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The Migration of New Christians and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula to the Ottoman Empire during the Late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

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Abstract

This article examines the origins of the three waves of migration to the Ottoman Empire from the Iberian Peninsula in the late 15th and 16th centuries, focusing on Jews and New Christians. It questions the impact of the Spanish Inquisition and the issuance of expulsion edicts in Spain in 1492 and in Portugal in 1497, as well as the establishment of the Portuguese Inquisition in 1536. It investigates how the Inquisition's practices and the expulsion of non-Christians, influenced by monarchical interests, contributed to these exoduses. The edicts of expulsion of the Jews and the continuing persecution of New Christians led to exoduses from the Iberian Peninsula to countries that offered religious liberty, including the Ottoman Empire. The article finally contends that Iberian Jews, known as Sephardim, and New Christians who later reverted to Judaism brought their social and economic capital to the Ottoman Empire, thereby increasing the Empire's assets and developing ties to the Ottoman Court.

Keywords: Migration, Religious Liberty, The Edicts of Expulsion, The Inquisition, Ottoman Empire

Introduction

This article investigates the causes of Jewish and New Christian migration to the Ottoman Empire in the late 15th and 16th centuries. It begins by examining the reasons for establishing the Spanish Inquisition in the wake of the emergence of the New Christians. The article explores the status of the New Christians and provides background on their Jewish roots. It also examines the motives behind the 1492 edict expelling non-Christians, focusing on Jews in particular, and notes that the Portuguese monarch adopted the same practice in 1497. The edicts affected the lives of the Jewish population and led to the first wave of migration to safe havens, including the Ottoman Empire, for the religious liberty it offered. After the Jews, the second wave of migration came from the Iberian Peninsula. This time, New Christians began migrating to the Ottoman Empire in 1506 for religious freedom and to re-embrace Judaism. The article then examines the establishment of the Portuguese Inquisition in 1536, which prompted the third wave of New Christian migration. Finally, the article demonstrates that

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after arriving in the Ottoman Empire in three waves, Jews and New Christians who later reverted to Judaism obtained *dhimmi* status within the *millet* system, some of whom enhanced their standing and were favored by the Ottoman rulers for their social, cultural, and economic assets. The Iberian migration shaped the existing Jewish communities within the Ottoman Empire through their language, culture, and ethnicity. For New Christians who reconnected with their Jewish roots, the question of their legal and religious status became an important issue for the Jewish religious authorities to address. Finally, this article contends that, through their migration, Iberian Jews, the Sephardim, introduced their social and economic capital and contributed to the Ottoman Empire, with some elevating their status in sectors such as commerce, medicine, and bureaucracy, and establishing connections with the Ottoman Court.

The Origins of the Iberian Migration: The Spanish Inquisition

The Spanish Inquisition, like the Papal Inquisition established by Pope Gregory IX in the 1230s, was a Church institution that sought to address a socio-religious issue within the State's structure (Beinart, 1992:106). The origins of the Spanish Inquisition trace back to the issuance of a papal bull in 1478 (Beinart, 2014: 19; Kamen, 1992: 75; Kedourie, 1992: 16; Kessner, 1969: 448; Szalajfer, 2024: 6). At the request of the Catholic Monarchs, Papal authority was granted to establish an Inquisition, which began in 1480, with Tomás de Torquemada serving as the first Inquisitor-General. The Inquisition, conducted by the Church and sanctioned by the State, targeted the New Christians, not the non-Christians (Thomas, 2019: 211). Its motto, *Misericordia et Justitia*, reflected its purpose. Consequently, it was transformed into an instrument utilized by individuals selected by the monarchy. The primary objective behind its establishment was the conversion of New Christians to Judaism. It aimed to eradicate what was perceived as heretical beliefs and to prevent New Christians from reverting to the religious and cultural practices of their ancestors. Successive courts of the Spanish Inquisition were established in chronological order: Cordoba in 1482; Ciudad Real in 1483, serving as a precursor to the primary court in Toledo; and Saragossa in 1484. The Papal Inquisition of the Kingdom of Aragon was integrated into the Spanish National Inquisition (Beinart, 1992:107; Rowland, 2001: 128).

