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An Overview of Historical Background of Unknown Eastern Jews of Turkey

Süleyman ŞANLI[i]

Abstract: Since ancient times Mesopotamia and Anatolia were a home for the Jews. During the Roman and Byzantine period there were small Jewish communities known as Karaite and Romaniot in Anatolia. After the foundation of the Ottoman State they continued to survive. Afterwards Ashkenazim Jewish communities from central and Eastern Europe began to immigrate to the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth century. With the deportation of Jews from Spain, Anatolia became new home for Sephardim. As a result of flow of these immigrations, Sephardim became the dominant Jewish community among other Jewish groups. Thus, Jews were scattered in different parts of the Ottoman Empire. The majority of the Jews in the Empire were concentrated in the western regions, especially in Istanbul, Izmir, and Bursa and Edirne provinces. They made important contributions to the development of the Empire's trade and industry.

There were also considerable Jewish communities who lived in the eastern part of the country in provinces such as Gaziantep, Urfa, Siverek, Diyarbakir, Çermik, Mardin, Nusaybin, Cizre, Başkale and Van. As it is seen by meaning eastern Jews it is referred to Eastern part of first Ottoman later Turkey. This study aims to explore the history of Jews, who once lived in the eastern part of Ottoman Empire and later Turkey. The scarcity of sources indicates that Jews from these regions were received little scholarly attention. Through this study it is expected to make them more visible and to open new research areas for researchers. In addition to written sources it is also benefited from data collected through ethnographic interviews from an anthropological fieldwork conducted by the author in Israel in 2011. Currently, no Jews live or inhabit in the east and southeast of Turkey; therefore, one of the goals of this research is to reveal the existence of a community once had a way of life, beliefs, cultured in a multicultural and multireligious environment of the east.

Keywords: East, Jews, history, Turkey.

[i] Yrd. Doç. Dr., Mardin Artuklu Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Antropoloji Bölümü, suleymansanli@yahoo.com.

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Türkiye'nin Bilinmeyen Doğu Yahudilerinin Tarihsel Geçmişlerine Genel Bir Bakış

Öz: Eski çağlardan beri Mezopotamya ve Anadolu Yahudiler için bir yurttu. Roma ve Bizans döneminde Anadolu'da Karaite ve Romaniot olarak bilinen küçük Yahudi toplulukları vardı. Osmanlı Devleti'nin kuruluşundan sonra yaşamlarını sürdürmeye devam ettiler. Daha sonra Orta ve Doğu Avrupa'dan gelen Aşkenazim Yahudi cemaatleri on beşinci yüzyılda Osmanlı İmparatorluğuna göç etmeye başladılar. Yahudilerin İspanya'dan gönderilmesiyle birlikte Anadolu, Sefarad Yahudileri için yeni bir yurt oldu. Bu göç dalgalarının bir sonucu olarak Sefarad Yahudileri, diğer Yahudi gruplar arasında hakim Yahudi cemaati haline geldi. Böylece, Yahudiler Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun farklı yerlerine dağıldılar. İmparatorluk'taki Yahudilerin çoğunluğu, özellikle İstanbul, İzmir, Bursa ve Edirne gibi batı bölgelerinde yoğunlaştılar. İmparatorluğun ticaret ve sanayinin gelişimine önemli katkılarda bulundular.

Ancak, Gaziantep, Urfa, Siverek, Diyarbakır, Çermik, Mardin, Nusaybin, Cizre, Başkale ve Van gibi doğu kesimlerinde yaşayan önemli Yahudi cemaatler de vardı. Görüleceği üzere Doğu Yahudileri derken öncelikle Osmanlı Devletinin doğusunda daha sonra da Türkiye'nin doğusunda yaşayan Yahudilere atıfta bulunulmaktadır. Bu çalışma, bir zamanlar Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun ve daha sonraları Türkiye'nin doğusunda yaşayan Yahudilerin tarihini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Kaynak sayısınız azlığı, bu bölgelerdeki Yahudilere az bilimsel ilgi görüldüğünü gösteriyor. Bu çalışma sayesinde, onları daha görünür hale getirmek ve araştırmacılar için yeni araştırma alanların açılması beklenmektedir. Yazılı kaynaklara ek olarak, yazarın 2011'de İsrail'de gerçekleştirdiği antropolojik bir alan çalışmasıyla elde edilen etnografik mülakatlardan da yararlanılmaktadır. Günümüzde Türkiye'nin doğu ve güneydoğusunda Yahudiler yaşamamaktadır. Bu araştırma sayesinde, bir zamanlar doğuda çok kültürlü ve çok dinli bir çevrede yaşayan bir topluluğun varlığını, inançlarını yaşam biçimini ortaya çıkarmak amaçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Doğu, Yahudiler, tarih, Türkiye.

