Socio-political changes, confessionalization, and inter-confessional relations in Ottoman Damascus from 1760 to 1860

Massot, A.K.J.M.

Citation

Massot, A. K. J. M. (2021, January 26). *Socio-political changes, confessionalization, and inter-confessional relations in Ottoman Damascus from 1760 to 1860*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3134736

Version: Publisher's Version

License: Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden

Downloaded from: https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3134736

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page

Universiteit Leiden

The handle https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3134736 holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Massot, A.K.J.M.
Title: Socio-political changes, confessionalization, and inter-confessional relations in Ottoman Damascus from 1760 to 1860
Issue Date: 2021-01-26

Chapter 4: The Transformations of the Jewish Communities of *Bilād al-Šām*

The institutionalization of the *millet* system during the *Tanzimat* reforms had similar consequences for the Greek Catholic and Jewish communities. Both communities acceded to a new form of recognition by the Ottoman government in this period. In the previous two chapters we explored the dynamics of the Greek Catholic *millet* which was shaken by the centralization and homogenization objectives of its patriarch, encouraged by both the Ottoman government and Rome. Authority was increasingly imposed in a top-down manner, fostering resistance, escape mechanisms and encouraging the intervention of foreign powers and the Ottoman government in the internal divisions of the community. Centralization also took the form of the construction of a confessional culture through policies of differentiation and separation with other Christians. Although there are less archives available regarding the Jews of Damascus than the Greek Catholics,[1] similar dynamics in the organization and administration of Jewish communities can be identified.

This chapter will explore the institutionalization of the Jewish *millet* during the *Tanzimat* reforms, pointing to similarities with Greek Catholics but also to differences. Indeed, the internal divisions of the Jewish communities were less visible and did not take place in the public space. These divisions were only hinted at in the various archives, but do not seem to have called attention beyond the Jewish community. As such, they had less effect on inter-confessional relations than the violent divisions within the Greek Catholic community.

We will first explore the composition of Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire and in particular in Damascus. Second, we will analyse the transformations of authority and

[1] I could not access content in Hebrew.

leadership of Jewish communities starting in the 18th century. Third, we will focus on the institutionalization of the Jewish *millet* during the *Tanzimat* period through the creation of the position of *Hahambaşı.* Finally, the influence of the Jewish enlightenment, the *haskalah,* and the various resistances it generated will be analyzed.

1. Jewish Communities of Damascus

Jews in the Ottoman Empire were organized in a decentralized way with various *kahals*, or autonomous congregations based on origins.[2] They did not have a central leadership. In the Ottoman Empire, Jewish communities tended to reside in main cities and had few members in the countryside.[3] Each city was independent from the other, and was internally divided between various congregations. This division in *kahals* created strong divisions which tended to accentuate polemical and religious debates. In the 17th century however, Jewish congregations started to overcome divisions of origins and formed increasingly integrated communities.[4]

In *Bilād al-Šām*, the different *kahals* were not as separate as in Anatolia and in the Balkans.[5] The two main settlements of Jews in the region were Damascus and Aleppo.[6] Close to Damascus, there were also Jewish communities in Dayr al-Qamar, Sidon, Ḥaṣbayā and Tripoli. However they declined in the first part of the 19th century.[7] There were initially

---

[2] Haim Gerber, *Crossing Borders, Jews and Muslims in Ottoman Law, Economy and Society,* (Istanbul: ISIS Press, 2008), 50.
[3] Harel , *Syrian Jewry,* 27.
[4] Stanford. J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* (London:Palgrave Macmillan, 1991),54.
[5] Gerber, *Crossing Borders,* 50.
[6] Estimates of the Jewish population in Damascus in the 19th century vary from 4000 to 10 000, *Kitāb al-āḥzān, 30*; Kamal S. Salibi, Yūsuf Q. Khūrī and American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, *The Missionary Herald, Reports from Ottoman Syria, 1819-1870* (London: NABU, 1995), 273; Richard Edwards, *La Syrie 1840–1862*, *histoire, politique, administration, population, religion et moeurs, évènements de 1860 d'après des actes officiels et des documents authentiques* (Paris: Amyot, 1862), 167; F.O., 195/196, Wood -Canning, May 19th 1842; F.O., 78/660, Wood- Aberdeen, February 9th 1846; Salo Baron, "The Jews and the Syrian Massacres of 1860," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 4 (1932): 6; Yaron Harel, "Rabbi Isaac Aboulafia: Leader of the Education Revolution in Damascus 1864-1895," *International Journal of Jewish Education Research* 4, (2013): 9.
[7] Ibid, 79.

Arabized Jews (Mustaʿribūn)[8] and Karaites[9] who were joined in 1492 by Sephardis from Spain and by refuges from Sicily called Francos. Sephardis first spoke Ladino and gradually adopted Arabic.[10] It is recorded that in 1522 there were 500 Jewish families in the city of Damascus, and they already had three synagogues, one for Sephardis, another for Sicilians and finally one for 'native Jews' meaning Arabized Jews. Then, there was another one in Unb (Hūš al-bāšā) and one in Ǧūbar where Arabic speaking Jews amounted to 60 families.[11] A traveller to Damascus mentioned that in 1830 there were three synagogues, two being in the city center and one on the outskirts in Jūbar.[12] In 1853, the Jewish population was estimated at 4000.[13]

In the 19th century, Algerian Jews and Ashkenazi Jews from Poland and Russia also took residence in Damascus.[14] Jews from India, Iraq and Persia joined them in the same period. When an earthquake shook Aleppo in 1822, many Aleppine Jews also came to reside in Damascus.[15] Some fifty Jews of Italian origins were also present.[16] These different communities were however recorded as a single community in the state census in the 19th century, unlike Christians who were recorded according to communities. As per their language, in the 19th century, Jews in Damascus spoke Arabic, albeit with some Ladino and Hebrew words.[17]

In addition to ethnic distinctions, which faded over time, there were also strong divisions in terms of class and cultural orientations among Damascenes Jews. The gap

