# JEWISH CONVERTS REFUTE JUDAISM:
# CONVERSION AND RELIGIOUS POLEMICS
# IN THE LATE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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- I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have fully acknowledged and documented in my thesis all sources of ideas and words, including digital resources, which have been produced or published by another person or institution;
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ABSTRACT

Jewish Converts Refute Judaism: Conversions and

Religious Polemic in the Late Fifteenth-Century Ottoman Empire

This thesis consists of a textual and contextual analysis of two Ottoman polemical treatises directed against Judaism in the time of Bayezid II. In their works, the author of *Risāla al-hādiya*, Abd al-Salam, and the author of *Risāla al-ilzām*, Abd al-Allam, introduced themselves as Jewish converts to Islam at the service of Bayezid II. In these treatises, Judaism was attempted to be refuted relying on the rational argumentation and frequent Hebrew quotations from the Bible. The textual analysis reveals that two Ottoman polemicists followed the formal structure adopted by the medieval Muslim polemic writers. At the same time, a good deal of original content was produced in both polemics. The simultaneous appearance of these polemics, as the first known Ottoman polemics written against Judaism, was closely connected with the late fifteenth and early sixteenth-centuries historical context. In order to explore the relation of these polemics with the Ottoman religious politics, the religious policies of Bayezid II, especially towards the Jewish community, are broadly discussed. This thesis argues that the growing number of the Sephardic Jews arrived at the Ottoman lands aroused a scholarly interest in the Jewish faith among the Ottoman intellectuals. It is also among the claims of this thesis that the polemics under study marked the beginning of the anti-Jewish polemical writing in the Ottoman Empire.

# ÖZET

Yahudi Mühtediler Yahudiliği Çürütüyor:

Geç On Beşinci Yüzyıl Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda İhtida ve Dini Reddiyeler

Bu tez, II. Bayezid döneminde kaleme alınmış Yahudilik karşıtı iki reddiye risalesinin metinsel ve bağlamsal analizinden ibarettir. Bu iki reddiyeden *Risāletü'l-hādiye*'nin yazarı Abdüsselam ve *Risāletü'l-ilzām*'ın yazarı Abdülallam, kendilerini sultanın hizmetindeki Yahudi mühtediler olarak tanıtmaktadır. Söz konusu risalelerde; Yahudilik, Tevrat'tan yapılan İbranice alıntılar ve akli argümanlarla çürütülmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu tezde sunulan metinsel analize göre, iki Osmanlı reddiye yazarı Orta Çağ Müslüman yazarları tarafından ortaya konulmuş olan biçimsel yapıya bağlı kalmışlardır. Bununla birlikte, iki eserin de içeriği büyük oranda orijinaldir. Bu iki reddiyenin, Yahudilik karşıtı ilk Osmanlı polemik eserleri olarak eş zamanlı ortaya çıkışı, on beşinci yüzyıl sonu ve on altıncı yüzyıl başındaki tarihsel bağlam ile yakından ilişkilidir. Tezde; bu iki reddiyenin, dönemin din siyaseti ile ilişkisini sorgulamak amacıyla II. Bayezid dönemindeki -özellikle de Yahudi cemaatine yönelik- Osmanlı dini politikaları kapsamlı olarak tartışılmıştır. Bu tez; İspanya'dan devam eden göçle birlikte Yahudilerin artan görünürlüklerinin, Osmanlı ilim çevrelerinde Yahudiliğe karşı bir ilgiye neden olduğu savunmaktadır. Tezin bir başka iddiası ise çalışma konusu olan iki reddiyenin, Osmanlı dönemindeki Yahudilik karşıtı polemik yazımını başlattığıdır.

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It is far beyond the ability of this humble thesis, but, I consider it an opportunity to express my gratefulness to my caring parents, brother, and sister. Finally, my dear wife, Afra, deserves the greatest appreciation for being supportive and thoughtful towards me at any moment of this fluctuated year.

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# NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION

Arabic and Persian words have been transliterated according to the Library of Congress transliteration system. Ottoman Turkish words are rendered according to modern Turkish orthography. Arabic personal names are Romanized in according with the modern Turkish orthography in the cases that they refer to the Ottomans with the exceptions of Abd al-Salam and Abd al-Allam, whose names were transliterated as appeared in their Arabic texts.