Introduction

Abraham Malamat (1922–2010) claimed that the history of the Jews cannot be narrowed down to the boundaries of Palestine solely but was also tied to the ancient Near Eastern lands including Mesopotamia, "land of the Hebrew's origin" and the land of Nile, Egypt, a flourishing refuge for Jews (Malamat, 1997:3).

In the earliest time of Jewish history the people were exposed to two dreadful incidents "destruction and exile". These are, first, the exile of 'ten tribes' of Israel by Assyrian King and the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BC by Babylonia (Lang, 2004: 9; Stern, 1997: 185; Tadmor, 1997: 182). Afterwards, as Hayim Tadmor pointed out, Jewish history adopted a new pattern as "a vital diaspora coexisting in a symbiotic relationship with the community in the

homeland" (Tadmor, 1997: 182). With the destruction of the Second Temple by the Roman Empire in 70 AD, the expulsion and political and religious oppression, in addition to the economic bonanza of wealthy countries, made a huge influence on the demographic expansion of Jewish Diaspora. The political, social and economic conditions of the Jewish Diaspora varied according to the country in which they lived. Nevertheless, the common destiny of the Jewish nation, despite being dispersed in different parts of the world, was "closely united" and any serious limits on religious freedom had an effect among other Jewish communities (Stern, 1997: 278). Jews of the Diaspora always kept strong ties with the Land of Israel.

After the fall of the temples an extensive period of "proselytism" occurred (Safrai, 1997: 364). According to Safrai, the majority of the proselytes were originally non-Jews and they embraced Judaism in the eastern and western lands of the Diaspora (Safrai, 1997: 364). Generally, the proselytes were not from one social class but from different parts of society, some urban and some rural. According to Safrai:

> "*Some converted individually, leaving their homes and families; in other cases, entire families or even entire districts became Jewish. The Rabbis encouraged proselytism and promoted it both directly and indirectly in the course of travels. Only later, particularly after Christianity had come to power, was the trend reversed, not only because of the legal prohibition against proselytizing but also because the Jews preferred to live in a closed world of their own and no longer expected the fulfillment of their aspirations in the immediate future*" (Safrai, 1997: 364)

In line with this, Eastern Jews might be descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes who were exiled by the Assyrian King. After being exiled, some Jewish communities ended up resettling in Babylonia and Mesopotamia (Tadmor, 1997: 91; Stern 1997: 185; Levy:1994). A twelfth century traveler, Benjamin of Tudela[1], mentioned in his writings on his travels in the region "These Jews belong to the first captivity which King Salmanesser, King of Assyria, led away; and they speak the language in which the Targum[2] is written" (Tudela, 1907: 78).

Following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, the Ottoman Empire became a central location especially for the *Sephardi Jews* (or Sephardim) and for thousands of Jewish refugees during the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Shaw, 1991: 1; Levy, 1994: 1-13). The Sephardim became the predominant community among the Jews in the Empire because of their

1 Tudela's travels has been translated into Turkish by Prof. Nuh Arslantaş as "Tudelalı Benjamin ve Ratisbonlu Petachia, Ortaçağ'da İki Yahudi Seyyahın Avrupa, Asya ve Afrika Gözlemleri", MÜİFV Yayınları: İstanbul, 2009.

2 Targum (Hebrew: Translation): Ancient translation of Scripture into Aramaic, the international language that most Jews knew. See, Neusner Jacob and Alan Avery Peck 2004 The Routledge Dictionary of Judaism, Taylor & Francis, New York, p.162.

ancient cultural tradition and large population. By the end of the seventeenth century, Sephardi Jews became powerful enough to assimilate other Jewish congregations (Shmuelevitz, 1984: 1-34). However, when the Ottoman State was in its early "formative stages" Jews had already been long settled in the Balkans, Anatolia and Mesopotamia, where they had lived for centuries. Some were known as Greek speaking *Romaniot* Jews whose traditions and culture had been in place since Byzantium. Some were Jews from east Europe, known as *Ashkenazim,* and they came to the Ottoman State during the fifteenth century, mainly from East Europe. Another Jewish community was that of the Italian Jews, who had their own, distinguishing religious rituals that they practice before being forced out of the Iberian Peninsula (Levy, 1994: 3-4).