---

8 Harel , *Syrian Jewry,*12.
9 Karaites were a sect who lived relatively separately from other Jewish congregations, on this group see Shaw, *Jews of Ottoman Empire*, 467, 172; Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Alan Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York, NY: Facts On File, 2009), 308.
10 Šams al-dīn al-ʿAǧlāni, *Yahūd Dimašq al-Šām*, (Damascus: Maktaba al-ʿUlabī, 2008), 53.
11 Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands, a History and Source Book* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1979), 289.
12 Walter J. Fischel, ed., *Unknown Jews in Unknown Lands, the Travels of Rabbi David D'Beth Hillel* (1824-1832) (New York, Ktar Publishing House, Inc., 1973), 65, 66; Harel , *Syrian Jewry,* 30.
13 al-ʿAǧlāni, *Yahūd Dimašq,* 60.
14 Harel , *Syrian Jewry,* 28.
15 Ibid, 28.
16 al-ʿAǧlāni, *Yahūd Dimašq,* 60.
17 Fischel, *Unknown Jews in Unknown Lands,* 65.

between rich and poor was very wide, the community was composed of a small elite of around 10 families who owned large houses and the rest of the community was usually poor. The wealthy among the Jews built large houses, such as the famous house of the Stambouli family.[18] For a community of 5000 individuals there were approximately 800 living only on public charity.[19] In Damascus, the taxes were distributed based on the resources of the individual, so that most of the taxes were paid by twenty rich families.[20] The poor and the scholars were exempt from taxation.[21] We can observe the development of a large Jewish middle class in Aleppo already in the first part of the 19th century, while in Damascus there are no such indications.[22] However, albeit these socioeconomic differences, all the Jews were listed in the censuses as residing in the neighbourhood of al-Zaytūn without any exception.[23]

2. Authority and Leadership

Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire were led both by a secular and a religious leadership. On the one hand, the role of the laity in this leadership was considerable. Lay councils (*ma'mad*) whose members were called *parnassim,* were in charge of fiscal and administrative matters and represented the communities.[24] They were in charge of distributing and collecting the taxes and often paid in advance the amount of the taxes, thus deepening the dependency of the other Jews on these individuals.[25] They also administered the establishment of monopolies and fixed the prices of commodities.[26] On the downside, they were also held responsible for the actions of the community. They were thereby often

---

[18] Ibid, 32.
[19] F.O., 78/600, Wood-Aberdeen, February 9th 1846.
[20] Harel , *Syrian Jewry,* 73.
[21] Ibid, 74.
[22] Ibid, 54.
[23] Avner Levi, "Shav'at Aniyim: Social Cleavage, Class War and Leadership in the Sephardi community; The case of Izmir," in *Ottoman and Turkish Jewry: Community and Leadership*, ed. Aron Rodrigue (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1992), 184.
[24] Leah Bornstein-Makovetsky, "Jewish Lay Leadership" and Ottoman Authorities during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Ottoman and Turkish Jewry*, ed. Aron Rodrigue (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1992), 100. For a more detailed description of lay leadership institutions see Yaron Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution: Chief Rabbis in Aleppo, Baghdad, and Damascus, 1774-1914,* trans. Yehonatan Chipman (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 3.
[25] Ibid, 91.
[26] Shaw, *Jews of Ottoman Empire*, 63-65.

imprisoned when the Jewish population did not comply with the Ottoman orders or failed to pay taxes.[27] The *parnassim* had the support of the government who recognized their authority and enforced it. In theory, they were supposed to be elected to their position.[28]

On the other hand, religious authority was in the hands of the grand rabbi and the rabbinical court rabbis. Below them in the hierarchy there were teachers and religious functionaries and finally at the bottom were the scholars with no fixed posts. All of these individuals were exempt from internal taxation. The grand rabbis of different cities officially had a similar status even if in reality some grand rabbis had a dominant role, such as the grand rabbi of Istanbul or Baghdad.[29] Judicial and religious functions were monopolized by the *Beit Din* court led by the grand rabbi of the city.[30] Grand rabbis were supposed to be communally selected,[31] by an assembly of taxpayers, excluding the poor from the decision-making process.[32]

However, the lay and religious institutions were not opposed to each other but rather interdependent. The *parnassim* derived their legitimacy from the rabbis, who sanctioned their actions based on religious law. Whenever they wanted to enact new regulations, they needed the approval of the grand rabbi.[33] In exchange, the *parnassim* provided a variety of services for the religious leadership. They financed the religious schools, provided stipends for the poor and gave salaries to scholars, including the grand rabbi. Because of this financial responsibility, the *parnassim* had a say in the election of grand rabbis.[34]

In addition to the grand rabbi, there were Torah scholars in Damascus (40-60 individuals) who were linked to yeshivas[35] in the houses of wealthy Jews. The scholars

---

[27] Borntein-Makovetsky, "*Jewish Lay Leadership,*" 91.
[28] Shaw, *Jews of Ottoman Empire*, 63-65.
[29] Shaw, *Jews of Ottoman Empire*, 42.
[30] Avigdor Levy, *The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1992), 107.
[31] Harel , *Syrian Jewry,* 59.
[32] Ibid, 67.
[33] Ibid, 62.
[34] Harel , *Syrian Jewry,* 61.
[35] Schools of Talmudic learning

benefited from the *āwqāf* (*yekdeshot*) established for their benefit. Scholars were also administrators of these *āwāqf*. The community as a whole was responsible for their subsistence.[36] Scholars took fees for funerals, marriages, prayers, etc.[37] If they didn't have the sufficient funds they could also engage in commerce. Torah scholars were usually not wealthy, and the poor among them taught in Talmudic schools, even if they often could not obtain due payment for their activities.[38]

The Ottoman Empire in the 18th century was characterized by the decentralization of governance, which brought powerful families to monopolize the provincial institutions of the state in the provinces. The same dynamic is observable among religious groups. Among Jews, the *parnassim* came to bypass the election system and chose themselves their own successor by controlling the *ma'mad,* or lay councils.[39] The Grand rabbinate also came to be monopolized by a single family. The Greek Catholic community similarly saw the dominance of a few influential families on the administration of the Church. The 18th century was thus characterized by the centralization of power on a provincial level in all communities, due to the nature of the Ottoman rule.

