were first introduced by the *maskilim* and later ratified by the Zionists. These nationalist approaches were totally rejected by the Alliance

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<sup>386</sup> Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, p. 88.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

leaders in France and they were even seen as dangerous dreams that could harm the image of Jews as loyal citizens of their country.

## **5.4.2. The German Haskalah movement and its spread in Eastern Europe**

### **5.4.2.1. Overview**

The German Haskalah<sup>388</sup> movement and its extended version in Eastern Europe was another variant of the modernization movement initiated in the 1770s, which also came to influence the way of thinking of the Jewish elites in the Ottoman Empire. In contrast to the movement in France, the German Haskalah was not initiated by the state or by non-Jews, but by an elite group of Jewish individuals who under the influence of the European Enlightenment, believed in secular studies, culture and philosophy, as well as assimilation in language, dress and manners. They contended that these changes should be recognized as legitimate in Jewish education and daily life. According to those intellectuals, known as *maskilim*, followers of the Haskalah, a new reform in traditional Jewish perceptions should be necessary, so that Jews would stop considering themselves as aliens in *galut*, (exile) and become productive loyal citizens integrated into the emerging modern centralized states where they lived.<sup>389</sup> Moses Mendelssohn is often identified as the father of the ideology known as the Haskalah. He emphasized rational-philosophical truth as the major element leading men to rational actions and convictions. Nevertheless, Mendelssohn also gave a special importance to religion and introduced religion as a means which with its persuasive power would be influential in improving convictions, thus behavior of men. Like him, the pioneers of this movement were all self-educated and progressive

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<sup>388</sup> German Haskalah movement is also known as Berlin Haskalah. The well-known adherents of the movement lived and wrote in Berlin, the cultural center of Germany at the turn of the eighteenth century.

<sup>389</sup> Azriel Shochat, *Encyclopedia Judaica* –CD –ROM Edition, s.v. “Haskalah.”

intellectuals. Initially they expressed their reformist ideas mostly in Hebrew, in their publication *Ha-Me'assef*, which served as the major organ of propagating the views and values of the movement.

Among the first generation of German Haskalah intellectuals, Naphtali Herz Wessely and Isaac Euchel, the editor of *Ha-Me'assef*, are particularly distinguished by their contributions to the ideology endeavoring to legitimize the study and analysis of “history” with a secular approach. The Haskalah movement in Germany continued only for one generation and faded by the 1820s. However, the ideology spread with an active fervor in Galicia, Lithuania and later in provinces of the Russian Pale of Settlement remaining influential through the 1880s. The first maskilim of the Ottoman Jewry were also inspired by these reformist ideas through their contacts and correspondence with Eastern European maskilim.<sup>390</sup>

#### **5.4.2.2. Comparison of the nature of German and French movements**

The Berlin Haskalah movement and its continuation in Central and Eastern Europe differed from its counterpart in France in many ways. It will be useful to point out these differences in order to highlight their influential role on Jewish intellectuals in the Ottoman Empire.

1. Contrary to what occurred in France, there was no comprehensive and leading state initiative in the emergence of the movement in Central and Eastern Europe. There was

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<sup>390</sup> Benbassa and Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans*, p. 67.

some state interference in the German states, Austria<sup>391</sup> and Russia<sup>392</sup> but these were mostly limited to educational issues. They were less systematic and not effective in the implementation, and they were thus restricted in scope compared to the French example. Thus, the Revolution and the Napoleonic regime created a unique sociopolitical setting that differentiated the French Jewish enlightenment from the German and Eastern ones. As a consequence, in contrast to French Jews, German and Eastern Jewish communities continued to practice full communal autonomy.<sup>393</sup> In fact, German, Austrian and Russian rulers as well as state authorities were deemed as powers securing and protecting their autonomous status.

2. As Jews living in such autonomous communities, the maskilim in Eastern Europe were in general more conservative towards the traditional institutions of Judaism, compared to their enlightened counterparts in France. For example they adopted a relatively moderate attitude towards the Jewish religion.<sup>394</sup> Although they were radical in their effort to reshape Jewish traditions, still they were more careful and cautious in offering proposals that might lead Jews to apostasy. For example, with this concern in mind Moses

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<sup>391</sup> At the turn of the nineteenth century Austria was one of the most powerful states of Europe. Bohemia, Moravia, Hungary and Galicia, with their large Jewish populations were all provinces of the vast Austrian Empire. Emperor Joseph II, in his *Toleranz* edicts issued between 1781 and 1789, with the purpose to “make Jews useful to the state,” urged Jews to establish secular schools for the education of their children or to send them to the general state schools. See, *Encyclopedia Judaica* – CD-ROM Edition, s.v. “Austria.”

<sup>392</sup> In 1840, during the reign of the Tsar Nicholas I, a reform plan prepared by Count P.D. Kiselev was set to be implemented. A more drastic reform especially on education was initiated by Uvarov, Russian minister of National Enlightenment, in 1844 by enacting the law “On Establishing Special Schools for the Education of Jewish Youth”. The law called on Jews of the Pale of Settlement to establish new secular educational institutions. See Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), pp. 43-85.

<sup>393</sup> For example, they sustained their rabbinic judiciary system, halakhic marriage and divorce traditions contrary to the compulsory civil marriage regulations that were formed in France. On the consistory system and non-autonomous statue of French Jewry, see, Simon Schwarzfuchs, *Napoleon, the Jews and the Sanhedrin*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) For the Russian case, the law issued on December 19, 1844 abolished the *kahal*, the executive agency of the community on taxation, internal policing, and the administration of justice. However, that was “a paper reform.” The *kahal* persisted in its previous form until the last years of the nineteenth century. See Stanislawski, pp. 124-126.

<sup>394</sup> Feiner, *Haskalah and History. The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness*, p. 129, 152.

Mendelssohn was opposed to the education of Jewish and non-Jewish children together. Due to its conservative attitude, the Haskalah did not produce a rapid slide towards assimilation and disintegration particularly in Eastern Europe, as had occurred in France and Western Europe.

3. Hebrew, particularly Biblical Hebrew, gained an importance among the Eastern maskilim not only as the language for liturgy but also as the language of science and literature. Most of the works of the period, which conveyed the thoughts and ideologies of the Haskalah, were written in Hebrew. Indeed, the Hebrew language of almost all Haskalah periodicals, beginning with the *Ha-Me'assef* in Berlin, reflects the importance of the Hebrew language among the maskilim. As a rule, interest in Hebrew can be seen as a yard-stick, for evaluating the proximity of the Jewish movement to national ideologies.
4. Contrary to the French path to modernity, the Haskalah ideology of Eastern Europe acted as an agency in awakening and fostering Jewish sentiments along secular lines in Central and Eastern Europe. The anti-messianic and the rationalist stance of the Haskalah became a starting point for aspirations for redemption through national agency. Thus, pro-Zionist ideas which were strengthened in the second half of the nineteenth century found more fertile ground among the young Jews influenced by Hasakalah than among emancipationists and advocates for full Jewish social and legal integration as well as acculturation.
5. Beginning from the early stages of the maskilic movement, a renewed interest in the study of the nature of Judaism and the fate of the Jewish people gained strength with the intensions of demonstrating the spirituality of Judaism as being comparable to Christianity. As two pioneers of the Jewish enlightenment, Naphtali Herz Wessely and

Isaac Euchel noted, in their *Ha-Me'assef* articles, the historical explanations of “traditional history” which were in their view, mainly theological in an attempt to reveal the workings of a divine plan. These maskilim tried to demonstrate with much vigor, how a new and different understanding of history could also be possible and legitimate. As an outcome, a renewed, natural, realistic and rational trend in explaining historical facts emerged which can be defined as “maskilic history.” As a momentous step in the Jewish conception of “history,” this new approach also had secular characteristics. As stated by Feiner, for the first time Jewish history,

... like the European version, increasingly regarded man as an autonomous creator of history, assigning him responsibility for his actions and seeking universal mechanisms to account for historical processes, and thus serving the new Jewish ideal which the maskilim wished to shape.<sup>395</sup>

Demonstrating this renewed approach, biographies of eminent Jewish personalities were published mostly in Hebrew in *Ha-Me'assef* and in maskilic journals published later in Eastern Europe. As pointed out by Feiner, these prominent Jewish figures were introduced as “exemplary models that exhibited such maskilic values as virtuousness, rational thinking, and dedication to the struggle for truth and justice, and participation in beneficial political and social action.”<sup>396</sup> The attempt at a comprehensive history, *Vorlesungen ueber die neuere Geschichte der Juden*, by Solomon Loewisohn, a maskil from Prague, although unfinished, can be offered as an example that characterized “maskilic history.” On the other hand, as stated before, among French Jews history writing was rarer and carries the high level influence of French Hebraists.

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

The Haskalah ideology, and in particular its understanding of history, together with the approach identified with *Wissenschaft des Judentums* continued to exist and influence intellectuals especially in Eastern Europe and in the Ottoman Empire into the 1880s.

#### **5.4.2.3. The Influence of the Haskalah on Ottoman Jewry**

The ideologies of the Haskalah spread to the Ottoman lands through Eastern Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century and triggered the emergence of new modernization activities in the Ottoman Empire. As illustrative examples, we may cite the correspondence in Hebrew between Judah Nehama of Salonica and maskilim in Eastern Europe, and the organizational and educational efforts of the Hungarian maskil Joseph Halevy in Adrianople. The Jewish economic elites, mostly the “*Francos*,” Jews of Italian origin, were the main supporters of the maskilim in their endeavor to bring modernization into the backward Jewish communities of the Empire. According to these maskilim who were very few in number, the establishment of a rational and secular education was of primary importance as a first step towards a transformation of the community. Thus, new schools were opened in Jewish centers of the Empire, in Istanbul, Salonica and Izmir, well before the attempt of the Alliance, through the collaboration between the maskilim and the wealthy *Francos*. However, these schools were short lived due to the opposition of conservative circles and the lack of a central institutional body to coordinate them. Indeed, the activities of the maskilim in the Ottoman Empire took place as individual and local initiatives here and there, without any institutional or organizational frame.