It is important to note the status of the New Christians (Beinart, 1992: 92; Diner, 1999, 12; Kaplan, 2017: VII). In 1391, a series of persecutions against the Jewish population spread rapidly throughout Spain (Gerber, 1994: 113; Graizboard, 2019:4; Szalajfer, 2024: 5). The conversions to Christianity that followed lasted for approximately two decades, until the fifteenth century. As a result, a new community known as the New Christians emerged. These individuals had abandoned Judaism and were expected to integrate into the existing Spanish or Portuguese Old Christian population. However, they were coerced or compelled to convert, either out of desperation or under pressure, and as a result, they continued to exist as a culture that was neither fully one thing nor the other. They had to abruptly integrate into the Christian community around them, forsaking their previous lifestyle and religious beliefs. From a Christian perspective, there was no possibility of redemption. Nevertheless, the mass conversions failed to grant converted individuals access to Christian society; the New Christians were left to their absorption, with no effort made to educate them about its principles or to embrace them as equals within its community (Beinart, 1992: 92).

The Spanish Inquisition established tribunals supervised by a Supreme Council with equal authority to the Councils of Castile and Aragon. These tribunals conducted discreet



proceedings, with no opportunity for the accused to challenge or refute their accusers. They had the authority to use severe measures in investigating, adjudicating, and punishing wrongdoers. The execution of penalties was delegated to the 'secular arm' of the government, specifically the Corregidor. The Church, especially the Dominican Order, was responsible for coordinating and executing this effort, forming a council known as the Suprema. Betraying God was seen as disloyalty to both Church and State, leading to legal trials, punishments, and asset seizure. The charge process allowed counterclaims, but the identities of accusers remained unknown (Beinart, 1992: 106).

The tribunals admitted all testimony, whether based on claims or unsubstantiated, and whether it came from children testifying against their parents or from spouses testifying against one another (Beinart, 1992: 107; Beinart, 2014: 18; Diner, 1999: 12). The suspect faces several potential outcomes: release; sentencing to confess their sins and *abjure de vehementi* or *de levi*; participation in the *auto de fe* procession; imprisonment for a designated period or life; indefinite wear of the disgraceful garment (*sanbenito*); suspension of the trial to perform penance through pilgrimage or recitation of specific prayers; or the death penalty. (Beinart, 1992: 107; Thomas, 2019: 220).

The authorities executed individuals by burning them at the stake, although the Church opposed bloodshed. A remorseful New Christian could seek reconciliation with the Church through abjuration, absolving guilt. Condemnation usually led to property confiscation, with the state taking ownership. Reconciled individuals were barred from civil and church roles, and from professions like doctors, notaries, scribes, tax collectors, from wearing stonemasons, or tavern owners. Their male descendants, including sons and grandsons, couldn't hold government jobs, ride in carriages, or travel in carts. They were disallowed from wearing silk and brocade garments, weapons, and horse riding, and banned from Jewish interactions, traditions, or possession of Jewish literature. The defendant was presumed guilty and had to prove innocence, contradicting Roman law: *Nemo malus nisi provetur*. Managing these restrictions was a daily challenge for New Christians. Over time, the Inquisition grew into a moral authority and religious protector, dominating the nation with fear and hatred. It failed in its goals, causing suffering, and it blamed Spanish Jewry for its failure. Its reliance on force and coercion only achieved superficial compliance, and its efforts to promote Christianity's supremacy over Judaism through indoctrination were ineffective (Beinart, 1992: 107; Kedourie, 1992: 16).

The Exodus of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1497

Between the years 1391 and 1492, the circumstances faced by Jews in Spain progressively deteriorated, characterized by escalating persecution that ultimately resulted in their expulsion. The monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella issued an edict of expulsion on 31 March 1492 (Beinart, 2014: 33; Ravid, 2023: 121; Kamen, 1992: 74; Kedourie, 1992: 12; Rock et al., 2012: 7; Kessner, 1969: 448; Thomas, 2019: 199). The Jewish inhabitants within their territories were issued an ultimatum: either convert to another religion or depart by the deadline of July 31. While the possessions of those who chose exile were not to be confiscated, the limited timeframe between the decree's announcement and the required departure compelled individuals to either sell their assets at low prices or abandon them if they could not be easily converted into cash. The Jewish community fled the country, carrying their family belongings with them, excluding gold and silver. Any Jews attempting to return would face execution. According to

established estimates, approximately one-third of the Jewish community in the Iberian Peninsula converted to another faith. Conversely, another third perished as martyrs due to their religious beliefs. The remaining third escaped unscathed (Beinart, 1992: 92). The number of Jews leaving Spain after the expulsion is not accurately known, but estimated to have been between 100,000 and 800,000. According to *Encyclopedia Judaica* 100,000, an Italian Jew's 1495 writing states 250,000; M. Franco 200,000; Nesim Elnkave 250,000 (Güteryüz, 1993: 60).

