

The Jews of Antioch In Modern Times

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Abstract

The article analyses the reasons for Jews leaving the city of Antioch (in modern day Turkey). Nowadays, very few Jews live in Antioch and their number has fallen below 20. How has the situation in Antioch changed? With the rise of political Islam in Turkey, anti-Semitism has begun to affect life in some cities of Anatolia except for Antioch. The main reason behind the emigration of the Jews of Antioch, rather than the political developments occurring in Turkey, have been poverty and economic difficulties in the city. But this article considers political factors as well. The article works with interviews I collected with representatives of the Jewish community living in Antioch to offer insights into the reasons for the Jewish migration from the city.

Introduction

This paper sheds light on the history of Antioch's Jewish community after the Ottoman conquest. Shortly before the Second World War, around a thousand Jews were living in the city and they belonged to a variety of multi-cultural identities. This article consists of three parts: in the first part, I introduce the history of Jews living in Antioch under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. In the second part, the article outlines the history of the Jews in Antioch during the Republican era, and analyses the reasons for emigration. The final part offers insights into the lives of the last Jews who stayed in Antioch and their experiences with antisemitism. In the conclusion, I focus on the position of the Jews in Antioch in the framework of the rules in the Turkish nation-state.

The Ottoman Period

The Ottoman rule established the so-called *millet* system that recognized three non-Muslim communities (*millets*), Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Jewish, that were organized around their dominant religious institutions, with the understanding that religious institutions would define and delimit their collective life.¹ The Ottoman state recognized the Greek Patriarchy in 1454, and the Armenian in 1461. Although historians have not been able to find a treaty for the Jewish *millet*, it is likely that it was recognized around the same time. It has been suggested that the *millet* system existed until the late eighteenth century. The Ottoman administration system was established on the main principles of sharia, and the Empire did not provide equal rights to its non-Muslim subjects. The administration system was not based on pure toleration. Nevertheless, the state offered a degree of tolerance without precedent or parallel in Christian Europe at that time.² While the political and

military power centered around the Muslim communities, the Empire recognized the economic and commercial role of the Jews and Christians. They were allowed to practice their religion without any fear of persecution.

Selim I's (1512-20) conquest of the old Islamic provinces in the Middle East, including Syria, Eretz Israel, and Egypt, meant that also the ancient Jewish communities of Jerusalem, Safed, Damascus, Antioch, Cairo, and Alexandria now lived under the Ottoman rule. These included many of those who had only recently fled from Spain and Portugal, often coming through Cyprus on their way to the East.³ As Lewis asserted in his early texts, the Jewish community played a minor but not unimportant role in the Ottoman society. For a while in the late fifteenth and especially more in the sixteenth centuries, Jewish refugees from Europe brought with them their economic, technical, and medicinal skills, and occasionally served even in diplomatic missions.⁴ According to the Ottoman chroniclers, Jewish doctors, bankers, tradesmen, even statesmen were in sultans' close circle. For instance, Maestro Jacobo was a Jewish doctor from Venetia was a close associate of Mehmet the Conqueror.

The Ottomans obtained current information on Empire's resources of revenue through periodic registers called "*tahrir defterleri*" and "*tapu defterleri*". These various records included detailed information on taxpayers and taxable objects, making it possible to study the economic and social history of the Middle East in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The terms "*Yahudi*" or "*Yehud*" were used to refer to the Jewish community. The authorities used various other terms in different periods; some of them reflected the names Jews used for themselves. This was, for example, the case of Antioch and its inhabitants. Almost all the Ottoman archives associated with Antioch's taxpayers referred to "*Yahudi*", "*Yehud*" or "*Yahud*". These records allow us to analyse the composition of the Antioch's population shortly after the Ottoman's conquest. According to the Ottoman land registration records between 1525 and 1570, non-Muslims lived predominantly in rural areas and not in the urban settings.⁵

The Ottoman statesmen ordered that the non-Muslim population from Aleppo and other surrounding cities relocated to Antioch. Therefore, as of 1570, it has been suggested that the Jewish inhabitants of Antioch originally came from Aleppo.⁶ At that time the land registries suggest that there had only been 3 or 4 villages in the area that only had non-Muslim inhabitants: Suriye, Zeytuniye, and Hacıhabublu. There were also several villages in which Muslim and non-Muslim communities lived together such as Seldiren, Sablıca, Kebed, Bedevi, and Karsun.⁷ According to the land registries the Jewish villages were indistinguishable from the other settlements. Since Ottoman officers did not add any extra information about the non-Muslims' ethnicity or language, we can only assume that there were also some Jews living in these villages. Unfortunately, the available sources do not offer more detailed evidence about the communities.