As in Europe, the maskilim in the Ottoman Empire came from traditional backgrounds reflecting the peculiarities of the social strata from which they emerged. Their discourse for modernization

reflected a conservative character without having any assimilationist motifs in its beginning. These maskilim with their more traditional approach prepared an appropriate base for the more authoritative or assertive modernization movements brought about later by the Alliance and the Wissenschaft. Thus, the maskilim served as a bridge between the traditional community and the Westernization movements.

The two typical characteristics of the Haskalah as it emerged from Eastern Europe, giving importance to Hebrew and the fostering of Jewish nationalist sentiments, can also be distinctly seen in the activities of the Ottoman maskilim. As in Europe, the maskilim in the Ottoman Empire, like the pioneers Judah Nehama and Baruch Mitrani, as well as later ones, founded societies like *Dorshei Leshon Zion* (Friends of the Language of Zion) and *Dorshei Leshon Ever* (Friends of the Hebrew Language) that promoted the usage of Hebrew as the cornerstone of Jewish national and religious identity. Nevertheless, the maskilim in the Empire, despite all ideological inhibitions, also used, widely, the Judeo-Spanish language in their works, in order to expand their target audience, similar to their counterparts' usage of Yiddish in East Europe and particularly in Russia.<sup>397</sup> Indeed, like the periodical *Yosef Daat* (The Increase of Knowledge)/ *El Progreso* (The Progress) published by Judah Nehama, most of the journals published by the maskilim were bi-lingual, Judeo-Spanish and Hebrew, and had both Judeo-Spanish and Hebrew titles. It appears to be that there was a strong correlation between the Haskalah movement and the spread of Judeo-Spanish writing which became “the principal vehicle of modernization.”<sup>398</sup> In concurrence with the Haskalah objectives, the maskilim also played a role in founding of newspapers like *Karmin* in Adrianople and societies like *Kadima* (Forward) in Salonica which

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<sup>397</sup> See, historiography particularly in Yiddish in Russia, Feiner, p. 241.

<sup>398</sup> Benbassa, “The Process of Modernisation of Eastern Sephardi Communities” p. 2.



were soon transformed into publications and centers promoting the strengthening of Jewish national identity.<sup>399</sup>

An implicit product of the maskilic aim to awaken Jewish national identity and consciousness, was an infatuation with history, not only Jewish but also world history.<sup>400</sup> The increased interest in history stimulated the popularization of Jewish history. As a consequence both the writing of history and the translation of historical works flourished in the nineteenth century. Judah Nehama (1825- 1899) was one of the first among the intellectuals of his time to initiate the writing of history. In addition to translating a general historical work, he wrote biographies of two Jewish philanthropists Albert Cohn and Moses Allatini. These works which represent as the first historical writings of an Ottoman Jew of the age also carry the typical moralistic and didactic messages characteristic of “maskilic history.”

In the last decades of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the interest in history became even more prevalent. Well-known Jewish historical classics such as *Shevet Yehuda* by Salomon Verga, *Emek ha Bakha* by Joseph ha-Kohen, both from the sixteenth century, and Heinrich Graetz’s comprehensive history of the Jewish people were published in Judeo-Spanish and found a large audience. Another genre of historical work that had a maskilic character was the biography. Studies of prominent Jewish figures such as Montefiore, Crémieux and Rothschilds appeared in these years. These well-known Jews were seen as exemplary modern heroes among the Jews of the Orient, since the Damascus Affair of 1840, due to their beneficial

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<sup>399</sup> The conflict between the Felix Bloch, the director of Alliance school in Edirne and maskil Baruch Mitrani in 1868 was a significant illustrative case showing the differences between ideologies of the Alliance and Haskalah on issues like Hebrew teaching and Jewish nationalism. See, Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, p. 59-61.

<sup>400</sup> Benbassa and Rodrigue, p. 110.

political and social actions. In this period, with the increased interest in history, historical novels and romances also flourished. Indeed, the table listing the Judeo-Spanish literature of the nineteenth century prepared by Moise Franco shows that about one third of the literature of the age had an implicit or explicit historical character.<sup>401</sup> Closer analysis of the list also shows that an important part of this historical literature was written by anonymous writers. This feature reflects the wide-ranging general interest in history among contemporary Jewish intellectuals. In addition to Judah Nehama, Abraham Danon (1857-1925), in his early works, and partly Abraham Rosanes (1862-1938) also reflect characteristics of the maskilic history in their works.

### **5.4.3. The Social and Cultural Characteristics of Italian Jewry and their Effect on Ottoman Jewry**

#### **5.4.3.1. Overview of the Social and Cultural Distinctiveness of Italian Jewry and its Attitude towards Modernization**

In addition to the two different intellectual movements emanating from Western and Eastern Europe, the social and cultural traits of Italian Jewry and their articulated encounter with enlightened absolutism and the Haskalah also had its own distinctive characteristics. The elements unique to Italian Jewry also became an important contributing factor in the emergence and the shaping of Jewish intellectual formation in the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, as stated by Rodrigue, even throughout the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, which were the most insular and isolated period of Ottoman Jewry, there was still an ongoing active relationship with Italian Jewry, particularly with the Livorno Jewish

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<sup>401</sup> Franco, *Essai sur L'Histoire Des Israelites de L'Empire Ottoman* (Paris, U.I.S.F., 1980), pp. 270- 275.

community. Small groups of Italian Jews who chose to settle in major Ottoman Jewish centers due to the advantageous status of taxation given to foreigner merchants initiated this relationship.<sup>402</sup> Those Jews, known as *Francos*, reflected the characteristics of the Italian Jewish culture to which they belonged, kept their Italian language, and furthermore maintained for a long time their “traditional family ties with Italy, often sending their sons to be educated there.”<sup>403</sup> *Francos* began to be more influential in the affairs and cultural development of indigenous Jewish communities, especially after the middle of the nineteenth century. They served as an important bridge between the Western World and the Levant, and contributed Italian Jewish values and characteristics into local Jewish affairs. *Francos* were the founders of the first modern educational institutes in 1850s in the Ottoman Empire and after 1862, as a wealthy and progressive class, they took the initiative and established the first Alliance schools in the Empire.

It was not only the Jews of Italian origin living in the Ottoman Empire lands that were the transmitters of the Italian Jewish tradition. Although fewer in number, Sephardic-Ottoman Jews who were then living in the Italian states also helped link the two cultures.<sup>404</sup> For example, David Moses Attias, a Sarajevo-born author living in Livorno, introduced the

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<sup>402</sup> Mina Rozen, “Strangers in a Strange Land: The Extraterritorial Status of Jews in Italy and the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries” in *Ottoman and Turkish Jewry: Community and Leadership*, ed. Rodrigue (Bloomington; Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1992), pp. 123-166.

<sup>403</sup> Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, p. 39. See also, Rodrigue, “The Beginning of Westernization and Community Reform among Istanbul Jewry, 1854-65,” in *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Avigdor Levy, pp. 439-456.

<sup>404</sup> Beginning from the sixteenth century the Ottoman Empire and the Italian City states were reciprocally assigning special rights to merchants of each other permitted to settle in their lands. See Rozen, p. 12-125.

importance of secular learning and the developments in Italy on secular teaching in his Judeo-Spanish work *Guerta de Oro* (1778).<sup>405</sup>

In order to distinguish the Italian, particularly the Francos' influence on the Turkish Jewish intellectual formation, it will be useful to review some of the salient distinctive social and cultural features that were common in the Jewish communities of the Italian states. The time period of our limited investigation will be focused again on the last decades of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, since, as pointed out earlier, this was the era when new enlightened Jewish intellectual developments were emerging in the other parts of Europe.

In a different way from the Jews in France, Central and Eastern Europe, Italian Jews experienced a rapid, extensive and smooth integration into state and society and adjusted themselves relatively easily to the life outside of the ghetto.<sup>406</sup> The modern Enlightenment movement was infused into Italian Jewish communities through both the guidance of the state and the influence of the Berlin Haskalah. However, neither the legislation such as Joseph II's Tolerance edicts, urging Italian Jews in the Austrian Empire to reform their educational system, nor the Haskalah precepts that gave an important place to non-Torah studies such as linguistic, mathematical, moral, social, nor physical sciences were new concepts for Italian Jewry. Already a combined Jewish and general education was existent in Italian Jewish communities. As stated by Dubin, "Ease and familiarity with non-Jewish

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<sup>405</sup> Rodrigue, "The Ottoman Diaspora: The Rise and Fall of Ladino Literary Culture" in *Cultures of Jews* ed. David Biale, p. 876.

<sup>406</sup> Lois C. Dubin, "Trieste and Berlin: The Italian Role in the Cultural Politics of the Haskalah" in *Toward Modernity, The European Jewish Model* ed. Jacob Katz. (Oxford: Transaction Books, 1987), pp. 189-225.

realms – what we may call *acculturation*- was the basic premise of the Italian Jewry.”<sup>407</sup> There was a strong social adaptation reflected in language and appearance. As Wessely pointed out, Italian Jews generally spoke Italian dialects efficiently like an “orator” and they were equally capable of using the language for creating literary works. Even in the beginning of the seventeenth century vernacular sermons in the synagogues were common.<sup>408</sup> With the abolition of ghetto walls, a more vibrant interaction between Jews and Christians took place and they started to come together not only for their business activities, but also in coffee-houses, theaters and in Masonic lodges for social and cultural occasions. Again, contrary to other regions in Europe, partly because of the inherited more tolerant Sephardic influence,<sup>409</sup> there was not much opposition from religious circles against this non-traditional ongoing social and cultural openness. Indeed, the rabbis of the Italian communities aspired to be known not only by their “halakhic mastery,” but by their “university education, and literary prowess in both Hebrew and Italian, and often for their good relations with Gentile savants and authorities as well.”<sup>410</sup>

In spite of the enlightened and progressive image of Italian Jews, the most salient feature which characterized the Italian Jewish modernization was the conservative stance taken relative to religious reform as compared to that seen by co-religionists in France and Germany. For the Italian intellectuals of the age, there was no separate and autonomous

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Isaac Euchel in his portrayal of Livornese Jews in *Hame'assef* in the late 1780s underlines the Sephardic influence: “Most follow the Sephardic custom.” See, Euchel “Igrot Meshulam ben-Uriyah ha-Eshtamoi,” *Hame'assef* 6 (1789-90):173-74. Quoted by Lois C. Dubin, “The Rise and Fall of the Italian Jewish Model in Germany: From Haskalah to Reform, 1780-1820,” in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory* p. 273. In the same essay Dubin, asserts that “The stance of the Italian rabbis .... must be seen [as well] in terms of Sephardic religious responses to modernity, in both the West and the East. ...” p. 288.