At the same time, there were also Jews in Mesopotamia and Arab lands who spoke Aramaic, Arabic, and Kurdish (Lewis, 1984: 121; Ortaylı, 1994: 528). Scholars studying Ottoman Jewries usually focused on these four main communities - Romaniot, Sephardic, Ashkenazi and Musta'rab (Arabized Jews) (Levy, 1994, Lewis, 1984, Shaw 1991). The Eastern Jews were generally ignored in the researches, despite the fact that these communities were in place before the establishment of the Ottoman Empire.

A demographic expert on Jewish populations in the late Ottoman period, Justin McCarthy, has pointed out that estimates for the Jewish populations in the Empire were usually published either by travelers or officials of the consulates and statisticians who compiled their works (McCarthy, 1994: 375). In a census of the Ottoman capital in 1477, there were 1,647 Jewish households (11,529 people) (Shaw, 1991: 37). The population increased over the centuries due to the forced Jewish migration from Spain, population movements from western and central Europe and the conquest of new territories by the Ottoman Empire. However, the numbers and population of the Jews changed from period to another period. The number of the Jews in the last decade of the Empire can be seen below (Ruppin, 1913: 39-42).

In another figure the density and amount of Jews in 1911-1912 shown as;

Jews (Ottoman Subject) in the Empire* 1911-12

Area	Number of Jews	Percentage of Total
Ottoman Europe	89,000	25
Istanbul Province (Vilayeti)[1]	54,000	15
Western Anatolia	54,000	15
Southern Anatolia[2]	15,000	4
Remainder of Anatolia	8,000	2
Greater Syria	52,000	15
Iraq	85,000	24
Total	357,000	100

Source: McCarthy Justin, Jewish Population in the Ottoman Period, pp.385

*Not including Ottoman Arabia or noncitizens, especially significant in Istanbul, Palestine and İzmir

[1]Including Çatalca Sancak

[2]Primarily in the HalebVilayet

Eastern Jews in written Sources

The main obstacle in studying this subject was the lack of written sources. Among Jewish groups, eastern Jews of Turkey are the least known community. Most of our initial knowledge is based on the accounts of travelers who visited the Eastern Jewish communities and mentioned them in their travel writings. They usually gave the number of the Jews who lived in the places visited, note the head of the Jewish community, and describe the economic condition of Jewish society. The earliest descriptions come from the accounts of the two twelfth century travelers, Benjamin of Tudela, and Ratisbone of Petachia (Tudela, 1907: Ratisbone, 1856). They may have been traveling in search of the lost ten tribes (Brauer&Patai, 1993: 18) because they frequently refer to "tribes of Israel" and "captivity" and "exile" in their writings. Both travelers note the

prosperity of Eastern Jewish communities in the areas of what are now parts of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq, and make reference to the many synagogues and rabbis. The condition of the Jews in nineteenth century was seen as somewhat better than the Iranian Jews (Zaken, 2007: 13). "Compared with the Jews of Iran, Ottoman Jews were living in paradise," says Bernard Lewis (Lewis, 1984: 166). Famous Jewish traveler Benjamin II described the condition of Eastern Jews as becoming more tolerable under Turkish domination. He pointed out that Jews of Mardin, who lived in their own quarter, were tolerably free and noted their wealthy condition (Benjamin II, 1859: 62-77). However the condition of Eastern Jews was unsteady it frequently changed depending on external circumstances. According to Feitelson:

> "*These relations must have been subject to change with political upheavals. It is clear that the Jews were very much closer to their Muslim neighbors than the other religious minority group, the Nestorian. Nowadays the Jews like to exult in the memory of the social ties, which existed between the two groups. It seems clear that mutual visiting took place, and while the Muslims are said to have adored the kasher food, the Jews also ate in Muslim houses, abstaining on these occasions from meat and sometimes preparing part of their meal themselves*" (Feitelson, 1959: 1-16).

