“The Spirit of Love for our Holy Land:” Sephardi Zionism in Hamidian Jerusalem

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements  
Important Dates  
Introduction  

**Chapter 1: Sephardi Identity in Context (5600-5668/1840-1908)**  
Sephardi Identity Among Palestinian Arabs  
Sephardi Identity under the Ottoman Administration of Palestine  

**Chapter 2: Distinctly Sephardic Zionism (5640-5656/1880-1896)**  
Kol Yisra’el Ḥaverim and the New Sephardi Leadership  
Land Purchase Through International Sephardi Networks  
Land Purchase as a Religious Obligation  

**Chapter 3: Arab and Ottoman Influence on the Development of Sephardi Zionism (5646-5668/1886-1908)**  
Shifting Ottoman Boundaries and Jerusalem’s Political Ascent  
European Liberalism, Ottoman Reform, and Sephardi Zionism  
Sephardi Zionism as a Response to Hamidian Ottomanism  

**Chapter 4: The Decline of Sephardi Zionism in Jerusalem (5658-5668/1897-1908)**  
Aliyah, Jewish Demographics, and the Ashkenazi Ascent in Palestine  
Palestinian Arab Opposition to Zionist Activity in Jerusalem  
The Young Turk Revolt and the Death of Sephardi Zionism  

Conclusion  
Appendix  
Glossary of Persons  
Glossary of Terms  
Bibliography
Acknowledgements

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**Important Dates**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alhambra Decree - Jews expelled from Spain; Sultan Bayezit II accepts Jewish refugees into the Ottoman Empire</td>
<td>5252* (1492)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottoman conquest of Yerushalayim under Sultan Selim I</td>
<td>5277 (1516-17)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reconstruction of Old City walls by Sultan Suleiman I</td>
<td>5295-98 (1535-38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration of Yehuda HaTzadik and 500-1000 Ashkenazim to Yerushalayim</td>
<td>5461 (1700)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Ashkenazi synagogue destroyed and community expelled by Arab leadership</td>
<td>5481 (1720)</td>
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<td>Major earthquake in Tzfat and Tveria leads to large immigration to Jerusalem</td>
<td>5520 (1759)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napoleon Bonaparte’s invasion of Ottoman Palestine</td>
<td>5559 (1799)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhammad Ali’s control over Palestine</td>
<td>5592- 5600 (1831-1840)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzimat Reforms - <em>Hatti-i Sharif</em> of Gulhane and <em>Islahat Fermani</em></td>
<td>5500, 5616 (1839, 1856)</td>
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<td>Jewish settlement outside the Old City begins</td>
<td>5620 (1860)</td>
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<td>First Ottoman Constitution promulgated and parliament called</td>
<td>5637 (1876)</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Aliya begins - within a decade, approximately 30,000 Jews immigrate from Russia to Palestine</td>
<td>5642 (1881)</td>
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<td>Political Restructuring of Ottoman districts makes Jerusalem an administrative capital</td>
<td>5648 (1887)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Zionist Congress in Basel Switzerland</td>
<td>5658 (1897)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Turk Revolt</td>
<td>5668 (1908)</td>
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*Note: Dates in this thesis follow the Hebrew calendar, rather than the Gregorian calendar, when discussing Sephardi history because the subjects of the thesis, the Sephardi community of Hamidian Jerusalem, used these dates in their writings. Gregorian dates are given in parentheses.*
Introduction

The reign of Sultan Abd ul-Hamid II (1842-1918), ruler of the Ottoman Empire from 1876 until his deposition in 1909 in the aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution, marks the final years of traditional Ottoman rule and the prelude to the empire’s dissolution in the aftermath of World War I. Ottoman bureaucrats, local notables, and common people contended with the rapidly changing world, within the empire and beyond its boundaries, influenced by the previous sultan’s imperial reforms, the rising influence of European empires in the Middle East, and national movements for autonomy and independence across the globe. While it was a time of considerable turmoil for many with shifting borders, increasingly violent wars, and governmental restructuring, it also represented a period of growth and development economically, politically, and culturally for many people across the Ottoman empire.

There is perhaps nowhere in the empire where these changes were felt more sharply, more directly, than in Ottoman Jerusalem, a city which doubled in population size with drastic shifts in demographics over the course of the Sultan’s reign. The influx of Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe in the wake of the Tzar’s assassination after 1881, in addition to continued efforts by local Jewish communities towards decentralizing control within the Sephardi Ottoman Jewish leadership of the city remade the religio-political landscape of the Jewish community of Hamidian Jerusalem, just as Christian missionary activity and European economic expansion penetrated deeper into the daily life of Jerusalem’s Old City. Furthermore, the rising importance of Jerusalem within Ottoman bureaucracy, and the expanding population, which first exploded outside the Old City Walls only shortly before Abd ul-Hamid II took the throne, altered the ways in which each religious community within the city interacted with the
others, all under the authority of local Muslim administrators and representatives of the Sultan’s court.

In addition to the local Ottoman, Arab, and Palestinian identities which developed at this time, a non-indigenous ideology also began to shape the course of events in Ottoman Palestine. Zionism, defined by leading ideologue Theodor Herzl, as efforts to “create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law,” characterized the Jewish population of Palestine to greater lengths over the course of this period, laying the groundwork for European Jewish settlement and the development of political institutions, diverse economies, and cultural spaces. Zionists formed into the State of Israel in 1948. But this Zionism, theorized, represented, and enacted primarily by European Ashkenazi Jews, led the Palestine region into decades of conflict and violent skirmishes which peaked in the wars of 1948 when relative peace was established within its borders. This Zionism also carried a legacy of discrimination against Arabs and Ottoman Jews alike, who are just now, in the twenty-first century, beginning to reclaim narratives of their experience in the final decades of Ottoman rule.

The economic, cultural, and political activities of Sephardi Jews in Ottoman Jerusalem constituted a distinct brand of Zionism, distinct from various schools of Ashkenazi Zionism for its religious commitment to Eretz Yisra’el - the land of Israel, its amicable relations with local Palestinian Arabs, and its utilization of the Ottoman system to advance its aims. Chapter One seeks to understand the Sephardi community of Hamidian Jerusalem in its Jewish, Arab, and Ottoman context, which make it truly different, but deeply connected to those outside it located across the Empire and Europe. Chapter Two attempts to identify the implications of this distinct Jerusalem Sephardi identity on the creations of Sephardi Zionism, and to define that Zionism in
its own terms. Chapter Three analyzes the influence of Ottoman and Arab non-Jews across the
Ottoman imperial bureaucracy on the formation of this Zionism in order to contextualize
Sephardi Zionism among concurrent social and political developments in Jerusalem and the
Ottoman Empire as a whole. Finally, Chapter Four explores the ultimate failure of Sephardi
Zionism to maintain strength around the turn of the century, and the implications of this failure
on the trajectory of history in Palestine. By exploring these topics in depth, this thesis ultimately
aims to understand the distinctly Sephardi expression of a Jewish national revival within its
Ottoman context during the Hamidian era. This understanding will advance the ongoing
academic and political conversations around the true meaning of Zionism and its implications for
Jews, for Palestinians, and for the world over the past century and a half.

This thesis is part of an emerging body of work aimed at more clearly understanding the
deep nuances of the early history of Zionism, modern Israel, and the Israeli Palestinian conflict.
In “Rethinking the Yishuv,” Yair Wallach presents an extensive guide to the existing literature
on the topic of late-Ottoman Palestine. One of the most pressing critiques he has of the
historiography, especially in the twentieth-century writings of the Jerusalem School (the leading
historians of The Hebrew University in Jerusalem), is its tendency to divorce portrayals of the
Jewish community of Palestine from its Arab and Ottoman settings on the one hand and to treat
Palestinian Jews as exceptional in broader studies of Jews in the Ottoman empire on the other,
creating a monolithic view of “The Yishuv.”\footnote{Yair Wallach, “Rethinking the Yishuv: Late-Ottoman Palestine’s Jewish Communities Revisited,” \textit{Journal of Modern Jewish Studies} 16, no. 2 (2017): 276.} He contrasts this with the more recent focus of
historians of the Middle East and Arab world, who tend to frame developments in late-Ottoman
Palestine as “relational” between Jewish, and especially Sephardi, communities and their Arab
and Ottoman neighbors. This body of work also paints a more nuanced picture of the Yishuv as highly divided internally along ethnic, national, and linguistic lines. However, he remains critical of their maintained focus on the Yishuv as a framework for understanding the Jewish communities of Ottoman Palestine, especially considering that the term was not widely used until after 1908. In light of Wallach’s critique, this study aims to paint the Jewish community of Jerusalem, and especially the Sephardi community, as part of a complex and diverse network of individuals, institutions, and communities existing in a specific historical, social, and political context, and not simply as a monolithic representation of all Jews, or even all Ottoman Jews, in Jerusalem.

Most of the literature that explores the Sephardi community of Ottoman Jerusalem in relation to its local and imperial settings focuses on Sephardi activity during and after the Young Turk revolution, in the last decade of Ottoman power. While works like Michelle Campos’s *Ottoman Brothers*, Samuel Dolbee and Shay Hazkani’s “Unlikely Identities,” and Abigail Jacobson’s “The Sephardi Community in Pre-World War I Jerusalem” provide fascinating insights into the ways that Sephardim in Jerusalem experienced the restructuring of the Ottoman Empire under the Young Turk Regime, examining their complex and ever-changing identities, they all focus entirely on the brief period between 1908 and 1914, pinning much of the historic change of the late Ottoman period and the British Mandate for Palestine on the developments of 1908 and its aftermath. In overlooking precedents for Sephardi participation in Ottoman and Zionist politics, in the revival of Hebrew, and in the local Palestinian Arab community, these authors describe Sephardi Zionism as largely reactive, rather than an expression of authentically

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2 Wallach, 281
3 Wallach, 285
Sephardi aspirations. While Wallach asserts that the Jews of Jerusalem must be understood in relation to the worlds around them, the fact remains that Sephardim in late nineteenth-century Jerusalem were active participants in their own fates, and did much to contribute to the eventual creation of Israel as it exists today.

In addition to engaging the existing literature, this thesis draws on the personal and public writings of some leading figures in the Sephardi community of Jerusalem. One of the primary figures is Rabbi Ben-Zion Avraham Cuenca (5627–5697/1867-1937), a Jerusalem native whose family had come to Palestine from Salonika, where they had lived since the expulsion from Spain in 1492. An avid scholar of Jewish religious and legal writings, as well as secular humanities, he was uniquely situated to begin publishing a journal of halakha (Jewish law) featuring entries by leading rabbis from across the globe (including America in later years of publication). This journal, which he called HaMe’asef, “The Collector,” assembled halachic writings on topics relevant to Jews, and especially Jews in Palestine, in its day and age. Published from 1896 to 1914, it provides a window into the religio-political attitudes of Sephardi rabbinic leaders in Jerusalem, who collectively threw their full support behind Cuenca’s support.

Another source of great interest to this thesis is the collection of personal letters written by David Yellin (5624-5702/1864-1941), an Ottoman Jewish educator, political activist, and academic, born to an Ashkenazi father born in Jerusalem and a Baghdadi mother from a line of Middle Eastern Jewish elites. While not Sephardi in his religious practice, the influence of his mother’s family, his father’s Arab business relations, and the early date of his family’s arrival which predated Ashkenazi communal autonomy all contributed to his close relationship with the Sephardim of Jerusalem, with whom he lived and worked closely in the earlier years of his
career. In addition to revealing numerous insights into Yellin’s own career, it contains correspondence with, and references to, leaders of the Sephardi community of Jerusalem, influential Sephardim and Ashkenazim across Europe and the Middle East, and Palestinian and Ottoman bureaucrats and politicians involved in the historic developments taking place in Hamidian Palestine.

More formal writings by Yellin, journalistic publications, political pronouncements, and contemporary historical writings complement these greater collections to contextualize, corroborate, and complicate the picture laid out in Cuenca’s and Yellin’s writings. While not representative of all Sephardim in Jerusalem during the reign of Abd ul-Hamid II, the attitudes of Cuenca, Yellin, and their compatriots are a dominant trend within Sephardi Jerusalem with no considerable internal opposition movement during the Hamidian era. The voices of women, more recent immigrants, and other more marginalized members of Sephardi society in Jerusalem remain elusive and absent from the narrative. Societal discrimination in their own time and modern biases in historical preservation and publication have left historians today with a dearth of material on the outlooks, aspirations, and attitudes of these groups. It would be excessively simplistic to assert that their views did not differ in meaningful ways from the elite men of the Sephardi leadership, but the lack of available information makes it difficult to ascertain the precise ways in which they differed. As the field advances and scholars across the globe uncover and explore more archives with attention to questions of Sephardi identity and politics in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, historians can better understand the diversity within these communities and dissenting strains of opinion. This thesis seeks to lay a foundation for such future work, drawing on the presently available primary works to advance the field’s
understanding of who the Sephardim of Hamidian Jerusalem were, how they perceived the rising nationalisms that engulfed them, and why they responded, or failed to respond, to the changing times.
Chapter 1: Sephardi Identity in Context (5600-5668/1840-1908)

In order to understand Sephardi attitudes towards the development of Eretz Yisra’el (the land of Israel) in Hamidian Jerusalem, we must first understand who these Sephardim were. Traditionally, the word “Sephardi” originates from the Hebrew s’farad, meaning Spain, and was used to refer to Jews of Iberian origin, most of whom left the area after 1492 and immigrated to other parts of Europe, North Africa, and the Ottoman Empire, which opened its doors to them under Sultan Bayezit II (1447-1512). However, as these Iberian refugees interacted with extant communities in the Eastern Mediterranean, their rituals and cultures blended into the local rites creating a Sephardi tradition in Ottoman lands distinct from, though closely related to, the Sephardi traditions of North African and Western European Sephardim (mostly in the Netherlands). As the centuries passed, the Sephardim of the Ottoman Empire came to identify more strongly as Ottoman subjects, as their collective memories of a lost home in Iberia became instead an identification with the Ottoman state that had welcomed them into its borders. This further blurred the distinctions between Sephardim originally from the Levant, and those from Yemen, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and other Ottoman territories.

The Sephardim of Jerusalem are no exception to this, and in many ways, due to the religious importance of Jerusalem which motivated Jews from across the Empire to move to the city [list of reasons jews moved there], it serves as a prime example of this conglomeration of Jewish traditions into a broad umbrella of “Sephardi” identity. Even Ashkenazi Jews (European Jews mostly from Lithuania and Russia at this time) often integrated into the Sephardi community before the large influx of immigrants from Europe created a critical mass for a
distinct Ashkenazi community.⁴ As Matthias B. Lehmann describes in “Rethinking Sephardi Identity,” the traditionally Sephardi communities of Moroccan and Bukharan immigrants also asserted their own desire for autonomy from the centralized Sephardi authority at the time.⁵ However, despite these minor splinters, the Sephardim retained a surprising degree of cohesion throughout the Hamidian period, especially compared to their Ashkenazi brethren. So, while it is outside the scope of this project to formulate a blanket understanding of the role of all Sephardim in the social, economic, and political structures of Ottoman Jerusalem, a general characterization will be drawn, with attention to some significant outliers. As a community of Jews, they were set apart from their Christian and Muslim neighbors politically by the Ottoman millet system, an institutionalization of non-Muslim communities of “people of the book” (dhimmi) which granted limited communal autonomy to these minorities within the Empire. Yet, they were integrated linguistically and culturally into the daily life of the city. They saw themselves as Ottomans, but with a distinctly Jewish connection to the city and the land, due to the historic and religious importance of Eretz Yisra’el and Jerusalem for Jews, and exceptional associations with the Jewish diaspora across the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe.

The course of Abd ul-Hamid’s rule, though, was one of great demographic change for the Jewish community of Jerusalem. According to Israeli geographer and historian Yehoshua Ben-Arieh’s rough estimates in his two volume history of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century development of the city of Jerusalem, there were 5,500 Sephardim in the city by 1870. For relative comparison, this number is approximately equal to the number of Ashkenazim and around a quarter of the 22,000 total population, with the combined Jewish

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⁴ Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, Jerusalem in the 19 Century, The Old City (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1984), 282.
population comprising half of the city’s total residents, compared to 6,500 Muslims and 4,500 Christians of varying denominations. His estimate includes all residents of the city, however, so he makes no distinction between Ottoman subjects and foreign nationals. According to Ottoman records, the numbers are 5,200 Sephardim and 2,500 Ashkenazim (for a decade earlier in 1861). Since there is no evidence that the population of Ashkenazim doubled in a decade, these numbers demonstrate the greater political significance of the Sephardim as Ottoman subjects, since a majority of the Ashkenazim were considered foreigners. In 1903, the city was approximately 63 percent Jewish. However, as Michelle Campos makes clear, only two thirds of these were Ottoman subjects, with the rest (almost all Ashkenazim), being foreigners under the protection of foreign governments. According to Gad Gilbar, 8,100 Sephardim (defined broadly as discussed above) were Ottoman subjects to 5,600 Ashkenazim, with the remaining 21,000 or so Jews in the Jerusalem kaza being foreigners, not subject to autonomy authority. So, while Ashkenazim may have risen from an equal share of Jerusalem’s Jews at the outset of the Hamidian era to a comfortable majority at its end, Sephardim retained a dominant position within the Ottoman system as the majority of registered subjects of the sultan.