<sup>410</sup> Dubin, “Trieste and Berlin: The Italian Role in the Cultural Politics of the Haskalah” p. 210.

realm of human culture from the Torah, contrary to the German Haskalah ideology, with which they were familiar due to their correspondence with Wessely<sup>411</sup>. As stated by Dubin,

Theirs was a harmonistic integrative conception of Torah and wisdom, of religion and culture – in which God’s Torah is the absolute value, the firm bedrock of education, and all-embracing framework for every kind of knowledge. ...[As allies of the German Haskalah movement, they] were neither passive recipients nor imitators. They selected carefully from Berlin’s wares, affirming values and methods that seemed familiar but rejecting that which struck them as radically new. Their reservations did not stem from a narrow or obscurantist view of Jewish culture –none appreciated European languages and the arts, humanities, and sciences more than they- but rather from a different configuration of Judaism and general culture than Haskalah’s. For Italian Jews, neither Torah nor general culture had to yield in order for the other to have a place.<sup>412</sup>

#### **5.4.3.2. The Italian Jewish Influence on Ottoman Jewish Modernization**

It was the Francos who were the initiating force of the first modernization movements in the Ottoman Empire. They supported the maskilim and cooperated with them in their reformist efforts, and played a significant role in the establishment of new secular and modern educational institutes in different centers of the Empire beginning from 1854. It would not be an exaggeration to say that without their economic power and westernized attitude the modernization movement and the establishment of new schools in the Empire could not have been realized at such a pace. After the 1860s the Francos were also active in creating links with the Alliance and again it was the Francos who constituted the local committees of the Alliance founded in the major centers of the Empire. Among the Franco elite, Abraham de Camondo and Emmanuelle Veneziani from Istanbul, Moise Allatini and Solomon Fernandez from Salonica,

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<sup>411</sup> Naphtali Herz Wessely proposed a dualism of *torat ha'adam* (universal human knowledge) and *torat hashem* (Judaism). He asserted that in the spirit of this twofold ideal that the Jewish society would be transformed into a religious tolerant, enlightened and ethical one appropriate to the enlightened and rational European culture. See Feiner, p. 10.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., p. 202, 209.

and Alexander Sidi from Izmir were the most prominent and active leaders of modernization movements. Edirne was the only major Jewish center that was not a port city and therefore had no Franco element.<sup>413</sup> In this city, the Hungarian maskil Joseph Halevy was the initiator of modernization and reformed schooling using all of his organizational talents. The mysterious burning of the Alliance school in Edirne in 1868,<sup>414</sup> in its first year, and the clash of the Alliance with the maskil Baruch Mitrani and his maskilic organization, *Mikveh Israel* may be attributed to the absence of the balancing role of the Francos. It is possible to assert that in those other cities, the Francos, who combined Western tendencies and traditional Italian-Sephardic conservatism, formed a bridge between the French absolutism of the Alliance and the conservative attitudes of indigenous Ottoman Jewry. The reluctance of Abraham de Camondo<sup>415</sup> to deliver the school that he was in charge of in Hasköy, Istanbul to the control of the Alliance in spite of demands of the institution<sup>416</sup> may also be explained by the same line of reasoning.

The Italian education in the school founded by Alexander Sidi, a Franco in Izmir<sup>417</sup> and its director, Moses Jacob Ottolenghi from Italy, is also noteworthy in illustrating the influence of the Italian Jewish orientation on Ottoman Jewry. Indeed, the Italian language was one of the languages of education besides Turkish, Hebrew and French in the first European-style school that was inaugurated in 1854, in Hasköy.<sup>418</sup> Additionally, Masonic Italian lodges were also highly active particularly in Salonica and had an important number of local Jewish notables as

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<sup>413</sup> Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, p. 50. The comparison of Edirne with other major Jewish centers of the Empire which had the Franco element missing, will be an interesting research subject in order to evaluate the role Francos played in the modernization movement of the Empire Jewry.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>415</sup> Abraham de Camondo was a very influential banker of his age and known as the “Rothschild of the East.” See, Nora Şeni and Sophie Le Taanec, *Camondolar*, (Istanbul, İletişim, 2000)

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>417</sup> Benbassa and Rodrigue, p. 77.

<sup>418</sup> Rodrigue, “The Beginnings of westernization and Community Reform Among Istanbul ‘s Jewry, 1854-65,” p. 443.

their members. Indeed, Emmanuel Karaso and Nessim Mazliah, who after the 1908 *Meşrutiyet* coup became active members of the Ottoman Parliament, were members of the Italian “Macedonia Risorta” lodge.

This Franco community has not produced its own historians. The Francos were mostly a wealthy merchant and banker class within the Ottoman Jewish community. In addition to their philanthropic and reformist attitude, their conservative Western characteristics played a significant role in the creation and production of an enlightened and educated class of Jews in the Ottoman Empire.

#### **5.4.4. *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement and its new approach to Jewish History.**

##### **Its Influence on Ottoman Jewish History Writing.**

##### **5.4.4.1. Overview**

*Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the scientific “study of Judaism” movement, appeared in Germany in the second decade of the nineteenth century as an ideology aiming to establish Jewish modernization and scholarship on a scientific base. The pioneers of the movement were hoping that through scientific analysis of Judaic texts, history and philosophy, it would be possible to show the high moral and mental activity of the Judaic past and illustrate the richness of Jewish culture. Indeed, Leopold Zunz, one of the well-known founders of the movement, with his favorite term defined Jews as one of the oldest *Kulturvolk*, or a cultural nation, who deserved high esteem. He believed such a scientific illustration of Jewish people would discredit the critiques lodged against Judaism in his age, and would remove those hindrances which denied



full emancipation to Jews. The Wissenschaft intellectuals, who were mostly educated in the eminent universities of Germany, believed that to investigate the past culture and history of Jews would also raise self-esteem within the Jewish community. As Max Weiner states, “by no means was *Wissenschaft* solely, or in large measure, a matter of restoring Jewish honor in the eyes of Christians. More urgent appeared the need to magnify or renew the honor of the Jews among themselves.”<sup>419</sup>

A scientific interest in Jewish history and study of the Jewish sources according to shared objective and scientific methods of research and interpretation was the most prevalent trait of the Wissenschaft. It had several differences with the historical approach of the Haskalah, i.e., the “maskilic history,” which continued to exist in parallel throughout the whole nineteenth century. An examination of divergent points of these two historical attitudes will be useful in analyzing the influential trends on the Ottoman historians who wrote in the last decades of the century.

#### **5.4.4.2. The Difference between the Haskalah and the Wissenschaft Approaches towards History Writing**

In the last decades of the eighteenth century, one of the first challenges facing the Haskalah influenced historians was not to contradict the long-established Jewish approach to history. One of the characteristic features of these perceptions was that any preoccupation with the historical past could not be legitimate if it was not harnessed to theological aims transcending history

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<sup>419</sup> Max Weiner, *Judische Religion im Zeitalter der Emanzipation* quoted by Leon Weiseltier, “*Etwas Über Judische Historik: Leopold Zunz and the Inception of Modern Jewish Historiography*,” *History and Theory*, Volume 20, Issue 2 (May, 1981), p. 144.

itself.<sup>420</sup> Thus, the maskilim exerted a considerable amount of effort in order to legitimate their new historical approach. To find exemplary lessons and to extract moralistic and intellectual benefits from the past was their justification for studying history. Thus, as a characteristic feature, their presentation of history was always apologetic and cautious. As a result of this approach, maskilic history was pragmatic, rationalistic and most importantly didactic. With this attitude and with its ideology, maskilic history contrasted sharply with Hegel's view of history. According to Hegel, "the events of the past ought not to be considered in the light of current events; nor should one try to derive moral lessons from them. ... [Thus] didactic history was an inferior and anachronistic form of historical writing."<sup>421</sup> However, as pointed out by Feiner, the maskilim were "omnivorously combing history for examples and moral lessons."<sup>422</sup> Indeed in maskilic history, great Jewish people and their deeds were analyzed as exemplary models with emphasis on extracting positive moral lessons from them. On the other hand, maskilic history had a relatively conservative line and showed respect to the Jewish religion. A letter sent by the Galician maskil Solomon Judah Rapoport to the Wissenschaft historian Leopold Zunz reflects this moderate attitude and his criticism of the historical approach taken by Wissenschaft: "historical criticism must be constructive, not destructive, must avoid undermining religion and particularly must avoid applying the critical method to the Bible."<sup>423</sup> Thus, maskilic history had its own path. It drew its fundamentals first and foremost from the maskilic ideology and its goals. In contrast to the Wissenschaft principles, it was selective, moderate in its attitude towards religion and sought not to challenge tradition but rather to enrich it.<sup>424</sup> In sum, the maskilic

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<sup>420</sup> Feiner, *Haskalah and History*, p. 12.

<sup>421</sup> Cf. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 1-6. Quoted by Feiner, p. 129.

<sup>422</sup> Feiner, p. 129.

<sup>423</sup> Rapoport's letter to Zunz. (1833). Quoted by Feiner, p. 134.