In the years 1166-1171, Benjamin of Tudela visited Jewish communities who lived in eastern regions. He started his journey in Palestine than continued through Damascus, Nisebin (today Nusaybin in Turkey) and Aleppo, from where he went to Mosul by way of Jezirat al-Omar (today Cizre in Turkey) (Tudela, 1907). A contemporary traveler of Benjamin of Tudela, Rabbi Petachia of Ratisbone set out his journey in 1175. During his trip first he went to Russia, crossed the Black Sea and then he visited Nisebin, going on to Hisn-Kepa (today Hasankeyf in Turkey) and returning to Palestine by way of Mosul through Baghdad (Ratisbone, 1856). In addition to mentioning the Jews in Anatolia and Mesopotamia, the biggest part of his account has to do with Babylonia, Syria and Eretz Israel. According to Erich Brauer, the observations of Rabbi Petachia were better than those of Benjamin and the "descriptions are more vivid" (Brauer&Patai, 1993: 39).

A few decades after Benjamin of Tudela, the Spanish Poet Judah al-Harizi (1166–1225) visited Eastern Jewish communities in about 1230. His observations of Eastern Jewish communities' customs and tradition are recorded in his *Maqāmāt*, a kind of rhymed prose narratives, entitled *Tahkemoni* (Harizi, 1952). The importance of his work has to do both with the poems and the information about thirteenth century Jewish life and the culture he provides (Brauer&Patai, 1993: 39; Sabar, 1982). According to Brauer, after the "upheavals caused by the Mongol invasions" there is no information about Eastern Jews for about three centuries until the Yemenite Jewish poet Yihya al-Zahiri (Zechariah al-Dahiri) set

down a book similar to *Maqamas* titled *Sefer Ha-MUSAR* (Book of Instructions), which dealt with his journey to the cities Baghdad, Arbil, Kerkuk, Mosul, Kalne (Rakka), Nisebin and Urfa (Brauer&Patai, 1993: 40; Ratzaby, 2007: 486; Sabar, 1982: 19).

After the Benjamin of Tudela and Pethahiah of Ratisbone, another prominent Jewish traveler who is also considered one of the main sources for first-hand observations on Eastern Jewish communities and other "oriental sects and religions" is David d'Beth Hillel (around 1827) (Fischel, 1957: 240:247; Brauer&Patai, 1993: 41; Hillel, 1973: 17). He is author of the book *Travels from Jerusalem through Arabia, Kurdistan, Part of Persia and India to Madras 1824-1832* (Hillel, 1973). From his writings, it is clear that he was looking for the "Remnants of Israel" in remote lands. There are many references in his writings to "forgotten remnants and lost tribes". Whenever he encountered a Jewish community if any form or size, he looked signs or symbols in their customs and languages that might be relevant to one of ancient Israelite lost tribes. He often writes, "Therefore I conceive that they are...", "they must be…" and "some of the lost ten tribes..." (Hillel 1973; Fischel, 1957). His observations on social and economic conditions, language and dialects of oriental Jewish communities are significant and played an important role as a reference on the Oriental Diaspora in the early nineteenth century (Fischel, 1957: 240-247; Brauer&Patai, 1993: 42).

David d'Beth Hillel, also known as Hakham (sage, wise man), set out on his travel to the east in 1824. He journeyed through Palestine, Syria, remote regions and the highlands of the Eastern Anatolia and Persia. He went through Mardin to Diyarbakır and back to Nisebin, then on to Peshkhabur and Zakho. From Zakho he went to Mosul, visited Duhok and the Jewish villages of Sundur and Amadiya. He came to Arbil and Kerkuk. Afterwards he went to visit Sulaimani, Bana, Sakis, Sabhlakh and Tazqala, and then by the way of Bashqala over Urmia and Van Lakes he went to Baghdad (Hillel, 1973; Fischel, 1957).