The predominance of Sephardim in Ottoman bureaucracy, despite their increasing minority status in real terms, proved a source of considerable tension among the Jews of

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6 Ben-Arieh, *Old City*, 278-79.
7 Ben-Arieh, *Old City*, 276.
8 Ruth Kark and Michal Oren-Nordheim, *Jerusalem and its Environs: Quarters, Neighborhoods, Villages, 1800-1948* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press: 2001), 28. Ben-Arieh supports this percentage, but includes a large number of non-subject Ashkenazim. His numbers are also higher for both general and Jewish population.
10 Gilbar relies on data from the administrative district (kaza) at large, not just the city. However, he asserts that almost all of the Jews in the kaza of Jerusalem did live in the city.
Hamidian Jerusalem. One of the largest sources of this tension was the distribution of money raised by *shliṭim* (emissaries) to Jewish communities around the world. The poor of Jerusalem were heavily dependant on the *shliḥim* for their subsistence, as many dedicated their lives to religious learning and piety rather than material pursuits. Due to the considerable historic and religious significance of Jerusalem for Jews everywhere, the Jewish community in the city was able to sustain itself with the help of *halukah* funds (donations from diasporic communities). As the historical majority, the Sephardim claimed authority over these funds which were distributed from a central treasury to Sephardim and Ashkenazim alike.\(^\text{12}\) However, as the Ashkenazi community grew larger, it sought more economic autonomy, pushing for its own *kolel* (communal institution) that could arrange independent collection and distribution of funds in 1856, and factions within the Sephardi community shortly followed suit, notably the *ma'aravim* (Moroccans), the *gurgim* (Georgians) and the *buḥarim* (Bukharans).\(^\text{13}\) Over the second half of the nineteenth century, these division became more numerous and more salient, breaking the historic monopoly on internal power of the Sephardi rabbinic leadership.

It is thus clear that, at the outset of the Hamidian period, the Sephardi community’s traditional hegemony in the Jerusalem Jewish community was in decline. Yet, their status as Ottoman subjects also made the ascendant Ashkenazim dependant on them as intermediaries with the government. This was most significant in regards to land purchases, which the Porte restricted for non-subjects to varying degrees throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. This led some Sephardim, as well as earlier Ashkenazi immigrants who had integrated into the Sephardi community, to serve as agents of Ashkenazi organizations and businessmen

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\(^{12}\) Ben-Arieh, *Old City*, 283-84.

\(^{13}\) Lehmann, 97-100.
who desired to develop the Jewish presence in Palestine, and especially outside the walls of Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{14} The exact dynamics of this relationship will be examined further in a later section, but most notably, it placed the Sephardi community of Jerusalem directly between Ashkenazi Zionists, Arab landowners and tenants, and Ottoman bureaucrats. It is in this context that Sephardim developed distinct attitudes to each of these local groups and to the “nationalist” ideologies which they espoused.

\textit{Sephardi Identity Among Palestinian Arabs}

Sephardi relations with their Arab neighbors during this period deserve a closer look, since it has not received much attention in scholarship. While many Ashkenazim at the time saw Sephardim, and especially immigrants from Yemen and Morocco, as representative of a lost biblical way of life,\textsuperscript{15} these attitudes were deeply grounded in Orientalist views of Arabs, and Jews in Arab lands, as backward, and belonging to an earlier time.\textsuperscript{16} They also ignore the highly urban character of Sephardim across the Ottoman Empire, who engaged in trade, politics, and culture in Istanbul, Salonika, Damascus, and countless other imperial centers. However, due to the distinct nature of Jewish settlement in Palestine, and especially in Jerusalem, the Sephardim of Jerusalem must be understood differently from their brothers in other Ottoman cities.

\textsuperscript{14} Kark and Oren-Nordheim, 90-91.
According to Gilbar’s study of the Ottoman census of 1905, the Sephardim of Hamidian Jerusalem concentrated in jobs similar to those of the Arab Christians of the city, working as craftsmen and traders. They were less commonly found in service occupations than their Christian or Muslim neighbors, and far less commonly in administrative and clerking positions than the Muslim population. The concentration of Sephardim in craft and trade, rather than administration and service is reflective of their connection to global Sephardi networks of trade and historic barriers to non-Muslim advancement. David Yellin, a Jerusalemite and early Ashkenazi leader in the movements for Zionist land development and the revival of the Hebrew language, points out that while Sephardim were often engaged in trade, making up as many as 40 of 60 stores in the Batrak Street market, “Among our brothers the Ashkenazi Jews, not a single one takes part in this trade.” Yellin also notes that of the few Jewish shopkeepers near the Damascus gate, all were Sephardi and Moroccan, and that the only market dominated by Ashkenazim was that on the Street of Jews in the Jewish Quarter, because here they could work in Yiddish. As traders and craftsmen in the Muslim and Christian quarters of the city, Sephardi merchants interacted frequently with the non-Jewish Arab population. This was possible for Sephardim in a way that it wasn’t for Ashkenazi immigrants due to their ability to communicate in Arabic and their closer ties to their fellow Ottoman subjects. In a letter to his father from 1881, David Yellin, recounts how, on his departure from Jerusalem, he was sent off by his father’s colleagues, including Hajj Khaled and Abu Hanan and his family. While not technically

17 Gilbar, 44.
Sephardi, David’s father Yehoshua Yellin’s integration into the Sephardi community due to the early date of his family’s arrival places him within the sphere of Ottoman Sephardim in their relationships with Arabs. And as the son of an Iraqi mother, in his early years, Yellin identified even more strongly with the Sephardim of Jerusalem. His close companionship with his father’s Arab colleagues and their families exemplifies the positive personal relationships common among Jerusalemites of different faiths.

However, these social bonds were limited in scope. According to Kark and Oren-Nordheim’s analysis of maps of the city from the nineteenth century, the Jewish quarter was the first and only quarter to be recognized by cartographers as a distinct sector in the first half of the nineteenth century, and had existed in some (less sharply delineated) capacity since the time of the Islamic conquests in the seventh century. While Jerusalem’s Sephardi Jews did work and interact socially with their Palestinian Arab neighbors, they lived in a separate quarter of the city in the nineteenth century, as they had in the ninth century. No amount of social and economic integration was sufficient to break down these physical divisions. While its boundaries were highly fluid, with Christians and Muslims owning property and living in the Jewish quarter and Jews living and working in the other quarters, the concentration of Jews on the southern side of the Old City was an accepted reality based in the practical necessity of concentrating around a synagogue as well as the religious and political status of Jews under various historical ruling powers. This geographic isolation, despite economic and social interaction, also proved a source of tension due to the value of property in the Jewish Quarter for Jews. Many Arab landlords owned the houses and courtyard complexes in the quarter, and could raise prices at will.

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21 Called “Judenstadt” on an 1818 map of the city.
22 Kark and Oren-Nordheim, 43-54.
due to the high demand. As Ben-Arieh explains, the community, therefore, developed the ḥazakah system of granting lessees who remained as tenants for three years a Bill of Ḥazakah. This bill entitled the tenant to remain the uncontested lessee, and no other Jew could rent the property without express consent of the bilholder.23 This serves as a remarkable display of the internal Jewish collaboration in opposition to their Arab neighbors, engendered by the concentration of Jews in their own quarter of the city.

Tension between Jews and Arab Muslims also flared up around the issue of the Western Wall of the Temple Mount. While the Muslim residents of the city generally allowed Jews to pray at the wall, the holiest site in Judaism, they complained to the authorities when Jews tried to make the area more formally resemble a synagogue with lanterns, benches, and other trappings. Similarly, when a formal attempt to purchase and develop the Western Wall area, financed by Baron Rothschild but with backing from the city’s rabbinic leadership, was presented to the authorities, it was halted by Sayyid Bashir, who served as chief administrator of the waqf,24 who convinced the higher Islamic authorities and the Ottoman Pasha not to approve the plan.25 It is therefore evident that Arab Muslim tolerance of Jewish prayer hinged on the condition of formal Jewish political subservience to the needs of the Muslim community, personified by the Jerusalem religious authorities of Jerusalem and the empire’s representatives in the city. Despite this tension, Ben-Arieh posits that relationships between Jews and Muslims remained more positive than those between Jews and Christians, since Christianity was perceived as more antagonistic and threatening to Jerusalem’s Jews. It is for this reason, as well as the availability of space, that Jews moving outside the Jewish Quarter settled in the Muslim Quarter rather than

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23 Ben-Arieh, Old City, 328.
24 Religiously consecrated property in Islamic law
25 Ben-Arieh, Old City, 371-75.
the Christian quarter.\textsuperscript{26} As mentioned above, this dynamic was somewhat dependent on an imbalance of power, due to the Muslim Arabs’ more direct avenues to the Pasha and his agents, and the Jews’ status as a non-Muslim \textit{millet} in the Ottoman administration.

\textit{Sephardi Identity under the Ottoman Administration of Palestine}

Sephardi identity in Jerusalem was not just defined on the local level. The Sephardim of Jerusalem were one of many Jewish communities in the empire, whose political and religious lives were shaped by the Ottoman empire’s administration of its non-Muslim subjects. The Sephardim of Jerusalem were officially recognized as the only Jewish \textit{millet}. This meant that all Jewish subjects of the sultan were represented by the Sephardi communal leadership, while all non-subjects were represented by foreign governments, based on their national origins. So, while there were some Ashkenazi and \textit{Mughrabi} (North African) subjects, denoted separately from Sephardim in the census of 1905,\textsuperscript{27} they were recognized only as individuals, without any communal representation or status. Therefore, when the Ottomans allowed the Jewish community to appoint a \textit{Ḥakham Bashi},\textsuperscript{28} a chief rabbi, in the 1840s, he was chosen from the Sephardi leadership, as were all of his successors under Ottoman rule. While his religious authority in \textit{halakha} (Jewish law) was limited to the Sephardi community, as other communities refused to submit internal matters to his oversight, matters regarding the Ottoman state, the Pasha’s authority, or interreligious relations were handled by the Sephardi \textit{Ḥakham Bashi}, regardless of whether those involved were Sephardi or not.\textsuperscript{29} Lehmann argues that the position

\textsuperscript{26} Ben-Arieh, \textit{Old City}, 386-87.  
\textsuperscript{27} Gilbar, 17-18.  
\textsuperscript{28} Also referred to as \textit{Rishon l’Tziyon} - The First of Zion  
\textsuperscript{29} Ben-Arieh, \textit{Old City}, 288-290.
was created to streamline Jewish-Ottoman relations in Jerusalem, especially in the aftermath of
the city’s reconquest from Muhammad Ali’s Egypt, and that the internal Jewish conflict between
Sephardim and other groups was to some degree based in the conflict for imperial resources in
the middle of the nineteenth century in what historians call the “millet wars,” which entailed
non-Muslims vying for power and influence as the empire enacted reforms to expand
opportunities for dhimmi communities. This historical background to the Hamidian period
clarifies the expanding autonomy and influence held by the Sephardim of Jerusalem, led by the
Hakham Bashi, in imperial administration.

The Ottoman reorganization of political boundaries in the late-nineteenth century created
an unprecedented opportunity for the Sephardim of Jerusalem to exercise this autonomy. In the
1870s, Jerusalem was made the capital of a new mutasarriflik (governorship), separate from the
district of Syria ruled from Damascus, of which it had previously been a part, and its mutasarrif
(governor) reported directly to Istanbul. Therefore, Jerusalem served as the administrative capital
of a mutasarriflik encompassing most of modern Israel/Palestine, a sançak (district), a kaza of
smaller scale, and a nahiye at the lowest administrative level (See Appendix A). Due to the
administrative power of Jerusalem, most matters were handled by the Pasha, who lived in the
city and on whose council the Hakham Bashi served, without being referred to higher outside
authorities. So, while the aforementioned limits to Jewish land purchase and development in and
around Jerusalem remained in effect on the imperial books, they could often be circumvented
through agents who were local residents, both Arab and Jewish, without any interference by the
authorities in Istanbul. In the Tammuz 8, 5656 (June 19, 1896) issue of the halakhic (from

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30 Lehmann, 95-96.
31 Along with kazas of Hebron, Jaffa, and Gaza according to Gilbar, 20
32 Kark and Oren-Nordheim, 31.
halakha - Jewish law) journal HaMe’asef, the sixth siman (article) discusses the halakhic status of land purchased through a non-Jewish agent.33 This article was written by Yosef Nisim Borla, head of the Sephardi Beit Din (court of law), and direct subordinate to the Ḥakham Bashi. As stated in the journal’s introduction written by its editor Ben-Zion Avraham Cuenca in the previous issue of Tammuz 1 (June 12), the focus of HaMe’asef is halakha relevant to the settlement (yishuv) of the land of Israel.34 These articles demonstrate that, despite formal legal limits on Jewish land purchase, the Sephardi rabbinic leadership was interested in establishing a halakhic basis for facilitating land purchase in Eretz Yisra’el for the whole Jewish community of Jerusalem, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, Ottoman subject and foreigner alike. This attitude was a product of their growing communal autonomy and influence with the pasha, which allowed for more lenient treatment of imperial law, at least in matters of special importance to the Sephardi leadership.

The Sephardi leadership of Hamidian Jerusalem and the community which they served operated in a particular historic, geographic, and political context that shaped their understandings of the world in which they lived. Due to their dominant political status in the broader Jewish community, despite a waning demographic majority and internal splintering, they represented the Jews of Ottoman Jerusalem to the Pasha and the diaspora. They served as go-betweens to the Ottoman administration and the local Arabs, with whom they had greater political legitimacy, and linguistic and cultural understanding. However, despite this greater degree of integration among the Ottoman Arabs of Jerusalem, they remained committed to internal Jewish solidarity in the face of economic and political challenges posed by the Arabs

34 Ben-Zion Avraham Cuenca, “Reshit Davar,” HaMe’asef, Vol. 1 No. 2, 1a-1b.
and Ottomans. Overall, the Sephardim of Hamidian Jerusalem found themselves uniquely situated to pursue their visions for the development of the Jewish community in Jerusalem as they entered the twentieth century.
Chapter 2: Distinctly Sephardic Zionism (5640-5656/1880-1896)

Sephardi rabbis in Jerusalem were among the first public figures in the nineteenth century to formulate treatises on the importance of Jewish settlement in the Eretz Yisra’el. They led some of the first agricultural societies, residential settlements, and Hebrew language schools in Jerusalem during the late nineteenth century. Yet, in the dominant Zionist historiographies, the Ashkenazi immigrants, with their European intellectual prowess and their pioneering spirit turned a desert wasteland into burgeoning urban center, at the heart of a new nation. While historians have begun looking at earlier thinkers who preempted the Zionist leaders like Theodore Herzl, these studies only include Sephardim incidentally, making little distinction between Ashkenazi and Sephardi proto-Zionists and the way their backgrounds shaped their contributions to the beginnings of the Zionist movement. They consider Rabbi Yehuda Ben Shlomo Alkalai a “pioneer of religious Zionism” but ignore the Ottoman Sephardi context in which he made his contributions to Zionism. A few Israeli historians have recognized the contributions of Sephardim in works written in Hebrew, but this historiography has yet to cross the linguistic divide. Even in recent historical works by Israeli authors, the contributions of Sephardim are often downplayed or disregarded.


36 See Shlomo Haramati, Shlosha Sh’kidmu L’Ben Yehuda (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1978). He addresses Nisim Bakhar, Barukh Mitran, and Yosef HaLevi as three Sephardi academics who worked to revive the Hebrew language among Ottoman Jews before Ben-Yehuda began his work in Palestine.

But Sephardim were instrumental in the development of Zionism within *Eretz Yisra’el*, and made monumental contributions to the earliest successes of the Zionist movement. Sephardi educators prefigured Eliezer Ben-Yehuda’s revival of the Hebrew language by reorienting the curriculum of a French Jewish school in Jerusalem to teach non-religious subjects in Hebrew. Sephardim in Jerusalem also actively participated in the creation and maintenance of land purchase societies in Palestine, often acting as agents of wealthy Sephardim and Ashkenazim in Europe, continuing a long history of Sephardi economic networks across the Mediterranean while leveraging their particular social and political positions to serve as intermediaries to Ottoman bureaucrats and landlords and Palestinian Arab tenants. Furthermore, they saw their activities as not just political or economic, but as the fulfillment of a religious mandate to redeem the Holy Land. In this way, they differed drastically from their contemporary Zionists, but laid the foundation for later Ashkenazim to establish movement of religious Zionism, through organizations like Mizraḥi (founded 1902 in Vilna).  