Thus, there is significant documentary gap between the ancient Jews of Antioch and the last Jewish remainders of the city. Ottoman land registers or tax archives do not give any reason to explain this gap throughout the history. Historians assume that Ottoman officers preferred to make only two categories of population at the beginning of the Ottoman rule in Antioch. This contrasted with very detailed records they held in some major cities such as Bursa, Edirne, and Istanbul. In such cases, and if there was more than one religious communities, each of them was listed as a quarter or district in the town or city and the leader's or former leader's name was used to distinguish among the groups. In eastern Anatolia and the Arab provinces some names did not mention *cemaat* and merely list "*mahalla-i Yahudiyan*" (Jewish Quarter), though occasionally the title *cemaat* is found as well.⁸

Evliya Celebi, a famous Turkish traveler of the seventeenth century, recorded some folk stories about the history of Antioch. It has been suggested that Celebi visited Antioch around 1648. *The Memoirs of Evliya Celebi* offer a rare and very detailed portrait of Antioch, though it is still impossible to learn about every social, religious, and cultural activity in the community at that time. According to Celebi, his Jewish contemporaries in Antioch believed that the Orontes River from the Nile river by a miracle of a Jewish prophet.⁹ The rest of the Jews claimed that the real father of the Orontes had lived and reached Antioch already at the time of Moses.¹⁰

In the eighteenth century, the number of quarters reached the highest point in 1736. There were several quarters such as Kantara, Mahsen, Kocaabdi, Senbek, and Gunluk, where Muslims, Jews, and Greeks lived together. The Antioch Synagogue was located in the middle of these quarters and this suggests that with all probability a considerable Jewish population lived in these quarters. Another two other quarters, where Jews, Armenians, and Muslims lived together can be identified based on Ottoman archives: Dutdibi and Kapı Bölüğü.¹¹ The Ottoman government did not record many details about the communities, such as their ethnic origins, languages they used, and so on. They, as taxpayers, were only identified by their religion. The archive allows us to conclude that affluent families lived in their majority in the quarters of Sari Mahmud and Mahsen. 11 of the 14 wealthy Christians lived in Mahsen and Sari Mahmud, together with Muslims and a small number of Jews.¹²

We can make the following observation based on this analysis: in contrast to Europe, there had never been any ghettos for the Jewish population in Antioch under the Ottoman rule. According to the annual and judicial records, there is no evidence to suggest that the Jews lived segregated from other communities. According to the Ottoman records, the Jewish population concentrated especially in the Kantara Quarter.¹³ The synagogue of Antioch was built in its neighborhood. Jews belonged to particular guilds. They tended to congregate in certain occupations but rarely monopolized them.¹⁴

According to Spanish traveller Ali Bey¹⁵ who traveled through Antioch in 1807, 150 Jews lived in the town.¹⁶ His estimates included only Jews in the city center of Antioch, but not those in the countryside. Ali Bey could not see any trace of the ancient synagogues built during the rule of the Roman emperor Augustus. Available sources, including Ottoman court records suggest that the new synagogue was not built before 1830. Ali Bey also recorded that modern Antioch occupied only a small part of the territory of the ancient city, whose vast line of the city walls still existed, and attested to its former grandeur.¹⁷ It is known from the records of Josephus and John Chrysostom that the biggest synagogue of ancient Antioch stood close to the city walls, though its exact location is unknown.