The Itinerary of Joseph Israel Benjamin (1818-1864), called Eight Years in Asia and Africa from 1846 to 1855 (Benjamin II, 1859) occupied a significant place among travel books that referred to Eastern Jews (Brauer&Patai, 1993: 46). Because he saw himself as influenced by and a follower of the medieval Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela, he called himself Benjamin the second (Benjamin II, 1859: 2). Benjamin II began his journey in 1845, going first to Egypt and from there to Eretz Israel and Syria, then to Iraq, eastern of Turkey, Persia, India and China. He went to Afghanistan and then through Vienna, going on to Italy, Tripoli, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. During his travels to the east he visited Urfa, then Siverek and Çermik. Through Diyarbekir, Mardin and Nisebin he went to Cizre and Zakho. He came to Sandur, Duhok, Betanure, Alqosh and Mosul. He visited Barzan and Arbil. On his third journey he visited Rowanduz, KhoiSanjak and ended at Kerkuk (Benjamin II, 1859).

Noted Jewish scholar Avigdor Levy claims that researches on Ottoman Jews in Turkey reached "a measure of recognition" by the beginning of the 21st century, yet it is still in the "early stages of a full appreciation" for the history of these Jewish communities (Levy, 2002: xvii). In order to establish the foundation for the research and utilize as many sources as possible I did research in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives[3] (*BOA, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri*). Some might say that for such an anthropological study it is not necessary to do archival investigation. However, for a study of a people living in recent history it was important.

The presence of Jews is reflected in various Ottoman archival documents. Earlier researchers mainly found material in the registers of the Public Affairs *(Mühimme Defterleri)*, in the registers of the finance department, in proceedings of the imperial council, in registers of non-Muslim places of worship and in the court records (İnalcık, 2002: 3; Lewis, 1952: 3). Most of these documents were translated into French by Abraham Galante (1873-1961) (Galante, 1961) and came from the *Mühimme Defterleri* and registers of non-Muslim places of worship. He gathered all these archival researches in an encyclopedia containing nine volumes. This made it accessible for western Jewish scholarship (Lewis, 1952: 2).

Scholars had limited access to archival documents at that time, in contrast to today, when technological developments allow researchers to reach registers without being present at the archive center. During my research in the archives more than half of the documents that I came across were about the residents of the western Jewish communities of the Empire, while perhaps 10 to 15 percent related just to eastern Jewish communities. However, this study is directly concerned with Jews who mainly lived in the eastern part of the Empire in the archival documents. Thus, regarding the Jewish communities in today's eastern and southeastern regions of Turkey, I found separate documents on different subjects ranging from firmans (*ferman*) to minutes. Mainly they were about religious and public matters, particularly on conversion or on taxation, renovation of a synagogue, commercial disputes and a few conflicts among Jews and Muslims.

A document[4] dated 24 June 1913 tells the story of an application for the repair of a synagogue. The Jewish community of Cizre, a district once administratively attached to the city of Diyarbekir, wanted to increase the height of their local synagogue up to 10 zira, repair the surrounding walls and make three new windows and two doors. They applied to the *Dahiliye, Adliye* and *Mezâhib Nezâretleri* (Ministries of Internal Affairs, Justice and Sects) and after some correspondence they are eventually allowed to carry out the repair

3 The name Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri (Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives) recently has changed as Türkiye Cumhuriyet Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri (Republic of Turkey General Directorate of State Archives). All state archives gathered under this name.

4 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), Babıâli Evrak Odası, no. 4186/31390.

process[5]. Another document[6] (7 March 1909) written by Ferdi, the governer of the city of Van, to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, deals with the religious case of a Jewish woman in the city of Hakkari. As far as the document is concerned, upon some complaints of her conversion and loyalty to Islam, a committee is decided to establish in Sheikh Hamid Pasha's house to investigate the issue and overcome the suspicions. Cella Effendy, a member of the Assembly of Local Administration, Semashe Effendy of the Jewish community, and Panas Effendy, a former Jewish member of the assembly, meet. The woman in question says that she does not know anything about the complaints and petitions against her and expresses her loyalty to Islam. Members of the small jury conclude that the woman in question has continued to remain loyal to Islam since her conversion, so there is no room for any further questioning and proceedings[7].