<sup>424</sup> Feiner, p. 129.

history was an “oriented history,” where absolute uniqueness and the superiority of Judaism was unchallenged.<sup>425</sup>

In contrast, the historical attitude of the *Wissenschaft* School was not apologetic. History was not accepted as a “handmaiden of dubious repute to be tolerated occasionally and with embarrassment”<sup>426</sup> but as a field of science which must be described scientifically and comprehensively from a wholly independent and objective stand point. Indeed, most of the pioneers of the movement, who were university educated, subscribed to the scientific precepts of their age as they were shaped by the lofty, meticulous and scholarly ambiance of the German Universities. Immanuel Wolf’s essay of 1822 clearly reflects the new scientific orientation and scholarly objectiveness of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, as well as the historical spirit, consciousness and methodology among its adherents:

The science of Judaism ... treats the object of study in and for itself, for its own sake, and not for any special purpose of definite intention. It begins without any preconceived opinion and is not concerned with the final result. Its aim is neither to put its object in a favorable, nor in unfavorable light, in relation to prevailing views, but to show it as it is. Science is self sufficient and is in itself an essential need of the human spirit.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Nachman Krochmal’s view of Jewish history was typical in reflecting such idea of superiority of Judaism. According to Krochmal, who was the leader of Galician maskilim, Jewish people reached their pinnacle of human spiritual development during the time period between Cyrus and Alexander, and became the vanguard and teacher of all humanity with their superiority in ethics and moral. Furthermore, Krochmal has placed Jewish spirituality beyond time and some sense outside of history. Thus, Israel, although subject to the normal pattern of growth, development and decline, unlike other nations, is capable of surviving the vicissitudes of history without decaying because of its consciousness of God as absolute being. See, Jay M. Harris, *Nachman Krochmal, Guiding the Perplexed of the Modern Age*. (New York: New York University Press, 1991), pp. 126-144.

<sup>426</sup> Yerushalmi, *Zakhor, Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. p. 84.

<sup>427</sup> Immanuel Wolf, “On the Concept of a Science of Judaism” in *The Jew in the Modern World* eds. Mendes-Flohr & Reinhartz, p. 219.

#### **5.4.4.3. The Influence of Wissenschaft on the Ottoman Jewish History Writing**

The writing of history, concurrent with the views of Wissenschaft did not show itself in its full form among Ottoman Jewish historians. Indeed, contrary to the Wissenschaft scholars these historians were all self-educated and none of them had any schooling outside of the traditional Jewish framework. Besides, they were all non-radical and congenial members of their conservative communities which did not carry any assimilationist intensions and they condemned inquiry into or criticism of the traditional values of Jewish life, especially its religion.

However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, especially in the first decades of the twentieth century, the main principles of Wissenschaft, reflecting history as an objective, unbiased and critical approach to the past as well as using historiographic methods and archival material also became well known by Ottoman Jewish intellectuals and characterized their history writing. Thus, in the work of historians active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the principles of Wissenschaft can be noticeable, to some extent. As an example, the comprehensive historical work of Moise Franco (1864-1910) on Ottoman Jewish history with its solemn style can be seen as being close to the Wissenschaft approach as adapted by French historians. Another historian, Abraham Danon, particularly in his late historical works, with a scholarly investigating attitude, adopted the Wissenschaft approach to history. In his researches, Danon attempted to use numerous different sources and documents and tried to present a critical analysis of his subjects. Danon was the first Ottoman historian to introduce little known aspects of the histories of Karaite and Sabbatian- *Dönme* sects and the traditions of their adherents in the Ottoman Empire.

Abraham Galante (1873-1961) can be seen as the first Turkish Jewish historian who had a more scholarly approach to the science of history and Ottoman Jewish history. Indeed, he was a professor in a high educational institute, the *Darülfünun*, in Istanbul on Middle Eastern Civilization of antiquity.<sup>428</sup> Galante was also the first historian who was interested in the Ottoman Archives of his time, in a quest for original documents and information on Ottoman Jewry.<sup>429</sup> Although, Galante was certainly not a historian of maskilic character, yet, it is difficult to identify him as a Wissenschaft type historian since it can hardly be said that the large number of studies that he published between 1898 and 1959, were completely unbiased and objective in spite of their rich historical content.<sup>430</sup> As a modern academic historian, Benbassa presents Galante as a “competent amateur,” implying his works contained historical knowledge but not historical thinking based on a scientific methodology.<sup>431</sup> By the same token, Albert E. Kalderon in his biographical work on Galante, presents Galante as chronicler rather than historian particularly in his later works and concludes that, “... compared to other historians of the Jews,

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<sup>428</sup> Although Galante had a title of Professor of Ancient History, he never had a formal education on history. He began his academic life as a translator of Professor G. Bargstrasser who was appointed to the Chair of Comparative Semitic Languages and of Ancient History of Semitic Peoples in 1914. After World War I, as a German scholar Prof. Bargstrasser was obliged to return to Germany and Galante was appointed to the chair with the title of professor. See Albert E. Kalderon, *Abraham Galante- A Biography* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, Inc., 1983), pp. 44-47.

<sup>429</sup> Between 1912 and 1918, Galante worked as a translator in the Ministry of the Navy and had the possibility to access the governmental archives without any hindrance. His friendship with Salih Saffet Bey, staff officer in the Navy and a member of the Ottoman Historical Society also facilitated his efforts to reach documents on Ottoman Jewish history. See, Kalderon, p. 42. Bernard Lewis portrays Galante as one of the first historians whose works served to attract attention of western scholars to the Ottoman Archives. Bernard Lewis, *Notes and Documents from the Turkish Archives, a Contribution to History of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire, Oriental Notes and Studies*, (Jerusalem, 1952), p. 2.

<sup>430</sup> “Intense hostility against the Jews” and “Turkification” policies seen in the early years of the Turkish Republic highly motivated Galante in writing his works particularly on historical relations between Jews and Turks. With a sense of “strong and vibrant apologia,” in his works he assembled “every available historical fact and document” that can be used to demonstrate the loyalty of Turkish Jews, and to confirm their usefulness and capability in the service of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. See Kalderon, p. 53.

<sup>431</sup> On this point Benbassa compares Galante with Katz asserting that there was no theoretical work undertaken on traditional Sephardic society as it was done on Ashkenazic society. See, Benbassa, “Associational Strategies in Ottoman Jewish Society in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.” In *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Avigdor Levy. (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1994), p. 478, note 7.

Galante did not achieve the degree of sophistication and depth of some of his western colleagues.”<sup>432</sup>

The actual scientific and objective historical writings on Ottoman Jewry, in line with Wissenschaft principles, began to appear much later in the second half of the twentieth century and gained popularity in the 1980s with the increased world-wide interest in Oriental Jewry. Some of these scholarly scientific studies on the history of Ottoman/Turkish Jewry have been written by Jewish historians of Turkish origin. Interestingly, all of these historians received their degrees from universities outside of Turkey, in Israel, Europe and the United States, and they wrote their historical works in languages other than Turkish.<sup>433</sup> The Turkish accounts on Ottoman/Turkish Jewry, written by self-educated Turkish Jewish historians, were fewer in number and in spite of their interesting content, reflected the characteristics similar to the maskilic approach of history. Rifat Bali, who began to write after 1995, is distinguished among them, as a prominent modern Turkish historian of non-maskilic character whose studies on Jews in the post-1920 period of Turkey can be classified as scientific and objective writing of history.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Kalderon, p. 69.

<sup>433</sup> Avner Levi, Esther Benbassa, Avigdor Levy and Aron Rodrigue can be identified as the most prominent academic historians of this group who live and produce their studies outside of Turkey. Although he had no formal academic background of history, Gad Nassi, with his studies on Sabbatians can be considered close to this group.

<sup>434</sup> Rifat Bali wrote a brief and limited introduction on the historiography of Ottoman /Turkish Jewry written by historians of the last decades. Rifat Bali “Osmanlı/Türk Yahudiliği Tarihi ile İlgili Yayınlar ve İçerdikleri Tarih Söylemi – Publications Related on the History of Ottoman /Turkish Jewry and their Inherent Approach to History” in *Toplumsal Tarih*, 33-34-35 (1996), Turkish.

#### 5.4.5. Conclusion

The modern historians who analyzed the modernization movements in the Ottoman Empire, as a group, shared the view that the Alliance Universal Israelite ideologies and its schooling policy played a major role in shaping processes among Ottoman Jewry. Indeed, the Alliance was the only institutional Jewish organization that acted authoritatively in the Empire for a long time after 1864. Similar Western organizations that had their own ideologies differed from the Alliance and began to be active among Ottoman Jewry in later years. In fact, the *Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden*, the German version of the Alliance, instituted its first organization in the Ottoman Empire only in 1902; the Zionists became organized in a disguised form after 1908; and B'nai B'rith which was organized as lodges was founded in 1911. Thus, at the turn of the twentieth century, before the appearance of these three institutions on the stage of Ottoman Jewish history, there already existed a social and intellectual formation with a distinctive ideological orientation among the Jews in the Empire.

The general tendency of giving most of the credit to the Alliance for the process of transforming and modernizing Ottoman Jewry in the second half of the nineteenth century necessitates a cautious re-consideration. Although never institutionalized, as was the Alliance perspective, the ideologies of the Haskalah as well as the Italian type conservative Jewish reformist currents also played significant roles in the acculturation process of Ottoman Jewry. However, due to their non-institutionalized character, these movements had an indirect influence and infused their approaches and views into the policies of the Alliance, forcing that institution to adopt less strict and absolutist policies than its original French agenda. Indeed, almost all of the maskilim, as well

as the Francos, who grew up with Italian-Jewish values, were active collaborators in the foundation of the local Alliance committees and schools. As a result, the interaction and amalgamation of different types of European social and intellectual movements of the nineteenth century created a resultant Sephardic version of them, which in return became influential in the emergence of a distinctive Sephardic Jewish identity in Ottoman lands.

On the other hand, due to the limited social and cultural interrelations between the Jewish community and the Ottoman majority, as in the previous centuries, so too in the nineteenth century the Ottoman-Islamic mainstream culture had a minimal role on the emergence of a resultant Sephardic culture. Indeed, adequate knowledge of the Turkish language among Ottoman Jews was a very rare trait even among the intellectual elites.<sup>435</sup> Concomitantly, it seems that the Ottoman Jewish intellectuals had no familiarity with Ottoman historiography.<sup>436</sup> Thus, this rich historiography with its content and style did not influence the Jewish historians of this period.<sup>437</sup> It is noteworthy that in this period, with the Ottoman Westernization movement, the Ottoman historians themselves also discovered European historiography and its methods. In the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, translations, adaptations and modern histories written under the inspiration of European historiography began to appear in Ottoman centers, together with the works of history composed in the old-traditional style.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Ilan Karmi, *The Jewish Community of Istanbul in the Nineteenth Century* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1996), p. 60.

