

ISRAEL

People | Land | State

A Nation and its Homeland

Editor: Avigdor Shinan

Co-editors: Aharon Oppenheimer Avraham Grossman Yehoshua Kaniel



YAD IZHAK BEN-ZVI • JERUSALEM

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The Ottoman Period – The First Centuries

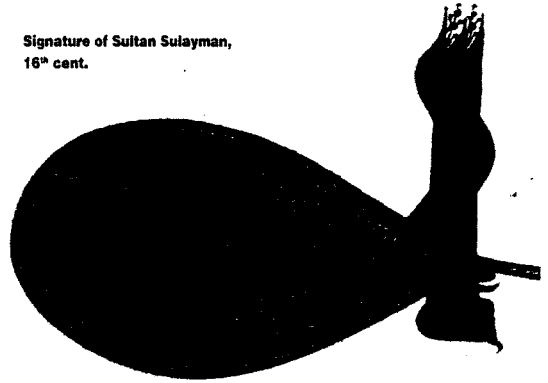
Yaron Ben-Naeh

For the Ottomans, whose empire extended over three continents, the Land of Israel was no more than another peripheral territory, small and impoverished, whose importance derived merely from its religious status and its function as a land bridge between Asia and Africa. The Ottoman period, which began in the late Middle Ages and came to an end in the twentieth century, was one of great importance in the history of the Land of Israel and the Jewish people. In these four centuries the bonds and relationships that linked Diaspora Jews to the Land of Israel and its Jewish community increased and grew stronger. The rise of the Ottomans and their expansive conquests, on one hand, and the expulsions from the Iberian Peninsula on the other, brought in their wake profound changes in Jewish thought. In the sixteenth century, and even later, Jewish thinkers in Islamic lands and in Europe developed new doctrines: living in exile – in the Diaspora – was considered to be a sin. Some viewed immigration to and settling in the Land of Israel as a binding commandment and an end unto itself, while others went so far as to connect immigration with the speeding up of Redemption, thereby transforming the settlement of the Land of Israel into a means.

The Ottoman period is characterized by the abundance and variety of information available to the modern scholar, making it possible to draw a full and balanced historical picture. Jewish sources include itineraries, chronicles, letters, isolated documents, and an extensive corpus of printed and manuscript religious works. Muslim sources are chiefly the records of the *shari'a* (religious) courts and documents from the Ottoman archives in Istanbul, while Christian sources take the form of itineraries, in addition to archives of European trading firms and of the churches and monasteries in the Land of Israel.

In 1453, Sultan Mehmed II conquered Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, resettled the city and made it the capital of his empire, renaming it Istanbul. When he died in 1481 the Janissaries raised his son Beyazid to the throne. His reign was marked by cultural reactionism and religious extremism, yet this did not prevent Beyazid from permitting thousands of Jews to enter his domains. The wars he conducted with the Mamluks and the Venetians did not result in substantial border changes, and he even avoided responding to the growing power of Safavid Persia (from 1501). After the revolt of the Kizilbash (Shi'ite Turkoman tribes in eastern Anatolia) and their rapid westward advance, Selim dethroned his father Beyazid and usurped his rule. He took immediate action, massacring the supporters of the Persian Shah Isma'il and advancing eastwards. Selim defeated the Shah's forces in the battle of Chaldiran (August 1514), conquered and annexed eastern Anatolia and the state of Dhu-l-Qadr, and seized the territories of present-day Iraq and the city of Tabriz. Increasing bitterness among his

Signature of Sultan Sulayman,
16th cent.

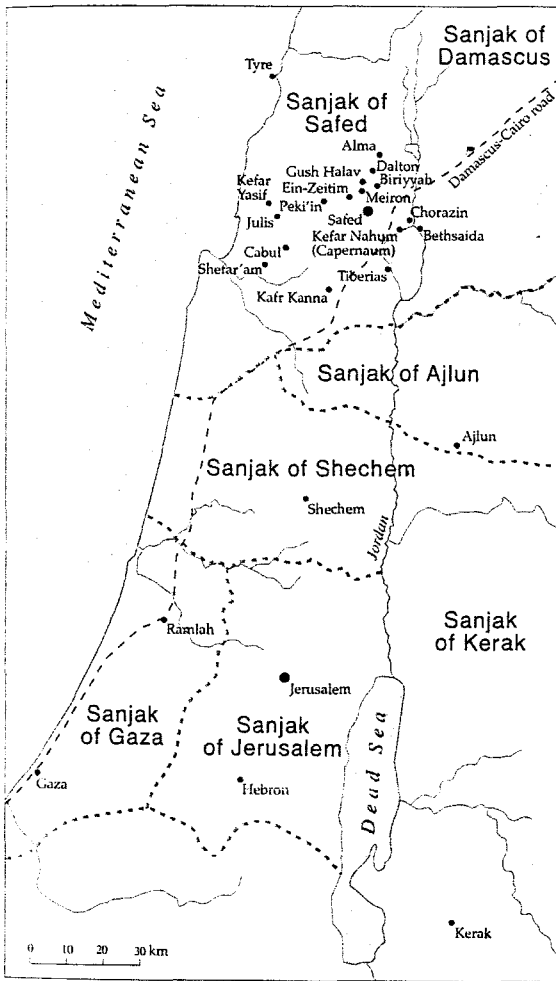


soldiers due to conditions in the field and the approaching winter led him to halt his advance into Persia and withdraw his forces to Anatolia.

The Mamluks, Shah Isma'il's allies who ruled Egypt and the province comprising of Syria and Palestine, were not a significant rival for the Ottoman power. Already in the late fourteenth century, corruption had become rife in the Mamluk military and governmental systems. Heavy taxes led to the ruin of agriculture and the decline of trade, while the army avoided introducing any innovations in weaponry and tactics. The Ottomans took

advantage of the opportunity with which they were presented: within two and a half years they had put an end to the Mamluk state. Selim turned southwards and in August 1516 his armies vanquished the troops of the elderly Mamluk sultan, Qansuh al-Ghuri, at the battle of Marj Dabek, near Aleppo. Qansuh and many of his commanders were killed in the battle, the caliph was taken prisoner, and the Syrian cities fell to the Ottomans. From Damascus, Selim sent his men further southwards and within a short time Druze leaders and Bedouin sheikhs appeared before him to pledge their loyalty. As the army advanced along

the seacoast in the direction of Gaza, delegations of dignitaries from the central region of Palestine came to Sinan Pasha, the grand vizier, to express loyalty and submission to the sultan. Resistance in the southern cities of Ramlah and Gaza was immediately suppressed with great cruelty and it seems that all of Palestine passed into Ottoman hands in the course of that year. Chaos prevailed in Cairo, the Mamluk capital, while the attempts of Tuman Bey – the recently enthroned Mamluk sultan – to reorganize the army and the administration proved to be ineffective. Contradictory rumors concerning the Ottoman army and Selim's intentions aggravated the situation. In January 1517, over 20,000 soldiers assembled under Tuman Bey's command at Raidaniyya, near Cairo, to face Selim's forces. The Mamluks suffered a crushing defeat, their ruler was taken captive and hung publicly at the gates of Cairo, and all Egypt fell to the Ottomans. The Hejaz, with its Islamic holy places, recognized the sovereignty of the Ottoman sultan, who was now called "the Servant of the Two Holy Places," and in fact became the caliph. Khayr Bey, formerly the Mamluk governor of Aleppo, was now appointed to govern Egypt, and Janbardi al-Ghazzali, one of Tuman Bey's commanders, was appointed governor in Damascus, from where he ruled over Syria and Palestine. Selim returned to Istanbul, where he died in 1520. When his son Suiayman came to the throne, Janbardi intended to become an independent ruler and took up arms against Suiayman. He began to advance his army and even conquered several Syrian coastal cities. He was eventually defeated, decapitated, and his head sent to Istanbul. The sultan speedily set out to set up a new administrative system that would be loyal and efficient, and ensure order, security, and proper tax collection. Most of the territory of Palestine was now part of the province (*vilayet*) of Damascus, which was itself



Palestine under Ottoman rule in the 16th cent., showing places where Jews resided



Sulayman the Lawgiver (1520-1566), a miniature by Nigari, 1560 (TP)

divided into five districts (*sanjaks*): Jerusalem, Gaza, Shechem (Nablus), Ajlun, and Safed.

Until the death of Sulayman in a military campaign in 1566, the Ottomans had conquered a vast territorial expanse in North Africa, eastern Europe (the entire Balkans came under their control), and the eastern Mediterranean islands. The reign of Sulayman, known as "the Lawgiver" or "the Magnificent," is considered the height of the Ottoman Empire from all points of view - military, political, economic, and juridical, as well as cultural. The imperial capital, Istanbul, became a cultural, artistic, and scientific center, due in no small part to the patronage of senior court officials. During the reign of his successor, Selim II, the struggle intensified on the eastern front against the Persians, and even more so against the Russians. The Ottomans conquered Cyprus in 1571, but shortly afterwards suffered a severe defeat in the naval battle of Lepanto. In the course of this battle with the Spaniards almost the entire Ottoman fleet was destroyed. Despite the speedy restoration of the fleet, the empire had lost its predominance in the Mediterranean basin. Selim died in 1574, to be replaced by Murad III, a weak ruler. The need to maintain a constantly growing army and to conduct warfare on two fronts weighed extremely heavily on the imperial treasury which had to contend with rising inflation and dwindling revenues from taxes and duties due to changes in trade routes and other factors. Ottoman currency was depreciated and heavier taxes were

imposed. The harmful influence of the sultan's advisors and the women of the seraglio together with increasing strength of the Janissaries in the imperial court led to a decline in the quality and abilities of the administrative and governmental system, which was tainted by growing corruption on all levels. Several violent uprisings erupted in the capital itself. In 1595, Mehmed III came to power and was immediately forced to deal with the Jelali revolts that continued until 1610. The situation in the 1620s steadily deteriorated: Cossack raids, renewed revolts and disorder in Anatolia and the capital, the murder of Sultan Othman II in 1622 together with intrigues at court did not leave much room for hope. The empire seemed to be quickly approaching its end. However, in the seventeenth century it made a surprising recovery, and many historians nowadays see that age as one of transition which prepared the Ottoman realm for the transformations that would confront it in the coming centuries.

The second half of the reign of Ahmed III (1703-1730) is known as "the Age of the Tulips." This extended period of peace was accompanied by economic growth and flourishing culture, as well as by the penetration of European influences. The popular uprising of 1730 led to the deposition of the sultan and the end of an era. His successors adopted a more conservative policy, once again becoming involved in several wars. The peace treaty of



Ottoman warriors in the 15th cent., reconstruction by Angus McBride

Kuchuk Kainarji (1774) once more indicated the empire's weakness vis-à-vis Europe, and encouraged displays of independence on the part of powerful groups and local governors. Real reforms only began during the reign of Selim III (1789-1807), presaging the great change that was to occur in the nineteenth century.