The British traveler James Silk Buckingham estimated that around 20 Jewish families lived in the city in 1816.¹⁸ He also recorded the number of mosques and domes. However, his writing contains less information about daily life and relations between various communities; he, for example, never referred to a separate Jewish Quarter in the town. Buckingham's observations could be another piece of evidence that the Jewish community was never forced by the authorities to live separately from other communities. On the other hand Buckingham recorded more information about the Jewish religious practices in Antioch. On Shabbat, the Jews assembled in a small room, which they used as their prayer room, or a substitute synagogue, in the house of the head of the community, where they were not disturbed during their prayers.¹⁹

According to the Islamic and Turkic theories of the state, the primary duty of the sultan to his subjects was the provision of justice, against the harassment by the local ruling authorities or illegal taxation.²⁰ Despite these strict rules, historical events demonstrate that relations between various communities could be problematic. For example, Jewish communities time to time experienced persecution in various cities in Syria under the Ottoman rule. Nevertheless, the Ottoman Empire generally protected the Jewish communities in Syria and exercised its authority, with some exceptions, over Antioch. Unfortunately, some fabricated stories, inspired by the writing of John Chrysostom, one of the most influential preachers end of the late Antiquity, still affected people in the middle of the nineteenth century. One of them, which triggered waves of terror against the Jews, was the allegation of blood libel.

The allegation of using human blood to communicate with gods seems to have originated from pagan times, and were aimed against early Christians. The stories were later taken over by Christians, who made similar allegations against Jews. It then became a familiar theme of Christian anti-Judaism, and has persisted until the present days.²¹ Regrettably, Jewish communities in Syria experienced the fallout from these allegations throughout history. Chrysostom's accusations had been affecting common people for more than 1600 years. During the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century,

the blood libel accusations frequently emerged in the Ottoman lands, as for example in Aleppo (1810, 1850, 1875), Antioch (1826), Damascus (1840, 1848, 1890) and Tripoli (1834).²² All these allegations had two common features: first, they almost invariably originated among the Christians, who promoted them in public, especially in the Greek press.²³ Second, Jews, in their defense, depended on the Ottoman help, and the sultans treated them as loyal subjects.

The large number of documents preserved in Turkish archives, for example court records, allow us to gain insights in the occupational structure of Antioch's Jews. For instance, according to the court records kept between 1827 and 1829, 7 Jewish men were engaged in trade²⁴ and the government officers calculated their taxes based on the commercial tax assessment. From ancient times, Jews had the reputation as the best doctors in Anatolia, though the court records suggest that at that time no Jews seemed to work in the medical field. Interestingly, more than half of the Jewish community worked as chemists. The information in the final part of the court records imply that the governmental officers sharply increased the tax burden of the Jewish community, which the Jews had to accept.²⁵ In general the Jews of Antioch worked as tradesmen, herbalists, chemists, milliners, and brokers.²⁶

These court records, completed at the end of 1829, indicate a more complex and durable tax burden imposed on the Jewish community in Antioch. For instance, the records kept between 1827 and 1829, do not show several professions, such as herbalists. Only later court record provide more details about Jews associated with various occupations. For example, 8 Jewish families were engaged in the sale of medicinal herbs, and they had to pay higher taxes than the rest of the Jewish community.²⁷

Mehmed Ali Pasha, the governor of Egypt, ruled over the Syrian territories of the Ottoman Empire, including Antioch, from 1830 until 1841, when he was defeated by the Ottomans and had to withdraw from the territory. He appointed Ibrahim Pasha, the crown prince of Egypt, as the governor of Syria and Antioch, and he manifested special interest in the territory. After the Egyptian forces took the city under their control, Ibrahim Pasha implemented administrative reforms that centralized the authority in the area. He regulated the taxation policy and granted privileges to non-Muslims in Antioch. New consultative *majlises* (local councils) formed under the Egyptian rule: *majlis-i istishari* (consultative commission), *diwan-i mashwara* (consultancy commission) and *majlis-i shura* (consultative council).²⁸ The last commission was established in big cities, which had at least 20,000 inhabitants. In these commissions, people were represented by elected members without distinctions of their religious and ethnic backgrounds. According to the census taken by Ibrahim Pasha, less than 5,600 inhabitants lived in Antioch.²⁹ Therefore, the minorities of Antioch, including the Jews, had never got a chance for codetermination as the local population was never big enough for administrative representation.