A considerable proportion of Jews in Spain were highly educated, belonged to the upper social strata, and engaged in diverse professions. It is broadly acknowledged that Jews held an influential position within the Iberian kingdoms. They played a pivotal role in financial affairs, functioning as financiers and tax collectors. Their active participation spanned various sectors of society and a broad spectrum of occupations and geographic areas, including both urban and rural regions, up until their expulsion. (Kedourie, 1992: 8).

Following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and their subsequent hardships in Portugal, the New Christian population was left without oversight. Consequently, insular, they needed to develop strategies to safeguard their identity by celebrating their Jewish heritage and maintaining a distinct way of life, with the firm belief that they would eventually revert to Judaism. To avoid detection by the Inquisition, which received support from the local community, they had to increase their efforts to conceal their crypto-Judaism. They engaged in a spiritual struggle to attain all that Christian culture offered, even as they rejected its fundamental principles. Their continued existence as a separate group was at risk, and they perceived their purpose in preserving it (Beinart, 1992: 15).

What was the reason for the expulsion? The edict's wording offered a spiritual justification, primarily to protect the faith of the New Christians. Past displacements, such as those from Andalusia and partial displacements from towns, set important precedents. Additionally, the history of anti-Jewish prejudice in the fifteenth century—including practices such as dividing neighborhoods and requiring badges—contributed to the overall context. The wording of the decree is probably best attributed to Tomas de Torquemada. Another view posits that influential New Christians in town councils played a key role in deporting former Jewish neighbors and potential witnesses for the Inquisition, supported by anti-Jewish sentiments found in many treaties they authored. A different interpretation views the expulsion as a calculated exploitation of religious conflicts to unite the nation and strengthen obedience to the monarchy. While religion was the primary focus of the edict, most subsequent documents centered on confiscating Jewish wealth and possessions (Gutwirth, 1992: 71).

After the edict, a considerable proportion of Spanish Jews converted due to intimidation and coercion. The status of the New Christians within Spanish society, coupled with the suspicion that some of them were insincere in their conversions and clandestinely adhered to Judaism, prompted religious authorities as well as Ferdinand and Isabella to implement more stringent measures to prevent relapse. Former coreligionists who persisted in Jewish doctrines and rituals, and maintained synagogues where New Christians could seek refuge, further exacerbated these concerns. An attempt was made to isolate the Jews physically; however, it was deemed ineffective. The subsequent course of action was their removal, resulting in either conversion or exile. In either case, the risk of New Christians relapsing was virtually eliminated (Kedourie, 1992: 15-16).



The majority of those displaced appear to have traveled on foot, reserving the mules for the infirm and senior citizens. Furthermore, the utilization of boats and river waterways was limited to a few instances in Spain. Often, exile led to the abandonment of areas historically inhabited by Jewish communities for generations, resulting in their deterioration, municipal neglect, and a decline in property values. The monarchy was eager to assert its precedence over other creditors of the Jewish populations, aiming to recover the alleged loss of tax revenue or obligations. Additionally, it prohibited the sale of community property to settle these debts. In certain cases, this resulted in affluent households bearing sole responsibility for the entire community's tax obligations (Gutwirth, 1992: 72). The Jewish populations who departed in 1492 were able to reestablish their communities in numerous locations, including North Africa, various regions of the Italian Peninsula, and, notably, the Ottoman Empire. Subsequently, some members of the Sephardim converted to Christianity but persisted in practicing their original religion clandestinely; others remained dedicated to their cultural heritage, or were compelled to flee due to persecution by the Inquisition (Kedourie, 1992: 13).