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Under Ottoman Rule

When Ottoman rule was established in Palestine, steps were taken to incorporate that country into the imperial administrative structure, and to improve the conditions of daily life there for the benefit of its inhabitants and the state's revenues. Old highways were renovated and new ones constructed. Way stations and caravansaries were built along the roads as facilities for travelers and for collecting duties. Efforts were even made to suppress highway bandits and to move the Bedouin tribes away from the settled areas. As early as 1525, the first known detailed population census was conducted in Palestine; the entire population was recorded, real estate was surveyed and registered, and tax rates were set. Throughout the century, several additional censuses were conducted. Despite the difficulties that they pose

for the researcher, the censuses are of immense value due to the information they contain about living conditions in the Land of Israel and its population in the sixteenth century. Only sporadic censuses were conducted during the following centuries. As a result, the allocation of taxes was not based on accurate, up-to-date data. Tax farmers and their representatives tried to collect larger sums, and taxes were levied according to a compromise reached between state officials and the religious minorities, usually with the help of sizeable bribes. Obviously, in times of crisis the financial burden placed on both Muslim and non-Muslim subjects increased.

The censuses indicate the size and distribution of the population of Palestine in the sixteenth century, and enable us to discern changing demographic patterns. About 250,000 persons inhabited the country in the sixteenth century. The basic units were the city and the village, the tribe and the *hamula* (clan or extended family). Most inhabitants were peasants (*fellahin*) who lived in rather harsh physical conditions. Since the conquest there had been rapid growth in the country's population, the number of villages, and the extent of tilled land. In the second half of the century the trend was reversed, and the population diminished once again. Among the common crops were wheat and barley, various pulses, fruit trees (and their by-products, such



Jews in Istanbul: left - a physician and a merchant; right - a married woman in European dress next to a widow. Manuscript, 1574 (GL)



The mosque of Ahmed al-Jazzar (1775-1804) in Acre, his capital

as olive oil and soap), sugar, and cotton. New crops were introduced from the Americas in the eighteenth century: tobacco, corn, tomatoes, potatoes, and prickly pear (cactus fruit). In suitable areas the inhabitants raised sheep and cattle (in the swampy areas in northern Palestine, even water buffaloes) and produced dairy products. In the coastal cities, as well as Tiberias, they also engaged in fishing.

Ottoman officials in small numbers, assisted by troops, conducted the administration from the few cities. The urban population earned its livelihood from trade and crafts (leatherwork, goldsmithery, and metal work). The Jews brought with them the craft of weaving, dyeing, sewing, and embroidering woolen cloth. In sixteenth-century Safed and Tiberias the Jews also engaged in silk weaving. The Christian inhabitants were mainly employed in producing religious artifacts and souvenirs for pilgrims.

From the late sixteenth century signs of decline were quite evident in the provinces, making life more difficult for the population. One of the outstanding manifestations of the authorities' weakness was the deterioration of internal security. In practice, safety was ensured only within the walled cities. Bandits controlled the roads once again, and Bedouin tribes raided settled areas. Governors and officials permitted themselves to ill-treat the local population and oppress them without fear. The declining power of the central government, the deterioration of the central administrative framework and the difficulty it encountered in enforcing its authority and directives in the

provinces, stimulated local leaders to implement their aspiration for independence. The Druze emirs of the Ma'n clan - Korkmaz, the son of Fakhr al-Din I, and even more so, Fakhr al-Din II, who formed strong connections with European states such as various Italian city-states - controlled most of the territory of Lebanon and northern Palestine. In the central region the families of Turabay and Mehmed ibn Farukh (for his governorship in Jerusalem, see below) gained much strength. The vigorous efforts of Murad IV, who exploited rivalries and conflicts between the heads of the powerful families in Palestine, finally brought about the fall of Fakhr al-Din, who was executed in Istanbul in 1634 together with his sons. Stabilization at the center

of Ottoman rule prevented the rise of such local rulers for about a century, becoming possible again only during the reign of Ahmed III and his successors, Mahmud I and Abdul-Hamid I. In 1703, a local revolt against the central authorities broke out in Jerusalem which became known as "the Revolt of the Naqib al-Ashraf." Representatives of the central government were refused entrance to the city, and Jerusalem was actually under siege for three years. In the 1730s Daher al-'Umar, who began his career as a tax farmer in the District of Sidon, gained considerable power, exercising control over Galilee from his fortified position in Tiberias. In 1750 he conquered and fortified Acre, making it his capital. Daher forged ties with European merchants, and in the early 1770s extended his control southwards by occupying large territories in central Palestine. By this stage he had already lost favor with the Ottomans and was murdered in the summer of 1775. There is some resemblance between him and Ahmed al-Jazzar, who was appointed to replace him as governor of Acre which now became the capital of the Sanjak of Sidon. Al-Jazzar gradually gained strength, creating his own large mercenary army, and in the 1790s became governor of the Vilayet of Damascus. It was during the terms in office of Jazzar and his successor that the influence of a Jew named Hayyim Farhi reached its peak. He served as Jazzar's advisor and minister of finance.

Napoleon's forces advanced northwards after their conquest of Egypt, taking Gaza, Ramlah, and Jaffa. Ahmed al-Jazzar was actually the only man standing in Napoleon's way. From 1799,

he avoided cooperating with Napoleon and withdrew to Acre, until the French army retreated after failing in all its efforts to conquer the city. Jazzar died in 1804. The careers of Daher and Jazzar illustrate the ambivalent relationship between local rulers and the central government in Istanbul. On one hand, the government feared an overly strong and independent local ruler. On the other hand, a local strongman brought administrative and financial benefit to the imperial treasury. The central authorities did not follow a consistent policy in dealing with such cases. Sometimes they tried to subdue a rebel through force, while at other times they acquiesced in post factum recognition of his status by granting him an official appointment, and even additional territories.

European influence in Palestine, particularly that of the French, increased during the eighteenth century as a direct result of the development of commerce between the European powers and the Ottoman Empire through the Levant trading companies, as well as the rising interest that the European powers displayed in sites holy to Christendom and in the Christian communities living in the Holy Land.

Ottoman Constuction in Palestine

The Sixteenth Century

Large scale building activities were conducted throughout the country. During the reign of "Sulayman the Lawgiver," Jerusalem went through a building boom of major dimensions that shaped

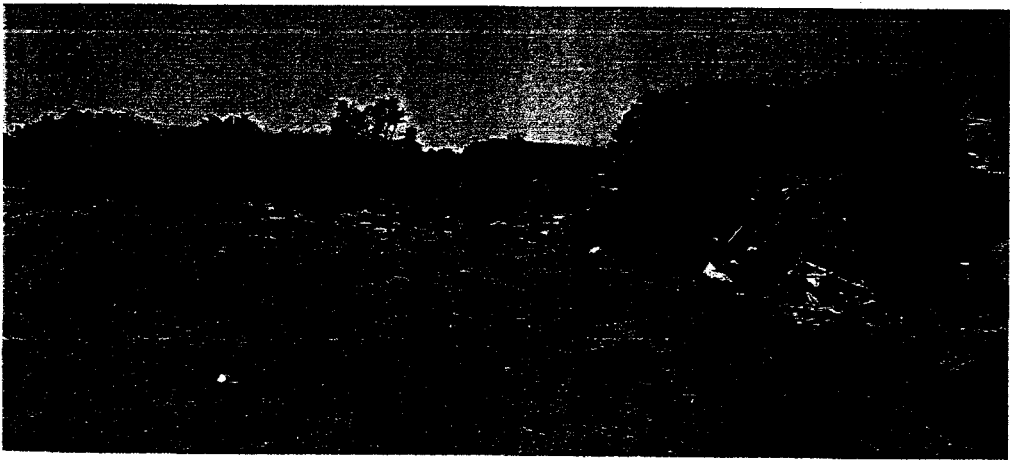
the urban landscape that we see before us today: the Dome of the Rock was thoroughly renovated, and several memorial structures built on the Temple Mount; the city walls and the citadel were rebuilt; markets were established, as were drinking fountains and public facilities. The Ottomans also restored the city's water supply system.

A large fortress was constructed between 1571 and 1573 at Rosh Ha-Ayin (Antipatris). Another fortress was erected at Jenin, and that at Bet-Guvrin was restored. In the northern part of the country commercial roads were renovated and several caravansaries built along them, including Khan al-Tujjar in Lower Galilee which was restored and enlarged at the end of the sixteenth century by the governor of Damascus (who also erected a mosque inside it), the khan known as Khirbet Job Yusuf near Ami'ad, Khan Qamun near Yokne'am, and Khan Jaljuliya in the north of the Afek Valley. Customs stations were located at some of these places.

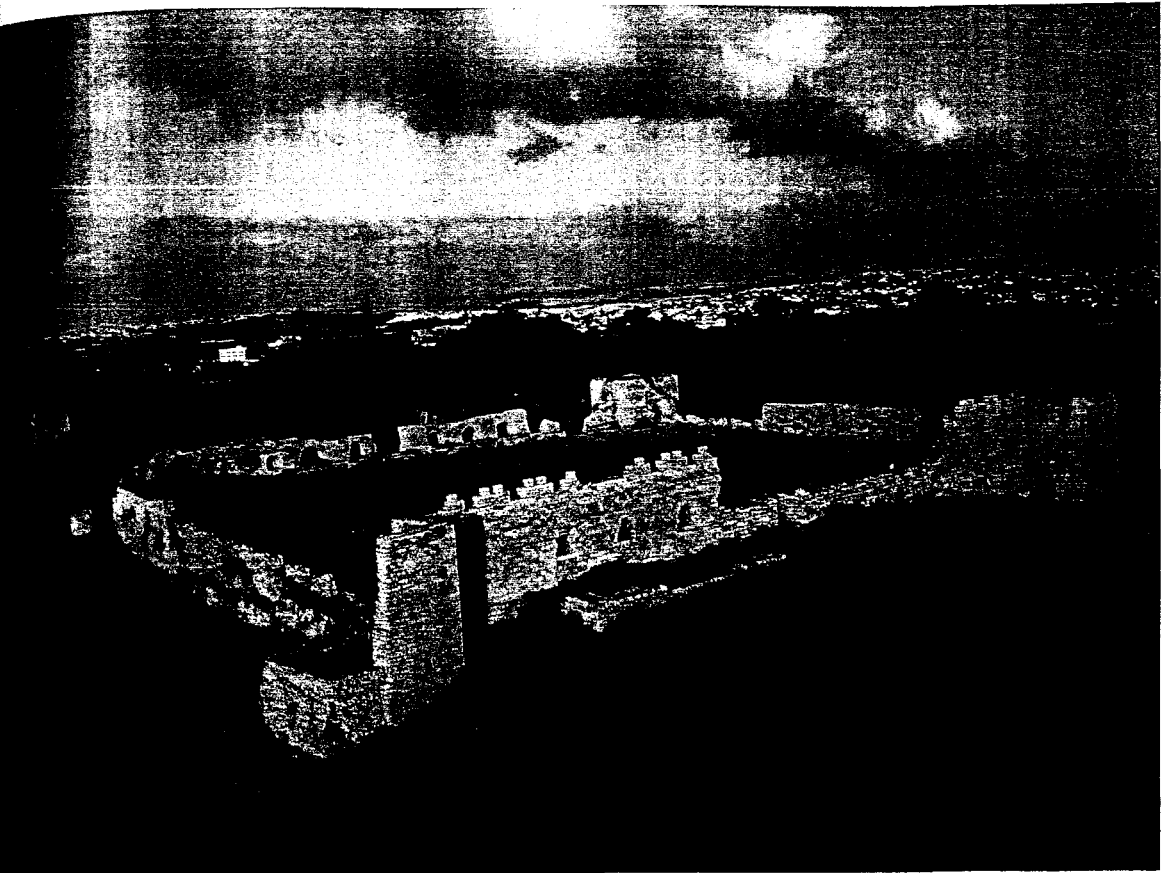
Safed and Tiberias, which had become the two major cities in northern Palestine, quickly grew and prospered as a result of a large influx of Jews. They were both walled cities in which many houses were built. Some of the fulling mills that Jews established as part of the woolen industry can still be seen in the stream canyons in the vicinity of Safed. In the 1580s, a "Citadel of the Jews" was built inside the city, now called Khan al-Pasha.

