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The privileges of Zionism in the Ottoman Empire

The subjects of the Ottoman Empire were organized into sectarian groups according to sect, but in an informal capacity. After controlling Constantinople, they had a status guaranteed by the state and they also had semi-independent organizations. The term “Milla” or “Sect” was used in the Islamic era mainly to refer to Muslims, but the Ottomans used it for non-Muslims.

The religious freedoms that all sects of the state had, including the Jews, were not found in other countries. In his book “About the Origins of Ottoman History”, the writer Ahmed Abdel Rahim says that this made the sects exercise their full freedom, including using their own language, establishing religious and educational institutes, collecting taxes and handing them over to the central treasury, and the majority of them lived in the European part of the Ottoman Empire.

In 1876, a law was issued stating that the state’s subjects of different sects are considered Ottoman, and this guarantees them the protection of the state. As for those who mastered the Turkish language, they had the right to hold various positions and jobs in the state, in addition to other rights. Thus, the loyalty of sects became dependent on whims and they felt that they could penetrate and impose their control in twisted ways, and this became apparent later on.

As for the Zionists of the Jews, the state treated them with a great deal of autonomy and administrative independence, so they worked in all branches of work, commerce, industry and the field of education, and this was the most dangerous. They were also allowed to choose spiritual leaders. The Ottoman Empire is the only one that did not issue any controls against them, which increased their number and their flow, especially towards Anatolia, after their expulsion from Spain in 1492 AD. The Ottomans welcomed them and allowed them to reside under the allegations that they transferred the sciences and knowledge of the civilization from which they were expelled for their misconduct.

Among the manifestations of the state’s suffering from them was that they dispersed in the state’s provinces such as Bursa, Amasya and Thessaloniki. They emerged in the field of medicine and became the doctors of the royal palace. Turkish and other historians explain that the spread of poisoned killings inside the palaces was the result of conspiracies arranged under the auspices of these doctors and others from their sect. They also worked as translators due to their association with Europe, and they remained very keen to preserve the heritage they brought with them.

The Jews in the state were two groups. The first group was the Ottoman Jews, who were followers of the Talmud, and they spoke the Greek language in the country, and their inclusion was large. The second group was the immigrant Jews, the Sephardim, and they were defined according to the country from which they came. These people constituted a burden due to their large influx and influence on social life, thus changing the state's attitudes against its subjects. They were arms makers and they monopolized that manufacture.

The problems of the Jews appeared in the history of the Ottoman Empire since the beginning of the nineteenth century and stemmed from the fact that they were a people united by one religion and dispersed in the land, so they dealt with that situation by deciding that the dream of having a homeland that unites them must be fulfilled. One of the most dangerous things that the Zionists did within the royal court was the conversion of some of them to the Islamic religion to make it easier for them to perform their own tasks.

Thus, they merged with the Ottomans in full freedom and most of them spoke at least three languages, namely Spanish, Turkish and French. They found in the Ottoman Empire what they did not get after their expulsion from Europe.