This chapter explores the distinct brand of Zionism developed by the Sephardi community of Jerusalem in the late nineteenth century. First, it looks at the way that the schools of Kol Yisra’el Ḥaverim blended the ideals of European Enlightenment with local Sephardi traditionalism to educate a generation of Sephardi leadership capable of working with the Ottoman authorities, local Arab leaders, and European Jews to bolster Jewish settlement of the land. Next, it examines the networks of Sephardim across Europe and the Middle East, many of them tied directly to Kol Yisra’el Ḥaverim, that participated in the development of Jewish

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38 Goldwater, 102.
settlement. Last, it explores the religious motivations for this Sephardi Zionism, distinguishing it from contemporary secular European Zionism and religious Ashkenazi anti-Zionism in Palestine.

As Ben-Zion Avraham Cuenca wrote in 1896 in the introduction to his halakhic journal, *HaMe’asef*, he was motivated to publish the journal by “the spirit of love for our holy land (artzenu hakdosha), which is engraved inside every Israelite (ish yisra’el).” One of the leading Sephardi rabbis of the Jewish community in Jerusalem at the end of the nineteenth century, Cuenca was able to accumulate *te’udot* (stamps of approval) from a wide range of rabbis for his publication. This list included *Ḥakham Bashi* Ya’akov Sha’ul Elyashar, the heads of the Jerusalem rabbinic court, the chief rabbi of Hebron, and other leading Sephardi rabbis of the Palestine Jewish community, in addition to an Ashkenazi rabbi of great renown in Poland. It is thus no overstatement to say that his views are representative of the leadership of the Sephardi Yishuv in Hamidian Palestine. This is unsurprising considering his background. His ancestors left Spain after being expelled in 1492, and had then moved to Salonika - which was a major center of Sephardi life after the expulsion - where they lived until 1850, when his father Avraham Cuenca immigrated to Ottoman Palestine in 1850. From an early age, he was educated by leading Sephardi pedagogues, both in rabbinic studies and secular topics such as history and language. Shortly after beginning publishing *HaMe’asef*, he founded a *yeshiva* (rabbinic educational institution), *Tiferet Yerushalayim*, where many of the next generation of Sephardi leaders would be educated. By all accounts, Cuenca represents the mainstream Sephardi

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39 Cuenca, “Reshit Davar.”
40 Rafae’l Yitzhak Yisrael, Yosef Nisim Burla, and Ya’akov Shimon Matalon
41 See the frontmatter of Cuenca, *HaMe’asef*, Vol. 1 No. 2.
leadership of Hamidian Jerusalem, and his publication serves as a useful window into the attitudes of that community.

The introduction to Cuenca’s first issue of *HaMe’asef* is highly instructive in understanding this distinctly Sephardi brand of Zionism. He wrote, “One of our essential goals will be to deliver and present the foundations in the *halakha* (rabbinic law), in all the issues and rulings, that relate to the settlement (*yishuv*) of the land.” Following upon the earlier works of Rabbi Yehuda Ben Shlomo Alkalai (5558-5639/1798-1878), who stressed the importance of settling the Holy Land, Cuenca saw *yishuv ha’aretz* as a fundamental concern for the Jewish people in his time. Over a year before the First Zionist Congress, an overwhelmingly Ashkenazi affair for which all of the elected leadership, and most of the general body were from Europe, with over half coming from Eastern Europe alone, the leadership of the Sephardi community in Jerusalem stood behind a declaration of the importance of the settlement - “yishuv” - of the land of Israel according to Jewish tradition. These men had been born in the Ottoman Empire, many of them within the walls of Jerusalem itself, and while they all had connections to the broader Jewish diaspora, throughout the Empire and in Europe, their aims and intentions were their own.

It is remarkable that they preempted the first point of Max Nordau’s Basel Program, published as the official aims of the Zionist movement at the First Zionist congress which met in Basel, Switzerland in 1897. The Basel Program highlighted the importance of “fostering the settlement of Palestine with farmers, labourers, and artisans.” European Zionism did exist

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43 Cuenca, “Reshit Davar.”
44 Goldwater, 28.
before 1897, and included calls and efforts to settle the land before the Congress. But, Central
and Eastern European Ashkenazim did not monopolize efforts to promote Jewish settlement in
Ottoman Palestine at the end of the nineteenth century. Ottoman Jews, and especially Sephardim
in Jerusalem, were avidly engaged in developing Jewish settlement in Palestine through their
own global networks, schools, charities, and religious organizations.

*Kol Yisra’el Haverim and the New Sephardi Leadership*

The blending of religious mandate and political aspiration in Sephardi efforts to develop
*Eretz Yisra’el* is grounded in a history of Sephardi mixing of religion and politics, which was
becoming anathema in the European (and Ashkenazi) political imagination of the time. As
exemplified by Cuenca’s own education, it was standard in Sephardi circles to develop religious
scholarship parallel to historical and linguistic studies. The quintessential Sephardi man of
letters, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides) of the twelfth century was similarly
polymathic, authoring comprehensive volumes on religious law as well as groundbreaking works
on medical science and Aristotelian philosophy.47 Especially for Sephardim in Ottoman
Palestine, there was much less tension between secular and religious studies than there was
among European Jews during the period of the *Haskalah* (the Jewish Enlightenment) in the late
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This dynamic enabled the Sephardi community of Jerusalem
to simultaneously develop internal linguistic revival and political organization as well as stronger
relations with the Arab leadership of the city.

In Europe, prominent *maskilim* (Jewish Enlightenment thinkers) such as Moses Mendelssohn juggled their Jewish and secular lives in a continent shaken by competing liberal reforms, emancipations, and national awakenings. The Ottoman Empire, more multi-confessional and more religiously-minded with official state *qadis* (Islamic judges, led by the *sheikh ul-Islam* at the Sultan’s court), placed less pressure on its subjects to choose between secular inclusion and religious exclusion. In this context, the Sephardim of Ottoman Palestine were prime candidates to join a new network of secular schools for Jews developing in France at the time. The Alliance Israélite Universelle, (*Kol Yisra’el Haverim* -abbreviated as *KiYaH* in Hebrew) was a groundbreaking educational organization. Alma Rachel Heckman and Frances Malino call it “the first international Jewish organization of its kind” while addressing its foundation in 1860 as a way to coordinate responses to gentile persecution of Jews in the wake of the Damascus and Mortara affairs.\(^4^8\) In their account, the educated and emancipated French Jewish leadership aimed “to come to the aid of persecuted and vulnerable coreligionists through diplomatic lobbying and ‘to regenerate’ the Jews of the world—vocationally, morally, and spiritually—through the establishment of modern, intellectually rigorous schools.”\(^4^9\) It deserves mention that the leadership of *KiYaH* were fundamentally orientalist in their outlook. They saw themselves as cultured representatives of the West, bringing modernity and its benefits to the benighted Jews of the Ottoman Empire.

That being said, the realization of their aims, at least in Palestine, was moderated by the Jews of Ottoman Palestine who staffed their schools, Nisim Bakhar (5608-5691/1848-1931)

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\(^4^8\) A modern blood libel centering around a Capuchin monk and the kidnapping and conversion of a young Jewish child by his Catholic nurse.

chief among them. Born in Jerusalem in 1848, he was educated by the rabbinic leadership (similarly to Cuenca) including his maternal grandfather, the great scholar Rabbi Yedidia Refa’el Hai Abulafia, the scion of a renowned rabbinic dynasty. Bakhar traveled to Paris in his teenage years and there studied at the KiYaH teaching institute, and upon graduation taught for brief stints in Syria, Bulgaria, and Istanbul, where he began developing a core curriculum in Hebrew, which he instituted upon his move to Jerusalem, where he created the school Torah u’Melacha (Torah and work).\(^{50}\) In this school, he taught and then worked alongside David Yellin, while also serving as an unofficial agent of Baron Edmond de Rothschild.\(^{51}\) As the head of this school, and in partnership with Yellin, Bakhar broke considerably from the traditional mold of KiYaH schools, starting with his extensive use of Hebrew in his curriculum. As Yellin claimed in his letter to Karl Netter, a founder of KiYaH, in the summer of 5642 (1882), his father had originally planned for him to learn Arabic and French from a student at Netter’s school Mikveh Yisrael in Jaffa,\(^{52}\) where both languages were taught and used. Only after these plans fell through did Yellin enroll at Torah u’Melacha where he learned primarily in Hebrew, which he had already mastered, and only learned French and Arabic secondarily. This focus on Hebrew, and the accompanying turn from French and Arabic, despite the absence of successful precedents, demonstrates the deep importance of the revival of the Hebrew language for Nisim Bakhar and his supporters.

\(^{50}\) Alexander Peli, “Nisim Bakhar,” Encyclopedia Hebraica (HaEncziklopediya Halvrit) (Jerusalem: Hevra L’hotza’at Entziklopediyot, 5729), 718.

\(^{51}\) Bakhar acted as Rothschild’s emissary in the aforementioned attempt to purchase the land of the Western Wall.

\(^{52}\) Yellin, “25. El Karl Netter,” Igrot, 35-37. This plan was secondary to an early plan for him to learn Arabic and French at a KiYaH school in Beirut as discussed in his letter to Moses Montefiore of 6 Marḥeshvan 5642 (1881), Yellin “20. El Moshe Montefiore,” Igrot, 30.
The historic ramifications of Bakhar’s Hebrew curriculum are exceptionally far-reaching. Shortly after opening the school, Bakhar was joined by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, considered to be the father of Modern Hebrew, who had recently immigrated to Jerusalem from France.\footnote{Joseph Gedaliah Klausner, ”Ben-Yehuda, Eliezer.” Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd ed., 386-388. Vol. 3} However, while history remembers that Ben-Yehuda worked with Bakhar at the \textit{KiYaH} school, Bakhar’s efforts to develop a Hebrew curriculum before ever meeting Ben-Yehuda (and even before Ben Yehuda’s immigration to Jerusalem) have largely been overwritten by Ben-Yehuda’s fame. Had Bakhar not offered Ben-Yehuda a teaching position in Hebrew, it is unclear how successful his revival of Hebrew would have been, especially considering that many of his associates in the Hebrew society that he established were drawn from the ranks of the \textit{KiYaH} school.\footnote{E.g. David Yellin, his father-in-law Yehiel Pines and his brother-in-law Yosef Meyuhas.} Shlomo Haramati highlighted the contributions of Bakhar and two Ottoman Sephardi peers in the revival of the Hebrew language in his work, \textit{Shlosha Sh’kidmu L ’Ben-Yehuda}\footnote{“Three Who Preceded Ben-Yehuda.”}, but successive histories of the revival of the Hebrew language have ignored their contributions.\footnote{See note 35.} So, while Ben-Yehuda undoubtedly made monumental contributions to the revival of the Hebrew language, his work needs to be contextualized among the parallel efforts by the Sephardi leadership in Jerusalem.

The extensive use of Hebrew language was not the only area in which Bakhar’s school was exceptional among \textit{KiYaH} institutions. Bakhar also distinguished himself by admitting the children of many leaders of the Arab community of Jerusalem into his school. As Yellin discussed in a letter to Bakhar on October 25, 1887,\footnote{Yellin, “30. El Nisim Bakhar,” Igrot, 42-44.} there was a growing contingent of Arab students attending the school. He remarked, somewhat comically, “Perhaps we’ve reached a point where the Muslims entrust their children to us to learn own language,” before noting the
difficulty he encountered trying to teach these Muslim students Arabic. However, he mentioned that despite the resistance of some students, an older student of the Khalidi family studied Arabic with him for an hour every day and that Sheikh Yusuf58 sent the son of the Muezzin59 of the Haram al-Sharif to study Arabic and French with them as well. Sheikh Yusuf even planned to send his own son to the school after he finished his primary education at the Rushdia school. By expanding the purview of a school created to serve the Jewish community of Jerusalem to include educating Palestinian Arabs in Arabic and French, Bakhar demonstrated the strong relationship between the Sephardim of Jerusalem and their Arab neighbors in a way that differed considerably from other Ottoman Jews and from Ashkenazim. In the wake of the persecutions that led to the founding of KiYaH, it is remarkable that Bakhar welcomed non-Jewish students into his school. And in light of Sheikh Yusuf’s later letter to Theodore Herzl, suggesting that the Zionists find another homeland and that “Palestine be left alone,”60 it raises the question of what happened to the seemingly ideal cooperation evident in this period.

These dual pedagogical coups, of creating a Hebrew curriculum to revive a national Jewish spoken tongue while simultaneously welcoming Palestinian Arab students into the classroom, define the particular nature of the Sephardi Zionism characterized by Bakhar during the reign of Abd ul-Hamid II. It stood in contrast both to the old Ashkenazi community of Jerusalem, which placed herem (communal exclusion) upon any family sending students to KiYaH schools while living alongside the Arabs of the old city, and the nascent Ashkenazi

59 Ritual proclaimer of Muslim prayer times.
60 Khalidi, “Yusuf Diya-uddin Pasha al-Khalidi.”
Zionist movement which involved itself extensively in efforts at national revival but rapidly came to be seen by leaders in the Arab community of Jerusalem as a threat. Sephardi Zionism in the late nineteenth century did not see national revival and inclusive development as mutually exclusive. For Nisim Bakhar, his partners, and his students, it was possible to strengthen Jewish national existence through the revival of Hebrew while simultaneously cultivating positive relationships with the surrounding Arab population, an approach unparalleled by other Jewish communities.

Land Purchase Through International Sephardi Networks

Another pillar of early Sephardi Zionism in the late-Ottoman empire was organized land purchases around Jerusalem and across Palestine. One of the most significant factors in this development was the economic and political power of Sephardi elites across the world, most notably in England and the United States. The familial and communal ties between Sephardim in Jerusalem and those in Europe and America facilitated the creation of groundbreaking land purchase societies in Palestine. These societies combined the wealth of European Sephardi elites with the social and political power of Ottoman Sephardim in Jerusalem to lay the groundwork for decades of land purchase efforts by Sephardim and Ashkenazim alike up until the creation of the state of Israel.

David Yellin serves as a useful case study in this regard. His father was Ashkenazi, but his Baghdadi mother, education with Kol Yisra’el Ḥaverim, and close partnership with Nisim Bakhar during the early years of his career complicate his identity. Especially in light of the

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61 Ethnic identity in Judaism has traditionally followed patrilineal descent.
Sephardi community’s dominance in Jerusalem when his family arrived in 1834, and his
grandfather and father’s integration into that Sephardi community in those early years, David
Yellin cannot simply be considered a member of the Ashkenazi community of Jerusalem.
Furthermore, the herem (decree of communal exclusion) from the Ashkenazi rabbinic leadership
that he and his father incurred upon his enrollment at the KiYaHa school further distanced him
from the Ashkenazi establishment in Jerusalem. For all these reasons, David Yellin can be
identified as a member of the Sephardi community of Jerusalem, at least in the early years of his
work.

On 18 Tammuz, 5646 (July 21, 1886), Yellin demonstrated his numerous connections to
notable Sephardi figures of the time in a letter to Yosef Sebag-Montefiore. Sebag-Montefiore, a
British Jew of Sephardi origins, and the recipient of the letter, had taken the Montefiore name
when he inherited the estate of his uncle, Moshe Montefiore, who was descended from a line of
Spanish and Portuguese Jewish emigres and is discussed in the letter. The letter discusses a
parcel of land bought by Moshe Montefiore outside the walls of Jerusalem, which had been
bequeathed to Yosef Sebag-Montefiore upon his uncle’s passing, but which was administered by
Nisim Bakhar on Sebag-Montefiore’s behalf. Bakhar’s role as administrator was Yellin’s
connection to the property, as Bakhar and Yellin worked together at the Kol Yisrael Chaverim
school in Jerusalem. This letter showcases the extensive global Sephardi networks involved in

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65 Jacobs, et al.
66 Note 5 on letter #27 of Yellin, Igrot, 39 identifies this parcel as “Batei Tura” which would become Mishkenot
Sha’ananim, the first Jewish settlement outside the walls of the Old City. It was organized by Montefiore and the
American Jew Yehuda Touro (Tura in Hebrew), also Sephardi
67 Discussed extensively in later letters between the two.
the development of *Eretz Yisrael* - from David Yellin and Nisim Bakhar in Jerusalem, to the Montefiores in London, and even Montefiore’s unmentioned partner in America.