The Seventeenth Century

In Jerusalem, building and renovation work was mainly conducted on the Temple Mount – construction of the Dome of Yusuf Agha, renovation of the Dome of Joseph in 1681 and



Khan Jaljuliya east of present-day Kefar Saba. Built in the Middle Ages, it was renovated in the early Ottoman period as part of an effort to restore trade routes in Palestine



An Ottoman fortress erected in 1571-1573 on the remains of the city of Antipatris built by King Herod Antipas

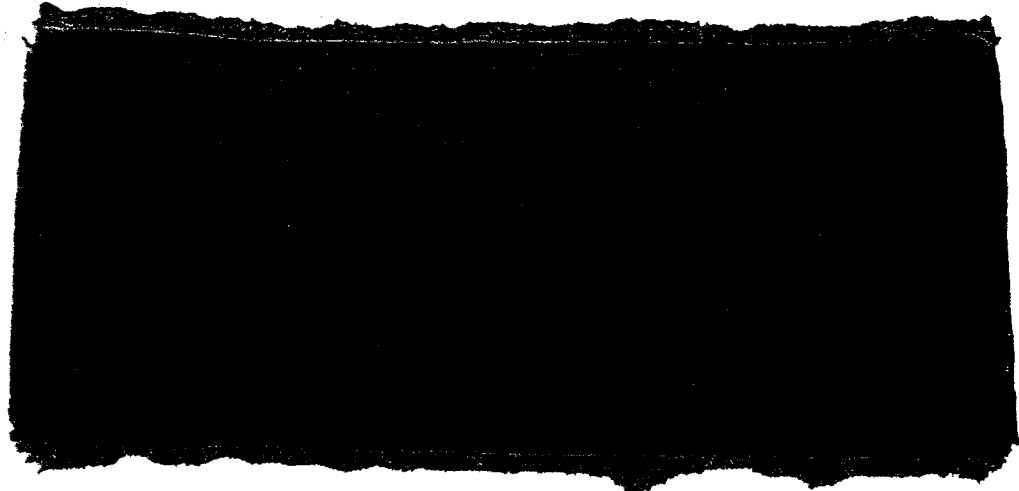
restoration of the Sabil of Sha'alan in 1628 - by the city's governor, Muhammad Pasha. In addition, a minaret was erected in the courtyard of the Citadel in 1655. The water supply system was restored, and as early as the beginning of the century the structure known as Qasr al-Buraq was built in order to defend Solomon's Pools. The structure above Rachel's Tomb was rebuilt by Jerusalem's governor in 1623 and, apparently, also that over the tomb of the Prophet Samuel (Nabi Samwil).

The Eighteenth Century

Building activity in Jerusalem was still centered on the Temple Mount, and included restoration of al-Aqsa Mosque (1702-1703); the *mihrab* (prayer niche) of the Dome of the Chain was surfaced with decorated ceramic tiles; Mustafa, the governor of

Jerusalem, constructed the Sabil al-Shaykh Badr (1740) and Ahmad Qollari paved an open space set aside for prayer (1760).

Efforts were made to fortify and develop the coastal cities upon the initiative of the central government. At Jaffa (the main port of entry for many of the pilgrims, which had become an important commercial harbor), a military garrison was stationed and a citadel built upon the orders of the grand vizier Rami Pasha in 1703, a city wall was erected by Daher al-'Umar, and a moat dug around it in the last third of the eighteenth century. At Haifa, two citadels were built to protect the entrance to the harbor, and troops and cannons stationed there to defend it against pirates (1722-1725). In the last quarter of the century, Daher encouraged permanent settlement near the citadels.



The Tomb of Rachel near Bethlehem – a structure that went through several stages of construction. Below – the site as painted by Luigi Mayer in 1803; above – its later appearance (on a woven carpet) after being renovated upon the initiative of Sir Moses Montefiore in the 19th cent.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the governors of Palestine initiated various works of construction in Galilee. Members of Daher's family built fortresses at Yokne'am, Deir Hanna, Shefar'am, Yehi'am, Safed, Sepphoris, and elsewhere. At Tiberias, the sixteenth-century walls were renovated and a mosque erected. Acre, which became the capital of the Vilayet of Sidon, went through a building boom during the time of Ahmed al-Jazzar. The Great Mosque and other mosques were constructed, as well as city walls, a *hammam* (bath house), caravansaries (Khan al-'Umdan, Khan

al-Afranj, Khan al-Tujjar), market-places, and even a *seraya* to house the local administration. The aqueduct built by Selim Pasha was in use up to the twentieth century.

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The Jews in the Land of Israel from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries

About 6,000 Jews lived in the Land of Israel towards the end of Mamluk rule, a diverse population both in its origins and customs. There were Arabic-speaking Musta'arabs (ancient inhabitants of the country), Maghrebis from North Africa, immigrants from the Iberian Peninsula including former crypto-Jews (whose number steadily increased, many of them having arrived after years of wandering). Italians, and Ashkenazim from Germany and Central Europe. Karaites lived in Jerusalem throughout this entire period and were formally considered to be part of the Jewish community.

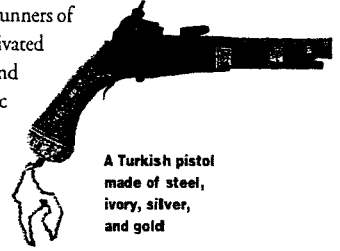
The rate of growth of the Jewish population during the Mamluk period greatly increased following the expulsions from the Iberian Peninsula, and especially



after the conquest of Palestine by the Ottomans. It was also related to the awakening of messianic hopes at the time and in subsequent years. With the beginning of Ottoman rule, most of the Land of Israel's Jews lived in Jerusalem, Safed, and Gaza. There were also small communities in Ramlah, Hebron, Shechem (Nablus) - alongside an ancient Samaritan community - and in several coastal cities (Sidon, Caesarea, and Jaffa). Dozens of Musta'arab families lived in various villages in Galilee where they engaged in agriculture (Banyas, Ein Zeitun, Biryah, Almah, Peki'in, Kefar Hananyah, Kefar Kanna, Kefar Yasif, Shefar'am, and Kabul). The censuses indicate a continuity of Jewish settlement throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and then a disappearance of a considerable part of those small Jewish communities in the seventeenth century. Over the course of time, the Musta'arab community became assimilated and almost totally disappeared. From then on the Sefardi group, with its unique lifestyle, customs, and language (Ladino), became the dominant Jewish ethnic group in the country. The rapid increase in the number of Jews, 10,000 at its height, reversed itself in the third quarter of the sixteenth century from which time it steadily decreased until the mid-eighteenth century. Simultaneously, the mood of messianic expectation that had typified the Jewish people in the Land of Israel at that time waned and was replaced by a sense of "exile in the [Holy] Land," to use the phrase coined by Israel Bartal.

As a result of the rule of independent governors, such as those of the Ma'an family in northern Palestine and the Ibn Farukh family in Jerusalem, the Jewish community was in difficult straits. From the 1620s on, the total Jewish population was less than 4,000. Only towards the end of that century did a certain recovery become evident. The energetic activity of The Istanbul Committee of Officers of Jerusalem (and later of the other holy cities) established in 1724 brought about a turn for the better, and from the late 1720s the Jewish community once again steadily increased in numbers. Among the well known immigrants who arrived then were R. Hayyim Abulafia of Izmir who settled with his followers in Tiberias and in fact was the renovator of Jewish settlement there (1740), R. Hayyim ben Attar of Morocco (1741), the Italian, R. Moses Hayyim Luzatto, who resided in Acre (1743), R. Abraham Gershon of Kutow (1746), R. Menahem Mendel of Peremyshlyany, and R. Nahman of Horodenka (1764), the latter three being leading Hasidic rabbis. Most of the immigrants continued to arrive from other areas within the Ottoman Empire and North Africa, and only in the last quarter of the century did the number of Ashkenazim significantly increase. The immigration of Hasidim in 1777, led by R. Menahem Mendel of Virebsk, R. Abraham Kohen of Kalisk,

and R. Israel of Polotsk, and the immigration of their adversaries in Eastern Europe, the Prushim who were disciples of Rabbi Elijah (the "Gaon of Vilna"), in the early nineteenth century, symbolized the beginning of a change in the map of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel. They were the forerunners of the beginning of ideologically motivated organized groups of immigrants, and became the basis for the Ashkenazic ultra-Orthodox "Old Yishuv." Despite the increase, the number of Jews in the Land of Israel at the end of the eighteenth century did not exceed 6,000.

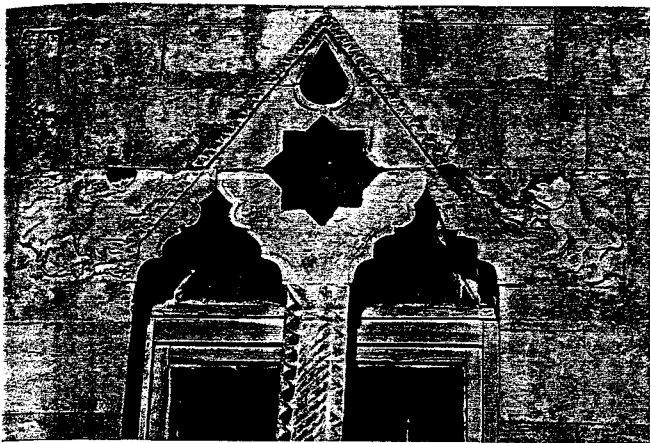


A Turkish pistol made of steel, ivory, silver, and gold

The two principal and most important communities during the Ottoman period were in Jerusalem and Safed. The largest Jewish community in the second half of the sixteenth century lived in Safed. However, from the seventeenth century onwards, the Jerusalem community once again predominated and retained that status in the future as well. Among the important traits of the Jewish communities in Palestine after the sixteenth century were, therefore, communal diversity and the lack of genealogical continuity. Renewal and continuity of settlement were achieved through unceasing immigration rather than by natural increase. This was inevitable given the typical demographic cross-section of the immigrants (single men and women, generally of an advanced age), the high death rate, and the increasing rate of emigration from the Land of Israel.



