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THE ROSY HISTORY OF JEWS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE: A CRITICAL APPROACH TO JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

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By all accounts, the expulsion of Sephardic Jews from Spain was a very traumatic experience not only for the Sephardim, but also for all Jews who were one way or another affected by this mass expulsion, or heard and learned about it during its course in the late fifteenth and during the sixteenth centuries. It would be fair to say that the expulsion was a cataclysm that left a deep scar on the collective Jewish psyche for decades to come. Accordingly, I argue, these displaced people perceived the Ottoman government's decision to allow them to settle in its lands with heightened gratitude and good will to match their anger at the expelling powers. Such extremes of emotion might be anticipated. What is more important for my purposes is that this event coincided with the rise of Jewish historiography on non-Jewish topics in the sixteenth century. Therefore, it was not only contemporary sentiments within the Jewish communities that were affected by the expulsion; narrative works were also written under the influence of, or commissioned with, feelings of gratitude toward the Ottomans. This paper examines the effects of this goodwill in Jewish writings from the early modern era, and inquires how these works became means for transferring particular viewpoints to later generations.

My inquiry is essentially a historiographical one. I track the exceedingly positive treatment of the Ottoman polity in the writings of Jewish authors prior to the nineteenth century, and demonstrate that certain themes were reproduced again and again in the literature. By exploring the authors' motivations and patronage networks, and thereby scrutinizing the special circumstances under which these chronicles were composed, I contend that these sources are in fact misleading with regard to Jewish perspectives on Ottoman governance and society. I examine seven authors, and others in passing, who wrote accounts of the Ottoman polity from the early sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth. While I cannot give a complete empirical account of the reception chains in this article, I hope to open discussion regarding the reliability of these narratives.¹

1 For full disclosure, I do not read Hebrew, but rely on translations or secondary studies on the chronicles under investigation here. There is no doubt that a more careful scrutiny of the

As the conclusion to this historiographical story, I analyze how these pro-Ottoman narratives were re-discovered and re-invented in mid- to late-nineteenth century through the popularization of history writing. Using the same pre-nineteenth histories that I examine here, popular Jewish historians replicated the pro-Ottoman stances in these pre-modern sources, fortified by their own contemporary motivations. In its early stages, the pro-Ottoman position might have been useful for buttressing a separate Sephardic identity. However, the established Turkish Jewish community found comfort in this rosy story, and wholeheartedly embraced and championed it – and the modern Turkish state even more so! Weary of having to deal with contending historical accounts of the troubled existences of ethnic and religious minorities in Ottoman lands, the Turkish state found a lifeboat in the grateful loyal Turkish Jews' story, and promulgated an even more idealized version in schoolbooks and official historiography. Recently, the Turkish political establishment has frequently pointed to the 1492 Iberian expulsion and the Ottoman government's invitation to refugees to settle its lands as an example of longstanding national generosity.

I believe that this rosy depiction is distorted. Again, my interest lies primarily in tracing the routes certain tropes travel in historiography. As is always the case, though, reconstruction of one distinct story and its eventual supersession of alternative viewpoints must take into account complex and strategic social and political calculations. I argue elsewhere that records show a perceptible dislike nurtured at least by some Ottoman Muslims towards Jews, and that it was more directed and elevated than the contempt routinely expressed towards other religious or ethnic groups of this society. Therefore, I question whether historians turned a blind eye to the negative experiences of Jewish life in the Ottoman society – a legacy of the centuries-old positive emotional association begun in the fifteenth century.

The Neat Story of the Sephardic Immigration

The indigenous Jewish communities in what would become Ottoman lands comprised two main communities: the Greek speaking Romaniote Jews who lived in the former territories of the Byzantine Empire and the Jewish communities of the pre-Ottoman Muslim world who usually spoke Arabic. A third small group, the Turkic-speaking Karaites, mostly lived in the Ottoman-controlled Crimea. Fleeing the Catholic persecution, a large new group of Jews arrived from the Iberian peninsula starting in the very late fifteenth century.² The wave of immigration of

language these authors used could have brought new angles to my study. I would like to express my gratitude to Aron Rodrigue for his encouragement on the publication of this essay.

- 2 For the numbers of Jews that immigrated to the Ottoman lands, see Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*. Basingstoke, 1991, 37f.; cf. Henry Kamen, 'The Mediterranean and the Expulsion of Spanish Jews in 1492', *Past and Present* 119 (1988) 30–55.

Jews of Spanish or Portuguese descent (Sephardic Jews), most of whom spoke various forms of Spanish (which would later merge into what came to be known as Ladino or Judezmo), continued intermittently throughout the sixteenth century. These would become the only communities who chose, if out of necessity, to live in the Ottoman lands, rather than having been subdued by conquests.³

New communities of Sephardic Jews settled in port cities around the Aegean Sea notably in İzmir and Salonica (which came to be known as the 'Jerusalem of the Balkans'); large communities also established themselves in Istanbul and Edirne, and some eventually made their way to Balkan cities such as Sarajevo and Sofia. Rural Jewish communities were generally rare in the western parts of the Ottoman Empire. Sephardic Jews found themselves in a much more liberal society than they had enjoyed under the Catholic rule. The Ottoman state allowed Jews to conduct their internal affairs as they pleased – as they did with members of other religions. They did not meddle in the intracommunal affairs of Jews, with the exception of criminal cases. Ottoman intervention was generally restricted to legal matters that involved Muslims. The Ottomans legal system allowed parallel legal codes to exist side by side; Jews were able to choose between Ottoman kadi court or the rabbinical court for civil matters (e.g., registering marriages or matters related to inheritance). In line with the Islamic law, all non-Muslim monotheistic subjects under Ottoman rule were granted protection, as long as they were obedient and paid extra poll-taxes. Although Islamic law technically forbade the building of new houses of worship by non-Muslims, Jews were granted permission to build numerous new synagogues in the cities in which they settled. Ottoman lands thus became a safe haven and a permanent home for a sizeable immigrant Jewish community in the early modern period. The Sephardic Jews led a peaceful existence, cherished their new home and overlords, and by all accounts were the most loyal subjects of the Ottoman state.

This is a very simplified version of the story of Sephardic immigration to Ottoman lands, and can be found in similar strokes in many textbooks and encyclopedias. Depending on the type of source consulted, the story of Sephardic migration to the Ottoman Empire is presented as a salvation story of varying levels of significance: the Ottoman lands a paradise for persecuted Iberian Jews, and the Ottoman government's decision to accept Jews a generous act of epic proportions.

I will not deny that this narrative contains a large kernel of truth – particularly if one compares Iberian Jews' experience in Ottoman lands with the concerted state persecution they had faced in the Spain or Portugal. The Ottoman state did not systematically persecute Jews – on the contrary, evidence suggests that it protected them as tax-paying subjects. However, the state's decision to allow fleeing Jews to settle in the Ottoman lands does not necessarily mean that they also received a heartfelt welcome by the established locals. Sephardic Jews constituted a sizable mass of immigrants who poured into existing communities and more often than not

3 Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*. Princeton, 1984, 121.

tilted the balance of population in the cities in which they settled. An animosity by the locals towards the newcomers is perhaps even to be expected. Whether this dislike subsided with time is a matter open to query. Therefore, when it comes to anti-Judaic sentiments among different segments of the Ottoman society, the facts on the ground may not have been as rosy as described in this widely accepted narrative. Nevertheless, Jewish historiography on the Ottomans overwhelmingly projected a sanguine picture. The discrimination that ordinary Jews faced and the adversities they experienced hardly ever made it to the pages of Jewish chronicles that emerged in the early sixteenth century. This was predominantly due to the conditions under which those historians composed their chronicles.

Jewish Narratives on the Ottomans in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

The emergence of an historiographical interest in non-Jewish topics in Jewish chronicles coincides with the expulsion of Jews from Spain in the early sixteenth century. Scholars have argued that the trauma of this expulsion may have contributed to an interest in other kinds of historiography. Still others find the thriving Italian renaissance a more convincing source of inspiration.⁴ In fact, several chronicles were written with the primary intent of imparting a historical perspective to accounts of Jewish persecution. Even then, the number of Jewish chronicles from the early modern period do not exceed a handful – a few of which touch upon the Ottomans. Most importantly for my purposes here, a distinctly favorable narrative of Jewish immigration to the Ottoman lands often constitutes a stark contrast to the foregoing persecution stories in these chronicles.