In 1838, the Ottoman Empire signed a commercial treaty with Britain. This treaty included clauses that unified import duties and eliminated monopolies. Syrians Jews benefited from this treaty because they could obtain consular protection and immunity from Ottoman taxes under the terms of treaties between the Ottoman Empire and the European powers.³⁰ According to James Raymond Wellsted, another British traveler who visited Antioch after 1838, estimated the city's population around 15,000 inhabitants. He also noted that Antioch exported products such as silks, carpets, blue, yellow, and red morocco leather, gums, mastic, wine, oil, and figs.³¹ Furthermore, most of the inland trade was in the hands of Jewish and Armenian tradesmen; the locals only had a few merchant-vessels, and both the sea import and export were conducted by foreigners.³²

More insights into the life of the Antioch community offered Frederick Artur Neale, another British traveler who visited the city. He also described the historical figure of Hadji Halil Aga, a descendant of a converted Jew, who played a significant role in Antioch's governance during the 1840s. Neale stayed in Antioch for eight months and his observations give remarkable details about the daily life in the city. The great significance of the Ottoman ruling elite attracted Neale's attention. He specifically mentioned that the second man of the Antioch society was a big landholder Hadji Halil Aga, who had a great influence over the society and the Ottoman governor of Antioch.³³ Neale claimed that Hadji Halil Aga was a son of a converted Jew and that he had assumed great influence and power.³⁴ It is of particular interest to note that Neale's writing is the first available source to suggest that Jews could own land in Antioch. According to the records, memoir books, and other state documents, there is no evidence that Jews were engaged in agriculture, or that they owned land.

Neale's memoirs suggest that Antioch had a colorful business life and that Jewish tradesmen were its indivisible part. He mentioned several times that Jewish merchants had established trade agents in Antioch, who retailed the goods at a high price or barter them for silk or oil.³⁵ Unfortunately, Neale did not record whether these tradesmen were residents of Antioch. That is why it is difficult to establish whether the Jewish community of Antioch was also involved in international commerce alongside the domestic trade. Neale estimated the population of Antioch at around 17,000 in 1848, though he did not record the size of the Jewish community.

In 1842, 43 Jews paid the tithe to Antioch's Township Tax Management.³⁶ In general, it is assumed that the Jews preferred to engage in trade and commerce in the Middle East, but that was hardly a matter of choice. One of the reasons was that the profession allowed the Jews to move to a different area if there was a threat of pogroms, epidemics, and wars. The tradesman profession did not make Antioch's Jews more prosperous than the rest of the city's population. According to the tithe taxes in 1848, 34 Jewish taxpayers were classified with the term of "*Edna*".³⁷ It means that 60 percent

of the Jewish families were lower-class families or came from lower-class background. The “*evsat*” term, a classification for the people of middle-class or lower middle-class, was used only for 14 Jewish taxpayers.³⁸

A turning point for all minorities under the Ottoman rule came in 1856, when the relations in the empire were transformed into a more secular way. Before this ordinance, all communities in the Ottoman empire had been ranked, with the Muslims on the top, then the Greeks, the Armenians, and finally the Jews. From 1856, all communities were put on the same level.³⁹ The conflict between Muslims and Christians turned into a civil war in some parts of Syria and Lebanon by the end of 1859. It does not seem that the Jews of Syria joined either side of the war. A prominent Ottoman historian and administrator Ahmed Cevdet Pasha asserted that the civil war was triggered by the mutual resentments in the communities.⁴⁰ In 1881, Pasha also conducted a census in the Aleppo province, which recorded 33 Jewish families settled in the city.⁴¹ According to the Aleppo’s annual records from 1890, there was a special primary school for Jewish children in Antioch.⁴²

Community	Woman	Man	Total
Muslims	26,412	28,779	55,191
Catholic Armenians	5	7	12
Greeks	1.659	1.754	3.413
Armenians	1.028	1.045	2.073
Protestants	156	127	283
Jews	108	113	221
Foreigners	5	5	10
Total	29,373	31,830	61,023

Table 1: The Population of Antioch in 1891 (Source: Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, 19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Devleti Yönetimi, Vol. 3, 274)