An Arab encampment on Mount Carmel, above Haifa, engraving by Laurent d'Arvieux, *Voyage dans la Palestine...Amsterdam, 1718*



An ornated window in the Synagogue of R. Isaac Luria Ashkenazi, Safed

Safed

Safed was set in the heart of a rich agricultural area. Due to its geographic proximity, it was closely linked to Damascus, the capital of the vilayet, and to other cities in Syria. At its peak, the Jewish population of Safed numbered 5,000 to 6,000 souls who were divided into *kehalim* (congregations) on the basis of their countries of origin, in the pattern familiar to us from other cities in the Ottoman Empire at that time. Among the congregations were those of Castile, Seville, Cordova, Ashkenaz, and others. Safed included many former crypto-Jews who had immigrated to the city, where they returned to the fold of Judaism in expectation of the oncoming Redemption.

The city's security was enhanced when a wall was built around it in 1549, and by the construction of a fortified caravansary that served for residence, trade, storage of merchandise, and safeguarding of money and valuable objects from bandits and fires. Many residents engaged in the wool weaving industry, while local merchants traded with cities in Egypt, Turkey, and Italy.

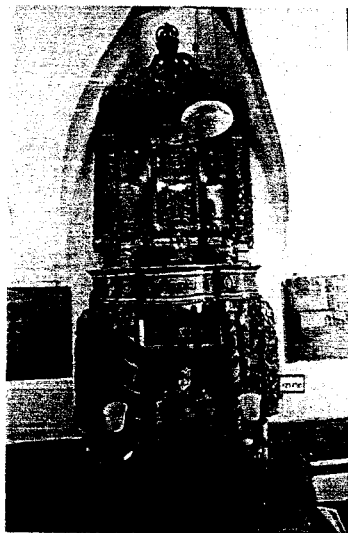
Economic prosperity and the diversified social infrastructure attracted scholars and well-known rabbis to the city, and thus Safed became a Jewish cultural center of the first order for the span of a generation. The printing shop of Eliezer Ashkenazi of Prague, who had engaged in the printing trade in Istanbul, operated in the city for about a decade (1577–1587). One of the noteworthy results of the concentration of sages in Safed was R. Jacob Berab's attempt to renew *semicha* (ordination). He intended this step to eventually lead to the establishment of a new Sanhedrin with extremely broad religious powers, and thus perhaps, to indirectly hasten the coming of Redemption. In 1538, a convocation of sages in Safed approved

the idea, authorizing Jacob Berab to ordain worthy candidates. However, the bitter opposition of the Jerusalem sages, led by R. Levi ibn Habib, eventually brought about a cessation of these efforts. Before fleeing to Damascus, Jacob Berab had ordained four of his students and subsequently these four gave ordination to several disciples of their own.

Among the famous sages of Safed were R. Joseph Caro (author of the *Shulhan Arukh*), R. Moses of Trani, R. Abraham Shalom, R. Yom Tov Zahalon, R. Ele'azar Azikri, R. Hiyya Rofeh and R. David ben Zimra, one of the greatest experts on halakhah, who for several years resided in Safed after having earlier lived in Egypt and Jerusalem; the leading Kabbalists R. Moses Cordovero,

R. Isaac Luria Ashkenazi ("ha-Ari") and R. Hayyim Vital; the Bible commentator R. Moses Alshekh; and the well-known liturgical poets R. Solomon Alkabez and R. Israel Najara.

This "golden age" did not last for long. Some see as the first stage in the crisis the imperial edict by which five hundred or even a thousand Jewish families were to be banished to Cyprus, which had been conquered by the Ottomans in 1571, shortly before the edict was issued. Causing more dire consequences for Safed was the decline in profitability of the trade in woven woolen



The Ark of the Law in the Synagogue of R. Isaac Luria Ashkenazi

goods as a result of cheap European imports. In a matter of a few years this industry totally collapsed, bringing to an end the mythical and glorious age of the Safed Jewish community.

Tiberias

Doña Gracia Nasi leased Tiberias and its surroundings from the authorities in 1560–1561. A water supply system was installed,

community was even established in Acre. During all this time, and afterwards as well, Safed and Tiberias were the main destination for immigrants from eastern Europe who apparently wanted to establish a spiritual center for Hasidism in the Land of Israel. As in earlier times, their encounter with the local Jews (Sefardim from the Ottoman lands and Jews from North Africa) was no easy matter, and there is evidence of tension among the



Tiberias in a photograph by Felix Bonfils, late 19th cent. The photograph was subsequently colored, apparently by his son Adrien

buildings erected, a wall was built around the city, and mulberry trees were planted in order to establish a silk industry. Despite this, few Jews migrated to Tiberias. After the death of Doña Gracia in 1569, the Jews of Tiberias came under the patronage of another court Jew in Istanbul, Don Solomon ibn Ya'ish. After his death a society to aid Tiberias was established in the imperial capital. Jews also settled in nearby villages – Kefar Nahum (Capernaum), Chorazin and Bethsaida – apparently mainly engaging in fishing.

In the course of the first half of the seventeenth century the Jewish communities of Safed and Tiberias to all intents and purposes ceased to exist. A renewed and substantial increase in the Jewish population of Galilee occurred in the second third (and especially the last half) of the eighteenth century due to the efforts to the Istanbul Committee to renew settlement in Tiberias, and to immigration from eastern Europe. Several villages in the area (Shefar'am, Peki'in, Kefar Yasif) were resettled and a Jewish

various ethnic Jewish groups. The powerful earthquake of 1759 dealt a heavy blow to the Jews of Safed, thus encouraging the rise of the community in Tiberias.

Jerusalem

Most of Jerusalem's inhabitants were Muslims, and it continued to be not only a holy city but also an important Muslim theological center, as it had been during the Mamluk period. Many religious academies and Sufi monasteries were active in Jerusalem during the sixteenth century. Christians, too, lived in the Holy City, divided into various denominations: Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenians, Roman Catholics, Copts, and others. The status of the Christian communities was unstable. It was determined to a great extent by the standing of their representatives at the Sublime Porte (these were the heads of the Eastern churches or ambassadors of European states in the capital),

and by their ability to meet the frequent financial demands. Side by side with the many Christian pilgrims who came to Jerusalem there was a gradually growing number of European travelers and merchants who visited the Holy City. The Jews were a minority, living in the present-day area of the Jewish Quarter.

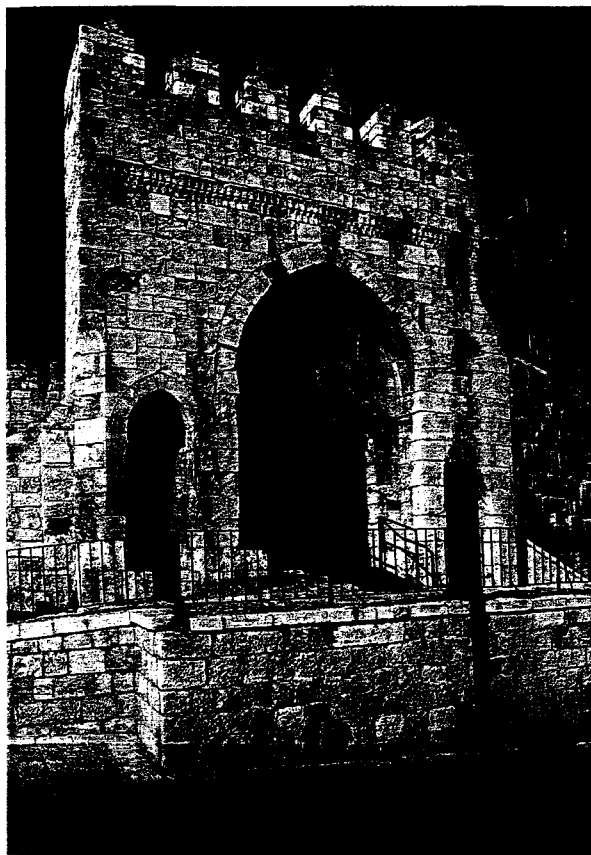
Throughout the whole period there were tense relations between the various religious communities in the city, although not necessarily on religious grounds. Periods of political unrest, war, or natural disasters made the situation even worse. Most incidents originated in the ruler's desire to extract money from his non-Muslim subjects. Time after time, controversies and court litigation on various levels arose between the Jewish population and the city's rulers over synagogues, the ownership of cemeteries, enforcement of legal restrictions on members of non-Muslim

communities and the tax rates imposed upon them, and so forth. When an appeal was made to the central government, it intervened and demanded fair treatment in accordance with the law. However, Istanbul was far away and its power greatly limited.

Though the Jerusalem community grew following the expulsions from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 and 1497, it still lagged behind Safed, which became the Jewish metropolis of the Land of Israel. The Jerusalem Sefardic community included immigrants from all Islamic lands, alongside which lived a small Ashkenazic community. Among the well-known sages living in Jerusalem at the beginning of the sixteenth century were Joseph ben R. Perez Colon from Italy and several Spanish emigrants: R. Jacob Berab, R. Levi ibn Habib, and the Kabbalist R. Abraham ben R. Eliezer ha-Levi. In mid-century the Jerusalem community

reached its peak, numbering nearly two thousand persons out of a total population of 15,000. They engaged in commerce, crafts, and agriculture, as well as financial services, while others lived off their savings. Like the other cities in the country, Jerusalem too experienced a certain demographic decline from the late 1560s. A notable deterioration of their situation occurred during the rule of the city governor Abu Sayfeyn, when – among other events – the Synagogue of Nahmanides was closed down in 1586. Towards the end of the century, R. Bezalel Ashkenazi arrived from Egypt, becoming the leading spiritual authority in Jerusalem.

Safed's distress was Jerusalem's gain, as its community gained in importance and from the beginning of the seventeenth century became the predominant Jewish community in the Land of Israel. In addition to those who moved to Jerusalem from Safed, there now came immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as from Italian city-states. Among the newcomers from Europe was R. Isaiah ha-Levi Horowitz, who came from Prague. At the beginning of the 1620s the Jewish community in the Holy City numbered about 2,000 persons, and perhaps even more. This felicitous condition came to an end when Mehmed ibn Farukh was appointed governor of Jerusalem in 1625. His despotism and greed totally impoverished the community (as they also did to the Christians), many of whose members fled the city while this was still possible. Those who stayed behind were compelled to do forced labor and to pay huge sums, many of them being imprisoned



The Citadel of Jerusalem, rebuilt together with the city walls in the 16th cent. by Sultan Sulayman as part of his great construction enterprise in Jerusalem



The Istanbul Synagogue in Jerusalem, drawing by W.H. Bartlett, early 19th cent.

until they paid. There were even threats that the Jews would be expelled. The community's emissaries aroused the established, well-to-do Jews of Istanbul to action. The latter protested Ibn Farukh's cruelty to the Sublime Porte. Their efforts were crowned with success, and instructions to dismiss Ibn Farukh were sent to the governor of the province at Damascus, but he did not quit Jerusalem until the end of 1626, leaving it "like a pond with no fish." At this time, one Jerusalemite sage printed his book, *Horvot Yerushalayim* (The Ruins of Jerusalem) in Venice. It described the dreadful events of Ibn Farukh's tyranny and stressed the importance of maintaining a continued Jewish presence in Jerusalem. From then on less than 1,000 Jews lived in the Holy City out of a total population of 10,000. It was only towards the end of the seventeenth century that the community slowly began to grow again.