Jewish writers' interest in the Ottoman polity had a few dimensions: On the one hand, recent developments had elevated Jews' aversion towards Catholics. Along those lines, a narrative developed with regards to the Ottomans that depicted them as God's punishment upon the Christians. If, as many Jews at the time sure enough wished for, a blow to Christian civilization was to occur soon, it would conceivably be achieved through the hands of the Ottomans. On the other hand, and very much connected to the first point of view, was the upsurge of messianic expectations within Jewish communities around this time. While the theme of an imminent

4 Cf. Yosef Yerushalmi, 'Clio and the Jews: Reflections on Jewish Historiography in the Sixteenth Century', *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 46–47 (1979–1980) 607–638; Eleazar Gutwirth, 'The Expulsion from Spain and Jewish Historiography', in Ada Rapoport-Albert – Steven J. Zipperstein (eds.), *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*. London, 1988, 141–161. Robert Bonfil contended the existence of a rich Jewish historical production in the first place, in 'How Golden was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?', *History and Theory* 27:4, Beiheft 27: *Essays in Jewish Historiography* (December 1988) 78–102. For a review of the scholarship on the rise of Jewish historiography and a survey of chronicles after 1500s, see Martin Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte in jüdischen Chroniken: hebräische Historiographie des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*. Tübingen, 2004, 36f.

coming of a savior was and remained everpresent in the Mediterranean basin, these ideas gained traction within communities during desperate times.⁵ The theme of interpreting the rise of Ottomans within a messianic framework is especially manifest in the works of the sixteenth century chroniclers. Jewish intellectuals sought explanations for these particularly turbulent times, and asked what the tilting balance of power meant for the Jews. Was the reign of 'idolatrous Christians' coming to an end? Did the fact that a new Muslim power had captured the Holy Lands portend a return to Jerusalem?

A few common themes regarding the Ottomans become visible in the chronicles under investigation here. Jewish historians noticeably refrain from criticizing the Ottoman polity in general, and/or play down the critical perspectives in their sources. Not only do they refrain from condemning this foreign Muslim power in any way, on the contrary, they utilize a praiseful, almost obsequious language to describe the sultans' achievements. It is fair to deduce that the particular circumstances in which these works were composed shaped the way their authors described the Ottoman Empire. Accordingly these patterns allow us make reasonable suggestions about the general sentiments that Jewish populations harbored towards the Ottomans at the time.

Joseph Hacker has shown that Romaniot Jews living in territories that the Ottomans came to dominate had held strong anti-Ottoman sentiments between 1453 and at least 1470s. The rise of negative feeling at this particular time mainly emanated from the forced resettlement of the local Jews from Anatolia and Rumelia after the capture of Constantinople. The resettlement of several communities of Jews (and Greeks) to the newly conquered city was forced by the Ottoman government, apparently to re-populate the city.⁶ Yet, as will be demonstrated below, a completely contrasting pro-Ottoman attitude would come to prevail in Jewish historiography starting with Elia Capsali in the wake of the first wave of Sephardic immigration. The agonies of forced resettlement experienced by the Romaniot Jews would fall into obscurity a generation later. Such a metamorphosis of sentiments is not surprising, as the exodus from Spain was undoubtedly one of the most traumatic experiences of the late medieval ages for all Jews who were affected by this mass expulsion. The Jewish world at large watched anxiously as events unfolded in Spain.

Elia Capsali, composed 1523

Rabbi Elia Capsali's (d. after 1550) 1523 account of Muslim history in general and Ottoman history in particular is considered the first instance of a Jewish chronicler

5 Rachel Elijor, 'Messianic Expectations and Spiritualization of Religious Life in the Sixteenth Century', in David B. Ruderman (ed.), *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*. New York, 1992, 283–298.

6 Joseph Hacker, *The Ottoman–Jewish Encounter: A Social and Cultural History of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire (1453–1600)*. Jerusalem, 2016, 118–121.

writing extensively on non-Jewish historical topics. Elia was a Romaniot Jew from a line of respected leaders of the Jewish community on the island of Crete. Many members of the Capsali family distinguished themselves in the study of the Torah and Talmud. Although a part of the family lived under Venetian rule in Crete, they had close connections with the Ottoman world. Elia's great uncle Moses Capsali (d. ca. 1500) served as the Chief Rabbi of Constantinople for almost half a century under Mehmed II (d. 1481) and Bayezid II (d. 1512); Elia's father Elkana (d. 1523) also spent time in Constantinople.

The Capsalis were also very much involved with Sephardic immigration in the eastern Mediterranean. Elia Capsali helped the expelled Sephardic Jews during their sojourn on the island; the Cretan rabbi offered his own quarters or arranged for housing for migrant Jews. He listened to stories of "the great and terrible exile from Spain" from the Sephardim themselves.⁷ Some of these settled in Candia (Heraklion), most moved on to Ottoman cities. When Elia composed his *Seder Elijahu Zuta* in 1520s, tens of thousands of Jews had already been allowed to settle in Ottoman lands.

Elia gathered up-to-date information about developments on the Ottoman side from "old and knowing Turks."⁸ He had had several conversations and learned about the conditions in Istanbul from his great uncle Moses, Chief Rabbi of the city, who is sometimes credited for influencing Bayezid II in the decision to allow the Sephardim to migrate to Ottoman lands. It is reasonable to assume that Elia learned quite a bit about the early stages of the Ottoman politics of resettling Jews from his uncle. His other oral sources included Rabbi Yitzhak al-Hakim (d. 1546), who was presumably a physician in the retinue of Selim I on his campaign to Syria, Palestine, and Cairo.⁹ Yitzhak provided Elia with an eyewitness account of the capture of Jerusalem. We may safely assume that Yitzhak gave Capsali the Ottoman perspective on the military and political developments in the Holy Land and Egypt.

Capsali does not quote any non-Jewish and only a few Jewish sources.¹⁰ Robert Bonfil suggested that he must have used Italian and Greek chronicles, hence was partly influenced by the humanistic culture of the Renaissance.¹¹ If he received the impetus to write a chronicle from such sources and used them for establishing some

7 Robert Bonfil, 'Jewish Attitudes Towards History and Historical Writing in Pre-Modern Times', *Jewish History* 11 (1997) 7–40: 19.

8 *Ibid.*, 19.

9 Aryeh Shmuelevitz, 'Capsali as a Source for Ottoman History, 1450–1523', in Idem, *Ottoman History and Society: Jewish Sources*. Istanbul, 1999, 29–35: 30; Aleida Paudice, *Between Several Worlds: The Life and Writings of Elia Capsali. The Historical Works of a 16th-century Cretan Rabbi*. München, 2010, 84.

10 *Ibid.*, 82.

11 Bonfil, 'Jewish Attitudes Towards History'; Paudice, *Between Several Worlds*, 83; See also Arthur M. Lesly, 'Jewish Adaptation of Humanist Concepts in Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Italy', in David B. Ruderman (ed.), *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*. New York, 1992, 45–62.

facts, his excessively favorable attitude towards Ottomans was certainly not a reflection of them, and positively unique to him. Capsali's representation of the Ottoman polity, and particularly the sultans, is indeed remarkable. He gives a hagiographical cast to the sultans by attributing wisdom to them.¹² He presents Sultans Mehmed II (r. 1444–1446; 1451–1481), Selim I (r. 1512–1520), and Süleyman I (r. 1520–1566) as benefactors of the Jews, and goes as far as to ascribe messianic roles to these sultans.¹³ Joseph Hacker observed that Capsali's wording of Mehmed's supposed invitation to Jews to settle in Istanbul resembled the decree that Cyrus issued in 538 BCE permitting Jews to return their homeland as it was quoted in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁴ Capsali presents Selim I as having similarities with King David and King Solomon.¹⁵ The Ottoman sultans set out on campaigns, according to the chronicler, with the apparent intention of rescuing Jews and punishing sinful Christian nations.¹⁶ All enemies of the Ottomans were sinners, scoundrels, and cheats.¹⁷ Furthermore, Martin Jacobs noticed that the idealized portrayal of the Ottomans contrasts remarkably with the polemical tone of the introductory chapters on the early history of Islam.¹⁸

An explanation for Capsali's extremely favorable stance on the Ottomans can be found in the convergence of several factors. As mentioned above, the despairing psychological condition of the expelled Iberian Jews and the Ottomans' invitation to them created an enormous sense of gratitude among Iberian Jews. First-hand knowledge of the dire circumstances of the expulsion must have greatly upset a rabbi, who, as the chief of the Jewish community on Crete was in a position of responsibility. This is only rather the expected psychological side of the equation though: more difficult is perhaps to understand how Jews of the time, particularly those who were well-versed in spiritual knowledge, interpreted the rapidly shifting balances on that side of the world. Capsali's primary concern was to comprehend how God's plan on earth unfolded and what the recent events meant for the Jews at that time and in the future, hence the messianic content of his work.¹⁹ The advance

12 Paudice, *Between Several Worlds*, 100.

13 *Ibid.*, 13, *passim*.

14 Joseph Hacker, 'Ottoman Policy Toward the Jews and Jewish Attitudes Toward the Ottomans during the Fifteenth Century', in Benjamin Braude – Bernard Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*. New York, 1982, 117–126: 118.

15 Charles Berlin, 'A Sixteenth-Century Hebrew Chronicle of the Ottoman Empire: The *Seder Elyahu Zuta* of Elijah Capsali and its Message', in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography, History and Literature in Honour of I. Edward Kiev*. New York, 1971, 21–44: 35–36; Shmuelevitz, 'Capsali as a Source for Ottoman History, 1450–1523', 31.

16 Paudice, *Between Several Worlds*, 100.

17 Shmuelevitz, 'Capsali as a Source for Ottoman History, 1450–1523', 31. For a detailed summary of contents and the sources of the chronicle see: Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte*, 62–80.

18 *Ibid.*, *passim*.