Most of these individuals established Sephardi communities abroad, with Amsterdam serving as a prominent example, and England following after the *de facto* readmission of Jews in the seventeenth century (Kedourie, 1992: 13; Gerber, 2020: 215; Glazer, 1989: 13). In the recipient countries, the Jews brought with them extensive expertise in commerce, as well as familial links to New Christians who chose to remain in Spain and preserve their familial relationships despite their conversion to Christianity. The majority of the Jews, accounting for approximately 85 percent or between 85,000 and 115,000 individuals, migrated to Portugal. They were welcomed by King Manuel I, the country's monarch, owing to their influential connections. As an Iberian nation, Portugal offered Jews the closest association with their previous lifestyles. Within Portugal, Sephardim continued to trade with Spain and endeavored to maintain a unified community. Nonetheless, in 1497, Manuel I enforced the conversion of all Jews while guaranteeing a non-investigation of their theological beliefs for a period of forty years (Rock et al., 2012: 7).

The Portuguese Inquisition and the Migration of the New Christians

In 1536, the Portuguese Inquisition was established under the auspices of King Manuel I. This development occurred significantly later than the Spanish Inquisition's inception. It is plausible that Spain exerted influence in this matter, given that Portugal served as a refuge for New Christians seeking to evade Inquisition persecution. King Manuel, I directed his ambassador to the Papal Curia, Miguel de Silva, to secure a Papal Bull authorizing the establishment of an Inquisition modeled after the Spanish institution. He argued that such measures were necessary due to the rising number of immigrant New Christians who continued to practice their crypto-Jewish customs secretly. The local authorities were instructed to compile registers of these New Christians. Nonetheless, it was only during the reign of John III (1521-33) that additional measures were enacted. In 1524, the King commissioned Jorge Themudo to develop inquisitorial procedures, with assistance from Enrique Nunez, a Castilian convert to Christianity originally from the Canary Islands (Beinart, 1992: 117-118; Israel, 1998: 19-20).

It is important to note that, once the Inquisition gained momentum, it became as ruthless, if not more so, than the Spanish Inquisition, and the Portuguese inquisitors faced more challenges than their Spanish counterparts. The Portuguese Inquisition was linked to the

expulsion ordered in Spain in 1492. Spanish New Christians loyal to Judaism had little to no contact with actual Jews, leading to a gradual loss of their knowledge of Jewish rituals and traditions. Many Spanish Jews migrated to Portugal, attracted by its comparatively lenient policies. The Portuguese king allowed these migrants to practice their religion in exchange for payment. After his death, his successor sought to strengthen his power through a marital alliance with Spain. Spain insisted that all Jews in Portugal be expelled as a condition. To comply, Portugal's ruler forced the Jews to convert en masse. Suddenly, the entire Portuguese Jewish community converted to New Christianity. Though outwardly unified, these converts secretly maintained aspects of Judaism, constrained by prohibitions (Kedourie, 1992: 18).

The delayed initiation of the Portuguese Inquisition in the 1540s allowed crypto-Judaism to persist among the New Christians without facing the severe penalties associated with its trials. The New Christians were restricted from leaving the Kingdom without official permission; nonetheless, some ultimately succeeded in fleeing and either integrated into existing Sephardi communities or established their own settlements. This phenomenon was particularly evident in Amsterdam, where Portuguese Jews were granted permission to settle and worship openly without interference from the late sixteenth century onward. New arrivals assumed a significant role in the international Dutch trade, facilitated by the Netherlands' independence from Spain and its rise as a naval power. These refugees of Portuguese origin, originally compelled to convert to Christianity, managed to establish a Jewish community that maintained authentic Jewish practices. Over successive generations, their numbers increased as additional refugees from Portugal and Spain joined them. They reintegrated into the broader historical Jewish tradition. From its inception, Amsterdam society has consistently exhibited a welcoming attitude towards the global community, distinguishing it as a unique assembly within Sephardi Jewry (Kedourie, 1992: 18).