The community was administered in this period by officers chosen by its tax-paying members. The huge debts of the community obliged it to send many envoys to Diaspora countries. The existence of an Ashkenazic congregation with semi-autonomous status within the framework of the Sefardic community gave rise to endless disputes over the distribution of the funds that were sent from Europe, and over the extent of its participation in and obligation towards the financial management of the community at large. Though there was some amelioration of the situation in the following decades, the Jewish community was in a persistent state of debt, which in fact was never wholly settled. In this period relations strengthened

between Jerusalem and the Diaspora communities. Some of the immigrants wrote works describing and praising the Holy Land, and extolling the religious obligation to tender financial support to the sages and poor of the Holy Land.

The growing Jewish population was in need of additional synagogues. Prohibition of the construction of new synagogues forced the Jews to pray in study houses and private homes. The major place of worship was the synagogue known today as "Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai." Next to it was located "*kak tar*" (the Holy Congregation "Study of the Torah") which was later known as the Synagogue of Elijah the Prophet. Apparently the Ashkenazim also had a synagogue in the city that was located within the Ashkenazic courtyard. It was here that the "House of Jacob" Synagogue was erected in the mid-nineteenth century, also known as the "Hurva" Synagogue (*hurva* = ruin, in Hebrew), in memory of the Ashkenazic synagogue that had gone up in flames 130 years earlier.

Among the special outstanding personalities who lived in the Holy City during the seventeenth century were the Kabbalist R. Jacob Zemah, and the intellectual and physician R. Raphael



Interior of the Ramban (Nahmanides) Synagogue in the Jewish Quarter, Jerusalem. Its proximity to the al-'Umari Mosque aroused the Muslim residents to demand the synagogue's closure, which they succeeded in attaining in 1586 after a lengthy conflict

Mordechai Malki, both of them former crypto-Jews who had immigrated to Jerusalem and produced many writings there. Another unique individual whose career was linked to Jerusalem was the false messiah Shabbetai Zevi. He arrived in Jerusalem after being expelled from Izmir and wandering through cities in the Balkans. In the early 1660s he lived in Jerusalem and was even sent to Egypt as an emissary of its community, where he made the acquaintance of the Chelebi Raphael Joseph. In Gaza, Nathan



Afbeelding van den gewaentent miszeten Joodischen Koning
SABETHA SEBI
 Met zijn byzettingende Profet, oorgehoert in den jaer 1664. en 1666
 vele daer van toe noch toe bekent is, of van de Joden geseyt wort
 uit de manen lazarigste bieren, en schriften opgereckent.

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A broadsheet printed in Amsterdam in 1665, dealing with Shabbetai Zevi

Ashkenazi revealed to Shabbetai Zevi that he was the Messiah. Upon his return to Jerusalem the rabbis rejected his messianic pretensions, warned him, and finally caused him to leave the city. He returned to Gaza and from there traveled to Izmir. Rumors that he was the Messiah circulated throughout the world of Jewry causing great excitement and expectations of approaching Redemption. His conversion to Islam became common knowledge late in 1666, putting an end to the hopes that masses of believers had placed in him. The number of those who believed in him steadily dwindled, particularly after his death in 1676 and the death of his prophet, Nathan of Gaza, in 1680. Jerusalem was apparently one of the few cities in which a group of Sabbatean believers continued to exist even after his conversion to Islam. It is also known that certain emissaries from the Land of Israel during the last third of the seventeenth century were crypto-Sabbateans who exploited their missions to spread Sabbatean rumors among the believers in the Diaspora. Sabbateanism was one of the major factors motivating Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. Among such well-known immigrants were R. Judah Hasid and his entourage who came from Europe in 1700, and the wealthy R. Abraham Rovigo who immigrated from Italy with his group in 1702. From Izmir came several sages who tended towards Sabbateanism, including R. Jacob Israel Algazi and R. Hayyim Abulafia.

In the course of the seventeenth century there were various study houses and *yeshivot* active in Jerusalem. Among the most

important was the veteran local yeshiva, "Yeshivat ha-Torah," which was sustained by endowments and contributions from abroad. The "Beth Jacob" (House of Jacob) yeshiva was founded in the middle of the century by the benefactors Jacob and Israel Vega from Leghorn. It was directed by R. Jacob Hagiz (a native of Fez, in Morocco) and after him by R. Moses Galante. Another yeshiva bearing the same name was active in the city in the nineties, named after Jacob Pereira of Amsterdam and directed by R. Hizkiah da Silva.

In the last decade of the seventeenth century great efforts were made once again to raise large sums of money in central and eastern Europe to pay off the debts of the Ashkenazim in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem community was once again in a state of crisis at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The arrival of the entourage of R. Judah Hasid, a plague that broke out in the city, and the revolt of the Naqib al-Ashraf (1703-1705) caused the flight of many of the city's Jews which increased the burden of debt on the remaining members of the community. The Ashkenazim once again fell into debt when they took large loans at high interest rates. Despite the efforts of court Jews and the Austrian ambassador in Istanbul, all efforts to achieve a compromise failed, inducing the Arab creditors to set fire to the Ashkenazic courtyard and its synagogue in 1720. With the establishment in 1726 of the Istanbul Committee of Officers for Jerusalem and its energetic efforts to organize communal life in the Holy Land and to institutionalize support for it, the Jerusalem community once more mounted the path of progress. The debts were spread out over a period of years and the community's affairs were administered by an official who was



R. Joseph Hayyim David Azulai (bynamed "Hida," 1724-1806), one of the great sages of Jerusalem, an emissary, bibliographer, and famous halakhic decisor



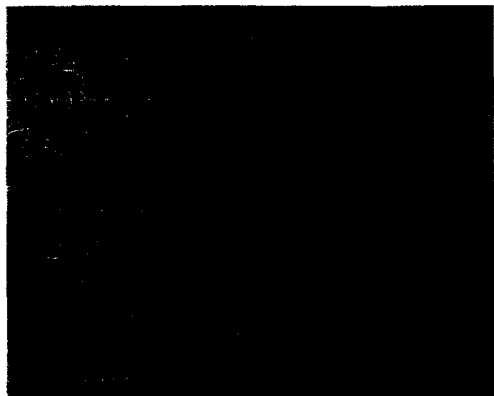
A firman (imperial writ) of Sultan Selim III dealing with collecting money from the Jews of Jerusalem

appointed by the committee in Istanbul. The committee did not limit itself to gathering and transferring funds; in fact it dealt with all communal affairs, instituting various regulations and even intervening in appointments and the assignment of sages to the various yeshivot. Despite the constant tension between the committee and its officials in the Land of Israel, on one hand, and the local leadership and elite on the other, the stream of immigrants (many of them poor) grew, and there was a sizeable increase in the city's Jewish population. It was only in the middle

of the eighteenth century that a well ordered, permanent communal organization began to develop, taking its final form in the nineteenth century. The number of Jews in mid-eighteenth century Jerusalem is estimated to have been about 3,000 persons, diminishing once again in the last quarter of the century.

Many important rabbis lived in Jerusalem in the eighteenth century (most of them originating from various Turkish cities), leaving behind them dozens of halakhic essays in manuscript and print. Among the famous personalities who lived or were raised

in Jerusalem, R. Hayyim Joseph David Azulai (1724-1806), a native of Jerusalem and fruitful author in many fields who served as an emissary and officiated for many years as the rabbi of Leghorn



Ramiah in an etching by Oibrecht Dapper of 1677 (courtesy of M. Pollak Gallery, Tel Aviv)

in Italy, is outstanding for his biography and intellectual skills.

Several yeshivot were established in the city with donations from Italy, Amsterdam, North Africa, and Turkey. These institutions were named after their founders, who provided support for their maintenance and many scholars. Specially important among them was the Kabbalists' yeshivah, "Beth El" (House of God), founded in 1737. Among those who studied there were Kabbalists who had immigrated from various countries, including some crypto-Sabbateans. Cultural life flourished in Jerusalem, and diverse religious writings were produced there.

We know that two additional synagogues were established in Jerusalem in the eighteenth century adjacent to the older ones: the first being the "Middle" synagogue, while the second, known as the "Istanbuli," was founded later.

Other Communities

The Hebron community was generally overshadowed by that of its neighbor, Jerusalem. This community became firmly established after purchase of the famous "courtyard" which became the center of Jewish life in Hebron until the twentieth century. It grew and diversified in the course of the seventeenth century, coming to include the descendants of Musta'arabs, Sefardim, Ashkenazim, and Maghrebis. They lived under more difficult conditions than their brethren in Jerusalem, for they were subject to the arbitrary moods and cruelties of local sheikhs, and sometimes fell victim to hostility among the rival factions in the city. The old Jewish community in Gaza continued to exist

until the nineteenth century, although it had dwindled considerably during the eighteenth century. There was a non-permanent Jewish community in Ramlah which was an important trading center and which also served as the usual refuge to which the Jews of Jerusalem fled during plagues

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The Land of Israel and the Diaspora

The ties between the Diaspora and the Jewish population in the Land of Israel were closer and more widespread during the Ottoman period than in earlier times. From the seventeenth century on, the various Jewish communities in the Land of Israel were totally dependent on financial aid and the stream of immigrants from Diaspora communities. Though political upheavals and wars disrupted these ties, they were never completely severed. The inclusion of Palestine in the Ottoman empire facilitated the formation of especially close ties between communities in Anatolia, the Balkans, the Near East, and Egypt, and the Jews of the Land of Israel. Nor did the authorities prevent the passage of immigrants, emissaries, or funds into Ottoman territory from European lands, which were considered enemy countries. The tradition of extending aid, together with geographic proximity and cultural affinity, seem to have been the chief causes for the increased proportion of former residents of other parts of the Ottoman Empire in the Jewish population of the Land of Israel. Personal and family ties reinforced the special link between the communities in Turkey and the Jews of the Land of Israel beyond the ordinary relationship that always existed between immigrants and their cities of origin or former communities. This relationship was characteristic of the entire period and constituted a basic criterion for the distribution of funds from abroad and an important component in the identity and lifestyle of the immigrants.