19 For example, see Berlin, 'A Sixteenth-Century Hebrew Chronicle'.

of 'Turks,' i.e. Muslim Ottomans, was an unavoidable 'complication' for which Christian clerics also offered their own apocalyptic explanations at the time. Many theologians, including no less than Martin Luther (d. 1546), interpreted the Ottomans as God's chastising rod for the sinful Christians during this time.²⁰ It seems that many early modern Jews regarded the Ottomans along the same lines – as a divine punishment for Christian Europe – for reasons of their own. Combined with the expulsion, which Capsali regarded as a part of a divine plan,²¹ the capture of Jerusalem by a new Muslim power had implications for the coming moment when the exiles of Israel would gather in the holy city. Ottomans, therefore, acted as agents within the framework of a divine master plan.

Yosef ha-Kohen, completed 1553, printed 1554

While Capsali had close ties to the Ottoman world and was well-informed about happenings there, other Jewish chroniclers who lived further away were less aware of and perhaps less interested in the circumstances of Jews who migrated to Ottoman cities. Yosef ha-Kohen (d. ca. 1575) is one of these. Yosef's parents fled Spain and settled in Avignon during the first wave of exodus at the very late fifteenth century. He was born there in 1496, but the family once more fled persecution, and ultimately settled in Genoa in 1501. Thus, Yosef grew up as a second-generation migrant in Genoa, subsequently relocating a few times within the borders of the city-state. He practiced medicine.

Yosef ha-Kohen's chronicle is an attempt to offer a Jewish perspective on the history of Muslim and Christian empires. The title of the book, *Sefer divre ha-yamim le-malkhe Sarefat u-vet Otoman ha-Togar (Chronicles of the Kings of France and the Kings of the House of Ottoman Turks)*, creates an expectation that the account will provide a detailed account of these two polities, and perhaps juxtapose French Kings and Ottoman Sultans. Yet the title reflects the contents only minimally.²² Furthermore, although ha-Kohen remarks in his introduction that he compiled the sufferings of Jews "in the lands of the gentiles" so that they would be remembered by later generations, he does not provide a detailed account of Jewish hardships in history, nor does the forced migration out of France and Spain find mention in more than a few pages – this, in spite of the fact that the author himself

20 See, for example, John W. Bohnstedt, 'The Infidel Scourge of God: The Turkish Menace as Seen by German Pamphleteers of the Reformation Era', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 58:9 (1968) 1–58.

21 Paudice, *Between Several Worlds*, 93.

22 Joseph Ha-Kohen, *Sefer divre ha-yamim le-malkhe Sarefat u-vet Otoman ha-Togar*, published as: Idem, *The Chronicles of Rabbi Joseph ben Joshua ben Meir, the Sphardi*. C. H. F. Bialloblotzky (trans.). London, 1835–1836. Yosef Yerushalmi sought for the reasons for the discrepancy of the title with the contents of the book in his 'Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen', in Bernard Dov Cooperman (ed.), *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*. Cambridge, MA, 1983, 460–487.

came from a family of exiles.²³ The chronicle is thus a history of the larger Mediterranean world since the early middle ages.

Despite the disappointing discrepancy between the title and the text, the historian provides enough material – especially in the second part of the work when he turns his attention to recent and contemporary developments – for us to consider his viewpoint in scrutinizing early modern Jewish opinions on the Ottomans.²⁴ Ha-Kohen does not display an excessive gratitude towards the Ottomans. That does not mean that his general attitude was not relatively pro-Ottoman, but Capsali's enthusiastic account makes any comparable text bland in this respect. Then again, ha-Kohen possessed significantly less information on the happenings in the Ottoman lands. He corresponded with his brother, who lived in Salonica, regularly; but did not have access to current first-person accounts. The frequency of tragic migration stories had subsided by the time he set down to write his chronicle in the early 1550s in any case. He himself was occupied with more critical problems, such as freeing Jews enslaved by the Genoese in the southern Peloponnese. In establishing a narrative of French and Ottoman histories, the work heavily relies upon Italian histories.²⁵ Ha-Kohen does, however, as has been pointed out by Martin Jacobs, selectively depart from the dismissive depictions of Ottomans in his Italian sources – especially one that portrays the Ottoman sultans negatively.²⁶

Instead of characterizing ha-Kohen as a particularly pro-Ottoman writer, it is perhaps more adequate to view him as an author who carried the mental scars of Catholic persecution that haunted his generation. This condition, combined with a messianic interpretation of events that was widespread in his time, determined his views on the Ottomans.²⁷ Therefore, his evident hope for the collapse of Christian civilization in his narrative is unsurprising. According to the divine plan ha-Kohen saw in the unfolding of history, the Ottomans' military successes over the Christian nations were punishments for their ongoing oppression of the Jews. The chronicler

23 Yerushalmi, 'Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen', 462.

24 For the content and revision history of the book, see Martin Jacobs, 'Sephardic Migration and Cultural Transfer: The Ottoman and Spanish Expansion through a Cinquecento Jewish Lens', *Journal of Early Modern History* 21 (2017) 516–542: 522–524.

25 Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte*, 98–103; Idem, 'Joseph ha-Kohen, Paolo Giovio, and Sixteenth-Century Historiography', in David B. Ruderman – Giuseppe Veltri (eds.), *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early-Modern Italy*. Philadelphia, 2004, 67–85. Ha-Kohen also obtained a copy of Usque's *Consolação* (below), which was published the same year in which he finished his chronicle, and paraphrased sections on Jewish sufferings into a part he added in the work's later iteration: Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte*, 98–99.

26 *Ibid.*, 196, 198–199. Cf. also Jacobs 'Sephardic Migration and Cultural Transfer', 529, where the author quotes ha-Kohen referring to Sultan Süleyman I "as wise as an angel of God," clearly with a biblical allusion to 2 Samuel 14:20.

27 Yerushalmi, 'Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen'; Martin Jacobs does not agree with Yosef Yerushalmi about the messianic character of this work: Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte*, 198–199.

framed historical events such as the capture of Constantinople by the Ottomans and the fall of Byzantium as manifestations of divine justice.²⁸ The Ottomans were a force that would put an end to Christian sovereignty. That said, reporting on more recent events, such as how local Jews welcomed the Ottoman army during the capture of Buda in 1523, ha-Kohen imparted a sense that Jews generally held favorable views of Ottomans.²⁹

All in all, although ha-Kohen holds an idealized view of the Ottoman sultans and tends to regard the Ottoman lands as a safe haven for Jewish refugees, his chronicle is a bit more distanced towards the Ottomans compared to Capsali's. His information on events in Ottoman lands is limited and based on secondary sources. It seems he was more involved in the dire affairs of Jews in his part of the world, and even if his general attitude is favorable for the Ottomans, his more obvious emotion is a dislike of Christian civilization.³⁰

Samuel Usque, published 1553

About the same time ha-Kohen published his *Divre ha-yamim* in Sabbioneta, about a hundred kilometers to the east, a Portuguese marrano poet by the name of Samuel Usque (d. after 1555), brought out his *Consolação ás Tribulações de Israel* (*Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*), published in 1553 in Ferrara. Samuel Usque hailed from a distinguished family which was expelled from Spain to Portugal. Samuel was born in Lisbon in the early 1500s and baptized there by force. As the Inquisition started to take its toll in Portugal, Usques fled to Ferrara in northern Italy, probably in the late 1530s. Samuel would later immigrate to Ottoman lands, spend time in Safed and Salonica, and would compose his *Consolação* while he was there. Elegantly written in a poetic register, the book later became one of the classics of Portuguese literature.

Addressed to the "gentlemen of the diaspora of Portugal," and written in the form of dialogues between three shepherds, *Consolação* consists of reports on the sufferings of the Jewish people since antiquity. The past sufferings of Jewish people were presented as a part of God's plan, and accompanied by "consolations" with the manifest intention to lift the spirit and hopes of marranos in these difficult times. First and foremost, Usque reasoned that readers would find consolation in the fact that any of the past tribulations included in his narrative was a much greater hardship than the current one being endured. God also sent "secret consolations" to His people, Usque alleged, which ordinary people could not necessarily understand.

28 *Ibid.*, 200–201.

29 *Ibid.*, 212–213.

30 Martin Jacobs further conjectures that ha-Kohen's aversion towards Christianity may have been elevated due to his brother's conversion to this religion; see Jacobs, 'Sephardic Migration and Cultural Transfer', 521. Also see the same article for a comparison of ha-Kohen's depictions of Ottoman (Muslim) and Spanish (Christian) expansionist policies and practices.

Usque devoted a section on the persecution of Jews in Spain and Portugal. He knew well the circumstances in Spain, and himself witnessed the hostilities in Portugal in the late 1520s and early 1530s. The author offers Ottoman ascendancy at the time of the weakening power of the Christian nations as one of the consolations in his book. Christianity was splintered into sects and appeared to be on the road to dissolving altogether. Religious discord in Christianity was therefore to be regarded as a consolation.³¹ He compares the growing Ottoman supremacy to the breaking of the dawn and expects “the longed-for morning after winter’s stormy night [to] graciously appear to [the Jews].”³² *Consolação* has very striking passages about Jewish life in Ottoman lands. The glowingly positive language he uses can be appreciated in the following quotations:

“The eighth and most signal way by which you will rise to a higher degree of consolation is 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 [...]. 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. This is a sublime mercy from the Lord, for He has granted you such abundant freedom in these realms that you may now take the first step toward your belated repentance. Consider this a great consolation, and you will find relief for your tribulations in a refuge so certain and sure. For here you may come to terms with your soul, and be unafraid that pressures will remove it from His Law, as has happened in other kingdoms.”³³

Apart from the moving language Samuel Usque employs, the fact that most of his comments were based on his own observations make these sections even more significant. He travelled to Ottoman cities; he sojourned in Salonica in 1550s and interacted with mystic circles during his stay in Safed. He seems to have been more impressed by migrants’ experiences in Salonica than by the city of Safed. In a much quoted passage, he declared that Salonica was “mother of Judaism” (*madre de Judesmo*):³⁴

31 Usque, *Consolaçam às tribulações de Israel*, published as: *Samuel Usque’s Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*. Martin A. Cohen (trans.). Philadelphia, 1964 (second printing Skokie, 2002), 10, 27, 38.