Unfortunately, there are not any memoirs or correspondence that would allow historians to reach conclusions about relations between the Jews and other communities. Historians and anthropologists have been able to collect only memoirs and testimonies of the older generation. Therefore, they recorded interviews with prominent members of the Jewish community, but also members of the Muslim community in Antioch. Ottoman judicial records are another source of information to answer this question. For example, Ottoman probate records shed light on commercial relations among the communities. Based on these records, relations between the communities were subject to different social rules. For instance, the regent of Antioch stated in one of his letters to the city’s *mufti* and *qaymaqam* that in 1848 some inhabitants of Mukbil Quarter had sold their houses to non-Muslims.⁴³

It has been generally assumed that the Ottoman courts protected the Muslim rights against non-Muslims. But the Ottoman judicial records

challenge this assumption. For instance, a *kadi* protected a Jew's creditor rights in the case of an alleged infringement of an obligation and adjudicated that a Muslim would have to pay back his debt.⁴⁴ Jews often preferred to apply to the Ottoman courts instead of their own local courts in case of disputes between community members in Antioch. This was in particular the case of trade and creditor-debtor disputes.⁴⁵

The Last Gasp of Jewish Antioch

The once mighty Ottoman Empire was defeated at the end of World War 1, and the victorious powers divided large parts of its territories. French forces occupied Antioch, a provincial part of North Syria. It does not seem that the position of Jews in the region was of any concern for the new French authorities. Almost all French governors focused on the positions of the Armenians, and Arab Christians in Antioch. It is estimated that nearly fifty thousand people emigrated from Antioch to Syria, Lebanon and other countries in the Middle East by the end of the French era.⁴⁶ The largest group among these refugees were Armenians. The annexation of Antioch by the Turkish Republic in 1939 was a critical point in terms of the impact on the population, including the Jews.

First Jews left Antioch by the end of the French administration. We do not have any census data from the French administration or the independent Hatay State, a short-lived transitional unit that existed between 1938 and 1939, before the territory was annexed by Turkey. Historians only know that at that time some Jews left Antioch for Aleppo. Harun Cemal, at that time a sixty-year-old textile vendor in Antioch, made this comment in his interview for Aljazeera:

“My family, they came from Aleppo. We are Arab Jews. When the republic [of Turkey] was formed, my grandparents chose to stay here, but many of my relatives stayed in Aleppo”⁴⁷

But how did the creation of the Turkish Republic reshape the relations between various communities in the city? Following the regime changes, the new Turkish regime was compelled to develop new methods of managing their attitude towards minorities in Turkey. The new Turkish ruling elites aimed to establish new institutions that promoted secularism and secular nationalism. These two main principles replaced but also contradicted the previous *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire.

The new state developed tools, such as the Wealth Tax⁴⁸ that could be seen as discriminatory against minority communities. The government's main goal was to raise funds to cover the growing budget deficits and defense expenses in case Turkey was forced to enter World War 2. Tradesmen, industrialists and wealthy landowners were expected to make the main contribution. However, the implementation of the tax differed from the draft

of the law. Although the tax was supposed to be paid by all citizens, in reality non-Muslim communities of Turkey had to pay higher rates. People who were not able to pay the tax had to borrow money, or, in some cases, even had to sell their properties at public auctions or transfer their business rights to Muslim partners.

Province	Total tax collected (Lira)
Izmir	26,701,766
Ankara	16,658,800
Bursa	9,303,874
Adana	8,504,378
Mersin	6,173,206
Antakya (Antioch)	3,235,140
Konya	1,898,920
Aydın	1,381,619
Samsun	1,311,580
Eskisehir	1,300,000
Kutahya	1,004,216

Table 2: The collection of the Wealth Tax according to provinces, except for Istanbul (Source: Rıdvan Akar, *Aşkale Yolcuları, Varlık Vergisi ve Çalışma Kampları* (İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1999), 88-92.)

The imposition of the wealth tax in 1942 broke the bond between the Jews and Turkish state beyond repair. Non-Muslims were the main social group who had to pay this extraordinary tax. Some of the Jews considered emigration, especially later, after the creation of the State of Israel. Others were concerned that they would not be able to learn a new language in the Jewish state and decided to stay. Almost the entire Jewish community of Antioch could only speak Arabic and Turkish. Saul Cennudi, a leader of the Jewish community, pointed out that "the emigration" from Antioch to future Israel started shortly after the introduction of the new tax. By the beginning of the 1960s, Antioch lost nearly half of its Jewish population. The emigration to Israel continued at a decreasing rate until the beginning of the 1990s.