The New Christians in Portugal and Spain, who were hesitant to relinquish their allegiance to Judaism, gradually developed a more ambiguous understanding of the faith they were required to renounce. Over time, they became increasingly influenced by the Catholicism in which they were raised, which in turn shaped their perception of Judaism. They discreetly endeavored to preserve their loyalty to Judaism; however, their perception of Judaism profoundly influenced their Christian faith as they encountered it within the Church, educational institutions, and universities (Kedourie, 1992: 19). To preserve the valuable economic knowledge and wealth held by the Jews, who later became New Christians, King Manuel I issued a decree prohibiting their departure from the kingdom. Although some individuals managed to escape, the majority opted to remain. The King of Portugal was cautious about fostering a group of unfaithful reverts, whose baptism merely concealed their complete lack of understanding of their recently adopted religion and whose devotion was maintained through superficial connections based on fear. He believed it was necessary to gradually and deliberately introduce the reverts to their new beliefs. Consequently, he granted the New Christians a period of forty years to adapt, during which they were protected from persecution. This period allowed them to cease their Jewish practices and progressively embrace Catholicism. Conversely, the forty-year timeframe, which effectively tolerated religious heterodoxy provided there was evidence of readiness to understand the principles of the new religion and abandon the old, served as a significant respite from the scrutiny of the Inquisition. This period provided the New Christians ample opportunity to refine their covert practice of Judaism. Simultaneously, protected by this immunity, these crypto-Jews were able to establish the foundations of wealth and political influence. Following the death of King Manuel I in 1521 and the subsequent



establishment of the Portuguese Inquisition a decade later, emigration increased. However, unlike the disorganized Spanish exodus, these departures were more structured and deliberate. Some individuals of Jewish descent left due to fears of religious persecution, while others pursued improved financial opportunities (Rock et al., 1992, 7).

Once the Inquisition in Portugal was fully established, a sophisticated clandestine Jewish network emerged. The persistent existence of this heresy is documented in Portugal's blasphemy court proceedings, which continued until 1780. Therefore, the elimination of Jewish communities, often occurring in fifteenth-century Spain, did not necessarily reflect the entire experience of New Christians, particularly the Portuguese New Christians. Portuguese Jewry demonstrated resilience in maintaining its religious convictions; however, it faced obstacles that it could not circumvent. The imposition of state resistance led to a lack of awareness of Jewish scholarly research. The only elements that could be transmitted from father to son were the fundamental principles of faith and certain aspects of ritual, although even these were frequently corrupted. The strategy of disguising Jewish rituals in Christian attire led to the incorporation of Christian elements. Consequently, it is understandable how subsequent generations could adopt Christianized customs without recognizing their true origins, genuinely believing they were observing the principles of their religion (Kessner, 1969: 449).

The Migration of the Jews and New Christians to the Ottoman Empire

The first wave of migration from the Iberian Peninsula resulted from the Edict of Expulsion in Spain in 1492 and, later, from Portugal in 1497, which gave Jews two options: convert to Christianity or leave. A few converted; a group of Jews chose to emigrate to the East. A significant number of the Iberian Jews were welcomed by the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II, who officially declared that Sephardim were free to migrate to and settle in Ottoman lands and become loyal Ottoman subjects in return. The Sephardim represented a loyal minority, which led the Ottoman Sultan to favor them and their interests. The number of Jewish families who migrated to the Ottoman Empire after 1492 is estimated at roughly 12,000, equating to around 60,000 people (İnalçık, in Benbassa and Rodrigue, 2014: 91). While some limit the total number of Jews in the Empire to 50,000 as of the first quarter of the century (İnalçık, in Benbassa and Rodrigue, 2014: 91), others claim it to be 150,000, describing the Ottoman Jewish community as Europe's largest (Shaw in Benbassa and Rodrigue, 2014: 91).

The second wave of migration from the Iberian Peninsula, originating from Portugal in 1506, comprised the New Christians, who were no longer Jews but had been baptized as Christians. Their integration into local Jewish communities presented a significant challenge: should they be regarded as Jews or Christians? Rabbinical authorities deliberated upon and established the legal status of the New Christians in relation to Judaism (Ginio, 2009: 394). Arriving within the Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire affirmed the converts' desire to re-engage with Judaism; some were born Jewish and were compelled to convert to Christianity during the Portuguese expulsion of Jews in 1497. This led the *rabbanim* (pl. *rabbi*) to apply the Talmudic principles to them and adopt that an individual identifying as Jewish retains their religious status as a Jew, even if they have committed acts deemed sinful by the Jewish faith, such as converting to Christianity. This facilitated the acceptance of such newcomers and their integration into Jewish congregations. However, this policy also engendered various legal complexities concerning marriage and inheritance, arising from the disintegration of familial