32 *Ibid.*, 25, 38.

33 *Ibid.*, 231.

34 For the inaccurate translation of this term as “mother of Israel” (*madre de Israel*) in the late nineteenth century, see Devin E. Naar, ‘Fashioning the ‘Mother of Israel’: The Ottoman Jewish

“There is a city in the Turkish kingdom which formerly belonged to the Greeks, and in our days is a true mother-city in Judaism. For it is established on the very deep foundations of the Law. And it is filled with the choicest plants and most fruitful trees presently known anywhere on the face of our globe. These fruits are divine, because they are watered by an abundant stream of charities. The city’s walls are made of holy deeds of the greatest worth. The majority of my children who have been persecuted and exiled from Europe and many other parts of the world have taken refuge in this city, and she embraces them and receives them with as much love and good will as if she were Jerusalem, that old and ever pious mother of ours.”³⁵

All of Usque’s positive experiences amongst Jewish communities in Ottoman cities aside, the fact that he was part of an influential network probably considerably determined his positive attitude towards the Ottomans. His patrons were great proponents of the Ottomans. Samuel Usque and his brother Salomon, who himself was an author and translator, were supported by Doña Gracia Mendes Nasi (d. 1569) from the famous ex-conversos family Benveniste/Mendes. Samuel received a stipend from her over several years, and the publication of the book was also made possible by the businesswoman, to whom it is dedicated.³⁶ The extremely wealthy Jewish businesswoman was born in Lisbon, had moved from Antwerp to Venice 1544, and finally settled in Ferrara in 1550. Doña Gracia and her nephew and son-in-law Joseph Nasi (d. 1579) had close connections with the imperial court in Istanbul. They travelled together to Istanbul in 1560s and supported Selim II (r. 1566–1574) over his brother and rival. Eventually, Joseph Nasi became an influential intermediary for the Ottoman court and was instrumental in the composition of another pro-Ottoman Jewish history, that of Almosnino (below).

Samuel Shullam, published 1566

Esther Handali (d. 1590) was another patron – one with much closer connections at the Istanbul court – of a pro-Ottoman historical account. An affluent businesswoman, Handali also functioned as *kira*, i.e., financial and social intermediary, emissary, translator, and trustee, initially for the imperial mother Hürrem Sultan (Roxelana; d. 1558), and later for Nur Banu (d. 1574), the Venetian consort of Selim II after his accession to the throne in 1566. Handali was known for her philanthropic giving to Jewish causes. Undoubtedly, she knew Joseph Nasi and Doña Gracia well, and her sponsorship of a peculiar work must be seen within the

Historical Narrative and the Image of Jewish Salonica’, *Jewish History* 28:3–4 (2014) 337–372: 354–358.

35 Usque, *Consolaçam às tribulações de Israel*, 211; also cf. Elli Kohen, *History of the Turkish Jews and Sephardim: Memories of a Past Golden Age*. Lanham et al., 2007, 45.

36 Usque, *Consolaçam às tribulações de Israel*, 15; cf. Cecil Roth, *Doña Gracia of the House of Nasi*. Philadelphia, 2001 (first printing 1948), 76–78, 119, 133.

context of a concerted effort to promote the Ottoman polity within the Jewish communities.³⁷

The book in question is a modified version of Abraham Zacuto's (d. 1514) history *Sefer ha-Yuhasin*, or the *Book of Genealogies*, which had attained considerable popularity by the mid-sixteenth century. The author, an esteemed astronomer originally from Salamanca, composed *Yuhasin* in 1504 after he had settled in Tunis. Zacuto's history is a chronological account of the history of the world, with a special emphasis on Jewish scholars from antiquity to his time.³⁸ Though very popular and highly regarded, the *Book of Genealogies* would not be published until later in the century, when it would be reworked by the Cairene Samuel Shullam, and printed in Istanbul in 1566 with funds provided by Esther Handali.³⁹ Shullam omitted and interpolated numerous sections in *Yuhasin*. Most importantly, by using Arabic sources, he added a genealogy of Muslim kings to the book. Not trivial for our topic, the author took great care to update his Arabic sources by supplementing the genealogies with information on the Ottoman dynasty and extended it up until his time:

"I add to the memory of Muslim kings after their prophet Muhammad, also a list of the devout, able, the gracious kings of the Ottoman dynasty (may their soul rest in peace) up until the current honorable and chivalrous king who has had only good fortune in his affairs and campaigns. [...] Around the time of the beginning of Albrechts I's reign (i.e. 1298), the light of the devout Ottomans rose (may their soul rest in peace). They are the same Turks, who rule now in the year 5327 after the creation of the world (i.e. 1566–1567): Sultan Selim II (may his majesty be glorious and his kingdom be magnificent), our lord, the crown of our head, the illustrious and powerful king, who rules over three continents, most of Asia and Europe and half of Africa."⁴⁰

The edition by Samuel Shullam, otherwise not a celebrated scholar, was not a commentary on Zacuto's book. It was an extended edition of sorts. Given the fact that until mid-sixteenth century it was not customary to publish books by contemporary authors in the Ottoman Empire, Shullam's extensive interventions in

37 For another work Handali financed, not related to Ottoman history, see Marvin J. Heller, *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book: An Abridged Thesaurus*. 2 Vols. Leiden–Boston, 2004, 673.

38 Moises Orfali, 'Zacuto, Abraham b. Samuel', in Norman A. Stillman (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*. Consulted online on 07 November 2017: <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world>.

39 Shimon Shtober, 'The Chronologies of the Muslim Kingdoms in Sambari's Chronicle Divrei Yoseph', in A. Mirsky et al. (eds.), *Exile and Diaspora – Studies in the History of the Jewish People Presented to Prof. Haim Beinart*. Jerusalem, 1988, 415–429 [Hebrew].

40 My free translation from the German translation of these sections in: Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte*, 43.

the original work, along with an addendum on Muslim kings, and Handali's funding of such a work no less, would seem odd, even daring.⁴¹ Presumably it was due to the original book's prestige that such an account on Muslim kings could be published at the Yavetz brothers' press in Istanbul. Otherwise, in contrast to many printing houses in Italy, the presses in Istanbul and Salonica printed religious texts. Printing was considered a holy enterprise – and not without its politics either. Joseph Hacker demonstrated that ideological strains more or less determined which books were publishable. For example, halakhic commentaries or spiritual works by Ashkenazi, and even North African or Italian scholars were not preferred.⁴² Book printing in Istanbul was not a commercially satisfying enterprise either. The number of books published at Istanbul Hebrew presses was but a fraction of those produced at Italian print houses. The turnaround time for liquid capital was slow. The fact that religious scholars in Safed and elsewhere preferred Italian prints due to their better quality did not help printers in Istanbul or Salonica. Therefore, publication of any book more often than not necessitated outside funding. In light of these points, Shullam's edition of Zacuto's *Yuhasin* in 1566 is unusual and possibly could not have been materialized without Handali's support.

Moshe Almosnino, composed 1567–68

Moshe Almosnino's (d. 1580) family was from Aragon and settled in Salonica, where Moshe was born and educated to be a distinguished rabbi in that city. He was thus the first second-generation Ottoman Jew to write and reflect on the Ottoman polity extensively. The reasons and circumstances for the composition of the book are enlightening for understanding Jewish networks in Istanbul and beyond.

In the 1560s, an economic crisis threatened Salonica's Jewish population, a majority of which made their living by producing textiles for the imperial army. As the Ottoman government not only revoked Salonicans' monopoly in the textile production, but also annulled a tax exemption granted by Sultan Süleyman in 1537, Almosnino joined a delegation headed for Istanbul to plea for a reinstatement of the privilege. The delegation arrived in the throne city in June 1566, but had difficulty accessing the right persons; hence the mission's visit was prolonged until early 1568.

Moshe Almosnino composed his *Crónica de los reyes otomanos* (*The Chronicle of Ottoman Kings*) during his sojourn in Istanbul. The book is written in vernacular Ladino and consists of four books. The first two are on recent Ottoman history; one book details the tax negotiations, and another recounts the 'extreme qualities' of

41 Joseph Hacker, 'Authors, Readers, and Printers of Sixteenth-Century Hebrew Books in the Ottoman Empire', in Peggy K. Pearlstein (ed.), *Perspectives on the Hebraic Book. The Myron M. Weinstein Memorial Lectures at the Library of Congress*. Washington, DC, 2012, 17–64: 33–34.

42 *Ibid.*, 28–29.