The importance of this letter goes beyond the involved parties, though. In it, Yellin is writing to Sebag-Montefiore (on behalf of Bakhar) to inform him of a recent issue with his parcel of land. He describes how a large group of impoverished Jerusalem residents, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, whom he refers to as “the poor and miserable of the nation,” came to the parcel to complain to its managers that Montefiore had purchased it for their sake. The emphasis on these complainants as “of the nation” (*ha’am*) and both Ashkenazi and Sephardi is especially noteworthy, considering the previously discussed disputes between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim over *Halukah* funds and responsibility for the poor. While the Ashkenazi leadership was motivated politically to distinguish between Ashkenazi and Sephardi poor, this letter demonstrates the reality that, in Jerusalem at the end of the nineteenth century, these communities were much more integrated. And for Yellin, and Montefiore before him if the testimony of the poor is to be accepted, the poor deserved to be supported as a unit as the responsibility of the nation, and not one ethnic group or another. However, the distinction between Ashkenazim and Sephardim did not disappear in Yellin’s recommendation -- Yellin suggested that the areas of the parcel not being dedicated to Sebag-Montefiore’s workhouses should be split into “a sector for Sephardim and a sector for Ashkenazim,” in which plots would be distributed by lottery. Yellin seems to have been conforming with the attitudes of the Sephardi leadership. While he accepted, and even reinforced, social and communal divisions between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, Yellin saw both groups as equally deserving of Sebag-Montefiore’s “great compassion,” regardless of their background or communal affiliation.
Land development by Sephardim in Eretz Yisrael went far beyond charitable projects. As Yellin attested in a letter to his brother-in-law, Yeḥezk’el Sochovolsky, on 7 Shvat 5651 (1891), “There has been a great awakening in Jerusalem of land purchases, with societies springing up like grass.” Yellin then detailed his own efforts at establishing one such society, focusing on the offices he’d established in Jerusalem, Yafo, and Beirut, and recent efforts to “begin writing to America as well, to awaken them to participate in this project.” In this letter though, he was more forthcoming about the reasons for his efforts. First and foremost, he saw it as a religious mandate, writing, “Is not the redemption of the land a commandment for every man of Israel?” in a passage about membership in his society’s committees. In Yellin’s imagination, the establishment of land purchase societies was a manifestation of the will of G-d.

David Yellin, like his peer and mentor Nisim Bakhar, worked within global networks of Sephardi commercial and social interaction to facilitate land purchase and administration in Jerusalem at the end of the nineteenth century. His familial contacts in England, who had assisted his father’s earlier desires to purchase and develop land, served to connect him to British Sephardim, most notably the Montefiores, with whom he and Nisim Bakhar worked extensively. Notably though, as a product of his partially Sephardi upbringing, he saw these efforts as a manifestation of religious obligations incumbent upon all Jews for the sake of the whole community.

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Land Purchase as a Religious Obligation

This mandate of *geulat ha’arets* (redemption of the land), is deeply grounded in historic Jewish attitudes towards the land of Israel. Its roots in the Torah have resonated for Jewish communities in Eretz Yisrael and across the Diaspora across the ages. However, in this particular historic moment, the Ottoman political context combined with historic religious mandates to bring *geulat ha’arets* to the forefront of Jerusalem Sephardi communal consciousness. David Yellin and Nisim Bakhar’s efforts were supported by the religious leadership of the community in explicit statements of the importance of redeeming land in Eretz Yisrael.

From the Biblical commandment to possess and settle the land (Deuteronomy 11:31), to the Midrashic decree that “settlement of the land of Israel (*yishuv ha’arets*) is equal in worth to all of the commandments in the Torah,”⁶⁹ to Talmudic injunctions that it is better to divorce than to leave the land of Israel,⁷⁰ the foundational Jewish texts place a clear emphasis on the importance of Jewish settlement in the land of Israel. Later Rabbinic writers similarly stressed this importance, most notably Moshe ben Naḥman (Naḥmanides), one of the greatest Sephardi rabbis of the thirteenth century. Naḥmanides asserts that the fourth positive commandment in the Torah is the settlement of the land.⁷¹ However, in his accounting of the commandment, Naḥmanides adds the clarification that Jewish settlement of the land is necessary in order “not to leave it in the hands of other nations or in desolation.” It is in this practically-minded formulation that the importance of redemption of the land, and not just its settlement, gained prominence. In the diaspora, when *Eretz Yisra’el* is in the hands of the “other nations,” settlement of the land according to the biblical ideal was constructed as autonomous settlement, and not simply

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⁶⁹ Sifri on Parshat Re’eh, 80
⁷⁰ Ketubot 110b
⁷¹ *Hasagot haRamban al Sefer haMitzvot*, Mitzvot Aseh, 4.
subordinate residence. While the degree of that autonomy would remain in debate for centuries, the minimum of land ownership and development established by Nahmanides would serve as a precedent for many later generations.

It was this tradition of geulat ha’aretz that motivated David Yellin to create his land-purchase society, following in the footsteps of other organizers and investors of his time. As he described in his 1891 letter to Sochovolsky, “This is a major matter for the expansion of the Yishuv and for planting the knowledge of the commandment of the redemption of the land72 in the heart of every Jew.”73 For Yellin, the expansion of the Yishuv was inherently tied to the commandment to redeem and settle the land. In his own experience, he had seen that without formal organization efforts to this effect would be fruitless due to governmental restrictions, like those faced by his father in Kolonia. This is why he insisted on creating his society “with a solid foundational structure”74 for the purchase of parcels (karka ’ot) in Eretz Yisrael. The effectiveness of this organizational focus is borne out in a later correspondence with Dr. W. Herzberg, an academic and the principal of the Mikveh Yisra’el agricultural school, and later of the German orphanage school in Jerusalem.75 On 15 December 1891, Yellin wrote to Herzberg in great despair over the plight of immigrants who were being expelled from the Promised Land. “The strict laws against these immigrants are still in effect; nobody is coming into the country, and even those who were already here are gradually leaving.”76 In this case, there is a dual focus on the physical territory (the land of Israel) and its political organization (the Ottoman state).

72 “Netiyat-yediyat-mitzvat-geulat-ha’aretz.” The multilayered construct state in the original Hebrew, which is represented faithfully in my translation, adds poetic heft to the importance of geulat ha’aretz and doubles down on the metaphor of “planting” the knowledge of the biblical importance of land cultivation.
74 al basis nakhon, lit. on a correct base
75 Note 4 to letter #12 in Yellin, Igrot, 16.
76 Yellin, “46. El HaDr. W. Herzberg,” Igrot, 61. Letter #46 is printed in translation from the original French.
These parallel foci underscore the importance of geulat ha’aretz for Yellin. The essence of this redemption was not just living on the land, but living in control of it. His despair around the plight of the immigrants ultimately came down to the inability of the Jewish community in Ottoman Palestine to determine their own fate while they were beholden to Ottoman law and the Ottoman authorities.

This desire for autonomy was not unique to the late-Ottoman context. Throughout history, Jewish communities attempted to gain greater communal autonomy, and were sometimes granted this concession by the government under which they lived. Two of the most famous examples come from Europe, namely the Polish Council of Four Lands and the Napoleonic Grand Sanhedrin. The first was a series of hierarchically organized councils of Rabbis representing communities across the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, who collected taxes for the crown in exchange for control over the justice system for all internal Jewish disputes. This system lasted for centuries until shortly before Poland was dismembered by neighboring states in the late-eighteenth century. The second, the Napoleonic Grand Sanhedrin was a short-lived arrangement between Napoleon and the Jews of the lands he conquered in his imperial wars. He allowed them to assemble a council of rabbis, parallel to the Sanhedrin that led the Jewish people in the Second Temple Period, in order to synchronize halakha with the civil legal system he established in his Napoleonic Code. Both of these systems, but especially the Council of Four Lands, were fairly similar to the millet system that already existed in the Ottoman Empire. The novelty of Sephardi calls for ge’ulat ha’aretz was that this autonomy would be more complete and would exist specifically in Eretz Yisra’el. Though not demanding an independent state, or full separation from the Ottoman Empire, Yellin saw greater autonomy
beyond the *millet* system as a method to overcome the historic powerlessness that Jews in Europe as well as the Ottoman Empire experienced.

In the Ottoman context, though, this powerlessness was also self-reinforcing, in that Ottoman limits to Jewish land-purchase created a cyclical barrier to *geulat ha’aretz* -- limited political autonomy reinforced limited access to land, which further limited political autonomy. As Yellin lamented in his letter to Herzberg, by December of 1891 land purchases had ceased completely, and most previously made purchases could not be realized due to harsh restrictions. Though land purchase did not stop as completely in the early 1890s as Yellin claims, there were serious restrictions on Jewish land purchase. These led most land purchase societies dissolved due to the impracticality of maintaining societies for purchases which could not legally be completed. Yellin attributed this dissolution mostly to the profit-driven nature of the societies, writing, “When it became clear that it is again not permitted for foreigners to settle in the land, the business stopped being a business and stopped.” However, he recognized that the ultimate cause of the dissolutions was “the evil will of the local governments that have created difficulties at every step.” Yet, despite these obstacles, Yellin’s own society *Ḥibat Ha’aretz*, under the direction of a mix of Sephardi and Ashkenazi leaders, remained in operation, the only such society to do so in his account. Yellin attests that the reason for his society’s continuation in the face of so much opposition was its idealistic, rather than commercial approach to land purchase. It focused not on turning a profit, but on purchasing parcels in the Holy Land. While

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77 Kark and Oren-Nordheim, 82-85.
78 He mentions specifically *Nahalat Ya’akov*, created by the Warsaw Kolel (*Havatzelet* 21 Iyyar, 5658 [May 13, 1898]).
79 Which he detailed to Sochovolsky in his aforementioned *Shvat* 5651 letter.
80 Yellin was joined by Sephardim Yosef Meyuḥas and Hayyim Elasri and Ashkenazim Ephraim Cohen, Avraham Moshe Luncz, and Mendel Sosnitzky according to Yehoshua Yellin, *Zikhronot L’Ben Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem: Zion Press, 5684[1984]), 175.
Yellin’s romanticization of his own society should be taken with a grain of salt, his emphasis on the non-commercial nature of the society is borne out in his earlier description of the society. He acknowledged the limits of traditional investment-based societies in restricting participation to only those with considerable means in his letter to Sochovolsky in Shvat of 5651 (1891). While it is hard to determine the degree to which his society addressed these issues in practice, and even more difficult to confirm or deny whether such concerns were the determining factor in its success amidst the failure of other societies, his professed commitment to expanding opportunities for geulat ha’aretz to the less wealthy is noteworthy.

This emphasis on the universality of geulat ha’aretz was not unique to David Yellin. From the earliest Jewish sources, the relationship between each member of the children of Israel and the land of Israel was cemented within ritual practice. Rabbi Ben-Zion Avraham Cuenca published a discussion on the matter in a special discourse on the matter of kedushat ha’aretz - the sanctity of the land (of Israel) - in the first two issues of the second volume of HaMe’asef.81 The author of the column, Rabbi Elazar Halevi Greenhut established the fact of the sanctity of the land on two levels, that of the whole land and that on a higher level of Jerusalem and the site of the Temple, clarifying that the first level is marked by ritual observances such as annual offerings, tithes, and sabbatical and jubilee years.82 Each of these observances was mandatory for every member of the Children of Israel, as is repeatedly affirmed throughout the book of Leviticus and described further in three dedicated tractates in the Talmud.83 But as we’ve seen in H-Me’asef, Cuenca and his peers were concerned with these issues not just in the biblical period,

81 Published 11 Tishrei and 9 Heshvan, 5657 (1896)
83 The only exceptions are described in Mishna Terumot 1:1 and 1:6. They cover those not considered autonomous actors and thus not responsible for ritual observance and those in states of impurity, who would be expected to fulfill the obligation when they later became pure.
but in the modern era as well. In the discourse on *kedushat ha’aretz*, Greenhut asked the question whether the land’s sanctity was restricted to the era of its consecration by the biblical Joshua or whether it was sanctified for eternity, and eventually concluded that, indeed, *kedushat ha’aretz* remains a category in the modern era. The implications of this conclusion were monumental - if the Holy Land was as holy to the Jewish people in the late nineteenth century as it had been when the Biblical Joshua conquered it for the Israelites millennia earlier, then the impetus for *geulat ha’aretz* - the redemption of that land - took on biblical proportions. Greenhut was not Sephardi himself, but rather an immigrant to Palestine from Hungary. However, as a peer of Rabbi Cuenca and an immigrant from a region with a long Ottoman history, his views are not typical of Ashkenazi rabbis of his time. And, furthermore, Cuenca chose to publish the column because it fulfilled his mission of providing a halachic framework for the settlement of *Eretz Yisra’el*.

These deeply religious motivations for Sephardi development of *Eretz Yisrael* contrasted sharply with the solidifying currents of Zionist thought among Ashkenazi Jews. It was distinct from both the primarily political Zionism of Theodore Herzl, often called the “Father of Zionism,” and the culturally focused Zionism of his chief rival Asher Ginsberg (called Aḥad Ha’am). The emphasis was not on developing a network of support for Jewish autonomy among international governments like Herzl’s school, or on creating a distinctly Hebrew national culture as the basis of a national movement, but on restoring expansive religious Jewish life to the Jewish Holy Land, upholding the age-old religious call for *geulat ha’aretz*.

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84 He ultimately follows the opinion of Rabbi Yochanan in the Talmud (Zevachim 107b).
Ultimately, Sephardi efforts to develop the Jewish settlement of Palestine linguistically, politically, and territorially existed in parallel to early Ashkenazi Zionism -- Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews in Palestine and across Europe worked together more often than not to build the Jewish presence in Palestine together. But, in contrast to the Ashkenazi models of the time that drew from European political and cultural nationalism, Sephardi proto-Zionism was fundamentally grounded in religious devotion to the land and the connection between the people of Israel and the land of Israel, dating back to biblical times. From its chief practitioners, who were educated by leading rabbis and Jewish communal leaders, to its sanctioning by the rabbinic leadership of Jerusalem, it was inseparable from religious mandates for geulat ha’aretz. It blended religious and political considerations, seeing ge’ulat ha’aretz as a means to both the realization of divine commandments and the creation of greater communal autonomy and utilizing economic networks to achieve these aims. This mix also manifested in Sephardi Zionists’ revival of the Hebrew language, advancing it from a strictly religious language to one of general pedagogy, aimed at the creation of a class of Jewish leaders capable of leading the growing population of Ottoman Jerusalem in an increasingly complex world.
Chapter 3: Arab and Ottoman Influence on the Development of Sephardi Zionism

(5646-5668/1886-1908)

Yusuf Diya’uddin al-Khalidi (1842-1906), the “Sheikh Yusuf” who worked closely with Nisim Bakhar and David Yellin, provides an eye-opening insight into the ways that Palestinian leaders and Ottoman administrators in Jerusalem viewed early Sephardi Zionists. As famed Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi recounts in his “photographic history of the Palestinians,” Yusuf al-Khalidi was elected to, and served in the opposition in, the first Ottoman Parliament, called in 1877 by Sultan Abd ul-Hamid II. Another historian, Alexander Scholch, provides a more expansive biography of Khalidi, detailing his education, Ottoman political career, and involvement in the power struggles among Jerusalem’s elites. While he acknowledges that, in many ways, Khalidi was an exceptional figure in his time among the Jerusalem elites, he asserts that he did exemplify the reform-minded politics of many Ottoman elites, including those within Palestine, and the struggles between these reformers and more reactionary forces. These reactionaries included Sultan Abd ul-Hamid II and Khalidi’s Husayni rivals within Jerusalem, who “took the path of repression and pan-Islamism” rather than liberal constitutionalism. These forces with which Khalidi contended also typified the political realities in which Bakhar, Yellin, Cuenca, and other Sephardim operated. And, it is in this context that Sephardi Zionism developed when and how it did. While Sephardi Zionists drew on European and Ashkenazi conceptions of national identity and historic Jewish understandings of land, language, and nation,

87 Khalidi. The Parliament lasted less than a year and was dissolved by the imperial authorities fearing the liberal tendencies of the opposition.
their ideologies and actions were forged by the Ottoman and Palestinian Arab contexts in which they lived.

This chapter traces the influence of political developments during the reign of Abd ul-Hamid II, both in the empire as a whole and in Palestine in particular, on the development of Sephardi Zionism. It places special emphasis on the political struggles within Jerusalem between Turkish bureaucrats and the Khalidi and Husayni factions, and the reactions of local Sephardim to the ensuing shifts in policy. It addresses the political reorganization of Palestine that brought Jerusalem to political significance, shifting local politics from their previous rural centers to a new urban hub, with new demographics and political concerns, notably including a larger number of Jews. Next it addresses the threads of liberal constitutionalism that promoted broader political inclusion and expression within the empire, giving Jews in Jerusalem new opportunities to engage with the authorities and the local elites in ways that had previously been more severely restricted. It also looks at the rising influence of foreign European powers on the politics of Ottoman Palestine, and the implications of these developments on Sephardi Zionist activity. Finally, it examines the ways that Abd ul-Hamid’s anti-reformist crackdown and turn to conservative Ottomanism both ostracized Sephardi leaders and inspired them to promote their own national revival. This interplay between Ottoman politics and Sephardi Zionism is another defining feature in the development of this distinct brand of Zionism.
Shifting Ottoman Boundaries and Jerusalem’s Political Ascent

As discussed briefly in chapter one, the city of Jerusalem only rose to political prominence within the Ottoman system after 1872-1874 following a decade of similar redistricting across the empire. At this time, the Ottoman authorities undermined the various local political centers, focused in rural hilltops like Jabal al-Khalil and Jabal al-Nablus, conferring power on urban elites in Jerusalem instead, and consolidating imperial power by placing the governor of the Jerusalem province directly under Istanbul. However, in consolidating their power in Palestine, the Ottoman authorities unintentionally set the stage for a new series of challenges to their authority. While the mutasarrif (governor) of the province, accountable to Istanbul, was an Ottoman bureaucrat trained in imperial administrative schools in the capital and loyal to imperial interests, the mayors of the Jerusalem municipality, who had considerable political influence on everyday life and politics in the newly-elevated city, were local Palestinian Arab elites whose interests often clashed with those of the mutasarrif.