bonds. Some members remained committed to Judaism, while others converted to Christianity (Ginio, 2009: 395). The third wave of immigration from the Iberian Peninsula to the Ottoman Empire occurred after the establishment of the Portuguese Inquisition in 1536 and continued until the 1560s. These second- and third-generation New Christians were primarily motivated by their fear of the newly instituted Inquisition in Portugal. Some individuals may have retained faint memories of their ancestral Jewish faith. Emigrants from Portugal migrated, either as transient nodes or for permanent residence, to the Low Countries, particularly Flanders; to Italy, predominantly to Venice or Ancona (the latter under Papal control); and, most notably, to the Ottoman Empire (Ginio, 2009: 398).

After arriving in the Ottoman Empire, the Jews and New Christians who later embraced Judaism gained the status of *Dhimmi* (protected people) and *Millet* (originally meaning “a community defined by religion”), which aimed to keep them protected and insulated from harm. Judeo-Spanish was the medium through which the Iberian culture continued for over five centuries. According to Cohen, “The improvement in Jewish fortunes in the Ottoman world in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, coinciding with the political and economic successes of the Ottoman Turks, as well as the subsequent decline in both the Ottoman Empire and within the Ottoman Jewish communities, thus conforms to a recognizable pattern in the history of the Jews in Muslim lands” (Cohen 1996: 427). In the Ottoman Empire, the Sephardim were able to establish new communities, usually in cities or in areas under the control of the Sublime Porte (the Ottoman Empire’s government) (Bossong in Stechauner, 2013, 83). However, the new Jewish settlements within the Empire were not established at random but were strictly controlled through a policy of population transfer (Sevilla-Sharon, 1993:28). This policy affected not only Jewish subjects but also other minorities, including Muslims, and was initially implemented for economic reasons. When Sephardim came to the Ottoman Empire, a significant portion settled in Salonica, Istanbul, Edirne, and the towns of Morea, with Salonica becoming the capital of the exiles. Soon, there was a Spanish-speaking congregation in almost every major city of the Ottoman Empire, including Constantinople, Izmir, Bursa, Sarajevo, Belgrade, Monastir, Sofia, Filipopolis (Plovdiv), Jerusalem, Safed, and in other territories that the Ottoman Empire strongly influenced, such as Budapest, Rhodes, Cairo, and Vienna (Stechauner, 2013: 83).

Like other Muslim states, the Ottoman Empire preferred that its subjects be organized into specific, orderly groups, each represented by responsible leaders who exercised some of the central state’s authority. Citizens in cities were organized by religion, profession, and geographic location. Ottoman Jews were organized into groups known as *kahal* (congregations). It can be observed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that its members form a *kahal* according to where they come from. This is reflected in the names of the communities founded in Istanbul and other cities of the Ottoman Empire. The immigrants from the Iberian Peninsula and congregations founded by Italian Jews were also named *kahal* after the city or region from which their members came, such as Toledo, Lisbon, Castile, Aragon, and Sicily. “Gerus” (expulsion) or “Gerus Sefarad” (expulsion from Spain), a more general name for a *kahal*, was found in almost every community of the empire (Ben-Naeh, 2009: 171-72).

The Sephardim were not the first to establish Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire, which had already been home to Romaniote (Byzantine) Greek-speaking Jews for many centuries, as well as to smaller Jewish-Italian, Ashkenazic, and Karaite communities (Galanti,



1995: 23; Pinto, 2005: 112; Groepler, 1999: 29). The Spanish exiles soon outnumbered these long-established Jews, exerting a significant cultural influence on these autochthonous communities, for example, at the linguistic level. With the arrival of large numbers of Spanish and Portuguese Jews in the Balkans in 1492, Judeo-Greek culture gradually shifted toward Judeo-Spanish and Sephardic culture. Consequently, the arrival of the Sephardim initially gave rise to serious conflicts with the Romaniote community. (Benbassa and Rodrigue, 2014: 101; Stechauner, 2013: 83. Differences in the interpretation of the religious law predominantly characterized these communal conflicts. Here, it becomes clear that the already mentioned cultural hegemony and religious authority of Sephardim were not always absorbed voluntarily by other Jewish-ethnic groups.