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

The present thesis proposes textual and contextual analyses of two polemical treatises that were written in Arabic against Judaism by two Jewish converts to Islam during the reign of Bayezid II: Abd al-Salam al-Muhtadi's *Risāla al-hādiya*. (A Guiding Epistle) and al-Salam Abd al-Allam's treatise titled *Risāla al-ilzām al-Yahūd fī mā zaʿamū fī' al-Tawrāt min qibal ʿilm al-kalām* (An epistle compelling the Jews by the science of kalam concerning what they alleged about the Torah). The two treatises are of particular importance for three main reasons. First of all, the texts under study are the earliest known Ottoman polemical tracts written against Judaism, and greatly influenced Taşköprüzade's well-known polemic, *Risāla fī al-radd 'alā al-Yahūd* (An epistle on the reply to the Jews). Second, both of the polemicists were connected with the Ottoman imperial administration. In addition to the fact that both submitted their works to the Sultan, one of the two polemicists, Abd al-Salam al-Muhtadi, was the holder of a high-ranking office in the central administration as treasurer (*defterī*). Lastly, the two polemics were written in a very crucial juncture in Ottoman history. The period in question not only witnessed a massive Sephardic influx to the Ottoman lands, but it was also a time of growing sharia consciousness among the Ottoman ruling elites. In this sense, the two polemical tracts under study may also be discussed as a sharia-minded response to the influx of Jews to the Ottoman lands.

Recently, the interplay between conversion narratives and polemics was raised by several writers within the framework of "the Ottoman Age of

Confessionalism".[1] At this point, T. Krstić's two studies dealing with the polemical works of two Christian converts, one compiled in 1556/7 and the other translated into Ottoman Turkish in 1604, must be mentioned. Krstić remarks the elements of confessional polarization as manifested in the self-narratives integrated into the polemical works under study.[2] In explaining the underlying dynamics of confessional mentality, she ascribes a particular role to the inter-imperial political context in which the Ottoman Empire was engaged in military, political and religious rivalry with the empires of the Habsburgs in the west and the Safavids in the east. J. Pfeiffer deals with a seventeenth-century polemical treatise against Judaism penned by a Jewish convert to Islam.[3] She draws heavily on the concept of "Ottoman confessionalization" in understanding the Ottoman politics of religion.[4] However, she also contends that the absence of an "imperial backing" for the Jews unlike in the case of Shiites and Christians makes it problematic to locate the Jewish conversion narratives in the context of inter-imperial rivalry. This explains why Pfeiffer prefers to propose an examination of Jewish conversion narratives "*within* the context of Ottoman internal politics".[5]

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[1] Several historians have recently argued for the usefulness of the confessionalization paradigm, which was originated to approach the early modern social and political implications of state-church alignment, in the Ottoman context. See, for example, Krstic, T. (2014). *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*. Stanford: Stanford University Press., Burak, G. (2013). Faith, Law and Empire in the Ottoman "Age of Confessionalization": The Case of "Renewal of Faith." *Mediterranean Historical Review*, *28*(1), 1–23., Terzioğlu, D. (2012). How to Conceptualize Ottoman Sunnitization: A Historiographical Discussion. *Turcica*, (44), 301–338., Terzioğlu, D. (2013). Where 'İlm-i Ḥāl Meets Catechism: Islamic Manuals of Religious Instruction in the Ottoman Empire in the Age of Confessionalization. *Past & Present*, *220*(1), 79–114. For a critique of using this concept for the Ottoman Empire see a review of Baer, M. D. (2012). Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire by Tijana Krstić. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 23 (3), 391–394.

[2] Krstić, "Illuminated by the Light of Islam and the Glory of the Ottoman Sultanate"; Krstic, "Reading Abdallah B. Abdallah Al-Tarjuman's Tulila (1420) in the Ottoman Empire."

[3] Pfeiffer, "Confessional Polarization in the 17th Century Ottoman Empire and Yūsuf İbn Ebī ʿAbdü'd Deyyān's Keşfü'l-Esrār Fī Ilzāmi'l-Yehūd Ve'l-Aḥbār."

[4] Ibid., 18.

[5] Ibid., 19.