<sup>436</sup> On Ottoman Historians, see Franz Babinger, *Osmanlı Tarih Yazarları ve Eserleri – Ottoman Historians and their Works* translated by Çoşkun Üçok (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 1982). See also, Halil Inalcik, “The Rise of Ottoman Historiography,” and V.L. Menage, “The Beginings of Ottoman Historiography” in *Historians of the Middle East* ed. Bernard Lewis and P.M Holt, pp. 158-179.

<sup>437</sup> According to the Judeo-Spanish literary works list of Franco, there were three Ottoman histories that were published by anonymous writers in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Probably these histories were limited in content and were translations from French. See, Franco, pp. 270- 275.

<sup>438</sup> See, Ercüment Kuran, “Ottoman Historiography of the Tanzimat Period” in *Historians of the Middle East*, pp. 423-429. In this period, the twelve volume history written by Cevdet Pasha accepted as the climax of the Ottoman historiography by both historical and literary standards. See Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans*. P. 422.



Another point that merits careful consideration is the level of penetration and prevalence of the modernization movements among Ottoman Jewry. Particularly, the reorganization movements did not encompass all Jewish communities<sup>439</sup> and the spread of intellectual movements to local provincial communities especially in Anatolia was uncertain.<sup>440</sup> The reports sent by the Alliance teachers to their center in Paris describe the superstitious and uneducated traits of the Jewish masses in the Ottoman Empire, along with their poor and miserable conditions, and reflect their considerable distance to modernization movements.<sup>441</sup> Indeed, the Alliance statistics of 1908 show the low percentage of Jewish students relative to the population of the Jews in the Empire even in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>442</sup> Thus, the total enrollment of Jewish children in the contemporary modern schools was not much impressive.<sup>443</sup> The relative paucity of Ottoman Jewish literary creativity, including history writing can also be seen as another indication of the shallowness and limited effect of the modernization movements. After 1908, Zionism, a further evolution of the initial national sentiments of the Haskalah, would become a powerful force attracting the Jewish masses, while the same movement was not especially appealing to the elites in the Ottoman Empire.

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<sup>439</sup> Karmi, p. 117.

<sup>440</sup> There is very little historical data on Jewish communities other than the major centers like Istanbul, Salonica, Edirne and Izmir. Four historical works on Jewish communities of Ankara, Milas, Tire and Manisa (the last two are very close to Izmir) were recently published. See, A. Munis Armağan, *Anadolu Tarihinde Tire Yahudileri* (Izmir: Bilkar Bilge Karınca Matbaacılık, 2005), Beki L. Bahar, *Efsaneden Tarihe Ankara Yahudileri – From Legend to History Jews of Ankara* (Istanbul: Pan Yayinlari, 2003), Melek Çolak, *Milas Yahudileri – Milas Jews*. (Muğla: Ümit Yayıncılık, 2003), Feridun M. Emecen, *Unutulmuş Bir Cemmat, Manisa Yahudileri – A Forgotten Community, Jews of Manisa* (Istanbul, Eren Yayinlari, 1997)

<sup>441</sup> Paul Dumont, “Jewish Communities in Turkey during the Last Decades of the Nineteenth Century in the Light of the Archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle” in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 210-216.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>443</sup> Karmi, p. 71.

At that time, it was Zionism that appeared to be the continuation and the modern version of the earlier messianic aspirations, and Zionism presented itself as the vehicle of choice to the desperate Jewish people of the Empire in their search for redemption.

### **5.5. The Ottoman Jewish Historians that Emerged in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century under the Influence of Western Intellectual Movements**

The different intellectual movements developed in the West, the French emancipation aiming to create loyal *Israelite* citizens of the “Mosaic faith”; the Berlin Haskalah, its mutated spread in the East Europe and the emergence of nationalistic sentiments, the Italian conservative but open to modernization attitude, and finally the scientific approach of *Wissenschaft* were the major stimuli for Ottoman Jewry in their modernization process beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. The effort to differentiate the effects of all these movements on the intellectual transformation of Ottoman Jewry is a complicated task and requires a complete analysis on a vast spectrum of source material. Indeed, other than the outside influences, the inherited Sephardic communal traditions, internal communal dynamics and the regulatory reflections of the reform movements of the Ottoman state were also important elements in the shaping the modernization of Ottoman Jewry. However, it is possible to analyze the influence of the European models and communal change by studying the activities and discourses of the Ottoman Jewish elites of the period. Obviously, consistent with our approach to our subject matter, our concentration will be on the elites, those who had an interest in evaluating the Jewish past and in writing its history. These historians’ work carried the marks of the main currents

which affected Ottoman Jewry and the analysis of their ideological stance will highlight the evolution of the Jewish intellectual creativity. Indeed, the attitudes of the Jewish elites to the secular subjects and history in particular were enhanced by the emergence of the Haskalah and modern education. Beginning with the last decades of the nineteenth century, interest in the Jewish past and openness to world history became one of the main features of the cultural characteristics of the Ottoman Sephardic Jewry. As a consequence, at an increasing pace some of the classics of Jewish historiography were translated into Judeo-Spanish. Translated historical novels were of particular interest and became highly popular and found a large audience. The 16 Judeo-Spanish works of a historical character out of the 43 publications that were listed by Moise Franco reflect the increased interest in the history of the nineteenth century.<sup>444</sup>

### **5.5.1. Judah Nehama**

Judah Nehama was one of the first intellectuals of the Ottoman Empire who came in contact with the Haskalah ideals in the middle of the nineteenth century and became a pioneer in adopting the principals of the movement and adapting them to the Sephardic way of thinking in his native city of Salonica. He was actively involved in the effort to modernize traditional Jewish education, *meldar*, and cooperated with the Franco notables, to establish a new school for modern education in 1857, well before the commencement of similar activities of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. In 1863 he succeeded in organizing one of the first local committees of the Alliance in Salonica and for many years there after continued his endeavor to reform the outdated traditional educational system as the vice-president of the local committee of the institution. In his activities and works, Nehama vigorously engaged in conveying and disseminating the progressive ideas of

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<sup>444</sup> Franco, pp. 270-275.

the Haskalah movement. He maintained a continuous exchange of letters with well known Jewish European thinkers of his days like Samuel D. Luzzatto, Solomon L. Rapoport, Israel Stern and Leopold Zunz and was influenced by their views.<sup>445</sup> Indeed, with his rational approach, literary works, progressive values and reformist activities, Nehama can be seen as having the typical characteristics of an Eastern European maskil. As a rabbi, highly esteemed and as a dynamic Ottoman Jewish intellectual, Nehama played a major role in spreading the key reformist ideas of the Haskalah among his contemporaries and his successors. Indeed, as a pioneer in this endeavor, Nehama was seen as the “Turkish Mendelssohn” of his age.<sup>446</sup>

As a typical maskil, Nehama was also interested in Jewish history. Indeed, a new historical consciousness and awareness was one of the salient features of the Jewish Enlightenment. In 1861 he adopted and translated the history written by the English writer J. Parlay into Sephardic Judeo-Spanish, Ladino, as *Historia Universal por el Uso de los Chicos*. This work was written to be used as a source book for school children and its simplified content on post biblical Jewish history can be offered as evidence demonstrating the progressive educational intentions in the new founded school in Salonica. As in Europe, so too in the Ottoman Empire, Biblical Jewish history was the only type of history that used to be taught in the traditional type schools, i.e., in the *meldar* and its more advanced type *Talmud Torah*. With its didactic genre, *Historia Universal* conveys the characteristics of a “maskilic history.” Similar approaches and styles can also be seen as the salient feature in Nehama’s other historical works. In the two biographies that he wrote, he exalted two philanthropists Dr. Albert Cohn and Moses Allatini, both of whom were ardent supporters of modern schools and reform movements. The first biography, *Zikaron Tob ó*

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<sup>445</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Judah Nehama.”

<sup>446</sup> Benbassa and Rodrigue, p. 76.

*Biografía del muy Afamado Sabido y Filantropo Dr. Albert Cohn*, was published in 1877 and in the Judeo-Spanish language. In 1888, Nehama wrote his second biographical work, *Kol Anot*, in Hebrew on his major ally and financial supporter, the highly esteemed Franco, Dr. Moses Allatini after Allatini's death. The presentation of individual historical heroes via didactic, exemplary historical genre was a very popular trend in the "maskilic history" from its early days. Indeed, these biographies served as an appropriate vehicle for the maskilim to exhibit their "maskilic values as virtuousness, rational thinking, and dedication to the struggle for truth and justice, and participation in beneficial political and social action."<sup>447</sup> His other work *Miktebe Dodim* published in 1893, contains the letters he exchanged with his friends and some interesting information on the history of the Jews in Salonica. As another typical feature of the Haskalah, Nehama wrote all of his works either in the indigenous Jewish dialect, Ladino, in order to ease the propagation of his ideas, or in Hebrew, but not in Turkish. In Eastern Europe too, it was not uncommon for the maskilim to write in Yiddish, the popular Jewish daily language, in addition to Hebrew with the same reasoning of disseminating their ideas more effectively among the masses. With all his characteristics and values Judah Nehama illustrates an Ottoman Jewish intellectual exemplar of the Haskalah movement.

### **5.5.2. Moise Franco**

Moise Franco was another historian who was active in the last decades of the nineteenth century. He was a typical intellectual whose personality was shaped mostly by the Alliance since he was both trained to be a school teacher by the Alliance in Paris and worked as school master in different schools organized by that institute. After 1867, it was the Alliance policy to bring its

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<sup>447</sup> Feiner, p. 50.

talented students from the Orient to Paris and train them there, in their higher level school, Ecole Normale Israélite Orientale, in order to become future teachers of the institutions' schools all over the Levant. Mostly of Sephardic origin, these teachers and schoolmasters were under the surveillance of the authoritative directorial center in Paris and were obliged to maintain their strict link by sending reports in an orderly fashion. In his works, Moise Franco exhibits all "Francisation" characteristics formed by his education and all his works were written in French. For a long time he also contributed to two French periodicals published in Istanbul, *Stamboul* (1886-97) and *Le Moniteur Oriental* (1897-1903).<sup>448</sup>

Franco wrote three historical works. His major work, published in Paris, 1897, was *Essai sur L'Histoire des Israelites de l' Empire Ottoman*. There he presented the history of Jews in the Ottoman lands. His two other works were *Sciences Mystiques chez les Juifs d'Orient* published in 1900 and "La Communauté Israélite de Safed" published as an article in the periodical of the Alliance *Revue des Ecoles de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle* in 1901-02. Among his works, *Essai* was especially popular and was re-published several times in the twentieth century. This work was the first attempt at writing a comprehensive history on Ottoman Jewish communities and aimed to present the Jewish existence from its beginning in the fourteenth century until to his days. His book was based on the works of different contemporary historians, Theoder Reinach, Hammer and Jouanin<sup>449</sup> as well as on articles taken from the French Jewish periodical *Archives Israélites*. The periodical, *Yossef-Doath* that was mostly published in Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish by another Ottoman historian Abraham Danon was another highly significant source for Franco

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<sup>448</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Moses Franco."