Istanbul, a genre in its own right at the time. The first two books narrate Süleyman I's reign, his death and funeral, and the accession of Selim II to the Ottoman throne. Most significantly, his account of Ottoman history is Almosnino's original narrative, and does not replicate any other written sources.

Almosnino's depiction of the Ottomans can be unequivocally characterized as extraordinarily positive. Süleyman is depicted as a wise and generous ruler, his policies intended to help the poor and needy. The author also gives an apologetic account of the sultan's controversial murder of his son Mustafa, describing it as an act undertaken for the good of his realm.⁴³ Olga Boroyova, who analyzed the chronicle, describes the book as a political, even propagandistic, narrative aimed at making Sephardim feel that they were living at the right time in the right place, and that they should be docile Ottoman subjects.⁴⁴ Almosnino comfortably embraces the identity of an Ottoman subject, refers to the sultan as "our great master," and prays for his glory. The narrative is also written matter-of-factly, without any allusions to Jewish history, the Iberian expulsions, or messianic expectations.⁴⁵ The book was apparently intended for Sephardic Jews, most of whom spoke only Ladino at this time, and who converted back to Judaism after they immigrated, therefore not necessarily possessed of a deep knowledge of Judaism. Boroyova conjectures, based on the style of the narrative, that the intended audience must have been educated Ladino speakers – as opposed to the less educated readers of 'light' Ladino texts composed in subsequent centuries.⁴⁶ The book, then, was an excellent effort to integrate the members of a newly established Jewish community in Salonica and elsewhere in the Ottoman lands, and to make them feel comfortable in their new environment.

Boroyova further demonstrates that Almosnino was encouraged by influential Jews close to the Ottoman court to compose this book for purposes of strengthening the community's ties with the administration.⁴⁷ The most prominent name behind this enterprise was Joseph Nasi. As mentioned above, Nasi was a supporter and close courtier of Sultan Selim II. However, Almosnino had had ties with the Nasi family even before he travelled to Istanbul. He was appointed the rabbi of a new congregation (*kahal*) founded by Doña Gracia in Salonica. Some of the information that Almosnino includes in the book could have only come from "very competent

43 Alisa Meyuhas Ginio, 'A Salonican Sefardi Admires the Virtues of his Contemporary Ottoman Sultans and Describes the Grandeur of Costantina (Istanbul): Mosheh Almosnino's *Crónica de los Reyes Otomanos* (1566–1567)', *Journal of Sephardic Studies* 2 (2014) 89–100 [published digitally at sefarad-studies.org], 98; Idem, *Between Sepharad and Jerusalem: History, Identity and Memory of the Sephardim*. Leiden–Boston, 2014, 60–61.

44 Olga Boroyova, *The Beginnings of Ladino Literature: Moses Almosnino and His Readers*. Bloomington, 2017, 11.

45 *Ibid.*, 112–113.

46 *Ibid.*, 43.

47 *Ibid.*, 10–11.

people,” Almosnino reveals, “who are constantly engaged in business at this court.”⁴⁸ Since the author stayed at Nasi’s mansion at Ortaköy while in Istanbul, it is only plausible that the Portuguese businessman encouraged or persuaded Almosnino to depict the “the greatness of this great and famous court and exalted state” for Jewish communities.⁴⁹ That said, we should not discard the psychological effects of events taking place as Almosnino was putting the last touches to his work. After protracted negotiations, the tax privileges for Salonican Jews were reinstated by appealing to Selim II, the new sultan since the fall of 1566.

Given the fact that the Nasi family financed the publication of many books, and was involved in this enterprise to the degree that a printing press operated at their Istanbul mansion from 1592 onwards,⁵⁰ the intriguing question is *why* Almosnino’s chronicle was not printed at the time. It would appear that the fact that *Crónica* was on a non-religious topic – and on a contemporary and non-Jewish one at that – may have made it unappealing for publication. As mentioned above, Istanbul and Salonica presses almost exclusively printed texts which would further the knowledge of the Torah; such as *midrashim*, new commentaries, or homilies.⁵¹ The awareness on this aspect is evident, for example, in the fact that a body of Torah scholars took care to institute a regulation in Salonica in the late 1520s to prevent the publication of “things that were not worthy of being printed.”⁵² Furthermore, while printing books in Ladino will take off by the end of the sixteenth century, it was still unusual at this time. In fact, one other book by Almosnino in Ladino had been funded for publication by Joseph Nasi in Salonica only a couple of years before, in 1564 (the first ever Ladino book published) – but, that was a homiletic work.⁵³ Despite the circumstances, apparently Almosnino’s *Crónica* circulated widely as a manuscript (below).

Anonymous, composed ca. 1622–24

Before I move on to analyze Josef Sambari’s late-seventeenth century chronicle, I would like to briefly touch upon a peculiar narrative written in Istanbul by an anonymous author. This text differs in many ways from the other chronicles examined in this essay. The chronicle is short, incomplete, and was written in the

48 Moisés Almosnino, *Crónica de los Reyes Otomanos*. Pilar Romeu Ferré (ed.). Barcelona, 1998, 102; Borovaya, *The Beginnings of Ladino Literature*, 113; see also Ginio, ‘A Salonican Sefardi Admires the Virtues’, 95.

49 Almosnino, *Crónica de los Reyes Otomanos*, 78; Borovaya, *The Beginnings of Ladino Literature*, 113.

50 Heller, *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book*, xlvi; for books financed by the Nasi family also see *ibidem*.

51 See Heller’s catalogue of all published books in the sixteenth century: *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book*.

52 Hacker, ‘Authors, Readers, and Printers’, 41.

53 Heller, *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book*, 549.

form of an annal, which means that the entries were probably written as events unfolded or shortly thereafter. It also survives as a unique manuscript, which was recently edited.⁵⁴ The account comprises the events in Istanbul during the period of about two years from 1622 to 1624. The author seems to have had recourse to courtly circles, but his actual profession as well as any detail about his identity remain obscure. Incidentally, this is a tumultuous period during which anarchy rocked the city. The regiments of the palace cavalry and the janissaries caused much disturbance; they revolted against the rulership, demanded the execution of several grandees and Sultan Osman II, and also fought each other.

As the entries were written in temporal proximity to the events, emotional remarks by the author are not uncommon as the unrest in the city continued to unfold. The events he reports about are all contemporary happenings in Istanbul, and there is little reflection on the past, be it Jewish history or earlier Ottoman history. The format and the historical approach carry similarities with Ottoman court annals, which may suggest that the author could have been acquainted with Ottoman styles of annal-keeping.

This happens to be the only chronicle from this period that was written by an Ottoman Jewish subject from Istanbul. The author is well aware of the fact that the politically tense atmosphere of the throne city might not necessarily bode well for Jewish subjects. Hence he is more divorced from the idealized imagining of the Ottoman lands as being a peaceful country for Jews. He displays an apparent dislike of janissaries and the palace cavalry, who he blames not only for the current unrest in the city, disrespect and atrocities towards the imperial family, but also for cruel acts committed against the Jews. That said, the anonymous author is very much a part and parcel of the imperial ideology; he is a clear proponent of the Ottoman imperial dynasty and the establishment.

Yosef Sambari, composed 1673

The final chronicle that I wish to focus on is titled *Sefer Divrei Yosef (The Book of Yosef's Sayings)* written by the Cairene rabbi Yosef Sambari (d. early 1700s) as late as 1673 – which means his account came some 150 years after Capsali's chronicle, the first mentioned above. This account is a crucial link in the reception chain for pro-Ottoman views in Jewish communities.

Sefer Divrei Yosef is a politico-religious Islamic history intertwined with Jewish historical topics, and includes the biographies of Jewish sages and lists of rabbis. Though written in an elaborate biblical language, the narrative is dotted with simple didactic anecdotes which makes it an entertaining read. Yosef Sambari was a *musta'ribi* himself, hence was able to utilize Arabic chronicles for his work.

54 Anonymus, [Untitled Chronicle]. Published as: *Anonim Bir İbranicce Kroniğe Göre 1622–1624 Yıllarında Osmanlı Devleti ve İstanbul*. Nuh Arslantaş – Yaron Ben Naeh (trans.). Ankara, 2013.

However, his reporting on the Ottomans, which make up some 52 out of the total of 228 chapters, was overwhelmingly based on the works of sixteenth-century Jewish historians, mostly Capsali's *Seder* and ha-Kohen's *Divre ha-yamim*, but also Samuel Shullam's *Sefer Yuhasin* and Ibn Verga's *Shevet Yehudah*.⁵⁵ There is no indication that he used Turkish language sources.

Sambari narrates Ottoman history chronologically according to the reigns of sultans. His focus is mostly on significant political and military events, and, obviously reflecting the choices of his sources, depicts Mehmed II, Selim I, and Süleyman I in some detail. He seems to have relied on unidentified informants and his own recollections for the later part of his narrative which he recounts up until the current sultan's reign. Sambari narrates Ottoman activities on the eastern front in some detail; for instance, he reserves 13 chapters for Selim I's campaigns against the Safavids (1514) and Mamluks (1516–1517).