I will argue in the interest of the following pages that Pfeiffer's emphasis on the peculiarity of the religious polarization targeted the Jewish religion in the Ottoman context is highly relevant. However, unlike Pfeiffer, I maintain that "the Ottoman Age of Confessionalism" paradigm, even after some adjustments, fails to explain the rise of Muslim religious polemics directed against the Jews in the Ottoman Empire. From my point of view, concepts of narrower scope such as sharia consciousness prevailing among the Ottoman ruling elite and interreligious polarization in scholarly realm might provide with a sounder and more specific framework in exploration of the unprecedented Ottoman interest in the anti-Jewish polemical literature. Contrary to the Confessionalization discourse pointing to a comprehensive transformation of the Ottoman politics of religion, they enable us to focus on the specific reasons behind the two polemics. Relying excessively on the broader phenomenon of confessional polarization might be misleading given that it conceals the possible personal motivations of polemicists who were converts serving in the imperial court.

Until this date there has not appeared any historical study presenting a contextual examination of the two polemical treatises studied in this thesis. The existing scholarly literature on the two texts is limited to critical editions, translations, and a single study by J. Sadan, which discusses some linguistic characteristics of *Ilzām*.[6] The critical editions and translations of the two texts have been undertaken exclusively by S. Schmidtke and C. Adang. In 2009, Schmidtke published a critical edition of *Hādiya*. Schmidtke's edition is based on five manuscripts dated 1499/1500, 1568, 1581, 1790 and 1851, but leaves out the earliest

[6] Sadan, "Phonemes and Sounds as Criteria."

copy held in the Topkapı Palace library.[7] A year later, Adang published an English translation of this edition.[8] In the introduction to her translation, Adang briefly introduces the writer of the text, Abd al-Salam, and supply information available on the author in several Ottoman sources including the works of Katip Çelebi and Mustafa Âli. She does not, however, discuss in detail the widely diverging accounts that these sources provide about Abd al-Salam's place of origin and occupation, and concludes with a call for further research to shed light on the author of *Hādiya*.[9] As for Abd al-Allam's *Ilzām,* we have again Schmidtke's critical edition, based on the single extant manuscript,[10] and Adang's translation into English.[11]

An article co-authored by Schmidtke and Adang includes a critical edition and translation of the polemical treatise authored by Taşköprüzade (d. 1561).[12] In the introductory section of this textual examination, the writers offers general remarks on the arguments and proofs used by Taşköprüzade, which shows apparent resemblance with the two polemical treatises under the study of this thesis.

This thesis discusses the very composition of inter-religious polemical works by state-backed converts as an episode illustrative of the politics of religion in the early modern Ottoman context. In order to specify what accounts for the appearance of the first Ottoman polemical tracts directed against other religions in the late fifteenth century, this thesis begins with an exploration of the broader historical

[7] al-Salam Abd al-Allam, "Epistle Forcing the Jews [to Admit Their Error] with Regard to What They Contend about the Torah, by Dialectical Reasoning (Risālat Ilzām Al-Yahūd Fīmā Zaʿamū Fī L-Tawrāt Min Qibal ʿilm Al-Kalām) by Al-Salām ʿAbd Al-ʿAllām. A Critical Edition."
[8] Abd al-Salam, "Guided to Islam by the Torah: The Risāla Al-Hādiya by ʿAbd Al-Salām Al-Muhtadī Al-Muḥammadī."
[9] Ibid., 57-8.
[10] al-Salam Abd al-Allam, "Epistle Forcing the Jews [to Admit Their Error] with Regard to What They Contend about the Torah, by Dialectical Reasoning (Risālat Ilzām Al-Yahūd Fīmā Zaʿamū Fī L-Tawrāt Min Qibal ʿilm Al-Kalām) by Al-Salām ʿAbd Al-ʿAllām. A Critical Edition."
[11] al-Salam Abd al-Allam, "A Polemic against Judaism by a Convert to Islam from the Ottoman Period: Risalat Ilzam Al-Yahud Fima Za'amu Fi L-Tawrat Min Qibal Ilm Al-Kalam."
[12] Schmidtke and Adang, "Ahmad B. Mustafa Tashkubrizade's (D. 968/1561) Polemical Tract against Judaism."

context. In this framework, a particular emphasis will be laid on the ambivalent relationship between the Ottoman Jewish community and Bayezid II, whose name appears in both polemics. Given the limits of historical sources dealing with state-community relationships specific to the Ottoman Jews, I include the literature on the imperial policies regarding non-Muslims in a broader sense. The next chapter includes an overview of the Muslim polemical literature against Judaism, to which the two treatises belong in terms of content and form. My proposal to situate the polemics within a historical as well as literary setting will be followed by a section that explores the writers of the two texts, going well beyond their limited self-representations. The last chapter before conclusion proposes a textual analysis of the two polemics by focusing on their argumentation styles in a comparative way, which includes a discussion on the originality of their contents.