In Damascus, the post of grand rabbi had been made hereditary in the 18th century and was monopolized by the Galante family, an Italian-Sephardi family from Rome which settled in the Ottoman Empire and obtained positions of grand rabbi in various cities.[40] The grand rabbi's increased power over the community led to tensions with the *parnassim.*[41] The *parnassim* of Damascus, like in many other cities, controlled the community and the grand rabbi through funding the communal institutions.[42] The Farḥī family was dominant among

---

[36] Harel , *Syrian Jewry,* 37.
[37] Harel , *Syrian Jewry*, 38.
[38] Ibid, 38.
[39] Shaw, *Jews of Ottoman Empire*, 63-65.
[40] In Damascus, Mordecai Galante was the Grand Rabbi of Damascus until 1781, he was then followed by his son Moses Galante, Grand Rabbi until 1806; Harel,"Rabbi Isaac Aboulafia: Ābū al-ʿAfīyā," 11.
[41] Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution, 4.*
[42] Ibid.

the laity. There was thus a centralization of religious and secular power in the hands of a few families.[43]

The interdependence between the religious and secular leadership was challenged by the change of the elite and the reforms of the *Tanzimat*. The pre-*Tanzimat* leadership was well embedded in the religious framework of the Jewish community, adding to their legitimacy in the eyes of the people. For example, the notable Ḥāyīm Farḥī was called *Haham*[44] in the various chronicles. Mīḫāʾīl Mišāqa argued that it was because he knew the Torah very well.[45] Then, these leaders belonged to 'noble' families. However, a new elite arose in the first part of the 19th century which challenged the role of the *parnassim* and the centralization of power within Jewish communities. Starting with the Egyptian rule, other Jewish families assumed an important economic role. These were not outsiders neither new players as we have seen in the case of the Greek Catholics, they were instead well established families but they had been overshadowed by the political role of the Farḥī family. Similarly to the Greek Catholic established families, the traditional elite which had inherited their social status resented the increasing involvement of these other individuals into the affairs of the community.[46]

During the Egyptian rule in Damascus, the situation of the Jews followed the pattern of the Greek Catholics. With the installation of consuls and houses of commerce, Jews increasingly engaged in trade and obtained protégé statuses. However, contrary to Greek Catholics, Jewish merchants did not benefit from the initial French trade, but rather took the opportunities awarded to them by the English commercial dominance at the end of the 1840's. Jews had more trading houses than Christians and took more advantage of the new trading opportunities, also as a consequence of the monopolization of administrative positions by

---

[43] The same dynamic was observable in Aleppo, Yaron Harel, "Jewish-Christian Relations in Aleppo." *IJMES* 30 (1998): 85.
[44] Rabbi.
[45] Mishāqah, *Murder, Mayhem*, 49.
[46] Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 155.

Greek Catholics. In 1840, there were twenty-four Jewish trading houses in Damascus.[47] Their heavy involvement in trade is represented by the commercial power of the Piccioto family in Aleppo, whose members were under Austrian protection and were later named consuls. The richest families of Damascus were the Levy-Stambouli, Angel, Lisbona, Farḥī, Harārī, Tūbī and Ḥasūn.[48]

The dominant Farḥī family also engaged in trade with England early on. Among the wealthiest Jews of the city were two members of the Farḥī family, Murād and Nissim[49] They created alliances with other families in these domains.[50] Over the years however, while the Farḥī continued to be part of the lay leadership of the community, they did not continue to be active in foreign trade with Europe and were replaced by new families with British or Austrian protection.[51] For some reason, the Farḥī did not seek or were not awarded British or Austrian protection.

The Farḥī family had had difficulties recovering from a variety of changes. First, in Istanbul the Jewish bankers had been executed together with the Janissaries in 1823, thus depriving the provincial money-lenders such as the Farḥī of their financial base. According to some debts settlements documents found in the Ottoman archives, Rūfāʾīl Farḥī, to finance the *āġāwāt* who revolted against the Ottoman governor Salim Pasha in 1830, had to borrow from other bankers in Jerusalem, Izmir and other cities. While he was still able to keep his position thanks to this wide network, his children had to pay back his debts in the end of the 1840's.[52] Then, conflicts over the inheritance of Ḥāyīm Farḥī and later of Rūfāʾīl Farḥī

---

[47] John Bowring, *Report on the Commercial Statistics of Syria* (London, 1840) (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 94.
[48] Harel, *Syrian Jewry*, 73.
[49] Bowring, *Report*, 94.
[50] A.E., 166/PO-Serie D/20, vol. 2, Beaudin-Roussin, March 16th 1838.
[51] Harel, *Syrian Jewry*, 218.
[52] BOA, HR.MKT.172/95, February 6th 1849.

divided the family and led to the impoverishment of some of its members who thus lost their political influence.[53]

This change in the nature of the elite, from inherited status to economic activity and foreign status, transformed the relation between the *parnassim* and the religious establishment. The *parnassim* were now in majority foreign protégés and even foreign citizens, in the case of the Harārīs. They benefited from the protection of Britain, Austria and sometimes Prussia. As such, they were no longer submitted to the authority of the grand rabbi and the rabbinical court, as were foreign Jews.[54] Then, Ashkenazi Jews increasingly settled in the Ottoman Empire and attempted to obtain their independence from Sephardi authorities.[55]

The status of merchants under foreign protection had always been an issue of controversy in Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire. The fact that they escaped the authority of the grand rabbi was problematic for the latter in case of bad behavior or financial issues, but also for the government, which was deprived of an intermediary to ensure order and the payment of taxes. In some cases, they were even attempts from Jewish communities to prevent foreign merchants from exercising their trade in their cities to avoid any problem with the authorities. In the 19th century, this problem became generalized because of the large number of foreign merchants and the increasing burden of taxation.[56]

Albeit these internal conflicts, from the outside, the Damascene Jewish population presented a united front, in part because of the nature of Jewish communities' opacity in their internal struggles, in clear contrast to the Christian communities who did not hesitate to call for the intervention of the government in their internal issues. In the 19th century, some *parnassim* did bribe the government in order to obtain redress on some issues for which the

---

53 Harel , *Syrian Jewry,* 35.
54 Ibid, 218.
55 Matthias B. Lehman, "Rethinking Sephardi Identity: Jews and Other Jews in Ottoman Palestine," *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series 15, no. 1 (2008): 90.
56 Aryeh Shmuelevitz, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire in the late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, Administrative, Economic, Legal and Social Relations as Reflected in the Responsa* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 118.

rabbinical courts had refused to give them their rights, but they did not call for the intervention of foreign powers in their internal divisions.[57] The protection of Christian communities was also a more politically relevant issue for foreign powers, encouraging them to intervene in internal conflicts.