It is in this context that Sheikh Yusuf rose to prominence, as ra’is al-baladiyya (mayor), a position which he held from 1870-76 and from 1878-79. He was dismissed from his post in 1879 due to disagreements with mutasarrif Mehmed Ra’uf Paşa who held the post from 1877-89 as a strong Ottomanist, opposed to European influence and Jewish immigration. It appears that the disagreements between Ra’uf and Khalidi were based more on a struggle for power than any particular political differences, especially in light of their mutual efforts to improve education and transportation infrastructure in and around Jerusalem. However, it is clear from Yellin’s

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89 See page 20.
90 Scholch, 66.
92 Büssow, 546 and 554.
letters to Bakhar regarding their relationship with Khalidi that, after his dismissal, Khalidi worked to undermine Ra’uf regarding another pressing issue gaining prominence in the new mutasarriflik of Jerusalem. As Jewish emigration from Russia increased after the 1881 assassination of Russian Tzar Alexander II and an accompanying wave of pogroms, some came to Palestine at the urging of Zionist organizations like Hibat Tziyon. Some Sephardim in Palestine, who were Ottoman subjects and thus had access to the imperial bureaucracy, worked to gain immigration certificates from the authorities. While such efforts were subject to the whims of the Ottoman government, Sephardim had greater access to the organs of Ottoman power following the political elevation of Jerusalem to the capital of a mutasarriflik.

In light of the consolidation of Jerusalem’s population within the walls of the Old City, a space of only 1,000 dunams\(^3\) (about four tenths of a square mile or one square kilometer), the presence in the city of a mutasarrif directly subservient to Istanbul made it possible for Jerusalem’s Sephardim to engage more directly with the Sultan’s court, rather than engaging through intermediaries in Damascus as they had before Jerusalem’s elevation. And the combination of a local Hakham Bashi (an office established only three decades earlier) and a mutasarrif gave the Sephardim of Jerusalem unprecedented access to Ottoman elites. Only in this context can we understand Sephardi political organization and petition in the Old City. Various historians have recorded the efforts by Baron Edmond de Rothschild to purchase and renovate the land around the Western wall as a Jewish prayer space in the 1880s.\(^4\) However, most of these accounts ignore the fact that Rothschild's partner and agent on the ground was Nisim

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\(^3\) Kark and Oren-Nordheim, 55.
\(^4\) For example, see Luncz and Druyanov, quoted in Ben-Arieh, *Old City*, 374-375.
Bakhar, descended from an old Sephardi family living in Palestine for centuries. This fact sheds new light on Rothschild’s activity.

As Ben-Arieh writes, quoting Luncz:

[Rothschild] decided to purchase all the homes in the Muslim Mughrabi neighborhood, raze them to the ground and build an iron fence around the leveled area, making it the property of the Jewish community. Since the laws of the country forbid the sale of Waqf land, the Rothschilds’ emissary suggested a property exchange: the Baron would buy suitable real-estate elsewhere, and build the same number of homes there as in the present neighborhood… Realizing the benefit of this project from the standpoint of health in general and that of the residents of this quarter in particular, the pasha gave his approval, and said he would seek the authorization of the Sheikh al-Islam and the royal authorities. Suddenly, however, he reversed his decision. (I heard from the most learned Rabbi Jacob Saul Eliashar, the Hakham Bashi of the time, that the project was canceled because Sayyid Bashir, the son of ‘Abd al-Salam al Ḥuseini and guardian of Waqf property, discovered that the exchange had been decided upon without his knowledge.).95

This account details Bakhar petitioning “the pasha” mutasarrif Mehmed Ra’uf on behalf of British financier Baron Rothschild, Ra’uf turning to the top religious authority in the empire, the Sheikh ul-Islam who sat on the Sultan’s council in Istanbul, and Ra’uf’s initial decision being undermined by the local waqf authority controlled by the Husseini family. Interestingly, the very development that gave Rothschild and Bakhar more direct political access also enabled the Husseinis to oppose their efforts through the same direct access. However, the heightened level of political intrigue in this episode is revealed further in Yellin’s letters. In a letter that Yellin wrote to Bakhar dated October 25, 1887, in a section about their partnership with Sheikh Yusuf, he wrote, “We also spoke with him about the matter of the Western Wall and he said that currently the issue could not be settled” and instead advised being content with buying a few houses now, and then buying more of the non-waqf property after letting the issue blow over,

95 Luncz, Jerusalem, Jerusalem Yearbook for the Diffusion of an Accurate Knowledge of Ancient and Modern Palestine (Jerusalem: 1914), Vol. 10, 1-58 as quoted in Ben-Arieh, Old City, 374-75.
increasing their ultimate chances of success. Here we see that in the aftermath of Sheikh Yusuf’s dismissal as ra’is al-baladiyya, and replacement by a Husseini rival, he was advising Bakhar and Yellin, and thus Rothschild as well, on how to work around Husseini opposition to win back the favor of the mutasarrif and successfully gain control of the land surrounding the Western Wall. Such political maneuvering would have been impossible prior to the consolidation of Ottoman power in Jerusalem and the resulting power struggles between the Ottoman authorities, Husseinis, and Khalidis. While this bid to purchase the land around the Western Wall was ultimately defeated by Husseinis opposition, Bakhar’s efforts and their near success are indicative of the new political access that Sephardim attained during the reign of Abd ul-Hamid II after the political elevation of Jerusalem.

Another telling example from Bakhar and Yellin’s partnership is Yellin’s letter from 18 Tammuz 5646 (1886) to Yosef Sebag-Montefiore. While discussing the recent uprising of the poor over the use of a parcel of Sebag-Montefiore’s land, Yellin suggested that, if Sebag-Montefiore so desired, Bakhar could call upon the government’s power against the poor “to remove them and to quiet the uproar.” In presenting this offer, Yellin and Bakhar demonstrated a few noteworthy dynamics in the local systems of power to which they had access. First, Yellin’s confidence that the government would act in their favor if asked is itself indicative of familiarity with and confidence in the local government beyond what one may expect from Abd ul-Hamid’s conservative Ottomanist government. While the administration may have favored their cause out of concern for law and order, the concentration of the unrest in territory outside the city walls and the ownership of the land by Sebag-Montefiore, who had no

recourse to Ottoman courts himself, would presumably cast some doubt upon the government’s actions. However, the ra’is al-baladiyya at the time, Husayn Salim al-Husayni, was more disposed to their cause than had been previous governors. One of his most notable accomplishments included incorporating new neighborhoods outside the walls into the municipality, so it is unsurprising that he would have been committed to maintaining order in new Jewish settlements, despite their ownership. This program of expansion and consolidation of administrative power, under the banner of “law and order,” was in line with broader Ottoman policy both within the mutasarriflik under Mehmed Ra’uf and in the empire at large under Abd ul-Hamid II.

Sephardi Zionist land purchase in Jerusalem, mostly in association with major European investors like the Montefiores and Rothschilds, relied heavily upon the relationships that Jerusalem Sephardim built with the newly empowered bureaucrats of the city. As the imperial center restructured many of its territories to more directly assert its influence, Jerusalem’s elevation to a district capital directly subservient to Istanbul enabled these Sephardim to lobby high level Ottoman officials living in their immediate vicinity. This proximity to power, in conjunction with a general alignment of interests between Ottoman political consolidation and Sephardi land development, allowed Jerusalem Sephardim to broker (sometimes successfully) agreements with the authorities that served their own Zionist agendas as well as those of European Zionists, Sephardi and Ashkenazi alike.

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98 Büssow, 554.
European Liberalism, Ottoman Reform, and Sephardi Zionism

These regular interactions and engagements between Sephardi Zionists and Ottoman and Palestinian officials were crucial to the early development of Zionism in Ottoman Palestine. However, these relationships did not arise in a vacuum. While Jews and Muslims often interacted in the streets of the empire’s urban centers, political interactions between Ottoman Muslim officials and their dhimmi (non-Muslim) subjects were limited -- the post of Ḥakham Bashi of Palestine was established to create a greater connection between the imperial authorities and the Ottoman Jews in Palestine because the Sultan had no reliable organic channels of contact with the community. Yet, this developments was tempered by the era of tanzimat reforms, a series of liberalizing policies enacted by Sultans Abd ul-Mejid I (1823-1861) and Abd ul-Aziz (1830-1876) culminating in the promulgation of an Ottoman constitution on 7 Zilbridge, 1293 (13 December, 1876) by newly crowned Sultan Abd ul-Hamid II. This period was marked by a trend of imperial overhaul, in many ways following the model of French liberalism to incorporate all of the sultan’s subjects into an Ottoman nation.

In Palestine, and in the Ottoman Empire at large, Yusuf al-Khalidi was at the forefront of the liberal constitutionalist faction during the reign of Abd ul-Hamid II. While serving in the short-lived Ottoman parliament, Khalidi was exceptionally critical of the sultan’s violations of the new constitution, since he saw such actions as a threat to the survival of the empire. He championed political education and civic engagement as essential to the progression of the empire into the modern era, and even after his expulsion from Istanbul after the Sultan dissolved the parliament, he maintained his commitment to the empire’s improvement, serving again as
ra’is al-baladiyya in Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{99} The deep importance he placed on education helps to explain why a leading Ottoman politician would send his son and the sons of his peers to Nisim Bakhar’s KiYaH school in Jerusalem. Despite the Jerusalem school’s unorthodox structure relative to other KiYaH schools, it was still grounded in the organization’s French liberalism and mission of political education, which the organization’s French founders saw as the bedrock of Jewish survival in the modern diaspora, just as Khalidi saw them as the keys to Ottoman revival among the powers of Europe.

The relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the European powers during the reign of Abd ul-Hamid II was another key to the development of Sephardi Zionism in Hamidian Palestine. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire faced increasing imperial pressure from France and Britain, who exerted their political and military power on peripheral territories of the Ottoman empire to protect their own colonial interests in Africa and Asia. Mount Lebanon serves as one of the most instructive examples - after being promised equality under the law in the Tanzimat reforms of 1839 and 1856, local Christians turned to European powers who had claimed the right to represent religious minorities within the empire.\textsuperscript{100} This influence was guaranteed by concerted European efforts to maintain Ottoman stability as a pillar of the European balance of power, formalized in an agreement following European intervention to restore Ottoman sovereignty in Egypt after 1840.\textsuperscript{101} The Sultans’ dependence on European powers, especially Britain and France, made it ripe for economic and political penetration, and it is in this context that investors like Montefiore and Rothschild and educational institutions like KiYaH gained footholds in Palestine.

\textsuperscript{99} Scholch, 69-71.
\textsuperscript{101} Gelvin, 57.
Furthermore, in response both to the rising European involvement in Ottoman affairs and in an attempt to protect the empire from decay and dissolution, Sultan Abd ul-Mejid II enacted a series of major imperial reforms aimed at “defensive developmentalism” which expanded military power, bolstered tax revenue and economic production, and consolidated central imperial power. By erasing political distinctions between Muslim and dhimmi Ottoman subjects, at least nominally, the Porte claimed for itself the ability to tax and conscript dhimmis the same as their Muslim neighbors. However, the creation of the office of Hakham Bashi of Palestine as a direct representative of the Jewish community to the imperial authorities in this same period speaks to the incomplete nature of this integration of dhimmis. This was not solely due to limits to Ottoman power but also to the desires of these communities to retain certain internal autonomies. But, while integration may not have been as comprehensive in practice as the reformists envisioned, the promise of integration heralded a new age of political engagement for Ottoman Jews. This combination of domestic political rights for Ottoman Jews and external intervention by foreign Jews set the stage for partnerships like Bakhar’s with Montefiore and Rothschild which would have previously been infeasible from either dimension.

Of similarly great significance, the role of French liberalism and French educational institutions in the development of the empire as a whole, and Sephardi Zionism in particular, cannot be understated. Beyond its role as the dominant language of diplomacy and a European lingua franca at the time, the metonymy of French language for French enlightenment ideals led political elites and academics across the Ottoman Empire to study and communicate in French. Despite David Yellin and Nisim Bakhar’s shared ability to communicate in Hebrew, all of their

102 Gelvin, 73.
correspondence was written in French, which is a testament to the Francophone context of their partnership. This is especially noteworthy since Yellin’s correspondence with European Jews in England, France, and Germany outside the context of KiYaH was entirely in Hebrew. And, just as the Sephardi intellectual elite of Ottoman Palestine were trained in French, so too were the Ottoman elites, both local and imperial. Büssow attests that Mehmet Ra’uf Paşa earned a French education before joining the Ottoman bureaucracy, and Scholch posits that Yusuf al-Khalidi was exposed to French culture and language in the Imperial Medical School. Khalidi’s Francophilia extended far beyond the language though - an American consul who met him proclaimed him “almost as liberal as a French Republican, both in politics and religion.” While this liberalism may have put him at odds with the sultan during the short duration of the Ottoman Parliament, it created common cause with the Jerusalem representatives of KiYaH, an organization deeply rooted in the same French liberalism. The interreligious relations, political education, and broadly defined Ottomanism that Khalidi pursued so actively throughout his life were similarly important to Bakhar and Yellin, whose school exemplified these ideals.

These combined features of European intervention and European style liberalism, which defined the empire in the Tanzimat period and remained significant during the reign of Abd ul-Hamid II, were formative to the development of Sephardi Zionism in Jerusalem. The empire’s openness to foreign economic and political clout opened the door for European Jewish support of Sephardim developing land and educating communal leaders. Such efforts were further enabled by greater political cooperation between Sephardim and their Ottoman Palestinian neighbors, a new dynamic based in the political equality declared for all citizens during the Tanzimat period.

103 Büssow, 547.
104 Sholch, 68.
105 Sholch, 73.
And, the particularly French ideological penetration of Ottoman social and political consciousness created common ground between Ottoman reformists and Sephardi Zionists, allowing them to capitalize on the opportunity for cooperation presented by the *Tanzimat* in order to advance liberalism within their communities.

**Sephardi Zionism as a Response to Hamidian Ottomanism**

Abd ul-Hamid II’s dissolution of the Ottoman Parliament in 1877 brought the era of Ottoman liberal reform to an abrupt end for four decades. While the spirit of the *Tanzimat* era lived on in the hearts of liberals across the empire, as evidenced by Sheikh Yusuf’s cooperation with the Sephardim of Jerusalem a decade after his expulsion from Istanbul, constitutionalism and liberalism were suppressed actively in the imperial center, and through the Porte’s instruments of power which extended across the empire. They were replaced by Abd ul-Hamid’s particular variety of Ottoman nationalism, *Osmanlilik*. Gelvin classifies Hamidian *Osmanlilik* as “an ideology that gave pride of place to an Ottoman/Islamic identity” rather than an inclusive egalitarian secular identity.”\(^{106}\) On account of this more heavily Islamic expression of Ottomanness, Ottoman Sephardim for whom the *Tanzimat* era had seemed an opportunity for Jewish inclusion now joined forces with the more conservative religious establishment to respond to Islamic Ottomanism with a religious national revival of their own.

It is striking how closely Sephardi Zionist efforts in Jerusalem parallel not just the aims but the methods of Abd ul-Hamid’s *Osmanlilik* policies. The four key characteristics of the Sultan’s activities were restrictions on non-Sunni Muslim missionary activity within the empire,

\(^{106}\) Gelvin, 153.
publication and distribution of Islamic texts aligning with imperial orthodoxy, patronage of Islamic scholars following this same orthodoxy, and development of Islamic infrastructure and waqf endowments. Each of these pillars of imperial policy holds parallels in the activities of Yellin, Bakhar, and Cuenca, which were central to developing Sephardi Zionism in Jerusalem during this Hamidian period. Just as the Ottomans sought to curb conversions away from Sunni Islam, the Sephardi leadership worked to keep its community away from Christian missionary institutions by developing their own philanthropic organizations, since they did not have the power to actively disrupt missionary activity. Similarly, HaMe’asef stands out as a parallel to the Islamic texts which Abd ul-Hamid supported throughout his reign. The patronage of Islamic scholars was not mirrored as closely, since the Sephardim of Jerusalem had supported religious scholars in their midsts for centuries, however, Bakhar’s curation of a Hebrew-speaking faculty at the KiYaḤ school played a parallel role in Hebrew Zionist development. Finally, the competition between Bakhar and Montefiore on one side and the Husseini waqf authorities on the other to control the land around the Western Wall is symptomatic of the competing Jewish and Islamic claims to holy sites within Jerusalem, which gained greater importance to both during Abd ul-Hamid’s reign.