# CHAPTER 2

# THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

# OTTOMAN JEWRY UNTIL THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

## 2.1 The formative period: Ottoman Jewry during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries

The Ottoman expansion to Anatolia and the Balkans during the fourteenth century brought under Ottoman rule a multitude of small Jewish communities inherited mostly from the Byzantine Empire. The Ottoman Jewish population grew particularly as a result of the Ottoman annexations of Bursa (1326)[13], Ankara (1354), Adrianople (1361 c.), Plovdiv (1364), Sofia (1385 c.), Nikopol (1395) and Vidin (1396), which had been inhabited by Greek-speaking Romaniot Jewish communities long before Ottoman rule.[14]

The inflow of Jews from Germany and Italy, who were forced to leave their countries in the wake of anti-Jewish prosecutions, further accelerated the growth of the Jewish communities in the Ottoman cities during the fourteenth century.[15] The newcomers, who were Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews in most cases, encountered established Romaniot communities, including both Rabbinites and Karaites, in the Balkan and Western Anatolian cities as the largest congregation.[16] In a few cases, *musta'rib* (Arabicized) Jews, the majority of who inhabited the Fertile Crescent, had their own congregations in cities of western and southern Anatolia.[17]

The takeover of Constantinople by the Ottomans marked the beginning of increasing Jewish involvement in the city. This was primarily a consequence of

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[13] Bornstein-Makovetsky and Shmuelevitz, "Bursa," 300.
[14] Hirschberg, Geller, and Bornstein-Makovetsky, "Ottoman Empire," 520.
[15] Sevilla-Sharon, *Türkiye Yahudileri*, 22–23.
[16] Levy, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, 3–4.
[17] Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*, 5.

Mehmet II's decision to implement the policy of *sürgün* (exile) in order to repopulate the city after the conquest. As part of the forced migration to the new capital, the Jewish Romaniot communities in the Balkans and Asia Minor were transferred *en masse* to Constantinople throughout the first years of Ottoman rule in the city. By 1477, the Jewish population of Istanbul had reached above one-tenth of the city's total population.[18] This drastic change in the Ottoman Jewish demography transformed Constantinople into the most important center of Ottoman Jewry. Afflicted with wide-scale deportations, many Jewish communities in the Balkans and Anatolia almost disappeared as their populations declined dramatically.[19] The imperial decrees concerning the *sürgün*s stipulated that the new residents of Constantinople were to be granted a different, and disadvantaged, legal status than the voluntary settlers (*kendi gelen*), which brought about a set of restrictions for the former. For instance, they were prohibited from leaving the city or even the specific neighborhoods in which they were resettled as well as from taking up a job other than their current occupation.[20] Nevertheless, M. A. Epstein emphasizes the relatively less restrictive Ottoman attitude towards the Jewish community after the conquest as compared to the Christian subjects of the city who aroused greater suspicion on the grounds that they shared the faiths of the European enemies.[21] The distinguishing treatment of the two non-Muslim groups, he maintains, was manifested both in practice and in legal discourse. For instance, the Jews were exempted from the ban on the construction of worship places by non-Muslims and could construct new synagogues in Constantinople.

[18] İnalcık, "Jews in the Ottoman Economy and Finances, 1450-1500," 514.
[19] Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 45.
[20] Hacker, "The Sürgün System and Jewish Society in the Ottoman Empire during the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries," 5–6.
[21] Epstein, *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and Their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, 28.

Another remarkable dimension of the Jewish presence in the Ottoman lands during the fifteenth century was the role of the Jewish community in the Ottoman economy. The active participation of the Jews in economic activities in the Ottoman lands is well documented in the Ottoman tax registers and court records. Jewish middlemen were involved extensively in the trade of several products from Europe, Iran, and India; and played a central role in the emergence of the Ottoman woolen industry in the late fifteenth century.[22] The Jewish involvement in sectors that were directly tied to the state such as the production and distribution of coinage during the same period demonstrates the presence of commercial partnership between the Jewish merchants and the Ottoman polity even before the Iberian immigration.[23] The prominent place of Jews in the Ottoman economy also becomes clear in the context of their role in tax farming. Relying on the tax registers from the late 1470s to the early 1480s, M. A. Epstein demonstrates that Jews were the holders of major tax forms.[24] Correspondingly, in the light of Ottoman archival documents, H. İnalcık interprets the influence of the Jews on the Ottoman economy as 'far beyond the size of their community'.[25]