An Anthropological History Approach

As mentioned earlier, since eastern Jewish communities of Turkey did not have any of their own written sources regarding their background, what we know comes primarily from travelers' accounts. We learned from their itineraries that Benjamin of Tudela, Rabbi David Pethahiah, David d'Beth Hillel and Benjamin II paid visits to eastern Jewish communities of Turkey. For instance, Benjamin of Tudela visited Nisebin (Nusaybin) and Jezirat al-Omar (Cizre) (Tudela, 1907: 90). Rabbi Pethahiah of Ratisbone travelled to Nisebin and Hisn-Kepa (Hasankeyf) (Ratisbone, 1856:7). Then David d'Beth Hillel went to Nisebin, Mardin, Diyarbekir and Bashqala (Başkale) and Benjamin II visited to Urfa, Siverek and Chermuk (Çermik). Through Diyarbekir he went to Mardin, Nisebin and Jezire (Cizre) (Hillel, 1973: 71-75).

Particularly after the expulsion from Spain, the Ottoman Empire was a peaceful refuge for the Jews. In time, Ottoman Jewry became the most culturally diverse religious minority group and, in terms of geography, also the most widely distributed community in the Empire. Elsewhere, Jews lived

5 The originalversion of thedocument can be seen as below:

Dahiliye ve Adliye ve Mezâhib Nezâret-i Celîlelerine :

DiyarbekirVilâyeti'nde Cizre Kasabası'nda kâin ve Musevî cemâ'atine âid sinavinin irtifâ'ının on zirâ'a iblâğına ve etrâf duvarlarının ta'mîriyle üç pencere ve iki kapı küşâdına ruhsat i'tâsınadâir* Adliye ve MezâhibNezâret-i Celîlesimakāmının tezkire-i muhavvele üzerine** Şûrâ-yı Devlet karârıylatanzîm ve takdîm olunan irâde-i seniyye lâyihası imzâ-yıhümâyûn-ı cenâb-ı pâdişâhî ile tasdîk buyurulduğundan musaddak sûreti*** leffensavb-ı âlîlerineisrâ ve nezâret-i müşârun-ileyhâyateblîgâticrâkılınmağlaîfâ-yımuktezâsına himmet.

* Adliye'ye makām-ı vâlâlarının 9 Kânûn-ı Sânî sene [1]327 târihli ve 82 numrolu tezkire-i muhavvelesi üzerine **

*** Adliye'ye tasdîr olunan emr-i âlî ile

6 BOA, Dâhiliye Nezareti Mektubu Kalemi, no. 2758/19.

7 The originaldocumentshown as below:

Dahiliye Nezâret-i Celîlesi'ne C. 19 Şubat sene [1]324 İrâde buyurulan telgrafnâme kopyası mütâla'a olundu. Mühtediyenin İslâmiyetde sebâtı olup olmadığını anlamak için sâdâtdan Şeyh Hamid Paşa'nın hânesinde nezdine gönderilen mahalli Meclis-i İdâresia'zâsından Cella ve Musevî milletinden Şemaşe ve a'zâ-yı sâbıkadan ve yine Musevî milletinden Panas efendilerle sâire taraflarından tutulan zabıt varakası sûretine nazaran mezbûrenin İslâmiyeti kabûl edeliden beri İslâm olup şimdide İslâmiyetden müfârakat etmediği ve şikâyeti hâvî verilen istid'ânâmeden dahi haberdâr olmadığını ve evvelce ihtidâ istid'âsı üzerine meclis huzurundaki takrîrinde musır olduğunu beyân eylediği Hakkari Mutasarrıflığı'ndan cevaben bildirilmişdir. Fermân. Fî 22 Şubat sene [1]324. Van Valisi Ferid

throughout most of the Arab provinces, and in different parts of Anatolia (Lewis, 1984, Shmuelevitz 1984, Shaw 1991). Non-Muslim religious minorities were subject to "its own laws in matters of religions and personal status under the authority of its own religious chief" as known *millet system*. Accordingly, the Jews were recognized as millet under the authority of the *Hakhambashi*, the chief rabbi, and granted by the Ottoman administration with the same status as the Greeks and Armenian churches (Lewis 1984: 126).

Jews started to made important contributions to the development of Empire's trade and industry but especially played important roles in Istanbul, helping it to become a major imperial economic center by the second half of the fifteenth century. As successful merchants, bankers and entrepreneurs, they started to dominate the city's commercial life, operate the customhouses and the docks (Lewis, 1984; Levy, 1994). With the growth of their intellectual life, they had roles in science and medicine, in political and diplomatic affairs as well (Braude & Lewis, 1982). However, this prosperous and wealthy Jewish history under Ottoman rule existed only during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, starting to change by the eighteenth and nineteenth.