Some community members, such as Harun Jemmal and Saul Cennudi, suggested that the year of 1979 was a turning point for the Jewry in Antioch. First, political violence between left and right-wing groups in Turkey precipitated the decline of the Jewish population at the end of the 1970s. Cennudi suggested that before the Coup D'état in 1980, there was a pressure on the Jewish community to leave Antioch. However, there is no available evidence to support such claims. Furthermore, the community leaders defend the pre-1980 government, asserting that they endeavored to protect the Jewish minority in Antioch. But it is also correct that the measures taken after the coup made the Jews feel more secure in the city.

The 1980s and 1990s were a different period for the Jews of Antioch. The younger generation decided to leave for bigger cities like Izmir and Istanbul, with larger Jewish populations, to study and find partners. According to Cennudi, almost 250 Antiocheian Jews have been living in Istanbul for years and 50 Antiocheian Jews live in Izmir and Bursa. Cennudi estimates that 500 Jews, whose parents emigrated from Antioch to Israel, are now the citizens of the Jewish state. Even though Cennudi chose to stay in Antioch, his sons have been living in Istanbul for more than 15 years, and his only daughter lives in Tel-Aviv.

The former president of Turkey, Abdullah Gul, visited the synagogue in Antioch as the first head of the Republic in 2010 on the occasion of the Hannukah festival, which was celebrated as a state ceremony.⁴⁹ It was probably the most glorious moment in the Jewish history of Antioch. For Cennudi, this official visit is a proof that the Jews have been recognized as far more than a tolerated minority, but as a community whose religion and traditions are under the protection of the government.

The Last Jews of Antioch

There are various folk stories among the Jews of Antioch on their origins. It is alleged that the Jewish community of Antioch dwelled in the city after the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar sent the Israelites into exile. Although some of the Jews claim that they are descendants of the Jews exiled by the Babylonians, there is no current evidence to prove this connection.

The second claim is associated with the foundation of Antioch. Saul Cennudi suggested that the Jews had come from Jordan, Egypt, Palestine and Israel. Jewish merchants decided to settle in Antioch because of its resources, fertile soil and climate. In my opinion, another claim is more realistic, and is supported by chroniclers such as Josephus, Malalas and Abul Farac. According to their texts, the Jewish population in the region increased after the arrival of Israelites who migrated after being expelled from the province of Judea by the Roman forces. Even some community members in Antioch support this conclusion.⁵⁰ The Roman persecution of the Jewish population in Palestine is still part of the memory in Antioch.

It should be stressed that Antioch's Jews do not define themselves as Sephardic or Ashkenazi. They do not speak Ladino, Yiddish or Modern Hebrew. Judeo-Spanish or Ladino remains the second language for older Turkish male Jews and the first language for older females, except for those living in Iskenderun and Antioch, who use Arabic in addition to Turkish and those in Mersin, where two-thirds speak Ladino and one-third Arabic.⁵¹ The Jews' mother language is Arabic instead of Turkish, which still has not replaced Arabic as the main language. The Jewish community has close ties with Alawites and Orthodox Arab Christians in Antioch. Actually, they are defining themselves as a Judeo-Arab community. Judeo-Arab was the name given to the Jews living in the Arab world before the establishment of Israel.

There is an ongoing debate whether Judeo-Arab refers to a religious society, or also to an ethnic group.

In Antioch, Jews continued to prosper and engaged in craftsmanship and merchandising until well into the end of the eighteenth century. Cennudi points out that their ancestors were engaged in glass-producing. Actually, he referred to a millennial tradition, a bridge between him and his ancestors who had lived in Antioch. According to Benjamin of Tudela and Josephus, the Jews had worked as glass producers for ages.⁵² Dimitri Dogum, a son of an artisan and a jeweler, states that Jewish, Christian and Muslim jewelers could all work almost unrestricted in the jewelry bazaar.⁵³ In the past, this was one of the main professions among the Jews.