### 2.2 Ottoman Jewry in transition: The arrival of Sephardim in the Ottoman lands

It has been already mentioned that prior to the 1492 Edict of Expulsion the Ottoman lands had already been among the destinations, if not a major one, for the Jewish emigration from Europe. From the second half of the fourteenth century to the late fifteenth century, several waves of persecutions against Jews resulted in the mass exodus of Jews, from Hungary in 1376, from France in 1394 and from Sicily in the

[22] See İnalcık, "Jews in the Ottoman Economy and Finances, 1450-1500."
[23] Epstein, *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and Their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, 112-3.
[24] Ibid., 118.
[25] İnalcık, "Jews in the Ottoman Economy and Finances, 1450-1500," 3.

early fifteenth century. In this context, Ottoman cities like Edirne attracted a modest but steady flow of Jewish immigration.[26] According to the data extracted from Ottoman poll-tax records (*cizye defterleri*), for example, the number Jewish households in Constantinople showed a moderate increase from 1,674 to 1,980 between 1478 and 1490.[27] It was the subsequent waves of migration triggered first by the expulsion of Sephardic Jews from Spain by 1492 when this small-scale arrivals to the Ottoman lands was gradually transformed into a massive one. Faced with the option to convert or leave the Spanish territories, those who refused to convert to Christianity were required to find new places to settle.

In contrast with the widespread academic and non-academic inclination to start the history of Iberian Jews in the Ottoman Empire from 1492, the Ottoman archival documents and the literature on the Spanish Expulsion converge on the view that the influx of Jews to the territories of Ottoman Empire did not begin immediately after the edict of 1492. The first Spanish-speaking Jewish group that arrived in the Ottoman lands in the same year was rather small in number as the first route for the Sephardic Jews were the neighboring countries.[28] The subsequent cases of persecution and exile in their newly adopted countries compelled the Sephardic Jews to find new settlements beyond Europe. The forced conversion of Jews to Christianity in Portugal in 1497 was followed by the anti-Converso Lisbon riot of 1506, which pushed some of the Jews and *Converso*s to move to the non-Christian world.[29] Still, for the European Jews, the Ottoman Empire was quite distant and inaccessible compared to the cities of North Africa where the majority of immigrants

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[26] Epstein, *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and Their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, 20.
[27] Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 51.
[28] Levy, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, 4.
[29] Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 48.

headed during the first decade following the Spanish expulsion.[30] Therefore, the Jewish immigration to the Ottoman cities in this period was far from reaching the scale of the following century, which would transform Ottoman cities into centers of Jewish culture.[31]

It was at least two decades after the expulsion of 1492 that Ottoman cities became an important destination of Jewish immigration. The unfavorable conditions faced by the Iberian Jews in North Africa, a region constantly struck by political turmoil and scarcity, led them to seek new places to inhabit.[32] In this context, the relative prosperity of the Ottoman lands started to attract increasing numbers of refugees, who were dissatisfied by their initial destinations. Even though the exact number of Sephardic Jews who took refuge in the Ottoman Empire during the period after the 1492 expulsion remains unknown, the Ottoman tax registers (*tahrir defterleri*) records a dramatic growth in the population of the Jewish community in Constantinople during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. According to a study on the tax registers of 1490 and 1534, the number of Jewish households showed a drastic increase rising from 1,980 to 8,070 in the Ottoman capital.[33] In the same vein, while the tax register from 1478 Salonica listed no Jewish households, the *defter* of 1530 identifies 2,645 households in the Jewish community constituting almost two-thirds of the total population of the city.[34]

Sephardic immigration to the Ottoman lands further expanded the role Jews played in different sectors of the Ottoman economy. To encourage the Jewish merchants in the Ottoman lands several imperial decrees stipulating the guarantees and privileges, including tax exemptions, were issued during the reign of Bayezid

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[30] Ray, *After Expulsion*, 42.
[31] Ibid., 33.
[32] Ibid., 50.
[33] Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 51.
[34] Lowry, "When Did the Sephardim Arrive in Salonica?," 210.