It is important to note that the Ottoman Empire was not a modern nation-state but an empire of diverse religions, languages, and ethnic groups, spanning a vast territory. Both the Ottomans and the Sephardim needed to support each other to protect themselves from external threats and improve themselves. The Ottomans needed capital and people who knew European languages, culture, socio-economy, trade, and diplomacy. The Sephardim needed a land where they could live safely. The Sephardim played a major role in Ottoman-European relations. They had the skills to meet the Empire's needs. The contributions of the Sephardim can be divided into two categories: general and to the Sublime Porte. They brought many assets - their community life, institutions, culture, and scholarship - with them to the Ottoman Empire. They were instrumental in developing and expanding the Ottoman administration and economy. They were successful government advisors, merchants, bankers, civil administrators, translators, tax farmers, money lenders, metallurgists, gemologists, doctors, and chemists. They usually constituted part of the urban population and occupied an important, perhaps unique, position in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Levy, 2002: XIX). Sephardim strengthened their positions as traders and manufacturers. Some of them amassed great fortunes. During this period, their important role in tax collection as tax collectors and inspectors was undoubtedly due to their financial abilities. In addition, a large number of customs workers, possibly the majority, were Jews. The Sultan also made good use of these skilled craftsmen, especially the chemists who produced high-quality gunpowder for his new artillery batteries (Rodrigue, 1992: 168; Levy, 2002: XIX; Pehrson, 2013: 69). They used the advanced technology of the time in areas such as munitions and textile manufacture. Lewis states that the contribution of Ottoman Jews to the cultural life of the Ottoman Empire was limited to three areas: namely, medicine, the performing arts, and printing (Lewis, 1999: 150-51). The printing press was one of the items that Sephardim introduced to the Ottoman Empire (Besalel, 1999: 28). The urban skills of the Sephardim were well-suited to gaps in the economy. The Sephardim were also well-connected to trade circles in Europe (Rodrigue, 1992: 167). Since Ottoman policy embraced freedom of trade and movement, the Sephardim soon became involved in building up the Empire. (Barnai, 1990: 26, Rodrigue, 1992: 168).

As mentioned previously, the Sephardim brought with them a serious tradition of medical knowledge from Europe. In the sixteenth century, so many Jewish physicians worked in the Ottoman palace, including the Hamon family, that the palace records listed two separate groups of physicians, one Muslim and the other Jewish. Although it was uncommon to see it later, in the sixteenth century, Jews provided informal advice on foreign policy matters. They were also employed as translators for Ottoman ambassadors and were occasionally sent to Europe as envoys (Lewis, 1999: 150-51). Documents in the Ottoman archives clearly show

that Sephardim held important positions in public life, such as undersecretary of the government, financial attorney, and clerk. It is also suggested that Sephardim played important roles in economic life, industry, and interregional and international trade. The Jewish community, an important element of Ottoman society, gained a significant role in regional and international trade through tax farming since the fifteenth century. Sephardim held important status and roles in the Ottoman Empire. They served as a bridge between the Ottoman Empire and the West. This was both a choice and a necessity for the Ottoman Empire (İnalçık in Nommaz 2019: 11).

Conclusion

This article contends that the establishment of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions and the expulsion decrees of 1492 and 1497 had a considerable impact on the migration of Jews and New Christians to the Safe havens such as Amsterdam, Flanders, certain Italian cities, and the Ottoman Empire. The Iberian Inquisitions and the edicts also demonstrate how monarchical interests shaped relations between these kingdoms, leading them to adopt similar practices. As a result of religious oppression, Iberian Jews (Sephardim) and New Christians migrated in three distinct waves to the Ottoman Empire, in search of religious freedom. The article illustrates that the first wave was driven by the expulsions of 1492 and 1497, followed by migrations of New Christians in the early 1500s. A third wave, following the establishment of the Portuguese Inquisition in 1536 and the arrival in the Ottoman Empire, saw the structure of the Jewish communities within the Ottoman Empire change. For the New Christians who embraced their ancient religion, their religious status became an important issue in both the religious and legal spheres of the Ottoman Empire. Finally, this article concludes that Jews and New Christians who reverted to Judaism acquired *dhimmi* status within the *millet* system, which enabled some of them to leverage their social and economic capital, advance their roles in business, medicine, and administration, and establish connections with the Ottoman court.

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