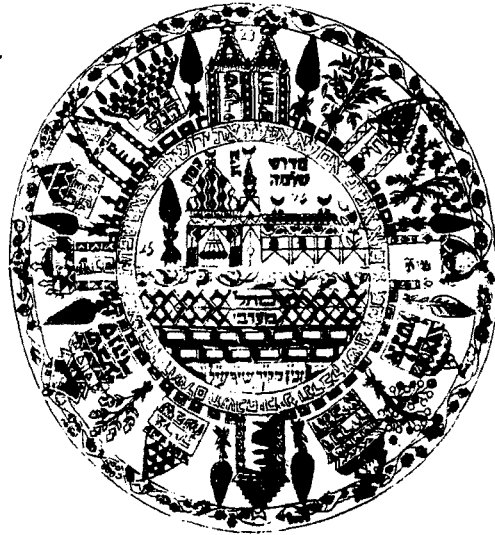
What was the conceptual basis of this relationship? Efforts on behalf of the Land of Israel were not only the result of a unique cultural-religious atmosphere, but also a function of economic ability, and in this context, of course, there were differences within the community. The random references in the Jewish sources to immigrants and donors mainly relate to the financial and cultural elite. Middle and upper class Jews, including scholars and congregational officers, are mentioned as being involved in all affairs having to do with the Land of Israel, as office holders in the congregations, and as having the means to contribute and bequeath sizeable sums for the Torah scholars and the poor in the Land of Israel.

The absence of a clear-cut decision between the conflicting opinions of Maimonides and Nahmanides as to whether the commandment of settling in the Land of Israel was obligatory in the present, left much leeway for the halakhic decisors of the period, who adopted a rather pragmatic approach: the Land of Israel and its inhabitants have great virtue, but this is not a commandment from the Torah, and although residing there has "some aspect of fulfilling a commandment," priority is still given to those who seek the welfare of their families in the Diaspora. The practical implications of this approach were reflected in the responsa by sages living in Islamic countries to the recurrent questions posed to them concerning marital separation when one member of a married couple wanted to immigrate to the Land of Israel, or in cases in which someone reneged on a vow to immigrate there, as well as in controversies over changing the specified use of religious trust funds. There were three major opinions in this period concerning the issues of the status of immigration to, and settlement in the Land of Israel:

A) A messianic outlook that viewed immigration to and settling in the Land of Israel, taken together with the study of Kabbalah and prayer, as a means to hasten Redemption. This view was commonly held by sages of Spanish origin who engaged in the study of Kabbalah in the sixteenth century. It almost completely disappeared during the first six decades of the next century, but was reawakened with even greater intensity in the wake of the Sabbatean movement. Although Sabbatean doctrine did not ascribe special importance to the Land of Israel, its followers considered the Land of Israel to be the arena of the future revelation of Shabbetai Zevi which would be followed by final Redemption. The immigration of such persons to the Land of Israel in the course of the first half of the eighteenth century was closely linked to various calculations of the End of Days. It was against such a background that several members of the Kabbalistic circle in Brod, which was connected to the first Hasidim, settled in the Land of Israel during the second half of that century.

B) A traditional, more neutral, approach was accepted by most Jews throughout the centuries. It was based on belief in the power of prayer and study in the Land of Israel, and on the virtue of burial in its hallowed soil. Such beliefs were widely accepted by Jews in the Islamic countries and, in conjunction with the circumstances noted above, was the reason for their being the majority of the Jewish population in Palestine until the nineteenth century. Throughout the Ottoman period, ancient concepts about the importance of living in the Land of Israel, immigration to it and burial there were reformulated, developed, and widely diffused. The Kabbalistic scholars who lived in

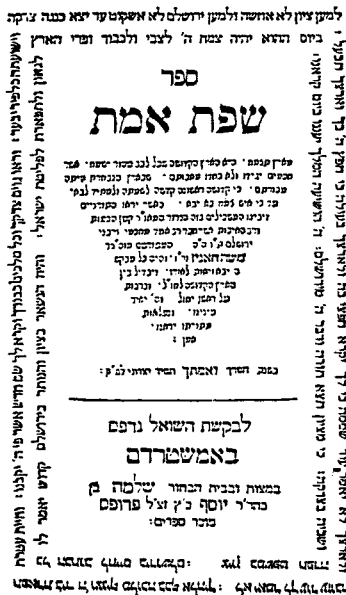
sixteenth-century Safed were especially instrumental in shaping such concepts, stressing motifs such as that the sins of those who reside in the Holy Land would be forgiven, or that it was advantageous to be buried in its soil. More frequent appeals by Jews in Palestine for financial aid from abroad made Jews conscious of the mutual relationship between the Land of Israel and the Diaspora and instilled a constant awareness of the importance of a continuous community there, and of the vital necessity of preserving its ancient cemeteries and holy places. The explicit demand for material support as being an obligation of Diaspora Jewry appeared only in the eighteenth century. Such support was now conceived as being active participation in this important endeavor, and no longer just an act which bestowed



Detail from the map on p. 224, Italy, 18th cent. The name "Midrash Shelomo" appears above a structure in the center, thus adopting the Crusader designation of al-Aqsa Mosque as "Solomon's Temple"

on the donors a reward from Heaven.

C) The third outlook was one of total rejection, for practical and ideological reasons, of the sanctity of the Land of Israel and the importance of residing there. This stance prevailed among certain Jewish segments, chiefly among former crypto-Jews in Western Europe. Many believed that enough Jewish capital had been forwarded from Jewish communities throughout the world to the Land of Israel, and that they must now first care for their own poor. There were even those who totally rejected the importance and significance of the Land of Israel for the Jewish



Title page of *Sfat Emet* by R. Moses Hagiz (Amsterdam, 1707), a book advocating the merits of the Land of Israel and of residing there

in the writs that accompanied emissaries and verified by those who returned to or left the country) – produced a real image of the Land of Israel which could not have served as an incentive for mass immigration, nor to speak of attracting young families. And indeed, the image of the Land of Israel had lost all its real, earthly attributes; it was now conceived as an abstract, hallowed essence. Its characterization as a place of burial was visually reinforced by portrayals of the holy places and tombs adorning synagogues in many lands. From the seventeenth century on, we find a return to the traditional pattern of immigration that was typical of earlier periods: immigration of individuals only (the elderly and scholars), who lived on allocations and grants from their communities of origin. The number of immigrants was large enough to balance out the natural decrease in population, and in the absence of genealogical continuity there was a rather speedy turnover of the Jewish population in the country. The two main groups among the immigrants were scholars and elderly widows, whose ideal was limited to study, prayer, and burial in the soil of the Holy Land. Young scholars came to study in the yeshivot of Safed and Jerusalem, later returning to their own countries in search of employment. Others came in their old age to spend their final years and die in the Land of Israel. Students of the Torah, on various levels of erudition, formed a significant element in the Jewish community of the Land of Israel, and it would seem that their proportion in the population even increased throughout the eighteenth century. The percentage of elderly widows among the immigrants was especially high, and the responsa literature contains dozens of references to women immigrants, including members of families of renowned scholars. At this stage of their lives, these women had concluded their social obligation to produce and raise offspring. Their dowries and inheritances granted them some degree of independence and the ability to finance their journey and ensure a limited sustenance, so that they could devote themselves to prayer, the performance of ritual commandments, and the acquisition of a burial plot in one of the four “holy cities.”

People and attributed no importance at all to residing within its borders. Some of these extreme opinions were documented in the polemical work of R. Moses Hagiz, *Sfat Emet* (Language of Truth; Amsterdam, 1707) that set out to defend the virtue of the Land of Israel. In the second half of the eighteenth century such opinions reappeared among Jewish intellectuals in Germany, from where they were adopted by European Reform Judaism.

Immigrants and Immigration

... When our eyes see this awakening among men of renown in the cities of Turkey, the Maghreb, Ashkenaz, and Poland who, even though they live at a far distance did not avoid coming along, and every year there are caravans of visitors who come, some to reside and settle down, and some at least to prostrate themselves... (R. Moses Hagiz, *Sfat Emet*, p. 25b).

In the sixteenth century Palestine was blessed with favorable political and economic conditions. In this period its Jewish population was “normal” from the demographic and economic standpoint, and even a cross-section of the immigrants shows diversification, including entire families and people of all ages and social classes.

The harsh reality that prevailed once again from the end of that century – difficulties of earning a livelihood, a heavy tax burden, and the cruelty of the local Arabs (described over and over again

The importance attached to burial in the soil of the Holy Land also explains the widespread phenomenon of bringing remains of deceased men for burial in the Land of Israel, usually in Jerusalem. That this was a widespread custom is attested to by both Jewish and non-Jewish sources:

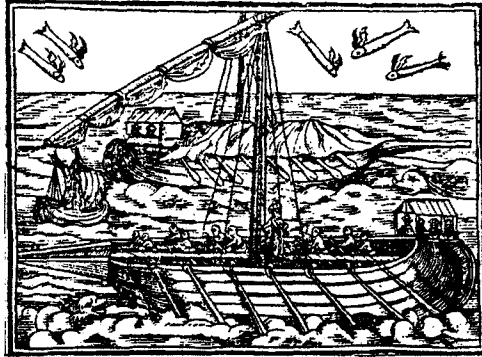
The flesh consumed, they dig up the bones of those that are of their families whereof whole bark-fuls not seldome do arriva at Ioppa to be conveyed and again interred at Ierusalem imagining that it doth adde delight unto the soules that did owe them and that they shall have a quicker dispatch in the general iudgement... (George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey begun in 1610*, London 1615).

Whoever could not finance the transfer of his bones to the Holy Land after his death made the effort to at least have earth from the Land of Israel placed in his grave. Others – few in number – came for sundry reasons. For example, some of the immigrants in the late seventeenth and the first third of the eighteenth centuries were Sabbatean believers who, relying on various calculations of the End of Days, looked to a second and final revelation of Shabbetai Zevi in the Land of Israel. Some hoped to produce, through their immigration, a certain dynamic that would hasten Redemption. A quite unusual group was comprised of indigent Jews who arrived from Amsterdam in the third and fourth decades of the seventeenth century (and perhaps later) not of their own free will. The leaders of the Portuguese Jewish community had sought to rid themselves of this element and sent them eastwards. One of the destinations was the Land of Israel, and these immigrants were provided with an annual sum after their arrival.

The immigrants made lengthy preparations for the voyage. They had to raise the money to pay for the journey, to sell or distribute their property, to purchase goods that they would need in the future, and – above all – to ensure their sustenance in the Holy Land. Bringing with them a large sum of capital was not usual nor was it recommended, and whoever was able to do so made arrangements with his heirs, legal representatives or business partners, so that he would enjoy a fixed yearly allocation after his immigration. Transfers to beneficiaries in Palestine were executed by means of promissory notes and by the use of a sophisticated credit system. The first stage in the journey was to reach a port of embarkation in Italy or the Levant from where ships sailed to the shores of the Land of Israel at regular intervals, mainly in the summer months. The port of Istanbul was one of the most important points of departure in the eastern Mediterranean basin, also serving immigrants from eastern and central Europe. There were those who availed themselves of the opportunity to have their books printed in one of the printing establishments in the area. Sailing was dangerous, since the forces of nature and pirates were a constant threat in this region. Pirates were especially pleased to take hapless Jews captive since they were sure to be ransomed. The journey, conducted under difficult conditions, was rather costly. In addition to money to pay for passage and food, one needed to fit oneself out with various items, and upon arrival in the Land of Israel it was necessary to pay taxes and duties, such as a road tax and at times even a poll tax. Every ship carried dozens, or even hundreds, of passengers in addition to merchandise, and many of the travelers were Jews. The ships anchored at Rhodes and Cyprus, where the passengers replenished their supply of fresh

food and made other purchases, from where they continued to Sidon, Acre, and Jaffa. Another, perhaps more popular route, led to Egypt and then overland along the coast to Gaza, Ramleh, and Jerusalem. Dangers lurked on these roads, making an escort of Ottoman soldiers a necessity.