<sup>449</sup> In *Histoire*, Sambari was the only historian referred as a footnote from earlier centuries. However, his history also contains the exaggerated and without basis assertions of Sambari as undisputable facts. It is interesting to note that, one of the existent two copies of the manuscripts of Sambari was in the library collections of the Alliance in Paris.

which he referred to frequently in his book. The nineteenth century and his contemporary period is treated extensively in the *Essai* and deserves our special attention. Indeed, in the period after 1860 the historical events, even in far-flung parts of the Empire, were presented in great detail and on a yearly basis through the scrutinized research of newspaper collections.<sup>450</sup> However, this is also the part which reflects the characteristics of a memorial book with little scientific or critical analysis of the historical events. The writer's lists introduced for each century themselves appear to be a good source for future research on Ottoman Jewish rabbinic and literary works.

With his background, style and francophone character, Moise Franco is a good example representing an enlightened Ottoman Jewish intellectual and historian who adopted the French norms and values of the period. The principles he embraced were those which first emerged with the French emancipation movement and gradually re-shaped and evolved pragmatically in time as a result of the contacts and the experiences of the Alliance leaders with the Orient. His style of history writing carries the traits of the existing French history concepts which were influenced by the second generation *Wissenschaft* scholars. Indeed, in his *Essai* there were references only to French historians of his age. Thus, contrary to the Eastern Haskalah, Franco's discourse did not convey a nationalistic flavor and his history did not contain moralistic and didactic elements. On the other hand, his history also has not been based on archival material like the historical works of the *Wissenschaft* historians. It appears that in his historical research, Franco concentrated more on the existing historical works on the Ottoman Empire and Judaism rather than in searching for new, original historical data and documents even for his own period.<sup>451</sup> Thus, his

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<sup>450</sup> As newspapers, *Journal Israelite*, *El Tiempo*, published in Constantinople and *Nacional* in Vienna were the most utilized ones.

<sup>451</sup> His indifference to contemporary original data on Ottoman Jews other than his close circle is especially attention grabbing. This can be a result of his looking at Ottoman Jewry like a foreigner from the outside. For example, in

*magnum opus*, *Essai*, appeared to be a compilation of works of different historians as well as articles published in newspapers of his day without much additional historical and critical analysis. However, as a separate work, he did offer an interesting and detailed account of the history of the Jews in his close circle, i.e., Edirne which was not included in his *Essai*.<sup>452</sup>

### 5.5.3. Abraham Danon

Abraham Danon was one of the most colorful and intellectually productive thinkers of his time. The son of a well-known rabbi in Adrianople (Edirne), he was also trained in the Gheron yeshiva to be a rabbi. A Hungarian *maskil*, Joseph Halevy,<sup>453</sup> appointed to be the director of the *Talmud Torah* of the city about the year 1856, was influential in bringing the ideas of the Haskalah to Adrianople. Danon in his teens became a student of Halevy and was influenced by his progressive ideas. In 1879 Danon was one of the members of the group who founded *Dorshei ha-Haskalah* (Friends of the Haskalah) and actively worked to disseminate the reformist ideology of the Haskalah in his native city. In 1891 he became head of the rabbinical seminary which he had founded in Adrianople, and offered a less conservative training to the students of the seminary.<sup>454</sup> In later years, the seminary which was supported by the Alliance moved to Istanbul under his directorship. Beginning with the last year of the First World War, Abraham Danon

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*Essai* (p.27, footnote.) he illustrated Eskisehir, a city in central Anatolia, as having no Jewish population at this time; “Aujord’hui même, ces villes [Eskişehir, Karahissar] ne possèdent point de communautés juives.” In those years there was indeed a Jewish community in Eskişehir. See Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*, p. 281.

<sup>452</sup> Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, p. 51, note 21.

<sup>453</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica* erroneously introduces Halevy as a native Jew from Adrianople. See *Encyclopedia Judaica* –CD –ROM Edition, s.v. “Joseph Halevy.” See also Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, p. 45.

<sup>454</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica* CD-ROM Edition, s.v. “Abraham Danon.”



engaged in research efforts in Paris and worked as a Hebrew teacher to train the future educators of the Alliance in the *Ecole Normale Israélite Orientale*(ENIO).<sup>455</sup>

As a typical maskil, Abraham Danon was actively interested in history and with his friends founded the historical review, *Yosef Da'at* (Growth of Knowledge)/*El Progreso*. This periodical would be the only publication which focused specifically on the history of the Turkish-Ottoman Jewry in the entire history of the Turkish Jews. The journal was published in Hebrew characters but in three languages; Hebrew, Ladino and Turkish. However, due to the despotic regime of Sultan Abdülhamit II, like other periodicals of the period, *Yosef Da'at* survived only for a period of nine months and was obliged to stop its activity in December 1888.<sup>456</sup> Danon's aim in publishing the historical review was to encourage historical studies and to promote the collection of documents relating to the history of Oriental Jewry. The journal was also of use to Danon, as a means to illustrate his studies, and to show the required scientific criteria and scholarly methodology for a true analytical type of historical analysis. He also published interesting scientific articles on Jews of the Ottoman Empire in most well known and highly reputable historical journals in Europe like *Revue des Etudes Juives*, *Journal Asiatique*, *Revue Hispanique*, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, etc. Danon also translated the *Histoire des Israelites* written by Thèodore Reinach into Hebrew with added excerpts from various Jewish historians under the title *Toledot Bene Abraham*.

Abraham Danon was a prolific historian and it is difficult to categorize his creativity with in the limits of a certain type of modernization movement. In fact, the distinctions between the

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<sup>455</sup> A.H. Navon, "Discours prononcé pour Abraham Danon" in *Abraham Danon, Sa Vie et Ses Oeuvres* (Paris: Imprimerie H. Elias, 1925), p. 15.

<sup>456</sup> Franco, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Abraham Danon."

movements were also very fluid and changeable according to time and region. Certainly, in his teenage years, especially under the influence of his mentor Joseph Halevy, the ideas of the Haskalah played an important role in his intellectual development. Indeed, Danon was at a young age of 22, in 1879, when he founded with his friends a society called *Dorshei ha- Haskalah*. His intension, similar to the ideology of the Haskalah, was to increase the learning and consciousness among Ottoman Jews in order to bring them “out of moral and material impoverishment.”<sup>457</sup> Similar to the Eastern European maskilic attitude, this group of Ottoman intellectuals gave special importance to the traditional languages of Judaism and Sephardic Jewry, i.e., Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish. Their aim of popularizing Jewish history with moralistic intensions reflects the characteristic features of the “maskilic history.” Indeed, in his formative years, Abraham Danon wrote most of his historical works in Hebrew.<sup>458</sup> The language of the journal, *Yosef Da’at* that he published in 1888 was also Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish. However, Danon’s articles in *Yosef Da’at*, also reflected a critical approach to the analysis of historical events. As Benbassa and Rodrigue pointed out “Danon was seeking to establish harmony between traditional learning and Western science.”<sup>459</sup> Thus, with the passing years, as a devoted historian, consistent with the existing scientific climate of his age, Danon’s approach to history also shifted from a “maskilic history” understanding to the *Wissenschaft* approach to history. According to A. H. Navon, the popular French historian of the age, Ernst Renan and his methodology of analyzing Hebrew texts had a pivotal role in the self-development of Danon as a historian.<sup>460</sup> In his later studies, as a historian close to second generation *Wissenschaft* historians, Danon’s historical works took on a

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<sup>457</sup> Benbassa and Rodrigue, p. 107.

<sup>458</sup> Franco in his short article in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* that was written around 1898, describes the insistence of Abraham Danon in Hebrew writing as an uncommon and significant feature of him: “Danon is the only author of the present generation of Oriental Jews who writes in Hebrew.”

<sup>459</sup> Benbassa and Rodrigue, p. 107.

<sup>460</sup> Contrary to *Wissenschaft* historians, Danon did not have a formal education on history. See Navon, “Discours prononcé pour Abraham Danon,” p. 13.

clear scientific task “for its own sake, and not for any special purpose of definite intention”<sup>461</sup> In fact, beginning from the last years of the nineteenth century, as a well-known orientalist, his articles on different aspects of the history of Turkish Jewry that were written in French and English began to appear in highly regarded refereed historical journals.<sup>462</sup> His studies on Sabbatian and Karaite traditions were cited by later historians like Gershom Scholem and Zvi Ankori.