As previously mentioned, one of the prime motivations for the establishment of KiYaḤ in 1860 was the Mortara affair. Christian missionaries across the Mediterranean worked tirelessly in the nineteenth century to keep the Catholic church growing. In one of the most famous cases of Jewish conversion, the Catholic authorities of Bologna removed the young son of the Jewish Mortara family from his home after learning that his nurse had secretly baptised him. In addition

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107 Gelvin, 154-55.
to alarming Jewish communities across the world, the Ottoman authorities were similarly vexed by Christian missionary activity within their borders. Abd ul-Hamid’s crackdown on all non-Sunni orthodox missionary activity within the empire was a response to Christian conversions as well as strands of Islam it found heretical and politically threatening.\footnote{Gelvin, 154-155.}

While no instances in Palestine gained such prominent attention in the global press as the Mortara Affair, similar difficulties pressed upon the Jewish community in Jerusalem. Ben-Arieh describes the extensive Protestant missionary activities within the city beginning in the 1830s that worked tirelessly to convert local Jews through economic inducement, due to the community’s extreme poverty.\footnote{Ben-Arieh, \textit{Old City}, 262.} Similar to the bans that the Ottoman authorities would later place on this missionary activity, the Sephardi rabbinic leadership placed serious \textit{heremot} (orders of communal exclusion) on all who used missionary institutions, to the extent of not counting them in prayer quorums and refusing to bury them in Jewish cemeteries.\footnote{Ben-Arieh, \textit{Old City}, 333-35.} While the missionaries were not exceptionally successful, converting fewer than a hundred Jews in over two decades of work, the few conversions that did occur motivated Jewish investment in their own communal institutions, which would remove incentives to turn to Christian missionaries for hospitals, vocational schools, and other social services.\footnote{Ben-Arieh, \textit{Old City}, 333-35.} European Jewish philanthropists like Baron de Edmond Rothschild and Moshe Montefiore supported these efforts, often acting through local agents, including Nisim Bakhar. Montefiore’s aforementioned plan for workhouses in \textit{Mishkenot Sha’ananim} was presumably one such effort, as was a similar effort funded by Rothschild and administered by Yellin and Bakhar in Ramla in order to lift the burden of

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\item \textsuperscript{108} Gelvin, 154-155.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Ben-Arieh, \textit{Old City}, 262.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Ben-Arieh, \textit{Old City}, 333-35.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Ben-Arieh, \textit{Old City}, 333-35.
\end{itemize}
overpopulation from Jerusalem. By offering the poor Jews of Jerusalem, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi, work in these developments funded by European Jewish benefactors, Yellin and Bakhar did much to combat the missionary work that preyed on destitute Jews. So, while Sephardim actually preempted some of Abd ul-Hamid’s suppression of missionary activity out of necessity in the mid-nineteenth century, their active responses through KiYaH schools and Jewish workhouses began in full force during the Hamidian period.

The publication of halakhic texts on topics relevant to the land of Israel also occurred before Abd ul-Hamid’s reign. The rabbinic leadership of the city published she’elot u’tshuvot (responsa) consistently for many years before Ben-Zion Avraham Cuenca began publishing HaMe’asef. His contemporary, the Hakham Bashi Ya’akov Sha’ul Elyashar, even published a compendium dedicated to “our master, the righteous and merciful king, Ghazi Sultan Abd ul-Hamid Khan” in 5659 (1899). But Cuenca’s innovation was publicizing Rabbinic responsa in a weekly periodical focused primarily on issues of yishuv ha’aretz (settlement of the land), rather than releasing the responsa one at a time, on in extensive volumes organized according to medieval classifications of topics. While such efforts could not rival the four thousand religious books and pamphlets that Abd ul-Hamid’s publishers put out from 1876-1891, the influence of Abd ul-Hamid’s Osmanlilik driven publications upon Cuenca’s work deserves attention.

Unlike the Sultan, Cuenca did not have the power, or the need, to define orthodoxy on all issues of halakha. As one of a group of leading rabbis, of a single community within the

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112 Discussed in a letter from Yellin to Rabbi Doctor Azri’el Hildsheimer in Germany, Yellin, “28. El HaR’ HaDr. Azri’el Hildsheimer,” Igrot, 40-42.
113 Ya’akov Sha’ul Elyashar, Olat Ish, (Jerusalem: 5659 [1899]).
114 Most collections of she’elot u’teshuvot are organized according to the Tur, a fourteenth-century code of Jewish law.
Ottoman Empire, no decisions or declarations that Cuenca made could have been binding upon all of the Jews of the Empire, especially since he only represented the Sephardi community. However, due to his residence in Jerusalem, and the te’udot he received from the rest of the leadership of Ottoman Palestine’s Jewish community, he was held up as an authoritative voice on halakhic considerations relevant to Eretz Yisra’el.

Interestingly, though, while the Sultan and his publishers saw the production of a religious orthodoxy as essential to the promotion of a national culture, Cuenca’s approach was different. He was concerned much less with broad religious orthodoxy, since his audience and contributors came from a wide range of traditions across the Jewish diaspora. Instead, he focused his efforts on collecting the various threads of this broad range of traditions as they applied to Jewish settlement in the Eretz Yisra’el. The journal would serve as a practical companion to the political developments already in motion as he wrote, rather than defining a religio-political moment in and of themselves.

Support for religious scholars was another Hamidian Osmanlilik policy which Sephardi Zionists in Jerusalem adapted for their own aims. The Sephardim of Jerusalem had numerous yeshivot in operation, which were considered by some observers to be “charitable institutions” for the financial support granted to resident Torah scholars, and grew in number, size, and wealth through the middle of the century. ¹¹⁵ Yet, secular education was not nearly as widespread. While the top students of the greatest schools were exposed to a broad range of topics as Cuenca was, those who only attended yeshivot for a few hours each day, and then worked to supplement their earnings, were less fortunate. Those who did not attend yeshivot were even less likely to receive

¹¹⁵ Ben-Arieh, Old City, 306-07.
anything beyond the most elementary education in secular topics. It is in this context that *KiYaH* entered the scene, providing vocational education for high school students. However, as Yellin attested in a letter to Bakhar from 14 December, 1887, the Mishna\(^{116}\) *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of our Fathers) was taught even in this secular school along with history of the Jewish diaspora after the Temple’s destruction in 70 CE.\(^ {117}\) This combination of vocational and linguistic instruction with traditional Jewish study is representative of the institutionalization of Sephardi blending of religious and secular life in academia. Yet, in the Hamidian era when education was inseparable from political development, this focus on classical Jewish ethics and history in a non-rabbinic school points to the intentional development of a national religious consciousness to parallel Abd ul-Hamid’s *Osmanlilik*.

Furthermore, the revival of spoken Hebrew as the language of instruction in Bakhar’s school, is essential to understanding the Zionism of Jerusalem’s Sephardim during the reign of Abd ul-Hamid. When Bakhar hired Eliezer Ben-Yehuda to instruct his students in Hebrew, he was actively promoting the historic language of the Jewish people in a school which combined the history and classical ethics of that people with modern vocational instruction and training in French and Arabic. In light of the sultan’s concurrent promotion of Islamic scholarship as a method of promoting Ottoman identity, Bakhar’s pedagogy can be understood as a clear attempt to direct the next generation of Sephardi leaders to become the vanguard of a revived Hebrew civilization in *Eretz Yisra’el*.

Finally, the development of Islamic infrastructure and *waqf* endowments found a powerful parallel among the Sephardim of Ottoman Palestine. Having prayed for centuries at the

\(^{116}\) A collection of rabbinic sayings and teachings from the era of the destruction of the Temple, compiled around 200 C.E. It is considered the first and most central work of the Jewish Oral Tradition.

Western Wall with no formal infrastructure, and only small-scale irregular efforts to keep it clean and fit for prayer, in 1840, the Jewish community attempted to pave the area but their petition was rejected. However, it seems that a later attempt was granted since an observer remarked that it had recently been paved in 1854, and contemporaries noted that the Jews paid a special tax for the privilege of praying at the site unmolested by the surrounding Muslim residents of the area.\footnote{Ben-Arieh, \textit{Old City}, 308-10.}

Yet, all of these attempts occurred with express permission at the mercy of the Sultan and the local administrator of the \textit{waqf}. The area remained under Muslim ownership, regardless of how many Jews attended the site for weekly prayers. It was not until the Hamidian era, when \textit{waqf} development became an issue of central importance to the empire, that Rothschild tried to purchase the land outright through his agent, Bakhar.

It seems counterintuitive that Bakhar would have appealed to the imperial administration to purchase \textit{waqf} land during a time when the sultan was so committed to supporting \textit{waqf} endowments across the empire. However, it may be for this very reason that the authorities were originally willing to entertain Bakhar’s offer - since Rothschild’s purchase would have required him to exchange more valuable land elsewhere for the \textit{waqf} land around the Wall, such an agreement would have expanded the \textit{waqf}’s endowment in accordance with Abd ul-Hamid’s policy. And as Bakhar engaged in various other efforts to develop the Jewish settlement of Palestine and a Jewish national revival, mirroring the sultan’s development of religious infrastructure by finally gaining control of the Western Wall plaza became a natural step in the development of early Sephardi Zionism, combining religious and political interests to develop the Jewish settlement in Jerusalem.
Examining Sephardi Zionism within the broader context of Hamidian politics, and specifically Abd ul-Hamid’s Islamic *Osmanlılık*, clarifies the motivations for Sephardim to develop a Jewish national identity distinct from their Ottoman identities, which became increasingly centered on a religiously exclusive *Osmanlılık*. Leaders like Yellin, Bakhar, and Cuenca initiated efforts with close parallels to Abd ul-Hamid’s national policies aimed at redefining Ottoman identity in an orthodox Sunni Muslim lens. However, these efforts drew upon earlier internal developments independent of Hamidian policy and external developments of the *Tanzimat* era that emboldened Ottoman Jews to engage politically in unprecedented ways. They also exploited opportunities created by political divisions among Ottoman bureaucrats and Palestinian Arab notables, as well as the openings created by colonial European powers, to gain financial and political support for their programs. It is the combination of these various socio-political contexts that enabled Sephardi Zionism to develop in Hamidian Jerusalem.
Chapter 4: The Decline of Sephardi Zionism in Jerusalem (5658-5668/1897-1908)

Up to this point, this thesis has traced the development and expansion of a distinctly Sephardi Zionism in Hamidian Jerusalem, focusing closely on this specific spatial and temporal context. However, as history has shown, the Zionism that characterized the British Mandate period and the foundation of the State of Israel was overwhelmingly Ashkenazi, secular, and antagonistic to the Palestinian population. The narrative of the dominant historiography has centered this Zionism focused on this Zionism, though scholarship has begun to challenge the dominance of this Ashkenazi Zionist narrative. However, in order to effectively challenge the absence of Sephardim from the traditional narrative, the origins of this omission must be deconstructed. It is true that Sephardi Zionism was less prominent in 1948 than it had been fifty years prior, and thus was less visible as the new state built its own foundation narratives. Therefore, this chapter examines the waning significance of distinctly Sephardi Zionism around the turn of the century and the Jewish, Palestinian, and Ottoman developments that contributed to that decline. It looks at the first two major wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine, known as the First and Second Aliyah (lit. ascent), and the demographic and political implications that this had for Sephardi dominance. It also looks at the rising Palestinian Arab opposition to predominantly Ashkenazi Zionism, and the affects of this opposition for Sephardi Zionists. Finally, it takes into account the monumental Young Turk Revolution that shook the empire in 1908, and the influence of this development on Sephardi Zionism. It also portrays the divergent paths followed by each of the leading Sephardi Zionists who characterized this Zionism in the Hamidian period, who serve as examples for the broader fate of Sephardi Zionism.
Aliyah, Jewish Demographics, and the Ashkenazi Ascent in Palestine

Demographics, while not determinant of history independently, often contribute to the comparative successes and failures of rival ideologies. So, while a wide array of factors contributed to the decline of Sephardi Zionism around the turn of the century, their general demographic decline and its accompanying implications for the fate of Sephardi Zionism must be addressed. The changing demographics of Jerusalem’s Jewish community around the turn of the century made the Sephardim a numeric minority while the fracturing of the Sephardi community that began in the middle of the century concretized to further weaken Sephardi dominance of Jewish politics in Hamidian Jerusalem. Finally, political restrictions on Ashkenazi immigration and Jewish land purchase were loosened at the end of the nineteenth century, removing the necessary role that Sephardim had served as intermediaries in early Zionist activity in Palestine.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Ashkenazi population of Jerusalem rose dramatically during the reign of Abd ul-Hamid II, climbing from 5,500 in 1870 to 25,000 in 1910.\textsuperscript{119} While the Sephardi population also grew, it increasingly lagged behind the Ashkenazi population, sinking from a comfortable majority before 1870 to a considerable minority by 1910. The decline of Sephardi demographic dominance was further compounded by the increasing factionalism within the Sephardi community, which broke into numerous more limited communal groups, such as North Africans, Georgians, Yemenites, and Persians. The magnitude of these fractures was so great that in 1909, of 13,200 non-Ashkenazi Jews living in Jerusalem, only 6,000 of these belonged to the Sephardi community, with Yemenites and North Africans

\textsuperscript{119} Ben-Arieh, \textit{Old City}, 278-79 and 357.
making up the next largest groups.\textsuperscript{120} It is therefore evident that Ashkenazi immigration alone did not unseat Sephardi dominance of the political scene in Jerusalem. Factionalism, based on internal desires for greater communal autonomy and less centralized control, also weakened the power of the Sephardi leadership of Jerusalem and their ability to influence the development of Zionism according to their own vision.

This new Ashkenazi majority was not just numerically superior to the Sephardim. The Ottoman \textit{millet} system which dictated the government’s relationship to its non-Muslim subjects also contributed to the shifting dynamics. While Sephardim were a recognized non-Muslim \textit{dhimmi} class, the Porte, the central Ottoman government in Istanbul, gave no such recognitions to Ashkenazim, who were subsumed under the Sephardi leadership if they became Ottoman subjects. More frequently though, Ashkenazi immigrants remained outside the realm of Ottoman administration entirely, opting to be subject to foreign consuls through the system of capitulations, a series of agreements between the Sultan and several European rulers in which the Ottoman government forfeited sovereignty over certain non-Muslim populations within the empire who were not integrated as Ottoman subjects. While these Ashkenazim retained their previous national attachments, their increased presence in Jerusalem had serious implications for the development of Zionism in Jerusalem. This was especially true after the Porte eased restrictions on foreigners purchasing and owning land in the Empire. While the authorities were inconsistent in their application official policy, by the mid to late-1890s, Istanbul had issued clear policy statements allowing for foreign nationals and Ottoman subjects of all faiths to purchase state and private land freely.\textsuperscript{121} This shift eliminated the role that Sephardi agents had

\textsuperscript{120} Ben-Arieh, \textit{Old City}, 361.
\textsuperscript{121} Ben-Arieh, \textit{New City}, 364
played previously, and enabled Ashkenazi Zionists to buy and develop land at will. A list of Jewish settlements outside the Old City compiled by Kark and Oren-Nordheim demonstrates the drastic affects of this policy.\textsuperscript{122} Of the twenty-eight Jewish neighborhoods developed up to 1890, only six were exclusively Ashkenazi, the rest being mixed (twelve) or Sephardi (ten).\textsuperscript{123} After 1890, Sephardi development continued at a slightly greater speed while Ashkenazi development accelerated considerably, and after 1900, only Ashkenazim were building new neighborhoods outside the Old City walls.\textsuperscript{124} In addition to serving the needs of a rising Ashkenazi population in the city, this acceleration in Ashkenazi land purchase and development shaped realities on the ground to make the “New City” of Jerusalem outside the walls largely Ashkenazi in character by the end of Abd ul-Hamid’s reign.