The immigrants were in regular contact with their cities of origin and families. This was a vital connection, for in the absence of regular support it would prove to be difficult to live in the country for an extended period of time. Such ties were also important for the immigrants' morale, and some took care to ensure that they would not be forgotten even after their death.



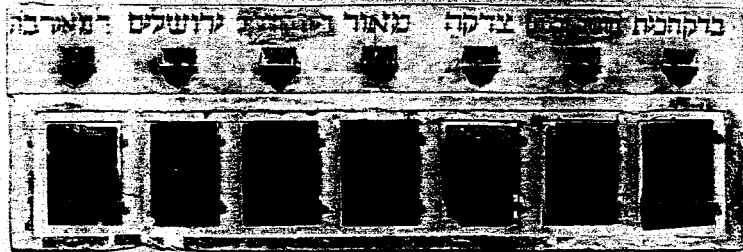
A ship approaching Jaffa, from *Konstantinopel und Jerusalem* by Solomon Schweigger, Nürnberg, 1608

Those who sought to take up residence turned to acquaintances (people from their hometowns or local brokers) to help them find a place to live. The Ashkenazim had an especially hard time since they spoke neither Arabic nor Ladino (the Judeo-Spanish language of the local Jews). The increasing number of Ashkenazim in the eighteenth century reinforced their inclination to break away from the Sefardi community.

Not all the travelers came with the purpose of staying; some came for relatively short periods of time (mostly around the holidays) in order to visit sacred tombs. Pilgrimage was a well-established custom throughout the Middle Ages, an expression of popular faith in the special qualities attached to tombs of holy men. In many cases, immigration was the fulfillment of a vow made at a time of duress, somewhat like a charm against death or severe disease. Pilgrimage sites were concentrated in two areas: Galilee, where many of the sites had been discovered or identified when the Safed Jewish community was at its height; and Jerusalem and its vicinity. Among the most important sites was Nabi Samwil, the tomb of the Prophet Samuel, which also attracted local residents and served as a significant source of income for the

Jerusalem Jewish community. On the traditionally accepted anniversaries of the death of certain holy men, popular

and in many Diaspora cities special funds were established for that purpose. Basically, contributions for the Holy Land were



Charity collection boxes in the synagogue in Firenze, 17th cent. The proceeds of the two boxes on the left were intended for the Jews in the Land of Israel

made on a voluntary basis, and the donors believed that the merits of study and prayer in the Land of Israel could save them and were beneficial to their souls in both this world and the next. Women accounted for a large percentage of the donors. Prayers were recited in the synagogues of the Land of Israel for the welfare of Diaspora communities

celebrations were held at their supposed tombs with the participation of local residents and pilgrims. The Tomb of Rachel and the Tomb of Simon the Just were also popular destinations for pilgrims, and of course the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron as well as additional, more isolated, tomb sites throughout the area. In the eighteenth century various guidebooks were written providing the pilgrim with travel routes, as well as instructions and prayers to be recited at each site.

The large number of pilgrims during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is reflected in contemporary sources. Pilgrimage was described in itineraries written by both Jews and Christians, and incidental testimonies have survived about overcrowding and jamming in the synagogues when the pilgrims were in town. This situation led to the composition and printing of many books and pamphlets dealing with the holy places. In the responsa literature we find several discussions as to whether pilgrims were obliged to celebrate two full, consecutive holy days on the festivals of Sukkot, Passover and Shavuot, as Diaspora Jews are required to do, whereas Jews living in the Land of Israel are obliged to celebrate only one day.

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Economic Aid and Political Support

Until the decline of Safed, the Jewish community in the Land of Israel was almost in no need of aid from abroad. Safed's severe crisis and the extensive efforts that were made on behalf of its Jewish community towards the end of the sixteenth century signify the beginning of organized support for the Jews in Palestine. More and more emissaries were sent to gather money,

and special blessings were said for contributors and the officers of the special funds. In the seventeenth century there was as yet no universally held concept that assistance to the Land of Israel was tantamount to a duty, since the inhabitants of the Holy Land atoned for the sins of all Diaspora Jews and their prayers were beneficial to all Jewry. It seems that *Sfar Emet*, by R. Jacob Hagiz, was a landmark in this respect, and only from the eighteenth century onwards do the emissaries' writs of authority contain an explicit demand that Diaspora Jews donate funds for their brethren in the Holy Land.

We should distinguish between the voluntary contributions of individuals and the institutionalized efforts of the community. As for individuals, in the absence of means to finance immigration to the Land of Israel, or to bequeath or endow for such purposes, the contribution of the Jewish lower classes was limited to putting a small coin into the collection box for the Land of Israel in the synagogue, or to responding to this or that emergency fund appeal. Those better off could make one-off donations of relatively large sums, either as endowments or as bequests. These funds were generally contributed while specifying the beneficiary: the poor of a certain community, those studying Torah in one of the holy cities, or "the poor of the Land of Israel" in general. Funds that were sent without a specified purpose were assigned to cover debts, and sometimes disputes broke out over the manner of their allocation. Pilgrims to the Land of Israel used to give alms generously upon their arrival.

On the congregational or communal level there were diverse patterns of fundraising, depending on the organizational tradition customary in each country. For example, Ottoman Jewry dealt with matters concerning the Land of Israel in a

manner different from that of Italian Jewry, which at that time conducted diverse, much more meticulous efforts. In the cities of the Ottoman Empire the person responsible for organizing this aid was the congregational rabbi, and only from the eighteenth century did this responsibility pass to the general officers of the congregation. Money raising efforts by means of funds and societies, the usual form in Italy and Europe, was not customary in Turkey and the Balkans.

Formal recognition of the duty to assist the Land of Israel and of the importance of a continuous Jewish presence there took two forms: financial assistance, and reduced communal taxes for those who intended to immigrate to the Land of Israel. In contrast to the big and irregular fundraising efforts of the late sixteenth century, in which money, cloth, and food were collected and sent, the major component in seventeenth-century aid was financial. In the budgets of the Jewish communities of Istanbul and other cities in the second half of the seventeenth century one could find a sum of money that was annually transferred to Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias, and Hebron, the "four holy cities," and distributed among them by a pre-set formula of allocation. This sum was funded by regular taxes that each community collected from its members. Some of the income from fines imposed by individuals on themselves or by the public were also designated for the poor of the Holy Land. Many communities enacted ordinances that reduced taxes to be paid by immigrants to the Land of Israel. Whereas any person who left the city was obliged to pay taxes for two or three years, and if he left property behind he was still considered a resident, the immigrant was released from this obligation and sometimes he was exempted from paying taxes on the property that he left behind, so that he would be able to provide for himself during his residence in the Land of Israel.

The monies collected were apparently coordinated in each congregation by a "treasurer of [the poor] of the Land of Israel," and when emissaries from the Holy Land arrived, the treasurers examined their trustworthiness, read the writs of delegation that they carried, and gave them some of the funds. Not all the money was transmitted through the emissaries. Many communities preferred to dispatch the funds directly to the holy cities. Since it was not customary to make transfers of funds in cash, on account of the danger involved, they used promissory notes that were an accepted means of payment in interurban and international trade, and were also accepted by Muslim creditors in Jerusalem. The responsa literature of the period is replete with questions dealing with donated funds and their transfer, and with controversies over who should take priority - the local poor, or the indigent and the sages of the Holy Land.

The Emissaries and the Centers for Fundraising on Behalf of the Land of Israel

They however send from Saphet some of their Rabbins of the greatest learning and integrity to Constantinople, Smyrna and other trading cities of the Ottoman empire where wealthy Jews reside, and some of them even visit Germany, Holland, England and other places not subject to the Inquisition collecting by this means considerable sums to be distributed among the Jews at Jerusalem, Hebron, and Saphet though the greatest part always falls to the latter... (Van Egmont and Heyman, *Travels*, II, p. 42).

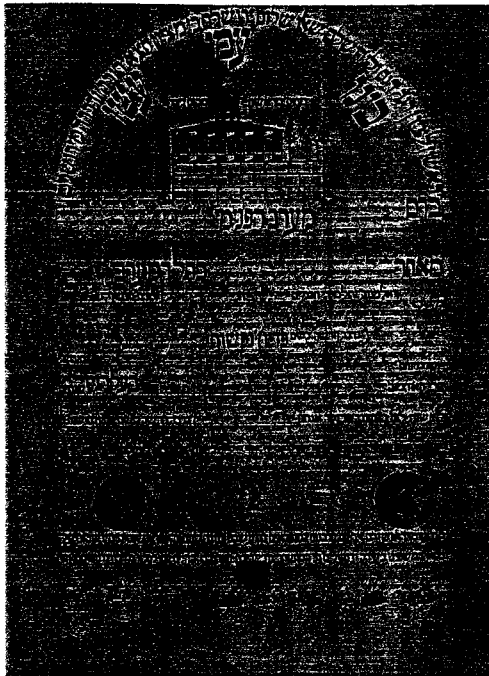
As already noted, there were no fixed patterns in the sixteenth century by which support was tendered to the Jewish population of the Land of Israel. As we have seen, it was the difficult conditions resulting from the collapse of the Safed community that led to an increasing number of emissaries being sent to the Diaspora countries to collect funds. It was during that century that the dispatch of envoys became standard practice. From the second quarter of the seventeenth century onwards, emissaries from the "holy cities" began to set out regularly for the Diaspora, bearing



R. Isaac Carigal of Hebron, the first emissary to arrive on a fundraising mission in America in 1773

“general” and “particular” writs of delegation. The texts of these writs were quite similar, with only the relevant details being changed from time to time. The authors described the size of the Jewish population, recounted its difficult condition at length and with exaggeration, detailed the burden of debts from loans taken at high interest, and stressed the immediate destructive results that would ensue should these debts not be paid: an end to Jewish presence in the cities of the Holy Land and the destruction of synagogues and cemeteries. Four geographic regions for such missions evolved in time: the “mission of Turkey,” the most important and prestigious, which included the communities of Anatolia and the Balkans; “the mission of Francia” was the most promising from the financial standpoint and included the communities of Italy and Western Europe; “the mission of the Maghreb,” that is, the North African countries; and “the mission of Arabistan,” which included communities in Syria, Iraq, and Persia. The itinerant emissary traveled to cities large and small, collected money for the Land of Israel from special funds designated for this purpose, and mounted additional fundraising campaigns. Procedures were also established in the communities for the further collection of funds. In many places the emissary, who was a rabbi, would deliver sermons that were intended to encourage the public to open its purse-strings. When the envoy returned, the funds were distributed (after deducting his expenses and salary) among the holy cities according to a formula that reflected their relative size and importance. Only in exceptional cases did emissaries set out on behalf of a particular group, such as the Italians, and from the mid-seventeenth century for the Ashkenazim as well. This was the cause of constant tension and conflict between the Sefardi majority and the Ashkenazim over entitlement to funds for the Land of Israel collected in European countries. The Sefardic community, whom the Ottoman authorities held responsible for all the Jews in Palestine, demanded to receive the funds, while the Ashkenazim, seeking to keep them for themselves, complained about this situation in Europe. In the final analysis these struggles dealt a blow to donations in general.