In this period, conflicts between the lay leadership and the grand rabbi were common. *Parnassim*, who were financially responsible for the grand rabbi's salary, wished to exert some level of influence over this position.[58] Conflicts took place between Grand Rabbi Yaʾqūb ʿAntābi (1816-1842) and some members of the Farḥī and Harārī families. ʿAntābi had been elected by the *parnassim*, led by the Farḥī family. At the time of ʿAntābi's election, the Farḥī family enjoyed a dominant status. He had been chosen over Rabbi Ḥāyīm Nissim Ābū al-ʿAfīya because he was less wealthy and independent, and thus could be easily influenced, even though he was younger and less knowledgeable.[59] This strategy however seems to have failed. Indeed, in 1833, a conflict occurred between different members of the Farḥī family over the inheritance of Ḥāyīm Farḥī, which included many *āwqāf* and funds for the support of the religious schools. This inheritance was thus was a key to control the rabbinate. Ḥāyīm's sons Rūfāʾīl, Menāhīm, Sulaymān and Mūsā were in disagreement over the distribution of the inheritance. ʿAntābi took a certain decision regarding the distribution. Mūsā and his sons refused the decision taken by ʿAntābi, tried to dismiss him of his post and even to get him arrested. Mūsā Farḥī's the support of the rabbis who criticized ʿAntābi for taking this decision without consulting them.[60] The unilateral decision-making power of the grand rabbi, which increased since the second part of the 18th century, was more and more challenged by the rabbinate. This dynamic resembled tensions which were taking place in the Greek Catholic Church.

---

[57] Harel , *Syrian Jewry*, 64.
[58] Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 144.
[59] Ibid, 61.
[60] Ibid, 61.

The aforementioned conflicts between the notables and the grand rabbi cannot be reduced to a struggle between the religious and the lay sphere. Indeed, the involvement of other rabbis into disputes between the notables and the grand rabbi, and their refusal to admit his legal opinions points to a changing conception of authority and a re-shuffling of the relations between the different levels of the religious hierarchy.[61] Judicial authority was at the center of this power struggle. Which issues were to be dealt with in the *ma'mad* and which one in the *Beit Din*? Who was to hold be the *posek* (halakhic authority, decision-making power)?

The fight between Mūsā Farḥī and Grand Rabbi ʿAntābi also involved various grand rabbis in the vicinity, each one siding with the other. Moses had the support of the concurrent of ʿAntābi, Ḥāyīm Nissim Ābū al-ʿAfīyā, who in the meantime had been awarded a rabbi position in Tiberias. ʿAntābi on the other hand had the support of the Grand Rabbis of Jerusalem Ibrāhīm Ḥayyim Gagin and Rūfāʾīl Yūsuf Ḥaḏān.[62]

Another conflict took place between the grand rabbi and the Harārī family. They were under British protection and refused to be submitted to his religious rulings. ʿAntābi criticized their lack of religious observance. In retribution, they withheld his salary for two and a half years.[63] By challenging the decision of the grand rabbi, the notables were questioning the authority of the court in matters of inheritance. The conflicts between the lay leadership and the grand rabbis continued throughout the 19th century.[64] It is only after the bankruptcy of the lay leaders of Damascus in 1875 caused by the economic crisis and the devaluation of bonds, that Grand Rabbi Ābū al-ʿAfīya could really have a determinant role in the community.[65]

---

[61] Haren, *Syrian Jewry,* 71.
[62] David Abulafia, "A Minority within a Minority: Reflections on Sephardi identity," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 33, no. 1 (2000): 10-19.
[63] Harel , *Syrian Jewry*, 61.
[64] Harel , *Syrian Jewry,* 63.
[65] Yaron Harel, *Zionism in Damascus: Ideology and Activity in the Jewish Community at the beginning of the twentieth century*' (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2015), 2.

In conclusion, the case of Damascus reveals that the relation between the religious leadership and the secular leadership and between the grand rabbi and the rabbis were being simultaneously reconsidered. The breakdown of the relation of interdependence between the grand rabbis, the rabbinical court and the *parnassim* was favored by the rise of a new commercial class under foreign protection and the increasing power of the grand rabbi. These questions mirror the developments within the Greek Catholic community, in which the power relation between bishops and the patriarch and between the merchant elite and the clergy were intertwined and foreign protection became a tool of power to escape the religious leadership.

3. Centralizing Judiciary Power

While the religious leadership was competing for judicial authority, the Ottoman reform of 1839 reduced the jurisdiction of the *Beit Din.*[66] It was made competent only in issues of personal status law.[67] The religious court was the main institution through which the religious leaders could enforce communal regulations and law, and thus exert their control over the community. It was the central tool of independence. The creation of secular courts or the jurisdiction given to the *mağlis* to deal with civil issues during the *Tanzimat* was thus a direct threat to their authority and the independence of the rabbis.[68]

It was not uncommon for Jews to refuse to appear in front of the *Beit Din*, or to use the *qāḍī* court, secular court or *mağlis* as a way to circumvent the religious hierarchy or when the decision taken in the *Beit Din* did not satisfy them.[69] To counter this dynamic, Jewish religious leaders forbade Jews from using the secular courts and instead compelled them to use only the *Beit Din*.[70] Yet Jews continued to use these institutions especially in cases of inheritance, property and commercial or financial disputes.[71] Paradoxically, in the *Tanzimat*

---

66 Ibid, 67.
67 Shaw, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire,* 150.
68 Harel, *Syrian Jewry,* 144.
69 Ibid, 72.
70 Shaw, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, 83.
71 Harel , *Syrian Jewry,* 72.

period, there was both an increasing clerical authority and the creation of a multiple institutions which allowed the individual to escape this authority.

The 1858 land registry law, which called for the registration of public land in the *mağlis* and the officialization of land transactions, made illegal land purchases which were not registered with a *tapu* deed.[72] This law was only applied to *miri* (public land) but it caused various conflicts regarding claims of ownership. For the Jewish leadership, this law meant that even in a transaction was conducted between Jews, they had to appear in front of the *mağlis* and the state law would be applied instead of the halakhic law. Some rabbis agreed to this reform based on the notion that the law of the king was to be obeyed.[73] This notion, born out of the specific conditions of the Jewish diaspora, was present in all Jewish communities, including Algerian Jews. When a conflict arose between the religious law and the law of the country it was the latter that was to be followed.[74] Other rabbis, however, rather rejected this reform. The refusal to apply this law was not granted in halakhic precedents, for property law were considered 'secular' and thus those who rejected such a reform, mainly the rabbis of Aleppo followed by the rabbis of Damascus, called for a new interpretation of the halakha on this issue.[75]

Similarly to the conflicts between the Greek Catholic patriarch and his bishops, the grand rabbi's judicial authority was weakened by Jewish notables' use of the qādī court and by the *Tanzimat* reforms which reduced the role of the religious courts, leading some rabbis to oppose these changes.