The historian seems at times to be even more sensitive than Capsali in excising source material that ascribed unfavorable qualities to Ottoman sultans. For instance, he omits stories with occasional brutality when he is quoting from Capsali.⁵⁶ All in all, the narrative suggests a very special relationship between the Jews and the Ottoman sultans, to the extent that Shimon Shtober conjectured that Sambari might have viewed the Ottomans through the lens of biblical stories about the 'lost kings of Israel'.⁵⁷ He claims that chief rabbis have a special seat in the imperial council (*divan-ı hümayun*); narrates a story wherein a prominent Jew saves a sultan from assassination by a divine intervention; and describes the capture of Rhodes (1522) as facilitated by the aid of a Jew from the island. Sambari would refer to the Ottoman sultans as "gracious Kings," "kings who loved the Jews," and to the current sultan as "our lord".

Reception and Reinvention

Now that we have seen so many examples and consistent patterns in pre-modern Jewish perceptions of Ottomans, it seems plausible that those views were passed on to the later generations. Any argument about the legacy of a generally favorable position in the Jewish chronicles towards the Ottomans from the sixteenth century onwards will necessarily have to be accompanied by evidence of their circulation and reception in subsequent decades. While it requires a more complete study to trace the transmission links, I will survey the most important works that facilitated the dissemination of these accounts to modern times.

55 Shtober, 'The Chronologies of the Muslim Kingdoms in Sambari's Chronicle', 420–421; Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte*, 123–124; Shimon Shtober, 'Yosef Sambari', <https://ottoman-historians.uchicago.edu>. Accessed on 1 November 2017.

56 Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte*, 253.

57 Shtober, 'The Chronologies of the Muslim Kingdoms in Sambari's Chronicle', 418.

Elia Capsali's chronicle *Seder Elijahu Zuta* found a limited reception during his time. The book was not printed and the fact that only four manuscripts have survived to date may indicate that it did not have a wide circulation. His contemporaries barely quote him.⁵⁸ However, this does not mean that his views did not make a substantial impact on nineteenth and twentieth-century Jewish historiography. The work would be rediscovered by philologists and historians of the mid-nineteenth century. The Italian scholar Samuel David Luzzatto (d. 1865) offered a translation of a short section of Capsali's work in 1858.⁵⁹ Heinrich Graetz (d. 1891) mentioned the chronicle a few times in his *Geschichte der Juden*, and eventually, Moses Lattes's (d. 1883) study of 1869 properly introduced Capsali's work to modern scholarship.⁶⁰ However, apart from the chronicle itself, the pro-Ottoman spirit of Capsali's work would be emulated by the widely-read Cairene historian Yosef Sambari, who used Capsali's work extensively (below).

Samuel Usque and Moshe Almosnino, on the other hand, were both sponsored to produce positive accounts of the Ottomans. Doña Gracia Mendes and Joseph Nasi supported the two authors financially, aided the latter access the powerful persons in Istanbul in order to obtain beneficial results in response to a petition. The wealthy businesswoman and her nephew Joseph both frequented the Ottoman court circles and were major proponents of the Ottoman polity. Therefore, the nearly propagandist nature of these two accounts must be recognized as such. A third work sponsored by another pro-Ottoman Jewish personality at the Ottoman court, the *kira* Esther Handali, was Samuel Shullam's revised edition of *Sefer ha-Yuhasin*. This prestigious book was reprinted three times by the mid-nineteenth century and served as a reference to later historians.⁶¹

Though Usque's *Consolação* was printed in Ferrara in 1553, copies of the work were apparently hard to come by at the time. Martin Cohen conjectures that copies of the book may have been burned by the Papal Inquisition.⁶² Nevertheless, Usque's text was lengthily paraphrased by contemporary authors. As mentioned above, Yosef ha-Kohen used *Consolação*'s first edition. Gedaliah ibn Yahya (d. 1587), who studied at a yeshiva in Usque's stomping grounds of Ferrara, also paraphrased long

58 Joseph Delmedigo (d. 1655), a seventeenth-century rabbi and physician found Capsali's work "delightful and entertaining in times of trouble and affliction." Paudice, *Between Several Worlds*, 1 quotes Moses Lattes, *De vita et scriptis Eliae Kapsalii*. Padua, 1869.

59 Yosef Ha-Kohen, *Emeq ha-bakha*. Published as: *Emek habacha von R. Joseph ha Cohen. Aus dem Hebräischen ins Deutsche übertragen, mit einem Vorworte, Noten und Registern versehen und mit hebräischen handschriftlichen Beilagen bereichert*. M. Wiener (ed.), [with contributions by Samuel David Luzzatto]. Leipzig, 1858, appendix.

60 Lattes, *De vita et scriptis Eliae Kapsalii*.

61 Istanbul: 1566; Cracow: 1581; Amsterdam: 1717; Königsberg: 1857; London: 1857 (complete edition).

62 Usque, *Consolaçam às tribulações de Israel*, 30–31.

sections from Usque's work. The book had a second print run in Amsterdam in 1559.

Almosnino's *Crónica* is celebrated today as one of the earliest examples of Ladino literature.⁶³ The book was evidently copied, read, and circulated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries so widely that different manuscript branches formed. An abridged Latin script adaptation, published in Madrid in 1638 and titled *Extremos y grandezas de Constantinopla* (*The Extremes and Great Things of Constantinople*), made parts of the book accessible to wider audiences.

Ha-Kohen completed the first iteration of his *Divre ha-yamim* in October 1553, and it was printed in Sabbioneta a year later. He continued to work on and add sections to the published book; after he received a copy of Usque's *Consolação*, he adapted and added a section on the Jewish sufferings to his own book. No doubt he also read Usque's very positive remarks about Ottoman lands. All in all, ha-Kohen's history may not offer stunning original reporting, but it is valuable in terms of his general attitude towards the Ottomans within the framework of this article. The chronicle was widely used by Jewish historians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁶⁴ It was later printed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and was translated into English before the mid-nineteenth century.⁶⁵

Sambari's chronicle, written a century and a half after the first work on the Ottomans by Capsali, functioned as an important work that transmitted the spirit of earlier historiography to later times – particularly to Ottoman Jewish communities. Sambari had access to an excellent library of his master Rabbi Abraham Scandari in Cairo. By the time Sambari extensively utilized Capsali (and other historians) for the reconstruction of the glorious Ottoman centuries, the latter's explanation of God's plan on earth through the lens of an imminent messianic revival did not arouse similar expectations in a post-Sabbatai Zevi world. The mass commotion and the eventual conversion of Zevi to Islam had taken place only a few years earlier (1666). Having met him several times in Cairo, Sambari was reserved about messianic ideas at the time of his writing. Therefore, while replicating Capsali's views, Sambari consciously stripped them of their messianic context, leaving behind Capsali's pro-Ottoman stance.⁶⁶ The sections on the Ottomans of Sambari's chronicle were separately printed twice – in 1728 in Istanbul and in 1756 in İzmir – and were translated into Ladino and printed in Istanbul in 1767,⁶⁷ making it possibly the most critical link in the chain of transmission. The work would become the standard work

63 Borovaya, *The Beginnings of Ladino Literature*.

64 Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte*, 103, 122–124.

65 Amsterdam: 1733; Lemberg: 1859; London: 1835–36 (translation). Also a synopsis in Latin appeared in Paris: 1670.

66 Martin Jacobs analysed the circumstances in which Sambari composed his chronicle and how he was responding to certain contemporary concerns in: Jacobs, 'An Ex-Sabbatean's Remorse? Sambari's Polemics against Islam', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 97:3 (Summer 2007) 347–378.

67 Idem, *Islamische Geschichte*, 127.

through which Sephardic Jews educated themselves about their past in the Ottoman lands. Sambari's neat account also found a large reception among popular and professional historians in the subsequent decades.

All these pre-nineteenth century works might have found a readership among rabbinical scholars and perhaps educated Jews at the time. It is only through the rise of professional history writing as a discipline in the mid-nineteenth century in Germany that made a profound affect on the dissemination of intracommunal notions to later and wider audiences and eventually led to the establishment of a more-or-less standard narrative. The new history writing, which was obsessed with accurate depiction of history through a utilization of primary sources, facilitated this approach. Heinrich Graetz's *Geschichte der Juden*, boosted this approach in its subtitle, "Re-written based on primary sources" (*Aus den Quellen neu bearbeitet*). Initially published between 1853 and 1875, Graetz's *Geschichte* enjoyed three print runs and was translated to English, French, Russian, Hebrew, Yiddish and Ladino before the turn of the century. Graetz utilized, for the first time in a modern history of Jews, many of the positive accounts examined here, and more importantly, accepted and partially inflated their idealized depiction of the prosperous Jewish centuries in Ottoman lands, without pondering about the circumstances in which they were written. Graetz introduced Capsali's narrative as a pure reflection of reality.⁶⁸ Making use of such sources, he spoke of the "elevated position and high spirit of Jews in Turkey" and stated that "the prosperity, freedom, comfort and security of existence among Jews" instigated their "uplifted mood".⁶⁹

Ottoman intellectuals, Jewish or otherwise, followed closely the new historical production in Europe. In Ottoman lands, too, popular historical writing proliferated significantly by the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Parts of *Geschichte der Juden* dealing with the Sephardim were translated and appeared in Ladino journals in Istanbul, İzmir and Vienna before the end of the century.⁷⁰ Graetz's *Geschichte* may have been immensely influential on the new historical conceptualization of the Jewish past generally, Ottoman Jews still felt that the Sephardic perspective was inadequately represented in the book. The German scholar was no doubt a product

68 H[einrich] Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden; Aus den Quellen neu bearbeitet*. Vol. 9: *von der Verbannung der Juden aus Spanien und Portugal bis zur dauernden Ansiedelung der Marranen in Holland (1618)*. Leipzig, 1866, 44; "Kapsali bestrebt sich, nur die Wahrheit zu erzählen." Already Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall had availed himself with the Spanish version of Almosnino's chronicle in his monumental *Geschichte* published during late 1820s and 1830s. See Joseph Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches; grossentheils aus bisher unbenützten Handschriften und Archiven*. 10 Vols. Pest, 1827–1835, Vol. 3, 618, *passim*; Vol. 10, 123. The Austrian Orientalist also prided himself on the utilization for the first time of scores of Ottoman and European primary sources in a history of the Ottoman Empire extensively.