Compared to the western Jews, eastern Jews were the smallest minority in the east of the Empire. Eastern Jews were the smallest non-Muslim religious group in the east. The description previously of the position of Jews in the Ottoman Empire and the conditions of Jewish communities in the millet system is not applicable to all parts of the Ottoman Empire. There were significant differences among the cities, towns, urban and rural areas and it is not possible to discuss Istanbul, Aleppo, Bursa, Edirne, Salonica, Diyarbakır, Mardin and Mosul as all equal. They were in different regions and most of them had different cultural and administrative backgrounds (Shmuelevitz, 1984: 29). The majority of Jews who were settled in the eastern regions lived in urban areas and a smaller number of Jews lived in rural villages. Muslim Kurds usually belonged to the tribal class, the powerful group in Kurdish society. Jews those who lived in villages and some rural areas usually belonged to non-tribal class of society, which was dependent on the protection of tribal chieftain (Zaken, 2007: 8). MordechaiZaken pointed out that "the patronage of the Kurdish chieftain was one of the key instruments that made Jewish survival possible in Kurdish towns and villages through generations" (Zaken, 2007: 24).

Eastern Jews are different from their religious fellows in other regions of the Empire, especially when comparing those who lived in villages and urban centers. Urban Jewish communities who were settled in the eastern of Ottoman Empire usually lived in their own quarters known as "*mahalle*" (Schroeter, 1994: 285). Zaken mentiones as the social and cultural life of the Jewish community was usually structured around the Jewish quarter. Each community had its own synagogue, rabbis, elementary schools called *Talmud torahs*, cemeteries and in some areas, hospitals. However many rural Jewish communities had a low

population compare to urban centers. They consisted of a small number of families, usually close relatives. Rural communities had difficulties in terms of community life and religious organization. They had no synagogues, no Jewish education, sometime no rabbis or slaughterers for animals. In contrast to rural Jews, in urban areas the synagogue was the most central part of Jewish life, not only for ritual prayers but also as a school for Jewish children of the community for education and social experiences (Zaken, 2007: 28). The number of Jews in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, which also constitutes the research areas of this study, is shown below.

Table 2- Eastern Jews (Ottoman Subject) in the Empire 1883-1914

Area	Year	Jews
Diyarbekir Province (includes Mardin, Siverek Viranşehir,)	1883	1,051
	1908	1,165
	1914	2,008
Van	1883	?
	1908	?
	1914	1,383
Urfa (include Birecik, Rakka, Hawran)	1883	?
	1908	?
	1914	865
Aleppo Province (Aleppo, Antep, Antakya, İskenderun, Kilis)	1883	9,913
	1908	11,664
	1914	12,193

Source: Shaw J. Stanford, The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, pp. 272-285

Compared to their brethren in the West, the lives of eastern Jews of Turkey appear to have been ignored. The reason appears to be that they were at a disadvantage because they lived in remote areas that were difficult to reach, with relatively small populations and limited economic and cultural activities

(Bali, 1999: 367). The statistics of the eastern Jews of the Ottoman Empire are unusual. For instance, the Jews in Van province did not seem to exist in 1912, although there were many Jews in 1883. They were not recorded. McCarthy argues that "statistics for Van were the worst in Anatolia" (McCarthy, 1994: 381). This was similar for the Jewish residents of the *Hakkari sancak* (district). They may have resided for centuries unregistered until the Ottoman enumeration of the population of the east. According to McCarthy this may have been true for some of the Jews of Diyarbakır and some rural districts in the south of the province (McCarthy, 1994: 381).

We should note that because Turkey's geographical borders changed in 1908, 1914 and 1927, the numbers from these years varied and may not be comparable (Toval, 1982). Turkey was established in 1923 and first official census was conducted in 1927, four years following proclamation of the Republic of Turkey. According to statistical data of the American Jewish Year Book published in 1930, there were 55,592 Jews in European Turkey, 26,280 Jews in Asian Turkey, for a total of 81,872 Jews (Lienfield, 1930/31: 227-229). Prime Ministry, State Institute of Statistic of Turkey stopped counting people by religion in the 1970 census by the order of the Council of Ministers (Shaw, 1991: 285).