4. The Institutionalization of the Jewish millet: Position of Hahambaşı

72 Legal ownership right.

73 Zohar Zvi, *Rabbinic Creativity in the Modern Middle East* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 98.

74 Valerie Assan, *Les Consistoires israélites d'Algérie au XIXe siècle. « L'alliance de la civilisation et de la religion »* (Paris: Armand Colin, coll. « Recherche », 2012), 17.

75 Zohar Zvi, *Rabbinic Creativity in the Modern Middle East* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 98.

Until the *Tanzimat*, Jews of the Ottoman Empire were not represented by a single religious leader. While a position of *hahambaşı* had been first granted in 1525 to Moses Capsali followed by Elijah Mizrahi, their jurisdiction never extended beyond Istanbul. After Mizrahi's death in 1526 the office was left vacant because of internal divisions.[76] Since Jewish communities of the Empire did not have a specific religious head to represent them in Istanbul, they had previously relied on the patronage of state doctors and bankers who enjoyed a large influence with the sultans in the 16th century. They partook on the decision-making process in the capital and presented the petitions and requests of Jews throughout the empire to the Sublime Porte.[77]

However, in the 19th century these influential Jews of Istanbul faced a cruel fate. When Janissaries were executed in 1826, important Jewish figures who were financially related to this institution met the same fate, leaving the community without representation.[78] This lack of lay leadership created a need for representation for the Jewish community and in 1835 the post of *hahambaşı* was created to represent the entirety of the Ottoman Empire's Jewish community from Istanbul, thus centralizing their political representation.[79] It was created in part to answer this need for representation and in part because the Ottoman government saw the Jews as the example of a loyal *millet* after the rebellion and secession of Greece in 1832.[80]

The institutionalization of the Jewish religious leadership created a hierarchy quite foreign to Ottoman Jews. Abraham Levi, who obtained a *berat* in 1835,[81] was supposed to be the representative of the Jews in the whole empire and to hold a higher rank in the hierarchy than other grand rabbis. The sultan had an important role to play in the choice of *hahambaşı*

[76] Shaw, *Jews of Ottoman Empire*, 42.
[77] Bornstein-Makovetsky, "Jewish Lay Leadership," 100.
[78] Shaw, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire,* 148.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Levy, " *millet* Politics," 434.
[81] Shaw, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire,* 149.

as he could refuse to recognize his election or had to confer upon him an official recognition of his status.[82] This reform opened the way for the appointment of rabbis by the state.[83] For many, it represented the recognition of Jews as an official *millet.*[84] This change mirrors the institutionalization of Catholic Churches.[85] Then, the appointment of a *hahambaşı* changed the balance of power between the laity and the religious leadership because for the first time since the 16th century the representative of the Jewish community originated from the religious hierarchy instead of the notables.

The institution of the position of *hahambaşı* did not meet with the immediate acceptance of Ottoman Jews and even led to harsh criticism.[86] Many saw this institution as an attempt of the state to interfere in religious affairs. In the end, because of this resistance, a religious office of grand rabbi (*Rav ha-kolel*) of Istanbul continued to exist side by side with the *hahambaşı*.[87] The Grand Rabbi was in charge of religious issues and the *hahambaşı* was in charge of communication and representation in front of the Ottoman government.[88]

Similarly to the case of the Greek Catholics, the border between civil and spiritual authority was unclear and led to conflicts within the leadership.[89] The *hahambaşı* officially had three functions: he was first a government employee in charge of the administration of the Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire and thus was responsible for collecting taxes, enforcing compliance with the state's laws, and was the conduct through which Jews in the empire could communicate their complains to the government. In this capacity, he fulfilled the role of the *parnassim*. Then, he was the administrator of all Jewish waqf. Finally he was a religious leader and was thus at the highest legal position and had the right to

[82] Franco, *Essai*, 151.
[83] Levy, "Shav'at Aniyim," 195.
[84] Levy, *The Sephardim,* 105.
[85] Masters, *Christians and Jews,* 139
[86] Levy, *The Sephardim,* 105, 106.
[87] Franco, *Essai sur l'histoire,* 152.
[88] Levy, *The Sephardim*, 106.
[89] Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 7.

excommunicate.[90] However, his actual position in the hierarchy was unclear. Some authors such as Stanford Shaw describe his position as superior to grand rabbis, mirroring the office of patriarch. Yet, for others it was simply a representative post, but did not yield specific powers within the community.[91] His position also encroached on the jurisdiction of the members of the rabbinic court, encouraging them to challenge the hahambaşı's involvement in religious affairs.[92] The institutionalization of the Jewish *millet* thus further challenged the interdependence between the notables and the religious leadership that had ensured the balance of power between the two groups.[93]

After Istanbul, provincial offices of *hahambaşı* were instituted in Jerusalem in 1841, in Baghdad in 1848, and Damascus in 1849 among others, with the intervention of the *hahambaşı* of Istanbul.[94] The various resistances to the creation of a single representative for all the Jews of the Ottoman Empire must have triggered the creation of these positions. Conflicts over the appointment of *hahambaşılar* were numerous, especially in Jerusalem, Sidon and Aleppo.[95] In Jerusalem, Abraham Gagin was appointed in 1841 by the *hahambaşı* of Istanbul and met with a strong opposition among the population, especially among Ashkenazis who refused to be imposed his leadership. As a result of these divisions, similarly to Istanbul, in the provinces, the position of Grand Rabbi, or *rav ha-kolel* continued to exist side by side with the *hahambaşı*. In Damascus also, the appointment of the *hahambaşı* Jacob Perez in 1849 led to the division of the office of grand rabbi between a *hahambaşı* and a *Rav ha-kolel*. The two offices remained separate until 1880. *Hahambaşı* Perez was to be in charge of representation with the authorities and *Rav ha-kolel* Hārūn Yaʿqūb Binyāmīn Baġdādī was to be in charge of rabbinical courts, and exercise halakhic[96] authority. The relationship

[90] Ibid, 8; Shaw, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, 150.
[91] Levy, *The Sephardim*, 107; Avigdor Levy, "*Millet* Politics," 432.
[92] Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 11.
[93] Ibid, 101-103.
[94] BOA, A.DVN.40.33, October 3rd 1848; Levy, *The Sephardim,* 107.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Religious law.

between the *rav ha-kolel* who did not receive any official position or *berat* and the official position of *hahambaşı* was quite difficult.[97]

The creation of the position of the *hahambaşı* was an attempt to create a top-down hierarchy at the level of the empire, which was foreign to Jewish communal organization and thus led to a strong opposition among the rabbinate. Divisions did not simply pit the laity against the rabbinate but rather cut across these two groups. The attempt of the grand rabbi to impose his authority on those who had previously benefited from some level of interstitial freedom led to resistances and mirrors the efforts of homogenization of norms at play in the Greek Catholic community.