Developments in David Yellin’s own land purchase endeavors reflect this shift as well. After lamenting the decline of land purchases due to government restrictions in December of 1891 in a letter to Herzberg,\textsuperscript{125} and in 5655 (1894) asked David Fresco,\textsuperscript{126} a journalist and leader of the Sephardi community of Istanbul, to lobby the Porte for an abolition of legal distinction between Jews and non-Jews in property law. In Sh’vat of 5656 (January/February 1896), he wrote of restrictions on even Turkish Jews purchasing land in Jerusalem if they had not lived there for at least five years.\textsuperscript{127} While this did not directly affect Yellin, who held land in the area of Motza, which his father had purchased in 1869, and who had founded the \textit{Hibat ha-Aretz}

\textsuperscript{122} Kark and Oren-Nordheim, 82-85.
\textsuperscript{123} Many were not broadly Sephardi, but were identified with distinct subdivisions, such as Moroccan, Persian, Yemenite, and others.
\textsuperscript{124} Sephardim developed 10 neighborhoods from 1891-1900, while Ashkenazim created 13 in the same range. Only five new mixed neighborhoods were developed. After 1900, the Ashkenazim developed another 11 neighborhoods before the Young Turk Revolt of 1908, while Sephardim did not build a single neighborhood, either for themselves or in conjunction with Ashkenazim.
\textsuperscript{125} Yellin, “46. El HaDr. W. Herzberg,” \textit{Igrot}, 61-62.
\textsuperscript{127} Yellin, “Ha’avarat Karka’ot” and “\textit{Be’HS L’Banot/Mekhirat Karkao’t},” \textit{Yerushalayim Shel Tmol}, 2 and 8.
society with some peers in order to develop it, his efforts to sell plots and further settle the land were stymied. This held true until 5658 (1897), when a new mutasarrif (governor) was appointed to the mutasarriflik of Jerusalem, and, according to Yellin, overturned previous restrictions on Jewish purchase of miri (state-owned) land. This new mutasarrif, Mehmed Tevfik Bey, who served until 1901, was well regarded by the British consul for his “liberal views.” Yet, the construction and economic development of Motza in the mid-1890s mark a notable turning point in David Yellin’s life and career. After the letters to Sochovolsky concerning the textile plants and Yemeni artisans, Yellin’s communications no longer focused on his land purchase and development efforts. Aside from a single offhanded mention of his former work with Ḥibbat ha-Aretz, and a brief discussion of outstanding debts from his earlier work for the Montefiores, both in letters to Sochovolsky from 5660 (1900), he makes no mention of the land in Motza. Besides this, he only rarely discusses ongoing business with the Montefiores and does not appear to be actively engaged in land purchase again until 5665 (1904). Such a shift is surprising considering his earlier insistence on the vital importance of these efforts as an imperative for all Jews.

Yellin was still a Zionist. He remained avidly committed to the expansion of Hebrew education, the revival of the Hebrew language, and Hebrew cultural pursuits. He was involved in founding and expanding a Hebrew library in Jerusalem, produced multiple literary and pedagogical works in Hebrew, and maintained regular communication with Asher Ginsberg, the ideological founder of cultural Zionism. Yet his Zionism ceased to center the Jewish

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128 Yellin, “HaPaḥa haḤadash Ba” and “Tikvot B’Paḥa haḤadash,” Yerushalayim Shel Tmol, 76 and 77.
129 Büßow, 547
“redemption” and development of land in Israel. While this confirms his claims that he was previously driven by ideals and not profit, since Zionist land societies became much more profitable in the aftermath of the Porte’s loosened restrictions, it raises the question of what led him to seemingly reevaluate his ideals. However, when taken in the context of the flourishing of Ashkenazi development without the necessity for local agents who were Ottoman subjects, it appears that Yellin was able to see this part of his vision realized without having to personally facilitate it.

Instead, he focused his efforts on the cultural and linguistic revival of the Jewish people that characterized the rest of his career, and for which he is famous. While Sephardi Zionism broadly, and Yellin’s Zionism in particular, was distinct from both Theodore Herzl’s political Zionism and Ginsberg’s cultural Zionism, it is unsurprising that he felt greater affinity for cultural Zionism. Yellin’s Sephardi education and successive tenure as student and teacher at the KiYaH school marked him from an early age as a man deeply committed to the education of the Jews of Jerusalem. As a Jerusalemite, unexposed to rampant European anti-Semitism, Herzl’s formulation of political Zionism as an answer to “The Jewish Question” was less poignant than Ginsberg’s appeal to Jewish cultural revival, to which Bakhar’s pedagogical innovations contributed. While Yellin was happy to help immigrants fleeing Russia to enter Palestine, which Ginsberg did oppose, he was less concerned with an ingathering of the Jewish Diaspora than Herzl was. In his eyes, the development and settlement of Eretz Yisra’el was a national and religious ideal, not a modern political necessity. Nisim Bakhar similarly understood his work in developing the Hebrew language and Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisra’el as distinct from facilitating mass immigration. As a matter of fact, after years serving as head of the KiYaH
school which he had founded, he was given a pension in 5658 (1897) and left the school. As long as those committed to the same ideal, like the Ashkenazi leadership of the Russian land purchase society Ḥovevei Tziyon, were engaged in ge’ulat ha’aretz, the redemption of the land, due to their new freedoms in the empire and greater sources of capital, Yellin saw their work as complementary to his cultural and educational development in Jerusalem.

However, he did find fault in Herzl’s political Zionism. In a letter to Sochovolsky in 5664 (1903), he expressed sympathy with Menaḥem Ussishkin in his critique of Herzl’s Uganda Program at the Sixth Zionist Congress, concern for the future of Zionist support for communities in Eretz Yisra’el, and his frustration that the Jews of Eretz Yisra’el were given no say on the matter. This disconnect between the interests of those developing the settlement of Eretz Yisrael on the ground and those of European Zionist ideologues is symptomatic of a rising tension between Ashkenazi Zionists and the people of Ottoman Palestine, Sephardi and Arab alike. The ramifications of this influx of Ashkenazi immigrants to Jerusalem on daily life and Jewish-Arab relations in the city was considerable. Ashkenazi settlement outside the Old City walls was regularly ethnically homogenous - not only were mixed neighborhoods with Sephardim and Ashkenazim less frequent in the last decade of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth, but comingling of Jews and Arabs outside the walls became more infrequent. The neighborly interactions that had created bonds between even the Ashkenazi Yehoshua Yellin and the Palestinian Arabs living around him declined considerably with this move outside the walls, especially among Ashkenazi immigrants who spoke no Arabic or

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135 Campos, 16-17
Turkish. These compounding divisions became greater sources of tension, especially in Jerusalem, as the twentieth century began.

**Palestinian Arab Opposition to Zionist Activity in Jerusalem**

The depth and breadth of scholarship on the “beginning” of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is extensive and overwhelming. Historical assessments range from as early 1886\(^{136}\) to the 1917 Balfour declaration,\(^{137}\) to the Israeli Declaration of Independence in 1948.\(^{138}\) It is ultimately impossible to definitively name a single year or event that made war and the creation of the State of Israel inevitable. However, one of the key turning points in this process was the expansion of Ashkenazi immigration and settlement in the 1890s at the expense of generally positive local relationships between Jews and Palestinian Arabs. While there was occasional anti-Jewish violence and vandalism before the beginning of concerted efforts at European Jewish settlement, and also that some of the violence after this time was aimed at Sephardi rather than Ashkenazi Jews, the overall trend points to greater conflict as a response to more concerted Ashkenazi settlement. Even some Palestinians who had earlier been sympathetic to Jewish immigration and land purchase and development became increasingly hostile as the newcomers changed the city’s social dynamics in unprecedented ways. Ultimately, though Palestinian opposition would not

\(^{136}\) John Rose, *The Myths of Zionism* (London; Ann Arbor, MI; Pluto Press, 2004), 95. He holds the Battle of Petah-Tikvah as a starting point for “The peasant war on the Zionist settlers in Palestine.”


\(^{138}\) Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 10. While Said discusses many factors prior to the declaration of the State of Israel, he notes that there was a massive Palestinian majority in the country for millennia and that Jews only began to pose a challenge to that numeric superiority a few weeks before the declaration.
arise in full force in Jerusalem until the British Mandate, the seeds of this resistance were sown in the last decades of Abd ul-Hamid’s reign.

The Jewish inhabitants of Ottoman Jerusalem in the mid-nineteenth century were no strangers to violence. They faced outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence from their neighbors in 1847 and 1870 in a context of similar occasional attacks across the Ottoman Empire in the throughout the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{139} While these attacks were neither as frequent nor as destructive as pogroms in the Russian Pale of Settlement, especially after the assassination of the Tzar in 1881. These attacks were not political acts of anti-Zionism, but rather anti-Semitic riots. Even the robbery and vandalism of a Yemeni Jewish house of prayer near the Mount of Olives in a newer neighborhood outside the walls on 24 Nissan of 5656 (7 April, 1896), seems to have been more religious and economic than political in nature, due to the fact that “the Torahs were thrown to the ground” after being stripped of their silver adornments.\textsuperscript{140} This attack in the Ezrat Nidaḥim houses, built in the predominantly Arab Silwan neighborhood in 1884,\textsuperscript{141} however, may have been an expression both of anti-Semitism and of anti-Zionist sentiments, since it was a notable case for its targeting of a community living among Arabs outside the walls. Following on the heels of the deadly incursion of Arab notables into Petah Tikvah, where they shot and killed Rabbi Shmuel Ya’akov on 23 Elul of 5655 (11 September, 1895), and the murder trial that it spawned in Jerusalem in Tevet 5655 (January 1896),\textsuperscript{142} tensions between the Jewish settlers outside the walls of Jerusalem and the local Palestinian Arab population must have been high.

\textsuperscript{139} William L. Langer and Peter N. Stearns, eds., “Beginnings of Modernizing Reform,” The Encyclopedia of World History (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, February 21, 2007). Many of these attacks can be attributed to blood libels like that of the more famous Damascus Affair, usually promoted by Christian minorities.

\textsuperscript{140} Yellin, “Gneva v’Hilul Sifrei Torah,” Yerushalayim Shel Tmol, 17.

\textsuperscript{141} Kark and Oren-Nordheim, 82.

\textsuperscript{142} Yellin, “Mishpato Shel Rotzeah,” Yerushalayim Shel Tmol, 5.
Anti-immigrant violence and exploitation is not a unique or surprising development in the nineteenth century. But, as an organized movement of immigration and settlement appearing in a context already marred by (mostly) latent anti-Jewish sentiments, Zionism, and especially Zionist land purchase and development in Jerusalem, a city also deeply steeped in religious sensitivities and newfound political significance, was destined to face tense opposition.

Outside of Jerusalem, the decade of the 1890s was marked by conflicts over Zionist settlement. In 1892 and 1893, local Arabs appealed to imperial authorities regarding the recent establishment of the Reḥovot settlement near Jaffa regarding a pasturing dispute, while multiple disputes became more violent with attacks from both sides.\(^\text{143}\) The source of such disputes was often the lack of common understandings of property and ownership between local Arabs and European Jews. As Avineri writes, “The Jews were not familiar with the laws and customs of land purchase, the rights of tenant farmers, pasture rights, etc” and on the other hand, “The Arabs were familiar with the old-type Jewish community, but a Jewish settler who worked the land with his own two hands was something totally new to them.”\(^\text{144}\) Yuval Ben-Bassat, in his analysis of the Bedouin petition against Reḥovot, contextualizes these disputes in the broader atmosphere of agricultural change in late nineteenth-century Palestine. He argues that they were more a reaction to Ottoman Land Reform after 1858 than a unique antagonism towards Zionism.\(^\text{145}\) However, his analysis lacks any attention to the differences between European “proto-Zionist” settlement and settlement by local Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews, more in tune with local ways. One such example is Elazar Rokaḥ of the northern city of Tzfat, who led a group of settlers from


\(^{144}\) Avineri, 77-78.

the city to settle in the nearby village of Ja’una, where they lived side by side with the local Arabs.\textsuperscript{146} Whereas some early instances of settlement, like Yehoshua Yellin’s purchase of Motza, and Rokah’s settlement in Ja’una experienced no serious conflict with local Arabs due to their integration into the local Sephardi community,\textsuperscript{147} and Ottoman Palestine more broadly, European immigrants who were educated in different economic and political contexts proceeded with their settlement and development in a manner far more antagonistic to the local Arab population.

One of the most publicly vocal opponents of European Zionism in the 1890s had previously been involved in David Yellin’s Zionist activities a decade earlier. In 1899, Sheikh Yusuf Khalidi wrote a letter to Tzadok Kahn, the chief rabbi of France, saying:

\begin{quote}
Who can challenge the rights of the Jews on Palestine? Good Lord, historically it is really your country. But the destiny of nations is not governed by abstract concepts, however pure and noble they may be… The reality is that Palestine is now an integral part of the Ottoman Empire. And what is more serious, it is inhabited by people other than Israelites... Jewish wealth cannot purchase Palestine. The day will never come when the Zionists will become masters of this country. For G-d’s sake, leave Palestine alone.\textsuperscript{148}
\end{quote}

The same Sheikh Yusuf who sent Muslim boys to the KiYaH school, helped Yellin attain entry permits for Russian emigrants, and even discussed the possibility of Jewish development around the Western Wall in 1887 was, by the end of the century, firmly opposed to Zionism, its European funded land purchases, and its efforts to wrest control of the country from the Ottomans and from its Arab inhabitants. However, this change of heart did not occur in a vacuum. The Zionism that Sheikh Yusuf had supported was the Sephardi Zionism of local

\textsuperscript{146} Ben-Bassat, 85-86.
\textsuperscript{147} While both were born to Ashkenazi immigrant families, the early date of their arrival and integration precedes the Ashkenazi push for greater autonomy, and thus their religious, economic, and social lives were dictated by the norms established by the Sephardi leadership.
Ottoman Jews. This Zionism was grounded in the social atmosphere of Jerusalem, based on daily interactions with the local population in their own language. In contrast, he saw Herzl’s Zionism as one of European Jewish economic and political conquest of the land, which necessarily posed a threat to the people of Palestine and their place within the Ottoman Empire. His emphasis on the “people other than Israelites” demonstrates a keen awareness of the negative consequences of political Zionism on the local population, a concern which did not exist regarding earlier contacts with Sephardi Zionism.

In hindsight, Khalidi was right. The successes of Herzl’s Zionism in the following decades would bring about the creation of a British Mandate that “view[ed] with favor the establishment of a national home in Palestine for the Jewish people,” and ultimately the creation of the State of Israel. As Ashkenazi Zionism expanded in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, and as Sephardi Zionism failed to match its pace and remain a driving force in the formation of Zionist ideology, these Zionists laid the foundations for Sheikh Yusuf’s fears to become reality, bringing the interests of Palestinian Arabs and Zionists into direct opposition, with the Sephardim of Jerusalem caught directly in the crosshairs, sometimes even literally.

The Young Turk Revolt and the Death of Sephardi Zionism

The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 also posed a serious challenge to the strength and success of Sephardi Zionism in Jerusalem. While it granted new freedoms and greater equality to the subjects of the Ottoman Empire, it also challenged and undermined local nationalist

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149 The Balfour Declaration was incorporated into the League of Nations charter for the British Mandate in Palestine.
movements. In addition to limited active suppressions of localized national movements, by appealing to the liberty, equality, and fraternity of all people within the Ottoman Empire, the Young Turks attracted many to their cause who had seen nationalism as the only method to attaining these ideals during the reign of Abd ul-Hamid II. Ultimately, through its effectiveness in both suppressing and diverting local national movements, The Young Turk revolution marked the ultimate downfall of a distinctly Sephardi Zionism within Jerusalem.

In the aftermath of the uprising, which promised equality to all citizens and an end to the segregation of civil society into Muslim and dhimmi communities, many of the Jews of Jerusalem were drawn to the new movement. Regarding the revolt, David Yellin wrote a letter to Marcus Adler, the son and brother of successive Chief Rabbis of the British Empire and an agent of the Montefiore’s endowment society,\(^{150}\) on 15 Heshvan, 5669 (9 November, 1908), three and a half months after the sultan’s capitulation. He wrote, “Suddenly a major change in our government occurred, and I personally felt obligated to engage in public service, and to encourage others to do this work as well, and especially to wake up our brothers to be ready for a new status quo in this country from which they can reap great benefits.”\(^{151}\) He saw the newly restored constitution, the newly called parliament elections, and the new Ottoman order as an opportunity for the Jews of Palestine, who had historically lived at the whim of their governors and sultans, to flourish politically and economically under a constitution promising equality and justice for all. Michelle Campos describes similarly optimistic sentiments, centering David Yellin’s younger brother, Shlomo, a member of the Beirut chapter of the Revolutionary Committee for Unity and Progress (CUP) that had carried out the revolution.\(^{152}\) Conversely


\(^{152}\) Campos, 1-2.
though, outside of Palestine, many Sephardi leaders across the empire decried Zionism as antithetical to the liberal Ottomanism that the Young Turks and their revolution espoused in that it undermined the trans-imperial national identity that the revolution had birthed. Chief among them was David Fresco who edited the Ladino periodical *El Tiempo* from Istanbul. The man who had served as David Yellin’s chief liaison to the Istanbul government, rejected Zionism after the Young Turk revolution, just as Sheikh Yusuf had a decade earlier, as he now perceived it as a threat to the success of Ottoman Jews being treated equally as Ottomans.