69 Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 398, 418; "gehobene Stellung und Stimmung der Juden in der Türkei."

70 Naar, 'Fashioning the 'Mother of Israel', 352–353, 350.

of his period and milieu: Even with the positive comments about Jews' tranquil circumstances, in the end he projected the prevalent Orientalist perceptions in Europe on to the Ottoman Jews. Thereupon, as Devin Naar has recently shown, Ottoman Jewish intellectuals undertook a solemn challenge against Graetz's narrative which regarded the Ottoman Jews' accomplishments as meager. If anything, then, Graetz's tepid depiction of Ottoman Jews' achievements prompted the Jewish intellectuals to offer revised and revamped accounts of the same story. In order to do that, they once again turned to historical narratives for evidence.

For example, Abraham Danon (d. 1925), a rabbi and an intellectual from Edirne, was the first to not only render and paraphrase Graetz's account of the Sephardic Jews in 1888, but he also altered and adjusted the narrative by adding an extra layer of Ottoman patriotism on it.⁷¹ Danon published the rendering in *Yosef Da'at/El Progreso*, a bi-weekly historical journal that printed Jewish sources on the history of Oriental Jews. Although short-lived, the multilingual journal had an impact, with circulation in cities with large Sephardic populations, and in European cities like Vienna as well. He also printed several excerpts from Usque, Sambari, and other historians of the past.⁷² Thanks to the new media, the new emphasis on the long-told positive story would quickly become the standard narrative of the immigration of Sephardim to Ottoman lands.

Incidentally, another Jewish popular historian of the time, Moïse Franco (d. 1910), the author of the popular *Essai sur l'histoire des Israélites de l'Empire Ottoman*, first published in 1897, also resided in Edirne and belonged to the intellectual network of Danon. Franco often quoted sources published in *Yosef Da'at* in his *Essai*, but also gave biographical details and introduced numerous pre-modern Jewish historians, including those mentioned in this article.⁷³ Using the same sources, Abraham Danon and Moïse Franco would later contribute numerous entries to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*.⁷⁴ The prestigious *Encyclopedia*, published in New York between 1901–1906, distinguished itself with its attention to the usage of primary sources in the German scholarly tradition.

When *Yosef Da'at* was shut down in 1899, David Fresco (d. 1933), the most prominent journalist among Ottoman Sephardim, was willing to publish primary sources on the history of Ottoman Jewry in *El Tiempo*, the first Sephardic newspaper in operation since 1872. Fresco was the chief editor of the newspaper, a firm believer of a distinct Sephardic identity, and a fierce opponent of Zionism. He engaged in advocating the common cultural traits of Ottoman Jewry – such as

71 *Ibid.*, 352–353.

72 Cf. Albert Navon – David Sidersky, *Abraham Danon, 1857–1925: sa vie et ses œuvres*. Paris, 1925, 20.

73 For example, see Moïse Franco, *Essai sur l'histoire des Israélites de l'Empire Ottoman depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*. Paris, 1897, 78–80, 89, *passim*.

74 For example, see 'Bajazet II' in Vol. 2, p. 460 written by Danon.

promoting the study of Turkish or publishing sources depicting a Sephardic past.⁷⁵

Any survey of the historiography of Sephardim in the Ottoman lands, however rudimentary, is incomplete without reference to Abraham Galante (Avram Galanti, d. 1961). Galante was probably the most prolific and academic of the generation of Jews who attempted to write the history of Ottoman–Turkish Jews based on primary sources. His many publications were marked by his utmost attention to Ottoman and Jewish sources. Holding the position of professor of Semitic languages at Istanbul University and later an elected delegate in the National Assembly, Galante was close to the Turkish political establishment, and, one could say, as a proud and politicized Turkish Jew, found comfort in depicting a harmonious existence between Jews and Turks. In the introduction to his influential *Türkler ve Yahudiler*, Galante summarized an article he had penned in early 1920s as a response to an opinion, apparently held by non-Turkish Jews, regarding the general security of Jews in Turkey. In the article, which carried the memorable title “Turkey, a Sanctuary for Non-Liberated Jews: Even their Father Didn’t Do the Good Turkey Did to Jews,” the author listed twelve historical examples which, he claimed, ‘scientifically’ proved that Jews of Turkey led lives absolutely free of hardships.⁷⁶ His euphoric approach to this topic aside, I do not want to do injustice to this remarkable scholar: as a prominent and responsible member of the Jewish community, Galante’s attempts certainly were also meant to mollify anti-Semitic feelings that occasionally erupted in Turkish society and politics. Still, we cannot but ascertain that his well-disseminated scholarship was most instrumental in popularizing the narrative of a congenial Turkish–Jewish friendship.

While the historiography of the Sephardim evolved in these strokes into the twentieth century, sure enough the memory of the expulsion from Spain was reinvented in the Jewish community itself. Drawing upon the writings of authors such as Abraham Danon and indeed some pre-nineteenth century Jewish primary sources, community elites used the reinvented historical narrative to assure their flocks of a longstanding relationship between Jews and Turks.⁷⁷ 1892 marked a turning point in how the memory of Jewish immigration was utilized and politicized; it was the first time that Ottoman Jews commemorated publicly and passionately the momentous, extended event of Jewish immigration to Turkey – now encapsulated to the year 1492.⁷⁸

75 Julia Phillips Cohen, ‘Fresco, David’, in Stillman (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Jews*. Consulted online on 03 November 2017. First published online in 2010.

76 Avram Galante, ‘Türkiye Gayr-ı Müstahlas Yahudilerin İlticagahı: Türkiyenin Musevilere Etdiği İyiliği Babaları Bile Etmemiştir’, *Vakit* (1178 / 21 March 1921).

77 Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era*. Oxford–New York, 2014, 1–3.

78 Cohen followed the emergence and the development of the idea of celebrating the fourth centennial of Sephardic immigration in the Ladino press: Julia Phillips Cohen, ‘Conceptions rivales du patriotisme ottoman: Les célébrations juives de 1892’, in Esther Benbassa (ed.),

Subsequently, the image of the Ottoman lands as a safe haven for Jewish refugees and Bayezid II, the ruling sultan at the time, as a wise and magnanimous sovereign would become the most important tropes of this narrative. The writings of Mercado Joseph Covo (d. 1940) in the Salonican newspaper *La Epoka* deserve to be mentioned as a promoter of a Jewish history narrative with an emphasis on Ottoman religious tolerance and Jews's loyalty to this polity since 1492. Incidentally, Covo claimed direct lineage from Yosef ha-Kohen, the author of the abovementioned *Chronicles of the Kings of France and the Kings of the House of Ottoman Turks* (1554). Evidently well-aware of his great-grand father's historical writings, he claimed to have inherited ha-Kohen's curiosity in the study of the past.⁷⁹

In the year leading up to 1892, the Ottoman Jewish community was engaged in a heated discussion about how to conceptualize and organize the celebrations. Aaron de Yosef Hazan, a journalist from a prominent established İzmir family and an ardent exponent of the 1892 celebrations argued: "Not only will these events be absolute proof of the deep gratitude we feel for the Ottoman government, but they will also be a direct response to the anti-Semites who blame us for being ungrateful and who claim that we are not good patriots."⁸⁰ It is interesting to note, as discovered by Julia Cohen in the pages of Ladino journals such as *La Buena Esperansa* (İzmir), *El Tiempo* (Istanbul), and *La Epoka* (Salonica), that the proponents of this newly invented tradition now referred to the upcoming event as a "sacred anniversary."⁸¹ Eventually, not only did the Jews commemorate among themselves the fourth centennial of their immigration to Turkey with rituals and prayers, they presented the ruling Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) with a translation of the prayers read on the first day of Pesah, embellished in golden letters in an album.⁸² The Ottoman Jewish press published numerous articles, letters, and poems in Ottoman Turkish, French, Spanish and Ladino in the following weeks, expressing the Jews' deep sense of gratitude to the Ottomans.⁸³ Archival records show that numerous letters of indebtedness were sent during that year by the Jewish leaders to the ruling sultan.⁸⁴ Non-Ottoman Jews partook in the display of euphoria, and not without a reason. The Central Committee of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris sent the following congratulatory message to the sultan:

"In the spring of the year 1492, the Jews expelled from Spain found shelter in Turkey. While they were oppressed in the rest of the world, they enjoyed in

Itinéraires sépharades: Complexité et diversité des identités. Paris, 2010, 109–125; Mahir Aydın looked at the Ottoman newspapers and documents: 'Musevilerin Osmanlı Topraklarına Kabulünün 400. Yıldönümü Kutlamaları', *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 13 (1993) 29–39.