5. *Haskalah* and Transnational Imagination : European Influence

In the 19th century, Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire were also shaken by transformations on the religio-cultural level. Mysticism had been widespread in the Ottoman Empire. It was linked to the arrival of Francos in the 17th century, which brought a revival in the Sephardi *minhag* (customs) and a Ladino cultural revival. Ladino rabbinical literature was linked with Lurianic Kabbalah, a form of mysticism which dominated theology in the modern era and had links with the Sabatean movement.[98] After the initial decline of Hebrew printing since 16th century, the resurgence of the Ladino language and cultural revival brought about the development of the printing presses in the beginning of the 18th century and favored a print culture. Before the 18th century, rabbinical works circulated in manuscript among elites. With the development of print, it spread among non-elites.[99]

---

[97] Ibid.

[98] Jacob Barnai, “From Sabbateanism to Modernization: Ottoman Jewry on the Eve of the Ottoman Reforms and the Haskala,” in *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*, ed. Harvey Goldberg (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 75. For an account of the Sabbatean movement see Jacob Barnai, “The Sabbatean movement in Smyrna: the social background,” in *Jewish Sects, Religious Movements, and Political Partie*s, ed. Menachem Mor. (Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 1992), 113-122.

[99] Barnai, “ From Sabbateanism”, 75.

As Matthias Lehmann observes, these dynamics coincided with the development of an Ottoman print culture in the 18th century.[100] Apparently, the funder of the first Jewish press Jonah Ashkenazi had helped Ibrahim Müteferikka to establish the first Ottoman press in 1720. However, both Ottoman ulema and rabbis worried about the spread of vernacular print to the population as a tool of social change and for this reason the Ottoman government did not print religious books until later on.[101] Together with the printed rabbinical works, vernacular literature was also developed.[102] The secular Sephardi literature was built on the rabbinic Ladino literature of the 18th century.[103] Various newspapers were also created in the first part of the 19th century such as Sha'are Mizrah, La Buena Esperanza. The themes of these newspapers were loyalty to the Ottoman government, ideas of civilization and progress and modern education.[104]

The development of a Ladino print culture propelled local Jewish communities into the larger Sephardi world in Europe and North Africa.[105] In Ottoman society at large, there was a wave of translations of European books, which were read outloud in cafes, giving access to knowledge for everyone, even the illiterate.[106] While Jews in the Ottoman Empire saw their horizons expand to the larger Sephardi world, they also found a new place within the Ottoman state structure. Julia Phillips Cohen argues that in the 19th century Jews further defined their role as imperial citizens, not against the state but instead through their 'patriotic' relations to it. In Jewish narratives and in Ottoman discourses, the empire's welcoming of the Jews fleeing persecutions from Spain in 1492 was omnipresent.[107] This narrative of Ottoman clemency towards persecuted Jews since the 15th century justified in the eyes of the Jewish

---

[100] Matthias Lehmann, *Ladino Rabbinic Literature and Ottoman Sephardic Culture (*Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 40.
[101] Ibid, 41.
[102] Ibid, 39.
[103] Ibid, 47.
[104] Ibid, 46.
[105] Lehmann, *Ladino Rabbic Literature,* 41.
[106] Ibid, 48.
[107] Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 141.

leaders the payment of the *ğizya* as a social contract which allowed them to buy their safety from persecution.[108]

The *Haskalah* movement interacted both with the development of mysticism and the emphasis on Jewish imperial citizenship. The *Haskalah*, otherwise called Jewish Enlightenment, was closely linked with the emancipation of Jews in Europe.[109] In 18th and 19th century Europe, especially in Germany, this movement sought to integrate Jews in the society in which they lived. In order to do so, Jews were encouraged to leave the ghetto and to mix with non-Jews. It was also underlined by a new engagement with religious sciences and challenged the place of *halakha* in the life of Jews, thus questioning the authority of the rabbis over the Jewish communities. Jews were encouraged to engage in education in secular studies, to study biblical Hebrew rather than Yiddish. In the field of scholarship it was exemplified by critical editions of rabbinical works. This movement focused on the study of history and emphasized a secular Jewish identity rather than a religious one. In Europe, the *Haskalah* entailed a front attack on the religious establishment. In the Ottoman Empire, the context was quite different. The religious/secular division developed in Europe made no sense to the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire whose life was underlined by the permanence of religion. In the Ottoman Empire, the *Haskalah* was rather predominantly marked by an attack on mysticism and tradition.[110]

In general, the Sephardi rabbis of the Ottoman Empire did not take a confrontational approach to the *Haskalah*, as it was the case with Ashkenazi Orthodoxy, because it did not take place in a confrontational and anti-religious atmosphere. There was no perceived direct

---

[108] Ibid, 141.
[109] On the Haskhalah see Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Olga Litvak, *Haskalah: The Romantic Movement in Judaism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).
[110] Represented in the Ottoman Empire by the Sabbatean movement, Jacob Barnai, "Christian Messianism and the Portuguese Marranos: The Emergence of Sabbateanism in Smyrna," *Jewish History* (Fall 1993): 119–126; For a comprehensive overview of the scholarship on mysticism see Frederick E. Greenspahn, *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah: New Insights and Scholarship* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

threat to the continuation of the religious establishment.[111] Rabbis were however well aware of the stakes of this change because these developments led to theological debates and encouraged a profusion of writings. For example, in Anatolia and especially in cities such as Smyrna, there were in the 19th century vivid theological debates followed by writings supported by the profusion of printing presses and the birth of various newspapers in the first part of the 19th century.[112]

In *Bilād al-Šām*, these cultural and religious developments were not as remarkable for the first part of the 19th century, but printing presses were developed, notably in Safad and Jerusalem.[113] Little is known about the Damascene Jewish cultural development in this period, in comparison to the profusion of works on Anatolian Jewry.[114] We do know that important Damascene rabbis, such as Grand Rabbi Ābū al-ʿAfīya wrote significant works from 1875 onwards.[115] Damascus was however not isolated form the greater cultural context and various books reached Damascus.[116] Ābū al-ʿAfīya described in the 1870's the influx of books coming from what he calls "the cities of the Ashkenazis", pointing to his perception of Europe.[117] The influence of European culture in the region thus meant the influence of the Ashkenazi in mostly *Mustʿarībūn* and Sephardi communities. Reactions to the *Haskalah* also have to be understood as part of this ethnic dynamic.