At present there are 16 synagogues operating in Istanbul, in addition to those in Izmir, Bursa, Kirklareli, Ankara, Canakkale, Iskenderun and Antioch.⁵⁴ All the community members believe that Antioch's Synagogue was built more than 250 years ago. Nonetheless, memoirs of travelers and Ottoman records tell a different story, suggesting that the synagogue was built only after 1830. The traveler William Francis Ainsworth stated that the synagogue stood there when he visited in 1835.⁵⁵ The Synagogue is located in the heart of the Kantara Quarter, where the Jews have been settled since the 1600s. Nowadays, almost all Jews live in three quarters: Kantara, Sümerler and Affan.

It is difficult to provide any reliable estimate concerning the size of the Jewish community in Antioch at any time throughout history. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Jewish population of the city rose to 300-400 individuals.⁵⁶ Around a thousand Jews lived in Antioch shortly before the introduction of the Wealth Tax in 1942. Unfortunately, the number has dropped sharply to below 20, according to the Jewish authorities of Antioch. Cennudi believes that only around 16-17 currently live in the city. The rest left for Istanbul or Israel. They did not leave because of intolerance or anti-Semitism, but mostly for economic reasons. Furthermore, nearly the entire Jewish community is over 65 years old. They are the last memento of the former cultural richness of the city.

The traditional Jewish family structure has changed as a consequence of economic and cultural developments since the 1940s. I can point to two main examples. First, a traditional Jewish family used to have 5 or 6 children, at least before World War 2. Cennudi was the first child of a family with 6 children. As a result of the increased importance of higher education for the families, and of the emigration to Israel, Jewish families started to have no more than 3 children. Cennudi assumes that the changing family structure is the second key reason for the decrease in the Jewish population after the emigration. He still remembers the surnames of the largest and prominent Jewish families of Antioch: Cennudi, Kebbudi, Mizrahil, Cammal, Shirem, Tavashi, Hassan, Sirem, Himsi and Berdean. Unfortunately, in contrast to the Jewish communities in Istanbul and Izmir, the births were not registered by

the Jewish community in Antioch. For the very reason it is very difficult to trace and research the community history in the city.

The Jewish community made a major contribution to the economic life of Antioch. It seems that the Muslim community inherited most of the artisanship activities from the Jews. Antioch is also famous for its cuisine and food preparation, such as butchery and bakery, that have also been influenced by the Jews. For example, the Jews and Alawites of Antioch share some common restrictions, such as the sacrifice of female animal, the consumption of animal considered unclean, and using scavengers for sacrificial purposes.

The mutual influences and mingling between the Jews and the rest of the local population has not been only cultural but also ethnic, and it has occurred mostly at the middle level of the societies. Although Muslim women are not supposed to marry non-Muslims, such social and cultural rules have often been ignored among people who have been living in the same areas, and such intermarriages have happened in Antioch. For example, a Jewish-Muslim couple is still living in Antioch. The author of this article has tried to find more information about the difficulties such intermarried couples experience in the city. A younger brother of the leader of Antioch's Jewish community leader married a woman from the Alawite society. He did not want to divulge his identity due to the difficulties he had to face his whole life. For example, his family stopped seeing him again after he married his Muslim wife.

Another example to demonstrate the relative intercommunal harmony is the way they celebrated religious holidays and festivals. There has been a common tradition among all communities to celebrate religious holidays together. For instance, the Day of Saint Peter, on 29 June, is the most significant holiday for Christians in Antioch but also in all of Turkey. But anyone can participate in the Peace March, which starts on 28 June, and one representative for each community is usually present. The representatives of respective religious communities visit each other's place of worship and pray there: in the Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, the Synagogue, and the Mosque of Habibi Neccar.⁵⁷ The leaders of communities attend the peace dinner and the concert held in the garden of the Saint Pierre (Peter) Church. After the concert, leaders of the communities deliver speeches, expressing hopes for a peaceful coexistence.

Also the Muslims celebrate Eid al-Adha, the festival of the sacrifice of Ibrahim and the subsequent covenant with God, together with Antioch's Jews who similarly recognize Ibrahim/Abraham's story. This has had a long tradition, as has been confirmed by a Jewish community member to a researcher from Ankara University. The interviewee mentioned that their Muslim neighbors would invite them to join them for the ritual of sacrificing animals.⁵⁸ After the religious ritual, both Muslims and Jews eat the sacrificed

meat together. Jewish women would make their best cakes and send them to their Muslim neighbors.