Total number of Jews in Republic of Turkey, 1927-1965

Year	**1927**	**1945**	**1955**	**1960**	**1965**
Number of Jews	**81,872**	**76,965**	**45,995**	**43,926**	**38,198**

Source:

1927. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başvekâlet İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü, '*28 Teşrinievvel 1927 Umumi Nüfus Tahriri: Türkiye Nüfusu*'İstatistik Yıllığı / Annuaire Statistique IV (1930-31), İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü Neşriyatından, sayı 14, s. 61-62, (Ankara 1931).

1945.Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanlık İstatistik Genel Müdürlüğü, *21 Ekim1945 Genel Nüfus Sayımı*, Türkiye İstatistik Yıllığı / Annuaire Statisque de Turquie, cilt 18, no: 328, s. 46 (Ankara, 1950).

1955-1960-1965.Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü *Türkiye İstatistik Yıllığı 1964-65 / Statisque de la Turquie,* no: 510, (Ankara, no date)

Shaul Toval, the consul general of Israel in Istanbul, went on two journeys in 1977, lasting 49 days, in search of Jewish communities of Turkey that still existed. He listed the existence of 14 Jewish communities throughout the country. The communities were as follows: Istanbul, Edirne, Tekirdağ, Kırklareli,

Gelibolu (Gallipoli), Çanakkale, Bursa, İzmir, Ankara, Mersin, Adana, İskenderun, Antakya and Gaziantep (Toval, 1982: 4). Shaul Toval also visited Urfa city in the east on June 1977 but he did not find anyone except one Jew who had converted to Islam. Only one city on Toval's list is part of my research area, Gaziantep[8]. Toval counted 122 Jews in the city in the year 1977. After Shaul Toval's travel to these Jewish communities we knew that between 1984 and 1989 Laurence Salzman, an American ethnographer, and his wife Ayse Gursan Salzman, a Turkish born anthropologist, visited 32 towns and cities in four geographical regions, including eastern and southeastern Anatolia in search of Jews (Salzman&Salzman, 2011). They went to the eastern cities of Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Diyarbakır, Nusaybin and Başkale. Unfortunately, they could not find any Jewish community still existing in the eastern parts by that time.

Accordingly, based on above information the population figures of eastern Jews between the founding of the Turkish Republic and 1965 can be seen as below.

Population of the Eastern Jews after proclamation of the Republic of Turkey, 1927-1965

Provinces	Year of Census				
	1927	1945	1955	1960	1965
Gaziantep	742	327	151	141	152
Diyarbekir	392	441	21	12	34
Hakkâri	43	34	2	1	0
Mardin	490	17	7	12	9
Urfa	318	234	11	2	14
Van	129	132	76	9	91
Total	2,114	1,185	268	177	300

Sources:

1927. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başvekâlet İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü, '*28 Teşrinievvel 1927 Umumi Nüfus Tahriri: Türkiye Nüfusu* İstatistik Yıllığı / Annuaire Statistique IV (1930-31), İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü Neşriyatından, sayı 14, s. 61-62, (Ankara 1931).

8 A recent study on Jews of Gaziantep has been published by the researcher Naim Güleryüz titled, "Gaziantep Yahudileri (Jews of Gaziantep), (Antap)", Gözlem Gazetecilik Basın ve Yayın A.Ş., İstanbul, 2012.

1945. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanlık İstatistik Genel Müdürlüğü, *21 Ekim1945 Genel Nüfus Sayımı*, Türkiye İstatistik Yıllığı / AnnuaireStatisque de Turquie, cilt 18, no: 328, s. 46 (Ankara, 1950).

1955 Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanlık İstatistik Genel Müdürlüğü (Republic of Turkey, Prime Ministry, General Statistical Office), *23 Ekim 1955 Genel Nüfus Sayımı: Türkiye Nüfusu,* (23 October 1955 Census of Population: Population of Turkey), (Ankara, 1961).

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As a result of data collected from travelers' accounts, archives and statistics the existence of Jews can be seen in the eastern region of first Ottoman and later Turkey. The scarcity of resources made them invisible however their presence in the east can be traced since ancient times. Compare their western brethren living in remote and rural areas might put eastern Jews in a disadvantage situation but hey were there that had a way of life, belief and culture in a multi religious and multicultural environment of the east.

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