In *Bilād al-Šām*, there were various oppostions to the *Haskalah.* In Aleppo, the rabbis rejected the use of annex sciences in the commentaries of the Torah. Rabbi Eliyahu Ben Amozegh had published a commentary of the Torah using philology, archeology and history to explain its meanings. In this effort, the author made parallels between pagan beliefs

---

[111] Zohar Zvi, *Rabbinic Creativity,* 357.
[112] Levy, *The Sephardim,* 90.
[113] Rina Cohen, "L'affaire de Damas et les prémices de l'antisémitisme moderne," *Archives Juives* 34, no. 1 (2001): 10; David Rossoff, *Safed:The Mystical City* (Jerusalem and Brooklyn: Shaar Books, 1991), 161-162.
[114] See for example Avner Levi, "Shavat Aniyim: Social cleavage, class war and leadership in the Sephardi community the case of Izmir 1847," in *Ottoman and Turkish Jewry: Community and Leadership*, ed. Aaron Rodrigue (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).
[115] On his works see Yaron Harel, "Rabbi Isaac Aboulafia".
[116] Harel , *Syrian Jewry*, 201.
[117] Ibid, 201.

and the Torah. It was perceived as such an heresy by the Aleppine rabbinic scholars that they burned the book, which contained the Talmud itself, a punishment only reserved for heretics. This step was followed by Damascene rabbinic scholars, even if some of their preeminent members of the community criticized this extreme reaction.[118]

In addition to religious reform, the *Haskalah* movement sought to reform the place of Jews in non-Jewish society. Wealthy European Jews were dedicated to the development of education among Jews. They attempted to remedy what they perceived as the inferiority of Middle Eastern Jews.[119] One of these wealthy British Jews was Moses Montefiore. He attributed the execution of the Jewish leadership in 1826 and the various accusations of blood libels in this period to the fact that Jews did not know enough the Ottoman language and lived too separately from other communities, both of which could be remedied through the establishment of secular schools. The Ottoman Jewish banker Abraham Salomon Kamondo also supported this interpretation.[120] In the 19th century, Christians were able to better take advantage of the employment opportunities awarded to non-Muslims after the decree of 1856 because of their mastering of foreign languages, which Jews tended not to know.[121] They were thus more represented in the administration than Jews.[122] This was even more true in Damascus. When the French banker Gustav de Rotchild came to Damascus in 1850, he had to use the services of the dragoman of the French Consulate to speak with the local Jewish notables, whom he described as ignorant of foreign languages.[123] Ottoman bureaucrats also wished to see Jews more involved in various state institutions, which required a focus on education and especially knowledge of languages. Jews were encouraged to join institutions such as the Ottoman School of Medicine or the Translation bureau. In order to attract them,

---

[118] Zohar Zvi, *Rabbinic Creativity,* 97.
[119] Yaron Harel, "Rabbi Isaac Aboulafia," 5, 7.
[120] Shaw, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire,* 160.
[121] Levy, *The Sephardim,* 95.
[122] Carter V. Findley, "The Acid Test of Ottomanism: The Acceptance of Non-Muslims in the Late Ottoman Bureaucracy," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire : The Functioning of a Plural Society,* ed. Braude, Benjamin and Bernard Lewis, vol.1 (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982), 344.
[123] A.E., 166/PO-Serie D/20, vol. 1, Lavalette- de Ségur, December 5th 1850.

specific arrangements were made to satisfy their religious obligations regarding food and holy days.[124]

The question of education was closely linked to foreign intervention. To reach important positions within the administration, Jews had to receive a similar education to their Christian peers. This education was often at the hand of missionaries. Some rabbis were adamant to forbid the education of Jews in missionary schools which they suspected of trying to convert Jews to Christianity. In Istanbul, the *hahambaşı* also warned Jews not to enroll their children in these schools.[125] Such an issue had been presented in 1843 by an correspondent from Istanbul cited in the Jewish American newspaper 'The Occident', which led him to advocate sending Ottoman Jews to Europe for education.[126] When the first schools started to teach French in 1856, some rabbis made a direct link between the learning of French and the lessening of religious observance.[127]

In the face of Protestant missionary activities amongst Jews in Palestine, and the presence of Irish and Scottish missionaries in Damascus, the concerns of Jewish community leaders was not misplaced. The rabbis were right to worry about the Protestant schools because the first Protestant missions did seek to convert Jews.[128] Protestant activities among

---

[124] Avigdor Levy, *The Sephardim,* 110.
[125] Shaw, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, 160.
[126] "The Jews of the East",The Occident and American Jewish Advocate, ed. Isaac Leeser and Mayer Sulzberger, vol. 1, no.1, (April 1843): 37.
[127] Rodrigue, "The Beginning of Westernization" 451.
[128] Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, 66, 94. On education and missionary activity see Mehmet Ali Doğan and Heather Sharkey eds., *American Missionaries and the Middle East: Foundational Encounters* (Salt Lake City:University of Utah Press, 2011); Verdeil, *La mission jésuite;* Karène Sanchez, *Politiques, éducation et identités linguistiques. Le collège des Frères des écoles chrétiennes de Jérusalem (1922-1939)* (Utrecht: LOT, 2009); Olivier Bocquet, *Missionnaires Français en terre d'Islam*; Rao Humphreys Lindsay, "Nineteenth Century American Schools in the Levant: A Study of Purposes." PhD diss., (University of Michigan, 1965); Selçuk Akşim Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire: Islamization, Autocracy, Discipline* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Heleen Murre-van den Berg, *New faith in ancient lands*; Roderic H. Davison, "Westernized Education in Ottoman Turkey," *Middle East Journal* 15, no. 3 (1961): 289-301; Susanna Ferguson, "'A Fever for an Education': Pedagogical Thought and Social Transformation in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, 1861–1914," *Arab Studies Journal* 26, no.1 (2018): 58–83; Ellen Fleischmann, "Evangelization or Education: American Protestant Missionaries, the American Board, and the Girls and Women of Syria (1830–1910)," in *New Faith in Ancient Lands: Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Heleen Murre-van den Berg, 263–280 (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Julia Hauser, Christine B. Lindner, and Esther Moller, eds., *Entangled Education: Foreign and Local Schools in Ottoman Syria and Mandate Lebanon (19th–20th centuries)* (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2016); Christine B. Lindner, *Negotiating the Field:*