The Sefardim divided the revenues collected by the emissaries into three parts – payment of taxes and maintenance of institutions; sustenance for some designated individuals and scholars, according to their degree of importance (on the basis of a *lista*, a fixed list); support for the poor, the sick, and the needy. The Ashkenazim, in contrast, considered these funds to be a kind of salary, an obligatory payment by the Jews of the Diaspora to their brethren living in Zion, and for that reason they distributed the money to all – in accordance with the number of members of each family without taking into account class, occupation, or



The writ of an emissary sent to the Maghreb

income. In reality, the funds were not equally distributed because some received grants from two or three sources, even if they were not in need of them.

The emissaries were part of a widespread framework that was engaged in the collection, concentration, and transfer of funds for the Land of Israel from the Diaspora. In the various countries, certain cities (centers of trade or ports) served as focal points for these efforts. These centers changed from time to time as a result of demographic, economic, and political changes. The close connection between Egypt and Palestine since the Mamluk period was weakened after the sixteenth century, and the decline of the Salonica community also led to a reduction of its involvement in the affairs of the Holy Land. In the seventeenth century there were several regional centers for gathering funds, such as Algiers which served as a transfer point for monies raised in North Africa, and Lvov (Lemberg) where funds from eastern Europe were concentrated. In the middle of the seventeenth century this latter center shifted to Frankfurt am Main, Leghorn replaced Venice as the center in Italy, and in western Europe the wealthy community of Amsterdam was an especially prominent focus of activity on behalf of the Jews of the Land of Israel, while

Vienna, Prague, and Frankfurt also served to transfer contributions from central Europe. Venice, which had channeled funds from all over to the Land of Israel as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century, was replaced in this function by the Istanbul community that from now became the leading factor in transferring financial aid to the Jewish communities in the Holy Land. In the absence of restrictions on the transfer of funds (which did exist in several European states), Istanbul served as a world crossroads for aid, even at times of financial distress for the Ottoman empire, such as in the late seventeenth century.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century it was clear to all — including the Jerusalem community's Muslim creditors — that the source of that community's livelihood and leadership lay in Istanbul. After lengthy negotiations among Jews in the Diaspora in the wake of the crisis that reached its peak in the setting afire of the courtyard of the Ashkenazim in Jerusalem, a committee of officials was established in Istanbul in 1726 to help the Jews of Jerusalem. Within a few years there were other committees to aid the other holy cities — Hebron (1733), Tiberias (1740), and Safed (1742). The committees took it upon themselves to maintain contacts with the authorities, to organize the collection of funds in the various communities and the proper use of these funds, to supervise and organize the emissary system, and to make arrangements for immigration to the Land of Israel. The initiative known as "the collection of the *para*" (1728) is worthy of special mention. Each and every individual was supposed to contribute a *para* (a small coin, the fortieth part of a *grush*) each week. However, the public response did not meet expectations, and the officials subsequently imposed in its place a kind of annual tax on every community in the Ottoman Empire. In practice, the Istanbul officials also administered the Jerusalem community and, to a lesser extent, those in the other three cities as well. They enacted various ordinances, shaped the communal leadership, and intervened in choosing communal officers and sages of the yeshivot.

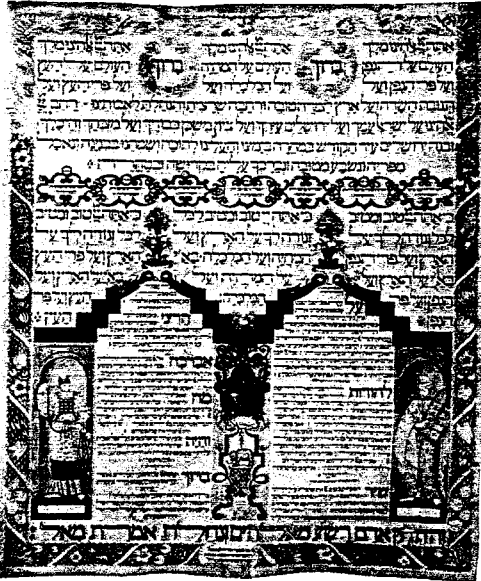
Such centers of aid on behalf of the Jews in the Land of Israel also arose in eastern Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century: funds to aid the Hasidim were collected in Reisen (Rydzyňa), while donations for non-Hasidic Ashkenazi Jews were concentrated in Shklov. A "Committee of Officers and Clerks" was established in Amsterdam in 1809 to collect funds throughout western Europe (mainly for the Prushim), to administer their transfer to the Holy Land and their fair allocation, while also making collection more efficient and increasing the sums donated. Like their forerunners, the members of the Lehren family, who led this committee for decades, demanded the exclusive right to conduct fundraising and to

determine how the monies be allocated through their appointed representatives. Their influence steadily increased, and in practice they administered the affairs of most of the Jewish population in the Land of Israel until the end of the nineteenth century.

Political Assistance

The status of the Jews in the Land of Israel was dependent to a great extent on the state of their relationship with those who wielded power on the local level — the governor of Damascus, the district governors of Jerusalem and Safed, the *qadi* (Muslim judge) of Jerusalem, and the like. Hence, the existence of a wealthy, well-connected Jewish community in Istanbul, capital of the Empire, was most important. The presence of influential Jews at the Sultan's court enabled the Jerusalem community to intervene through them in the choice of officials who would be amenable to the Jews before they left the capital to serve in the vilayet of Damascus or in Jerusalem itself, or at least to foster connections with them. It seems that in the last quarter of the sixteenth century a rather routine pattern emerged. When problems arose whose solution were beyond the capacity of the local leaders they appealed to their contacts in Istanbul, the heads of congregations and leading scholars, who, by virtue of their status in the community, appealed to Jews who had connections at court, requesting that they do whatever was necessary. These communal lobbyists were wealthy financiers, court provisioners, physicians, and those whose professions brought them into daily and close contact with the powerful men of the state. When the lobbyists were successful, edicts, orders, and warnings were sent to the governor of Jerusalem and to the *qadi* to treat the local Jews in accordance with the *shari'a* (Islamic religious law), that is, in accordance with accepted canons and norms. The continuing willingness of wealthy Jews with relations at the imperial court and acquainted with the powerful statesmen to use their knowledge, connections, and influence to help the Jewish community in the Land of Israel in various ways (usually without tangible compensation and at certain personal sacrifice) was a noteworthy phenomenon, although we know nothing of their motives or attitudes towards the Jews of the Holy Land. In any case, it was no accident that the Committee of Officers of Jerusalem was established in Istanbul.

Monopolization by the Istanbul community of political assistance to the communities in the Land of Israel came to an end in the eighteenth century, when we find active intervention by court Jews in European capitals. One such case is that of Samson Wertheimer who utilized his connections at the court of the Habsburg emperor to have the Austrian ambassador to



The blessing "Me'eyn Shalosh" which is recited after eating various kinds of grains and fruits for which the Land of Israel is renowned. An illustrated folio by Samuel Dreznitz of Moravia, 1755. (IMJ 177/65)

the Sublime Porte help in coming to an arrangement for settling the debts of the Ashkenazic Jews in Jerusalem.

Spiritual and Cultural Ties

In the spiritual and cultural sphere, it was the Land of Israel that contributed to the Diaspora, particularly to cities in Turkey and Italy with which extremely close relationships had been formed. Constant mobility back and forth by sages on all levels enhanced the network of cultural ties between the Land of Israel and the Diaspora communities.

The concentration of so many sages of Spanish descent in Safed, in unique historical circumstances, produced rich and diverse works in the fields of secular and religious poetry, Kabbalah, biblical commentary, ethics, and religious law. From the last quarter of the sixteenth century many of these works began to find their way abroad to the Jewish communities in the Diaspora, sent by their authors to be printed there, borne by sages who emigrated from the Land of Israel, by emissaries of the holy cities or others who were emissaries on their own behalf, and by pilgrims returning to their countries of origin. They took with them original manuscripts and copies, and during their wanderings spread oral traditions, religious legal rulings, traditions, and customs. The behavior of those coming from the

Holy Land served as living testimony to the Land of Israel customs, and they were sometimes asked what was customary in the Land of Israel in regard to a certain aspect of religious life. Traditions of the Kabbalah of Safed, which played an important role in this cultural interchange, were disseminated in this manner, especially pious usages and customs in the spirit of the Kabbalah that were customary among the Kabbalistic fellowships in Safed (such as customs and usages in welcoming the Sabbath, readings for the night of Shavuot [Pentecost] and Shmini Azeret, the recital of penitential prayers at night in study groups and prayer fellowships, etc.). Many of the works of the Safed sages were published in printing shops in Turkey and Italy, a fact that aided in their dissemination. It was in this very period that the *Shulhan Arukh* ("A Set Table"), the renowned compendium of Jewish law by R. Joseph Caro, was spreading throughout the world of Jewry. Together with *Ha-Mappah* ("The Tablecloth") of R. Moses Isserles, it was fast becoming the fundamental work guiding the general public and the halakhic decisors everywhere.

The prestige of the Land of Israel continued to be a weighty factor in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Even when it was clear to all that the true centers of Torah study were far removed from the Holy Land, people continued to treat the Land of Israel and its sages as being of the first order. However, the abundance of expressions referring to the prestige and merits of the yeshivot in the holy cities and their sages was no more than lip service. Many of the sages of the Land of Israel had come from cities in the Ottoman Empire and were well aware of their own standing when compared with that of the great scholars in the yeshivot in which they had studied. That many halakhic questions were referred from the Land of Israel to the most esteemed rabbis of Istanbul clearly demonstrates acceptance of the latter's spiritual hegemony. In the same manner, the Ashkenazim in the Holy Land continued to have recourse to the decisions and opinions of rabbis in eastern Europe.

From the middle of the seventeenth century, the presence of the Holy Land emissaries was a regular feature in Diaspora communities. They played an especially important role in the lives of the small communities, responding to halakhic questions, initiated communal ordinances, arbitrated disputes, and gave court decisions as well as certificates and appointments. In all these activities their informal authority stemmed from the sanctity of the Land of Israel. The dissemination of the teachings of the Land of Israel by the emissaries was not limited to one field, and they also communicated halakhic practices, as well as innovations in Torah, Kabbalah, and liturgical poetry. Among the well-known emissaries in the seventeenth century were the Kabbalists R.