#### 5.5.4. Other Historians

The next generation of Turkish Jewish historians produced their work from the first decade of the twentieth century with the acknowledgment of the well-formed principles of the discipline of history. The long process of modernization movements which had influenced historians compelled them to approach closer to a scientific, objective type of history which was a common characteristic of all the second generation *Wissenschaft* historians. However, as stated, the *Wissenschaft* ideologies did not show themselves in full form among the Ottoman Jewish historians. Those historians wrote local histories as well as general histories and shed light on obscure aspects of Ottoman and Turkish Jewry. Among them, Solomon Abraham Rosanes, from Ruschuk, (a small town in Bulgaria close to the Ottoman border and the Jewish center Edirne) was a self-educated historian, and his style still carried some traditional elements of history writing. His first historical works began to appear by 1885 and he had studies on Bulgarian Jews and on the history of the Jewish community of his small native land in Judeo-Spanish. His major work was a general history of the Jews in Turkey, the first three volumes of which were

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<sup>461</sup> Wolf, “On the Conception of a Science of Judaism”

<sup>462</sup> A complete list of his publication was listed by D. Sidersky, his colleague in *Ecole Normale Israélite Orientale*, ENIO. See, *Abraham Danon, Sa Vie et Ses Oeuvres*, pp. 19-24.

published between 1907 and 1912 under the title *Divrei Yemei Yisrael be-Togarmah* (The Life of Israelites in Turkey). The last three volumes of this history were published under a different title *Korot ha-Yehudim be-Turkiyah ve-Arzo ha-Kadem* (A History of the Jews in Turkey and in the Orient) partly after his death between 1930 and 1945. The large amount of original new information on Ottoman Jewry which Rosanes collected from different libraries and archives of Balkan provinces in the Ottoman Empire makes this comprehensive work extremely significant and an indispensable source book. He was the only person who succeeded in visiting the Sabbatian Library in Salonica and managed to reproduce a catalogue of the books in its collection before their total destruction in the great fire of Salonica.<sup>463</sup> His third work *Safah Ahat u-Devarim Ahadim* written in 1928 reflects his closeness to maskilic views. In *Safat*, Rosanes similar to the Russian maskil Issac Baer Levisohn, regarded Hebrew as an ancient “national” tongue “the mother of all Eastern languages.”<sup>464</sup>

Abraham Galante and Joseph Nehama (1881-1971) were the two other historians of great importance who were born in the last decades of the nineteenth century but wrote the major part of their historical works in the late 1920s. Nehama during his long career focused on the Jews of Greece in general and Salonica in particular both under the Ottoman rule and Greek sovereignty. He was culturally under the influence of the Alliance since he was a graduate of *ENIO* in Paris and for many years worked as an educator and administrator in Alliance institutions both in Salonica and Paris.<sup>465</sup> He wrote a comprehensive Jewish history of Salonica, *Histoire des Israélites de Selanique*, and dozens of essays on the history of Greek Jewry and its tragic

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<sup>463</sup> Giacomo Saban, “Osmanli Yahudileri’nin İlk Tarihçileri- The First Ottoman Jewish Historians” in *Tarih ve Toplum* 29 (May 1986), pp. 57-60. (Turkish)

<sup>464</sup> Tovia Preschel, *Encyclopedia Judaica*-CD Rom Edition, s.v., “Rosanes, Solomon Abraham.” On Levinsohn see, Feiner, p. 180.

<sup>465</sup> Saban, “Osmanli Yahudileri’nin İlk Tarihçileri- The First Ottoman Jewish Historians”

destruction in the Second World War, all in French. Galante was a professor of history of the Ancient Orient until 1933 in *Darülfünun*, the only academic institute of the young Turkish Republic, and specialized on Jewish history in Turkey.<sup>466</sup> As a prolific writer, Galante published about sixty works in the form of books and pamphlets and more than one hundred articles, essays and editorial comments.<sup>467</sup> Most of his works focused on Ottoman Jewry and its history. His major work, *Histoire Des Juifs de Turquie*, was a nine volume history of Turkish-Jewish history. The study of each of these two prolific historians, including an analysis of their perspectives on presenting history and an evaluation of their work merits a deep and comprehensive investigation and should be the subject of a separate study.

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<sup>466</sup> Some brief remarks on Galante have been given on pages 165 of this study.

<sup>467</sup> Kalderon, p. 69.

<u>No.</u>	<u>PERIOD</u>	<u>HISTORIAN</u>	<u>MAIN PUBLICATIONS IN THE PERIOD</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>AFFIL.</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>
1	18TH.	HAYIM JOSEPH DAVID AZULAI 1724 JERUSALEM-1807 LEGHORN	SHEM HA-GEDOLIM NAME OF GREAT ONES VA'AD LA-HAKHAMIM ASSEMBLY OF THE WISE	1774/1786  1796	B  B		BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CONTENT  BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CONTENT
2	19TH.	SALAMON HAZAN ?ALGERIA-1857 EGYPT	HA MA'A LOT LI SHELOMOH	1889 PUBL.			BIBLIOGRAPHER
3	19TH.	ISAC BEKOR AMARAGI SALONICA	SHEBILA OLAM	1853-57			TRANSLATOR AND HIST. WRIT. ON NAPALEON
4	19TH.	HEINRICH GRAETZ 1817-1891	HISTORY OF THE JEWS	1894 1949			GENERAL HISTORY
5	19TH.	SIMON DUBNOW 1860-1941	HISTORY OF THE JEWS	1925			GENERAL HISTORY
6	19TH.	JUDAH NEHAMA 1825-1899 SALONICA	1)HISTORIA UNIVERSAL POR EL USO DE CHICOS 2)ZIKARON TOB-BIOGRAFIA DEL MUY AFAMADO SABIDO y FILANTROPO DR. ALBERT COHEN 3)KOL ANOT 4)MIKTEBE DODIM	1861 1877  1888 1893	BIOG. BIOG.	MAS.	POST BIBLICAL JEWISH HIST./LADINO  BIOG. OF MOSES ALATINI LETTERS+HIST. OF THE JEWS OF SALONICA
7	19TH.	MOIZ FRANKO 1864 ISTANBUL-1910 GELIBOLU	1)ESSAI SUR L'HISTORIE DES ISRAELITES DE 2)L'EMPIRE OTTOMAN DEPUIS LES ORIGINS JUSQU'A NOS JOURS 3)HISTOIRE ET LITTERATURE JUIFS, PAYS PAR PAYS	1897 1891		FR.	ALL HIS WORKS ARE IN FRENCH
8	19TH.	R.ABRAHAM DANON 1857 EDIRNE -1925 PARIS	1)TOLEDOT BENE ABRAHAM (L'HISTOIRE DES ISRAELITES) 2)YOSEF DA'AT/EL PREGRESSO ABOUT 38 ESSAYS ON HIST. OF TYRKISH JEWRY	1887  1888 1895-1925			MAS.-W TRANSLATED FROM THEODORE REINACH  PERIODICAL ON HIST. OF OTTOMAN JEWRY PUBL. MOSTLY IN HAMAGID, REVUE DES ETUDES JUIVES, JOURNAL ASIATIQUE, JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW
9	19TH.	SALAMON ABRAHAM ROSANES1862 RUSCUK - 1938 SOFIA	DIVREY YEMEI ISRAEL BE TOGARMAH KORAT HA-YEHUDIM BE TURKIYAH VE ARZOT HA-KEDEM	1907-1914 1930-1945			6 VOLUME DETAILED FOUNDING OF OTTOMAN EMPIRE-MID 19TH. CENTURY
10	19TH.	JOSEPH NEHAMA 1880-1971	THE JEWS OF SELONIKA			FR./	
11	19TH.	ABRAHAM GALANTE 1873 BODRUM - 1961 ISTANBUL	TURKLER VE YAHUDILER TURCS ET JUIF LES SYNAGOGUES D'ISTANBUL HISTOIRE DES JUIFS D'ANATOLIE HISTOIRE DES JUIFS D'ISTANBUL	1927, 1947 1932 1937 1939 1941			HE HAD ABOUT 60 BOOKS AND MORE THAN 100 ESSAYS AND EDITORIAL COMMENTS ON HISTORY.

B: BOOK  
E: ESSAY

BIOG.: BIOGRAPHY  
TR.: TRANSLATED

**Table III Jewish Historiography on the Ottoman Empire and its Jewry – Third Period**

## 6. CONCLUSION

As pointed out by different scholars, beginning with the end of the biblical era until to the first decades of the nineteenth century, Jewish general interest in history and history writing was very limited. The religious norms of rabbinic Judaism, which first emerged with Pharisee ideologies in the last centuries of BCE, were further articulated in the following centuries and codified first in the Mishna in the second century, and later in the two Talmuds in the fourth and sixth centuries, played a crucial role in this appearance of Jewish indifference towards history. As formulated in Pirque Aboth tractate of the Mishna and emphasized later in the tenth century by Saadia Gaon's epistle, rabbinic sages introduced themselves as the leading authoritative class of the Jewish community and had an important influence on the emergence and shaping of this Jewish attitude towards history. As the only legitimate interpreters of religion, in the early centuries, sages perceived history and especially history writing as a form of prophecy due to the intermingling of history and Judaic religion. As pointed out by Neusner, for sages,

The labor of history writing (or at least, telling stories about historical events) went together with the work of law-making. The whole formed a single exercise in explanation of things that had happened- that is, historical explanation. True, one enterprise involved historical events, the other legal constructions. But the outcome was one and the same.<sup>468</sup>

Messianic obsession was another pivotal factor that shaped the Jewish attitude towards history. Again, similar to Pharisee ideologies, a popular belief in a personal messiah also first appeared in the last centuries of BCE, under the increasing tyranny of the Roman power, as a psychic defense

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<sup>468</sup> Neusner, "Judaic Uses of History in Talmudic Times," p. 34.

of frustrated and humiliated Jewish people who hitherto regarded themselves to be superior as the “chosen” people of God. Throughout the centuries, the expectations of the arrival of a redeemer who would end their physical and spiritual exile and unite them gloriously back in Zion caused the indifference of Jews to daily events and led them to feel themselves as temporary residents in the whole of the Diaspora. For Jews, the time interval between the destruction of the Temple and the arrival of the Messiah was considered to be trivial, not deserving any attention at all. Indeed, according to them, humans had no control over the course of events that were unfolding in accord with a master Divine scenario towards an ultimate, unavoidable and pre-determined end, the arrival of the Messiah.

For centuries, as a consequence of this indifference to history, there were very rare Jewish writings on history. Furthermore, whenever there were scant examples of historiography, these were either different kinds of chain of transmissions aiming to present sages as the erudite authoritative transmitters of Jewish traditions and values, or historical works written in the wake of tragic events with the stimulation of suffering or emotional upheaval of Israel. The examples of the second group of historiography aim to serve as remembrances of that suffering, mainly expulsions, massacres and persecutions. They explicitly or implicitly contain the effort to explain that tragic event by creating an associative link between the event and a theological consolatory set-up such as “the impending arrival of the messianic era” as seen in the resurgent historiography of the sixteenth century.<sup>469</sup> Beginning with the mid seventeenth century, partly in parallel to Western historiography, Jewish movements of a political/nationalistic character also

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<sup>469</sup> Apart from the strong intra-communal religious motivations, the cultural influence of the Renaissance, as an external element, had also played role in shaping of sixteenth century Jewish historiography. Indeed, although in an exceptional character, Azariah de Rossi’s *Me’or’ Einayim* was the most salient example of the age, reflecting the influence of the Renaissance. See Yerushalmi *Zakhor*, p. 69 and Bonfil “How Golden was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?” p.96.



stimulated a third, new type of historiography. The Messianic Sabbatian movement of 1665-1666, and the 1840 Damascus Affair were two salient examples of such political/nationalistic events, which in their fervor stimulated new resurgent waves in the production of historical studies.