Jews had at first been welcomed because they provided Hebrew bibles and resources and were associated with British interests. In the 1850's, these activities however attracted the resentment of many rabbis who took issue with their proselytizing goals.[129] While in Damascus, conversions of Jews to Christianity were not numerous, in Izmir on the other hand many poor Jews converted to Protestantism.[130] Damascene rabbis banned sending Jewish children to Protestant schools and co-operation with Protestant missionaries, allegedly under the influence of the Catholics.[131] The British consul Wood called the rabbis to discuss the issue and explained that the Protestant schools had no aim to convert Jews but rather to provide education to all, and especially to the poor. He threatened the rabbis to cut his relations with them if they insisted. Out of fear of losing such a precious ally, the rabbis lifted the ban on joining these schools.[132] In 1872 the ban was again applied, and the British consul succeeded a second time in lifting it. The *hahambaşı* Jacop Perez was present in these two case, and he argued that the rabbis acted without his consent.[133]

Beyond interactions between Jews and non-Jews in missionary schools, some rabbis also resented the increasing social interactions of Jews and non-Jews in cities of *Bilād al-Šām*. The Jewish merchant class came into close interaction and developed partnerships with non-Jews. They also lived in mixed neighborhoods. It called for close interaction and cultural exchanges, which did not please some of the rabbis.[134]

Beyond missionary schools there was the option of creating schools specific for Jews. In 1840, three European philanthropists, Adolphe Cremieux, Moses Montefiore and Salomon

---

American Protestant Missionaries in Ottoman Syria, 1823 to 1860, PhD diss., (Edinburgh University, 2009); Somel, Selçuk Akşim, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire: Islamization, Autocracy, Discipline* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

[129] Harel , *Syrian Jewry*, 190.

[130] Avigdor Levy, *The Sephardim,* 196.

[131] Ibid, 190.

[132] Ibid, 222-223.

[133] Harel *, Syrian Jewry*, 225.

[134] Harel , *Syrian Jewry*, 155.

Munk, obtained from Muḥammad ʿAlī the authorization to build secular schools for Jews.[135] In Istanbul, Moses Montefiore, together with the banker Abraham Kamondo also attempted to build schools, but attracted the ire of Jewish rabbis. The school projects were abandoned because of this opposition.[136] It is only in 1860 that the project really materialized and the Alliance Israelite Universelle was created. One of the reasons for this change was that the new *hahambaşı* of Istanbul, Yakub Avigdor, obtained his post through the support of Kamondo and thus supported his enterprise.[137] In Istanbul, two Rabbis, Shlomo Kamhi and Yitzhak Akrish, led the opposition to the secular education. Akrish was sent to prison on order of Fuad Paşa.[138] In 1860, *Hahambaşı* Yakub Avigdor made thorough reforms in the organization of the Jewish community.[139] However, he met with such a strong opposition by some rabbis who criticized his links to Kamondo and the government, that he was dismissed in 1862. Following this defeat, Kamondo moved his office to Europe.[140]

The question of education reveals a great division within the community between secular leaders such as Kamondo and a certain part of the religious leadership. To be sure, the religious leadership was also divided in various factions. This division is observable in Damascus, where the community was internally divided on the issue of reform. When the Damascene Grand Rabbi Ābū al-ʿAfīya supported the education of Jews in secular school in 1875, he met with the disapproval of other rabbis.[141]

It should be kept in mind that the creation of secular schools threatened the livelihood of most of the rabbis teaching in rabbinic schools. When the new type of education was developed, the scholars of lower classes thus saw them as a threat to their subsistence. The

---

135 Shaw, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, 158.
136 Ibid, 161.
137 Ibid, 161.
138 Shaw, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire,* 161.
139 He conducted a tax reform which increased the revenue derived from the communities and created a new *Beit Din*. He also set up rabbinical courts in some places such as Serez, Adrianople and Smyrna. He then made a *mağlis* in all neighborhoods led by elected members; Ibid, 161-162.
140 Ibid, 162.
141 Yaron Harel, "Rabbi Isaac Aboulafia", 10.

conflict between the elite promoting secular schools and the resistance of Talmudic schools teachers thus also had a class dimension and cannot be reduced to a conservative/modern dichotomy.

Similarly to the dynamics within the Greek Catholics, the collection of funds from Europe was an important basis of legitimacy of the leadership and a tool of power. The funding of schools was a tool in the power struggles over the community institutions.[142] The establishment of diaspora philanthropic associations and the institutionalization of the Jewish *millet* in 19th century encouraged to imagine a common identity among Jews in the Ottoman Empire.[143] However, the increasing influx of charity and repeated disputes regarding these funds and its distribution among the population reinforced sub-ethnic distinctions such as between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews.[144] It also strengthened identifications based on the dichotomy between local and foreign Jews, between Ottoman and European subjects.[145]

The reaction of the *hahambaşı* and certain rabbis against the secular education of Jews has also to be seen against the background of the *Haskalah* movement which threatened the survival of the religious authority. The *Haskalah* also promoted the idea of the diffusion of the decision-making power, which encouraged rabbis to question the monopoly of the grand rabbi on the tools of decision-making.

In conclusion, the Jewish community of Damascus went through similar transformations as the Greek Catholic community. Widened clerical authority came at the price of lessened autonomy. The intervention of the state in the appointments of *hahambaşı* was seen as problematic by a large part of the Jewish communities. Then, the imposition of a top-down authority on the flock and the attempts at homogenizing norms and practices led to widespread resistance, especially amongst notables. These notables and merchant used the

---

[142] Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 153, 154.
[143] Yair Wallach, "Rethinking the *yishuv*: late-Ottoman Palestine's Jewish communities revisited", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 16, no.2 (2017): 289.
[144] Lehman, "Rethinking," 84, 85, 87, 98.
[145] Ibid, 91, 93.

multiple jurisdictions created by foreign intervention and the new institutions of the *Tanzimat* to escape the increasing authority of the religious leadership. European influence took place through direct foreign intervention in the empire as well as on a cultural level with the *Haskalah,* which similarly to Latin influence among Greek Catholics, fostered opposition among the Jewish leadership and discourses of authenticity based on the local/foreign dichotomy. However, the internal divisions of Damascene Jews took place behind the scenes of the public political life and, unlike the struggles within the Greek Catholic millet, did not have consequences on inter-confessional relations.