79 This paragraph is based on Naar, 'Fashioning the 'Mother of Israel'', 359–363.

80 Quoted in Cohen, 'Conceptions rivales du patriotisme ottoman', 118.

81 *Ibid.*, 119.

82 Avram Galante, *Türkler ve Yahudiler: Tarihi, Siyasi Tedkik*. İstanbul, 1928, 40.

83 *Ibid.*, 41–44; Avigdor Levy, *The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire*. Princeton, NJ, 1992, 1–3.

84 Aydın, 'Musevilerin Osmanlı Topraklarına'.

the lands of your glorious ancestors a protection that never ceased. It permitted them to live in security... The Alliance Israélite Universelle joins the Jews of Turkey; and our coreligionists of all countries join us celebrating the fourth centennial of the settlement of the Jews in Turkey.”⁸⁵

The Alliance had strong ties to the Ottoman lands through the schools it operated, and, no doubt, a vested interest in their smooth operation. It was somewhat opportune that this particular commemoration was re-invented and became public. The Ottoman Jews used the occasion of 1892 to submit their loyalty to Sultan Abdülhamid II, who had been ruling the empire single-handedly. The Ottoman Empire had been dealing with separatist nationalisms for many decades. It was at least convenient for the local Jews to demonstrate their loyalty and faithfulness to the Ottoman government through the celebration and accentuation of a such a memorable event.

The account with a new emphasis quickly established itself as the standard narrative among Ottoman Jews. For example, when Baruch Ben-Jacob (d. 1943) took up position in 1911 against the central theme of the “Jewish sufferings” in European historiography of the Jewish past (notably in Graetz’s *Geschichte*, as Devin Naar suggested), he was glad to declare that, “Fortunately, this sad fate was never ours, we Ottoman Jews, who have been sheltered beneath the holy flag of Osman since our expulsion from Spain and Portugal, more than four hundred years ago. [...] Massacres and persecutions are absent from Jewish history in Ottoman lands.”⁸⁶ This emphatic statement was included in a pamphlet written in Ladino on the history Salonican Jews.

The democratization of history writing made many historical topics popular that had not hitherto been part of active public knowledge. If this was the process through which Jewish immigration to Ottoman lands was rediscovered, the new emphasis on this shared past came during an upsurge of nationalisms. Zionism also made use of collective memories of past traumatic events in Jewish history as catalyst for a new Jewish identity. However, Zionism was mostly a project of the European Jews, and this alone can not be the only reason why the Jewish immigration to Ottoman lands became suddenly such an important topic. On the contrary, a rediscovered and newly-defined momentous historical event of 1492 and the ensuing imagined ‘golden age’ acted as a bond in creating a Sephardic identity. Ottoman Jewish intellectuals argued that their ‘own’ history was yet to be written.⁸⁷ Rejecting Zionism was similarly a marker of Ottoman Jewish identity in the initial stages of redefining Jewishness. An imagined Sephardic community desired to

85 Quoted in Levy, *The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire*, 3.

86 Quoted in Naar, ‘Fashioning the ‘Mother of Israel’’, 338.

87 Julia Phillips Cohen – Sarah Abrevaya Stein, ‘Sephardic Scholarly Worlds: Toward a Novel Geography of Modern Jewish History’, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 100:3 (Summer 2010) 349–384: 357–358.

preserve its distinct identity against an overarching Zionist project spearheaded by European Jews. No doubt, a shared language had always given Sephardic Jews a sense of belonging to a separate community. It is no coincidence that a heightened linguistic interest in Ladino emerged just around this time.

Epilogue

Ottoman historians have long debated the usefulness and historical accuracy of the concept of an 'Ottoman decline'. This paradigm suggests that the Ottoman state and society entered a period of stagnation and decline after the reign of Süleyman I during the latter part of the sixteenth century. It seemed a useful model to explain the failing Ottoman military power from the later sixteenth century onwards – and conveniently, a number of contemporary writers observed this so-called decline as well. In fact, modern historians formulated this model based on none other than Ottoman sources and the very Ottoman intellectuals' observations of the period. Unsurprisingly, these sources became accessible and began to be used widely when Ottoman historiography underwent a similar transformation to that of Jewish historiography during the nineteenth century. Historians used the sources without paying attention to the circumstances in which they were written, and what purpose such observations might have served. Nowadays, the 'decline paradigm' is not considered a useful model for periodization of Ottoman centuries, or for explaining the conditions of Ottoman state and society at the time. It is fair to say that modern historians were partially misled by the Ottoman intellectuals' own observations on an Ottoman decline.

This historiographical conundrum shares many similarities with the reconstruction of the early-modern Sephardic history. Since the distortion is rooted in nothing but primary sources, it creates a historiographical complication for modern historians. As we have seen, evidence of the expressions of indebtedness that the Sephardim felt for the Ottoman polity at the time is not scarce, but their context-specific emphasis should be recognized. Just as an overblown emphasis on an 'Ottoman decline' was based on an uncritical reading of Ottoman sources, the rosy narrative of Jewish experience in Ottoman lands uncritically reflects the sentiments that originated in specific settings and contexts. A fruitful comparison might be to look at somewhat similar expressions of gratitude used by another branch of Sephardim who fled to the Netherlands. Jews who took refuge and settled in the Dutch Republic commonly referred to it as the *terras de libertad* (lands of liberty) in the seventeenth century and glamorized their existence there.⁸⁸

88 Yosef Kaplan, 'Amsterdam, the Forbidden Lands, and the Dynamics of the Sephardi Diaspora', in Idem (ed.), *The Dutch Intersection: The Jews and the Netherlands in Modern History*. Leiden, 2008, 33–62. I am grateful to Benny Bar-Lavi of the University of Chicago for bringing this perspective to my attention.

Sephardic immigration to the Ottoman lands continued to be remembered as a consequential event, especially by the Jews of Turkey, throughout the twentieth century. Its examination will exceed the limits of this article; suffice it to mention that a Quincentennial Foundation established in 1992 passionately promoted a “friendship that goes back centuries between Turks and Jews.” Turkish Jewish and Muslim intellectuals created the foundation with the express goal to “broadcast as fully as possible, both at home and abroad, the humane approach the Turkish nation displayed in opening its arms” to the Jews who fled the Spanish expulsion.⁸⁹ The occasion also gave rise to a flood of publications, many of them commissioned.

A remarkable example sponsored by the foundation is the *Curriculum on Five Hundred Years of Turkish Jewish Experience*, intended for secondary schools, young adults and adults in such settings as youth camps, study groups, and adult education programs. The book is an effort to educate Turkish Jewish children on the harmonious Jewish past in Ottoman lands and opens with a declaration of its objective as: “It is no exaggeration to claim that the Turkish Jewish experience represents the most positive case of a secure, enduring and productive Jewish existence in the history of Jewish communities in the diaspora.” The Quincentennial Foundation also administers a Jewish Museum of Turkey which basically serves as a testament of Jewish gratitude to (Ottomans and) Turks. The contents and the goal of the museum are described by the museum officials as: “The Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews tells the story of 700 years of amity between Turks and Jews. The aim of the museum is to display the humanitarian spirit of the Turkish Nation and to show how the two cultures influenced each other through the past seven centuries.”⁹⁰

If the precarious position of minorities in Turkey forces their hand to be diplomatic about how they represent their history and conflicts with the Ottoman and Turkish authorities, a majority of Turkish Jews’ position seems to be distinctly sincere and is mostly based on an idealized impression of a harmonious, calm, peaceful and fruitful existence in Ottoman lands.⁹¹ It is, no doubt, convenient that the narrative sources scrutinized in this article and widely popularized in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries support that rosy story. It is fair to say that even some scholars found comfort in this euphoric appreciation.

I strongly believe this commonly accepted story is a distorted one. It may well be true that the Ottoman lands presented a relatively safer environment for Jews than many Christian realms in the sixteenth century. However, the query in this article is

89 Cited in Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*, 1.

90 <http://www.aejm.org/members/500-yil-vakfi-tuerk-musevileri-muzesi-the-quincentennial-foundation-museum-of-turkish-jews/>. Accessed on 1 November 2017.

91 Of course, there are other Turkish Jews who are critical of this euphoria; see, for example, Roni Margulies’s note in *Bugün Pazar Yahudiler Azar: İstanbul Yahudileri Hakkında Kişisel Bir Gözlem*. İstanbul, 2006, 60. See also Rifat Bali’s critical scholarship on the history of Jews in modern Turkey.

a historiographical one. It aims to demonstrate how certain context-specific perspectives can be replicated by later generations. Once those contexts are no longer relevant and disappear from the memory, the particular position of one or the other historian may override any possible alternative scenarios that may have affected others in the same society. Modern historians of Ottoman Jewry have produced excellent and balanced studies. We all know that it takes time for professional historians' debates to have an effect, if ever, on popular perceptions. It is important for us to free ourselves of such historical burden.