



حبر أبيض
WHITE INK



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The Ottoman Empire was the home of the dispersed Jews

The Turkish Archives preserve huge numbers of documents relating to the history of the Jewish community in the period of the Ottoman Empire. These documents were classified within the classifications and catalogs of the Turkish Archives in Istanbul, and important materials were collected about Jews in the Ottoman Empire during the period of its control. These archived documents included the social and economic situation of the Jews, their number throughout the empire, their relations with the Ottoman authorities, and many historical studies on the Jews were conducted by Turkish researchers and others.

It indicates that the Ottoman Empire had opened its doors to those Jews fleeing from the inferno of Europe, so that the Ottoman lands became a destination for them to escape from dispersal during different historical periods starting from the fourteenth century AD to the nineteenth century AD. During those periods, the Jews succeeded in finding a foothold for them in the court of some sultans and the institutions of the Ottoman government.

Some of their figures reached a prominent position. For example, during the reign of Sultan Murad II (1451-1421 AD), who showed great tolerance with the Jews, until they called him (The great man of humanity), the chief physician of the Jews appeared in his court. He is considered one of the first to have a wide influence in the Sultan's court. It seems that it was the beginning that allowed the Jews to take up many important positions and jobs in the Ottoman government after that.

The Jews found refuge in the Ottoman Empire from the persecution they faced on the European continent in which they lived in neighborhoods isolated from the rest of the people "Jewish ghettos". During the reign of Sultan Mehmed II (1481-1451 AD), the Ottoman Millet system granted them humane treatment and allowed them to live in the capital, Istanbul. A chief rabbi (Hahambaşı) was appointed for them and was given powers similar to the powers of the Christian patriarch.

He also summoned many Jewish families to live in Istanbul. This is what the famous Turkish traveler, Evliya Celebi, witnessed when he said: "When Mehmed II invaded Istanbul, he settled fifty Jewish families in Tikfu Saray, near şahitler kuyusu, meaning - the well of the Witnesses - which later changed to Chivut kuyusu, meaning the Jews' well".

Sultan Mehmed II was not satisfied with that, but he tried to improve the conditions of those immigrants and displaced persons when he issued a decree exempting the Jewish communities from some taxes such as the tax on selling meat, money exchange and other usual taxes. The Russian researcher, Irma Lvovna Fadeeva, explains the reason for the Ottoman tolerance with the Jews by saying: "When Sultan Mehmed II and his successors allowed the Jews fleeing from Europe to enter the capital, it was for purely practical purposes of reviving the economy in the war-ravaged areas".

At all events, whether the goal was religious or economic, the Jews benefited greatly from that system in the Ottoman Empire. It was more like a system of citizenship that made them enjoy a lot of advantages over time and a kind of independence. The rabbis exercised their authority in their religious affairs by building synagogues and schools, working in various trades and exercising their civil rights.

The Jews settled in the Ottoman lands in the late fifteenth century AD after their emigration from Andalusia. They were known as "Sephardim", who were expelled from it and distributed among Portugal, Italy, Morocco and the Ottoman Empire. Historical documents mention that during the reign of Bayezid II (1512-1481 AD), a group of Jewish rabbis submitted a request to him to allow them to immigrate to the Ottoman Empire. He met this request unconditionally, brought them from Andalusia and settled them in Ottoman Turkey and its frontiers. He commanded that these people live in complete freedom.

Bayezid II ordered the governors of the provinces in the state not to refuse the entry of the Jews or arise trouble and to receive them warmly. This tolerance encouraged the continuous immigration of the Jews to the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth century AD from the regions of the European continent, east and west. They were known as "Ashkenazim". The Ottoman and Jewish historical sources state that the most prosperous period for the Jews in the Ottoman Empire was between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries AD, when a number of Jewish personalities succeeded in assuming some high positions and they also gained influence within the Ottoman court.

Istanbul was the Ottoman capital and the place where a large part of the fugitive Jews settled. In 1590, the ghetto population numbered more than twenty thousand of them, according to what was mentioned in the historical sources. They had a clear economic influence. One of these European historians says: "It was a normal thing to find among them (the Jews) who had a fortune of two hundred thousand ducats (European gold coins)". This was a very large amount at that historical stage. The Jews became increasingly influential in the Ottoman government, starting with the reign of Sultan Suleiman I (1566-1520 AD) and his son Selim II (1574-1566 AD). That influence appeared on the political, economic and social aspects.

The question here is, did the Ottoman Empire benefit from that tolerance with the Jews? Did they really have a real impact on the economic aspects of the empire? Were they worthy of such tolerance, or did they become one of the factors that brought down the Ottoman Empire later?

There is another matter that must be mentioned. Did the Ottomans, during that historical period, deal with the Andalusian Arabs, who were also subjected to the Inquisition and terrible massacres, with the same treatment as the Jews?

There are many questions that require us to research more in the Ottoman history and study it more precisely to know the origin of the story and the Turkish friendly relationship with the Jews?