Sephardi Zionists in Jerusalem mobilized to defend their Zionism against these claims to the imperial authorities and to their own communities, asserting the national but not political nature and aspirations of Zionism. As Yellin had a few years earlier, they framed their Zionism as distinct from the political Zionism of Herzl and his adherents, while still proudly identifying themselves as Zionists. These statements were not simply reactive defenses meant to appease the government, but genuine representations of Sephardi Zionism as the Sephardi community of Jerusalem understood it. The threat that Sephardi Zionists saw in Zionism in the wake of the Young Turk Revolution was not derived from Sephardi Zionism, but from European political Zionism, aimed at replacing Ottoman hegemony with Jewish autonomy in Palestine. Nevertheless, both official Ottoman and Sephardi leaders turned against Sephardi and Ashkenazi Zionism alike after the Young Turk Revolt. Ultimately, while the Ottoman Empire fell and Ottomanism fell with it, the virulent campaign against Zionism waged by Sephardi Ottoman

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154 Campos extensively details the volleys of criticism exchanged between Fresco and the Sephardi Zionists of Palestine over the compatibility of Zionism and Ottomanism through 1909 in chapter 6 of *Ottoman Brothers*, “Ottomans of the Mosaic Faith.”
156 Campos, 211-12
nationalists further damaged the fortunes of Sephardi Zionists in Palestine, turning the time against them with the onset of the British Mandate.

Beyond this direct threat to Sephardi Zionism, the Young Turk Revolution also created systemic changes in the Sephardi community of Jerusalem with significant implications for Sephardi Zionists. One of the most direct affects of the reinstated constitution on the community came from Article III, which guaranteed each millet community an elected council, to complement the leadership appointed by the sultan,\textsuperscript{157} the Hakham Bashi in the case of the Jews. Coinciding with internal disputes over communal leadership, and broader divisions that split the Sephardi community into smaller units over the second half of the nineteenth century, the power of the Hakham Bashi, and the Sephardi rabbinate as a whole, were much weaker under the Young Turk regime than they had been under Abd ul-Hamid II.

Despite this, the rabbinic leadership of Jerusalem after 1908 remained dedicated to influencing Zionism to become more religious in nature. Ben-Zion Avraham Cuenca continued publishing ha-Me’asef as before, with a continued focus on the halakhic (Jewish legal) practice of life in eretz yisra’el. The fifteenth year of publication, which began Tishrei 5670 (October 1909), included an introductory note entitled “Et la’Asot” (A Time for Action). In it, the author, Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer, an Ashkenazi rabbi closely tied to the Sephardi leadership of Jerusalem, where he grew up, and of Cairo, where he lived and worked for some years, writes of the importance of keeping up religious Jewish activism and education, even in the face of rising secularism throughout Jewish Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{158} Like Yellin, as a local Ashkenazi from a traditional family whose presence in the city preceded the first aliya, he was raised within the Sephardi

\textsuperscript{157} Campos, 53.
\textsuperscript{158} Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer, “Et La’Asot,” HaMe’asef, Vol. 15 No. 1, la-3a.
community before its dissolution into smaller factions. That Cuenca chose to publish his letter in the wake of the Young Turk Revolution as the sole note of its kind over the nineteen years that he published *HaMe’asef* speaks to the degree to which Wertheimer’s views were representative of Sephardi attitudes at large.

The “time for action” that Wertheimer speaks of is “a time to act for G-d, even a time to observe the actions of the generation in order to fix them, in opposition to those who break away from the Torah, and in order to restore their goodness.” He makes no explicit mention of Zionists or the Young Turk Revolution, but his calls to capture the national spirit (*lev ha’am*) and to engage those Jews who ignore the Torah or actively challenge it appear to be a direct response to secular European Zionism on the one side, and liberal Ottomanism on the other. His more particular critique of the decline in traditional Torah education within Jerusalem is also reflective of his antagonism towards Zionist institutions - while Sephardi-led schools like *KiYaH*’s *Torah u’Melacha* school blended traditional text study with secular and vocational studies, this was not the case in Ashkenazi institutions like the Lemel school which was considered no different from the traditional religious schools\(^\text{159}\) until it was fully reformed with a new staff and building in the late 1890s and early 1900s.\(^\text{160}\)

By calling the readership of *HaMe’asef* to step out of the *yeshivot* (study halls) in order to engage with the broader world, even as they rejected the Torah, in order to teach them and bring them closer to the ways of G-d, Wertheimer indicates the waning influence of religiously based Sephardi Zionism as an animating force to drive the national spirit, while still expressing hope that the national can once again reignite that flame.

\(^\text{159}\) Ben-Arieh, *Old City*, 342-343.
So, the Sephardi leadership of Jerusalem remained committed to promoting their own brand of Zionism, which they expressed in distinction from the political Zionism of European Ashkenazim. Challenged by the rise of liberal Young Turk Ottomanism as an alternative and sometimes conflicting national identity, the internal disputes surrounding succession and division of power under the reinstated constitution, and the secularization of Jerusalem by European Zionist immigrants and liberal Ottomanists alike, the proponents of a distinctly Sephardi Zionism were unable to maintain the momentum of their movement. In the aftermath of rising European demographic and political dominance in Palestine and in Zionist institutions, and in light of rising Palestinian Arab hostility towards Zionism, Sephardi Zionism was ultimately unable to capture the hearts of the people of Jerusalem and bring their Zionist vision to fruition.
Conclusion

The Sephardi community of Hamidian Jerusalem inhabited a unique geographic and temporal crossroads, between expanding European power and the decaying Ottoman state, in an era of rising nationalisms, collapsing empires, and shifting borders. Their active participation in Ottoman and Jewish political reconstructions and their contributions to religious, linguistic, and cultural innovation highlight the novel ways in which they engaged with their ever-changing world. In the public activities of their leaders, we can see a commitment to a distinctly Sephardi form of Zionism grounded in the Jewish religious tradition and shaped by the Ottoman and Palestinian context which it inhabited.

With roots dating to the turn of the sixteenth century and the expulsion from Spain, the Sephardim of Jerusalem were a prominent and well-integrated part of the city’s population. While living mostly in a distinct quarter of the city throughout the nineteenth century, they worked, shopped, and socialized among their Arab neighbors, with whom they shared language, culture, and history. However, they were politically distinct, recognized as the only Jewish millet community in the city, and represented by their chief rabbi, the ḥakham bashi, called rishon l’tzion, the first of Zion. This direct representation to the Sultan’s court tied the Sephardim of Jerusalem to the Ottoman Empire more deeply than the smaller Ashkenazi population, and significantly more deeply than the waves of Ashkenazi immigrants to the country starting in the 1880s. These relationships with the imperial administration and the local Palestinian Arab population undeniably shaped Sephardi politics, making them less antagonistic to Palestinian’s way of life and Ottoman civil society.
Sephardi Zionism was also far more religiously grounded than its parallels in Ashkenazi thought. In large part, this derived from the Sephardi experience of Ottoman religious politics as the norm. In contrast to late-nineteenth century-Europe, where religion and politics were increasingly held as separate spheres of life, Ottoman subjects were less ambivalent about the interplay of religious and political authority, which heavily permeated the Ottoman imperial system. This led Sephardi Zionists to appeal to religious ideals of *geulat ha’aretz*, “redemption of the land,” and the revival of *lashon hakodesh*, “the holy tongue” in their Zionism, without focusing as heavily on Zionism as an answer to European political developments and “the Jewish question.” It was more concerned with developing Jewish life in the Holy Land, and particularly in Jerusalem, according to the precepts of Jewish law, with less attention to economic and political development of a Jewish state. While Sephardi Zionists worked with their Ashkenazi counterparts, especially on immigration, education, and land purchase, they also vocally opposed elements of Ashkenazi Zionism which they considered incongruent with their own visions. They also often steered Ashkenazi institutions in Jerusalem to more accurately conform to Sephardi ideals, tempering French liberalism and British capitalism with Sephardi emphases on religion and community.

Yet, their Zionism did not arise in a vacuum. In addition to interacting with and responding to European Zionism, it drew upon rising Ottoman nationalism and the developing Palestinian identity forming around Jerusalem to create a Zionism indigenous to Hamidian Jerusalem. The mid-nineteenth century-restructuring of Ottoman boundaries that elevated Jerusalem’s political status to a district capital directly subordinate to Jerusalem opened a window of opportunity that the Sephardim exploited, utilizing new channels to the imperial
administration and heightened internal Palestinian rivalries to advance their own aims.

Furthermore, the liberal reforms promulgated by successive Ottoman sultans in the nineteenth century, largely to emulate their European rivals, and the rising influence of those European rivals within the empire led to a loosening of imperial restriction and division of millet communities like the Sephardim, who were thus able to work with like-minded Palestinian and Ottomans to develop civil and educational infrastructure that served Sephardi Zionist development. Finally, as Abd ul-Hamid II doubled down on his efforts to expand pan-Islamic consciousness and Ottoman identity across the empire, Sephardi Zionists emulated his methods to promote their own religious and national revival. This Ottoman context is essential to understanding the development of a distinctly Sephardi Zionism.

Sephardi Zionism, despite its deep roots within its own community’s religious, political, and historical context, was a short-lived movement. The influx of Ashkenazi immigrants to Palestine and the rising influence of Zionist organizations in Europe who relied on European colonial powers to achieve their aims ideologically and numerically overwhelmed Sephardi Zionists on the ground in Palestine, especially over the course of the 1890s. These Ashkenazi Zionists came into conflict with the Palestinians of Jerusalem as their statist intentions began undermining Palestinian access to land and work. Finally, in the aftermath of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, the new government’s liberal constitution declared each imperial citizen fully equal in the eyes of the law. The practical benefits of legal equality outweighed the ideals of Sephardi Zionism for many and the dissolution of Sephardi communal autonomies that accompanied this equality pulled the wind from the sails of the remaining proponents of a distinctly Sephardi Zionism.
Ultimately, the influence of Sephardi Zionism extends far beyond its particular historical moment. The contributions that Sephardi Zionists made to the early successes of broader Zionist activism are outsize to the roles they played in the movement’s later years and to the recognition they’ve been given in the historiography. Bakhar and Yellin’s educational innovations laid the basis for Ben Yehuda and others after him to accomplish the monumental feat of reviving the Hebrew language. Their work on-the-ground as mediators in land purchase and development efforts for wealthy European Zionists established precedents for much greater land purchase activity during the British Mandate, allowing later Zionists to create a reality on the ground which conformed with their ideals. In recognizing these contributions, we can add deeper nuance to our understandings of the history of Zionism, the roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the ethnic divides within Israel.

Future studies can build off this work to complicate the picture, incorporating sources in French, Arabic, Ladino, and Turkish that this study did not cover. Those bodies of primary and secondary literature may reveal more on the attitudes and activities of Sephardi women, immigrants from North Africa and Yemen, and other marginalized voices within the Sephardi community whose writings have not been preserved and published as broadly. The frequency and content of their interactions with Palestinian Arabs, Ottoman bureaucrats, which likely differed considerably from those of their leaders, which raises questions about how deep and widespread Sephardi Zionism was within the broader Sephardi community of Hamidian Jerusalem. As scholars of gender, class, and ethnicity and race continue to revisit and challenge accepted historiographies, the participation and resistance, support and subversion of non-elite Jerusalem Sephardim in the Zionism of their leaders will contribute to a more complex
understanding of the particular ways in which Sephardim engaged with Zionism in Hamidian Jerusalem.
Appendix

Appendix A

The thick black line encompass the Jerusalem sançak, which was the largest subdivision of the Jerusalem mutasarriflik. The medium nahiye boundaries. The four nahiyyes on the map, in addition to the Ramallah district make up the Jerusalem kaza.

Glossary of Persons

Abd ul-Hamid II (1842-1918): Ottoman Sultan from 1876 to 1909. His reign is often referred to as the Hamidian period, or the Hamidian era.

Abd ul-Mejid I (1823-1861): Ottoman Sultan from 1823 to 1861 who oversaw the era of Tanzimat reforms in his empire.

Bakhar, Nisim (5608-5691/1848-1931): Born into a renowned family of Sephardic rabbis, Bakhar studied under the leading rabbis of Jerusalem before going to learn in Paris at the KiYaH school there. After working in several schools across the Ottoman Empire, he founded the Torah u’Melacha school in Jerusalem where he developed a Hebrew curriculum.

Bayezit II (1447-1512): Fifteenth and sixteenth-century Ottoman Sultan, renowned for allowing Jewish refugees from the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition and expulsions to settle in his empire.

Cuenca, Ben-Zion Avraham (5627-5697/1867-1937): A leading rabbi among the Sephardim of Jerusalem, Cuenca published the halachic journal HaMe’asef, which collected rabbinic responsa on issues relevant to the settlement of the Land of Israel.

al-Khalidi, Yusuf Diya’ ud-Din: Two-time mayor of Jerusalem and representative in the short-lived Ottoman Parliament, Khalidi was a liberal reformist who worked with Bakhar and Yellin before turning against Zionism and penning a famous correspondence with Theodor Herzl.

Yellin, David (5624-5702/1864-1941): A Jerusalemite academic, educator, writer, and politician, Yellin straddled the Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities of Jerusalem, and became a
leading writer in the revival of the Hebrew language after stepping back from earlier work in land purchase societies.
Glossary of Terms

Aliya: Hebrew for “ascent,” refers to Jewish immigration to the land of Israel.

Ashkenazi (adj.): used to describe Jews of European (literally Germanic) descent.

Baladiyya: Ottoman administrative unit below the kaza, comprising a municipality, in contrast to more rural nahiyes. Administered by a ra’is al-baladiyya, “president of the municipality,” a city’s mayor.

Beit Din: Jewish court of law, responsible for giving practical verdicts based on halakha.

Dhimmi: Non-Muslim recognized religious minorities in Islamic law. Administered through the Millet system in the Ottoman Empire.

Eretz Yisra’el: the land of Israel, especially in its Biblical contexts.

Ge’ulat Ha’aretz: Redemption of the land of Israel as a religious mandate.

Ḥakham Bashi: Chief Rabbi, also called Rishon l’Tziyon in Palestine. Appointed by the Sultan as representative of the Jewish millet. Only drawn from the Sephardi leadership.

Halakha: Jewish religious law. Drawn from the Torah and the Talmud, and expanded upon by successive rabbis throughout the ages (adj. halakhic).

Ḥaluḳah: System of distributing donations from Diaspora communities to the Jews of Palestine.

Haskalah: The European Jewish “Enlightenment,” and rise of secular Judaism after European political emancipation of the Jews. Its proponents are called maskilim.

Ḥazaḳah: A system, upheld by the communal leadership of Jerusalem, guaranteeing lessees of three years or more primary claim on the properties they leased to preclude competition and price gouging by Arab landlords.
**Hebrew: Ḥerem** - A rabbinic declaration of communal exclusion. Included economic exclusion from receiving *halukah* funds.

**Kaza** - Ottoman administrative unit constituted as a juridical district. Smaller than a *mutasarriflik*, kazas were geographically based around large urban centers. Administered by a kaymakam (governor), a qadi (judge), and a treasurer.

**Kedushat Ha’aretz** - Sanctity of the Land of Israel in its Jewish understanding.

**Kolel** - Jewish communal organization responsible for internal administration such as distributing *Halukah* funds.

**Millet** - Ottoman system of autonomous control of internal affairs for *dhimmi* communities.

**Mutasarriflik** - Ottoman administrative unit, sometimes synonymous with a *sançak*, and directly under the authority of Istanbul. Administered by a mutasarrif (governor).

**Nahiye** - Ottoman administrative unit below the *kaza*, comprised of small cities or towns and their rural surroundings, in contrast to more urban *baladiyyas*. Administered by a mudur.

**Osmanlilik** - "Ottomanism," state-led Ottoman nationalism.

**Porte** - Usually used in the definitive, "The Porte," to refer to the central Ottoman government revolving around the sultan in Istanbul.

**Sançak** - Originally used synonymously with *mutasarriflik*, in the case of Jerusalem, after the region was elevated to a *mutasarriflik*, the district of Jerusalem was recognized as a *sançak*, encompassing the *kazas* of Jerusalem and Hebron, but not those of Jaffa and Gaza.

**Sephardi** (adj.): used to describe Jews of Spanish or North African descent - has historically also included Middle Eastern Jews, especially in the Ottoman context.

**Siman** - Numbering system for *halakhic* writing (lit. symbol or sign).
**Shaliaḥ (pl. Shliḥim):** Emissaries who collect funds for their home communities. Often Jews from Palestine, collecting from Diaspora communities.

**Tanzimat:** A series of Ottoman political reforms in the mid-nineteenth century that conformed to contemporary European models of governmental modernization. The two most notable policy declarations of the period were the *Hatti-i Sharif* of Gulhane (1839) and the *Islahat Fermani* (1856).

**Teʿudah (pl. Teʿudot):** Stamps of approval.

**Waqf:** Religiously consecrated property in Islamic law, and the administration in charge of the property.

**Yeshiva (pl. Yeshivot):** Rabbinic educational institution.

**Yishuv:** Blanket term for pre-Zionist Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel. Less accepted in modern historiography due to its obfuscation of the rich divides and differences among the Jews of this community (lit. settlement).
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