The Jewish historical writings on the Ottoman Empire and its Jewish subjects carry the typical characteristics of the general Jewish historiography. On the one hand, writers like Conforte, Azulai and Hazan although in a variant style, kept the tradition of *chain of transmission* by concentrating mostly on Sephardic sages and their works. The works of these three writers contain more historical essence than those earlier similar examples since they did not contain only names of the sages and titles of their works but also some personal information on them and some reflections of their critical thinking. In fact, the works of these historians, with their rabbinical style of literature and semi-alphabetical order, can be seen as one of the first bibliography-like examples in Jewish literature. On the other hand, the Jewish historiography on the Ottoman Empire and its Jewry contains a considerable number of historical writings, written as a consequence of two distinct upheavals in the Jewish world. The tragic character of the first one and the politic/nationalistic aspect of the second one were the factors in motivating the emergence of the two distinct expressions of historical literature.

The first wave of Jewish historiography appeared in the wake of the Spanish expulsion with the sentiments aroused by the tragic uprooting of Spanish Jewry. The history writers of the sixteenth century, especially Capsali, ha-Kohen and Usque attributed a divine role to the Ottoman Empire and the Turks in their messianic scenario and presented them as the Divine scourge that was sent

by God to punish the oppressive and torturing Christendom. Indeed, the wars between the Ottoman Empire and Christendom, reminiscent of wars of Gog and Magog, were seen with symbolic eschatological significance as harbinger of the apocalyptic final end and as a divine symbol implying the imminence of the messianic reign. Thus, the presentation of the Ottoman Empire and the Turks as Godly oriented people, and the high praise and exaltation of them appear as one of the important characteristics of the Jewish historiography of the sixteenth century. At the same time, Jewish life in the Empire was presented uncritically as if it were overwhelmingly peaceful and harmonious. In the following century, another historian, Sambari, partly influenced by the same messianic idea, partly influenced by earlier writers, appraised the Ottoman Empire in the same exaggerated approach.

This type of approach to the Ottoman Empire and her Jewry influenced later historians to a considerable manner and had an important contributing role in the emerging and biased history in succeeding centuries. Historians like Graetz, Dubnow, Rosanes and Galante, without being aware of the fundamental and profound causes of the way of thinking of these earlier historians, and how they were charged by an active messianic fervor, conveyed their views and presented them as objective historical facts. Furthermore, these historians' approach and its further articulated representation became pivotal alongside some other factors in the creation and the shaping of an overly pleasant, even a mythic image of the Ottoman Empire and its Jewry in the common collective memory and consciousness of the whole Jewish world. Interestingly, idealization and extravagant praising of the sixteenth century historians was even echoed verbatim in the last decades of the twentieth century during the discourse of the quincennial celebrations of the arrival of Jewish refugees of the Spanish expulsion.

The second surge of Jewish historiography on the Ottoman Empire and its Jewry occurred with the messianic Sabbatian movement in the mid seventeenth century. The movement with its political motivations created a high stir even in far flung parts of the Jewish world and once more prompted the awakening of the messianic sentiments. The powerful frenzy of the movement stimulated a considerable number of historical writings both in favor of the movement and against it in condemning character. As one of the characteristics of this particular historiography, all historical works were published in the West, none in the East due to the cautious and conscious hushing up of the messianic awakening policies of the Ottoman rabbinic authorities of the age. Some novel elements of the historiography on the Sabbatian movement make it distinctive. For example, as an interesting point, a vast number of letters and reports written during the Sabbatian movement, as well as eyewitness testimonies constitute the gist of these historical works, thus it is possible to see these works as the first examples of Jewish historiography where primary sources have been extensively used and quoted. Furthermore, their limited subject matter, focusing exclusively on a contemporary event and the non-representation of the movement in analogous biblical time theological frame makes this historiography different from earlier periods of Jewish historical writings.

Beginning with the middle of the seventeenth century, the economic decline which was already occurring since the turn of the century, and more importantly, the failure of the Sabbatian movement caused distressing and traumatic effect on Ottoman Jewish communities. In the wake of the movement, Ottoman Jewry lost its vibrant link with rising Western Judaism and for almost two centuries continued its existence as an introverted community of having minimum

intellectual/cultural activity and creativity. It was the Damascus Affair of 1840 which created the renewed interest of Western Jewry with their Eastern brethren and the re-establishment of relationships between the two Jewries. With the increased contacts with Western Judaism, Ottoman Jewry got acquainted with different Western Jewish intellectual and social models. The absolutist French “regeneration” movement, Berlin Haskalah and its extended version in the Eastern Europe, and the Italian conservative but open-minded attitude became active in the Ottoman lands as major influential currents. The interaction and amalgamation of these different types of social and intellectual movements of the nineteenth century created its resultant Sepharized version and in return became influential in the emergence of a distinctive Sephardic Jewish cultural identity in the Ottoman lands. In parallel to the West, interest in history and history writing also became popular among Ottoman Jewry. Alongside the translated historical works and novels, in the second part of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth century, Turkish Jews for the first time began to write their own histories. Judah Nehama, Moise Franco, Abraham Danon, and Solomon Abraham Rosanes were the most prominent historians of the period whose works reflect the characteristic influence of each of these Western currents in different levels. Apart from the already mentioned intellectual movements, *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as a scientific approach to Jewish history also influenced these Turkish historians. Joseph Nehama and Abraham Galante were the two important historians of a later period whose works with their significant historical content reflect a more meticulous historical analysis. Indeed, Galante was the first historian who used both Jewish rabbinic archives and Ottoman Imperial archives in his studies. However, none of these historians had academic training, thus their critical approach remained very limited. It is more appropriate to consider that the actual scientific and objective historical writing on Ottoman Jewry, in line with *Wissenschaft*

principles, began to appear much later in the second half of the twentieth century and gained popularity only after the 1980s with the increased world-wide scholarly interest in Oriental Jewry.

Historiography on Ottoman and Turkish Jewry show an exponential increase in quantity roughly by the year 1982, especially with the increased interest due to the quincentennial anniversary of the Jewish emigration from Spain. Indeed, in the course of these quincentennial celebrations, the awakened interest was further intensified and partly oriented by wide-spread academic seminars, publications and social events which were highly encouraged by the Turkish government for political reasons. As a short survey may reflect, a high percentage of these recent modern historical works were written by Jewish scholars and source-wise, most of them either depended on secondary sources or were based solely on Hebrew Jewish sources.<sup>470</sup> Although different new compilations and novel interpretations of existing Jewish sources interestingly enough shed light on the inter-communal and spiritual world of the Turkish Jewish world, their relatively restricted character leads to repetitions of same subjects from little changing vantage points. Further investigation of Jewish sources, including in particular the newly discovered documents and manuscripts in Hebrew and Ladino that can be found in institutional and personal archives,<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> Other than chronicles or history-like works which are the subject of this thesis, Responsa literature - replies of rabbis on matters of religious law to submitted questions, and Jewish documents such as letters and reports can be presented as the main gist of these Jewish sources. With the degree of their relevant content, Jewish books on subjects like ethics or taxation can also be shown as another Jewish source of history. Especially beginning with the eighteenth century Ladino as a second language became popular in such ethical works. Jewish magazines, journals and newspapers in Hebrew, Ladino and French (or any other language for the ones published in outside of the Ottoman Empire) can be presented as the fifth Jewish source exclusively for the last decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

<sup>471</sup> The state of archives of the Chief Rabbinate in Istanbul is unclear. It is well known that Galante had the opportunity to survey material in this archive during the chief rabbinate of Haim Becerano and brought out more than 20 old edicts-*fermans*. Indeed, these edicts are still being kept in safes of the Chief Rabbinate. Although the authorities reject the existence of an extensive archive a very recent article claims the opposite. See, Yaron Harel, "The Importance of Archive of the Hakham Bashi in Istanbul for the History of Ottoman Jewry," in *Frontiers of Ottoman Studies* eds. Colin Imber and Keiko Kiyotaki. (London;New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 252-263.

will certainly broaden our existing knowledge on Ottoman and Turkish Jewry. However, a more balanced and genuine type of investigation on the subject, free from certain biases, could be conducted by giving more emphasis to Turkish sources. Thus, the retrieval of information from archival documents of Başbakanlık Arşivi and Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, two central institutions of Ottoman archives in Istanbul, and from local archives of different cities/towns of the Ottoman Empire can be helpful in constructing a more exact and complete picture of Ottoman Jewry of the past. Indeed, Feridun Emecan's unique work on Manisa Jews is a good example where one of the least known Jewish communities of Western Anatolia was presented through new, first time introduced material extracted from Ottoman Archives. In fact, Ottoman archives with its every day expanding feature, combines more than 150 million documents<sup>472</sup> and appears to be an "inexhaustible resource"<sup>473</sup> for scholars of Jewish studies. Certainly, with still limited research and use of the sources, particularly those of Turkish origin, the Ottoman/Turkish Jewish studies appear to be an interesting and fertile area. As pointed out by a modern historian, still these studies are far from reaching the "Promised Land and continue to wander in the desert."<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> According to Halil İnalcık. See, Emine Çaykara, *Tarihçilerin Kutbu: Halil İnalcık Kitabı-Historians' Pole: Book of Halil İnalcık* (Istanbul: İş Bankası Yayınları, 2005), p. 148. (Turkish)

<sup>473</sup> Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 48-49.

<sup>474</sup> Amnon Cohen, "Ottoman Sources for the History of Ottoman Jews: How Important?" in *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Avigdor Levy. (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1994), pp. 687-704.

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