Throughout the centuries, the Jews and Muslims have had a very similar cult of saints in Antioch. Saints and ascetics inhabited Jabal El-Lukkâm near Antioch as they did in other parts of the Middle East.⁵⁹ For example, the cult of Khdir has a long history among all the communities in Antioch. Khdir is a historical and cultural figure who is believed to be either a holy spirit or a prophet. It has been suggested by Jews of Antioch that Khdir was none other than Elijah, a prophet and a miracle worker who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Ahab (in the 9th Century BC).⁶⁰ The Jews of Antioch do not pray to Elijah for his help or miracles. They use another name, Ilya Hannebi, which actually is an Arabic version of Elijah. Harun Cemal, a Jewish community member in Antioch, commented on the role of Ilya Hannebi in their spiritual world:

“Ilya Hannebi is the person whom we know and refer to as Khdir. When we say Ya Ilyahu, we believe that he will be always ready to help us.”

During my research, I directed questions about the rising anti-Semitism in Turkey to Cennudi and two other community members. Their answers imply that they are not concerned about the rising anti-Semitism, or that it would affect the lives of Antioch’s Jews, also because of their small number in the city. The Turkish government, the municipality of Antioch and various NGOs also support the Jews’ cultural activities. The city also uses the alleged intercommunal harmony in their public promotion. They claim to host all the major monotheistic religions and 72 different nations. It is in particular the co-existence with the city’s Jews that has for the city’s governors and prominent members of the council of the minister become the symbol of tolerance and respect.

Furthermore, Lutfu Savas, the mayor of Antioch, is a close friend of Saul Cennudi, who also works as his advisor. At the beginning of 2014, Savas donated two unused apartments for the use of the Jewish community as guesthouses, free of charge, for those who visit the city over the Sabbath. Cennudi is also regularly invited to the general meetings of the Republican People’s Party in Ankara, the founding political party of modern Turkey. Also the Turkish government support the Antioch’s Jews, and most of the Turkish statesmen believe that Antioch should serve as a model for the multicultural coexistence in Turkey. This multicultural character of the city has helped to create a positive environment for the last remaining Jews.

The second point I would like to make is that Antioch's Jews have a strong feeling of local patriotism. A Jewish community member expressed this feelings as follows:

*“I cannot stand Izmir for more than two days. I miss my friends, my family in Antioch. All we are living in Antioch together. Could you show me another city like Antioch?”*⁶¹

The community members are also very cautious when discussing the rising anti-Semitism in Turkey. I believe this could also be caused by fear. The only Jewish cemetery was closed 50 years ago and its stones were used in the construction of new buildings.⁶² There have also been attacks against the Jewish cemeteries since 2016. The perpetrators are unknown, and the cemetery had to be closed to visitors after similar attacks two years ago. The number of anti-Semitic incidents has recently increased.

It is also important to add that the notions of interethnic harmony do not necessarily match the facts. Until the introduction of the Wealth Tax, Antioch's open-air market had always been opened on Thursdays. In 1943, the prominent crafts of Antioch and the Antioch Chamber of Artisans decided to change the day and moved the open-air market to Saturday. Cennudi believes that this change aimed to impact on the Jews' economic activities, as Jewish dealers and artisans had dominated the professions, but were not allowed to work on Saturdays for religious reasons.

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1868	168
1891	221
1895	254
1901	280
1908	299
1914	357
1940	1000
1987	164
2014	45
2020	17

Table 3: The population of Antiochian Jews by year (source: various)

Conclusion

At the end of everything, the Jews of Antioch had to adapt to the requirement of the new Turkish nationalist state. Under the Ottoman rule, Antioch seemed to be a multicultural city rather than a town dominated by a particular socio-ethnic group. The existence of the Jewish community testifies to the past multi-ethnic character of the city. Antioch owes its unique character to the Jews who have decided to stay in the city despite all the discriminations and anti-Semitic incidents and atmosphere.

Benedict Anderson defines nations as an imaginary political community. He asserts that a nation is imagined because the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in their minds they believe they all belong to a particular community.⁶³ However, the Jews of Antioch are not an imaginary

political community. They have a strong sense of a shared identity, developed under the particular historical and political circumstances in the city and region.

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