II.[35] Furthermore, the willingness of the Ottoman administration to settle the Iberian immigrants in the trade centers alongside the Adriatic Sea, İnalcık argues, demonstrates that the Ottomans appreciated and intended to use the high potential of the new immigrants in overseas trade.[36] The presence of Jews in various sectors of domestic and foreign trade in Istanbul was significantly enlarged following the Sephardic influx to the city.[37] The period under discussion records a growing number of responsa, i.e. written answers given to the questions addressed to rabbis about every aspect of Jewish life, concerning the economic activities of the Jews in the Ottoman lands.[38]

### 2.3 The Sephardization of Ottoman Jewry

A long-term effect of the influx of Jews from Iberia on the Ottoman Jews was the Sephardization of Ottoman Jewry from the sixteenth century onwards. Within the first century of the expulsion from Spain the Sephardim established demographic and cultural domination over indigenous Jewry in the Ottoman cities with considerable Jewish communities.[39] The process was characterized by the diminishing religio-cultural presence of the Romaniot, as well as Arabic-speaking (*musta'rib*) Jews vis-à-vis the newcomers.[40] A visible indicator of this transformation appeared in the gradual adoption of the Sephardic rite by most Jewish congregations.[41] But the process was also accompanied by many controversies between the Iberian Jews and

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[35] Epstein, *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and Their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, 122-3.
[36] İnalcık, "Foundations of Ottoman-Jewish Cooperation," 12.
[37] Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 228–41.
[38] Shmuelevitz, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire in the Late Fifteenth and the Sixteenth Centuries*, 129.
[39] Levy, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, 61-2.
[40] Shmuelevitz, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire in the Late Fifteenth and the Sixteenth Centuries*, 13.
[41] Lehmann, *Ladino Rabbinic Literature and Ottoman Sephardic Culture*, 15.

the pre-existing Jewish groups in the Ottoman cities, which were in most cases triggered by conflicting views on religious matters.[42]

The proliferation of both popular and scholarly religious texts in Judeo-Spanish vernacular, i.e Ladino, by the eighteenth century suggests that the Sephardization of Ottoman Jewry in the cultural sense was substantially realized by this period.[43] Nevertheless, it is not easy to trace and specify what brought about this transformation. A. Levy argues that this process of transformation remained limited in Istanbul compared to other Western Anatolian and Balkan cities in the Empire. Drawing attention to the continuity in the demographic dominance of the Romaniot Jews over Iberian immigrants in the seventeenth-century Ottoman surveys from the capital, he claims that the Sephardization process was rather slow, particularly in Istanbul.[44] In the same vein, J. Hacker, while identifying the Sephardim as the majority in the Jewish community as opposed to Levy, argues for the presence of Romaniot resistance to the dominance of Sephardic majority particularly Istanbul, where the Romaniots had dominated the culture of the Jewish community well before the Ottoman period.[45] He maintains that it was only in the cities that had not previously had significant Jewish populations such as Salonica and Safed that the Iberian immigrants were able to form communities dominated by Sephardic traditions. Therefore, while tracing the establishment of Sephardic communities in several Ottoman towns, the sixteenth century seems to be too early to talk about the Sephardization of the pre-existing Jewry, which suggests the replacement of the Romaniot customs by its Sephardic counterparts.

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[42] Shmuelevitz, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire in the Late Fifteenth and the Sixteenth Centuries*, 13.
[43] Lehmann, *Ladino Rabbinic Literature and Ottoman Sephardic Culture*, 3.
[44] Levy, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, 8.
[45] Hacker, "The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth Century," 117-8

The discrepancy between the Iberian and Romaniot experiences of Ottoman rule following the conquest paved the way for conflicting contemporary Jewish accounts of the period. The Jewish historiography during the sixteenth and seventeenth century exhibits two strikingly different attitudes towards the Ottomans during the post-conquest period. While most contemporary Romaniot Jewish historians complained of the cruel treatment of the Jews after the Ottoman takeover of the city, many others, who were predominantly Iberian immigrants, celebrated the fall of Constantinople and depicted Mehmed II as having always been favorable to the Jews.[46]

### 2.4 Communal organization and leadership

In the wake of the Iberian immigration to the Ottoman Empire, a multitude of Sephardic congregations (*kahal, p. kahalim*) was established mostly in accordance with the immigrants' cities of origin. Having their own religious and educational institutions, the separate *kahalim* enjoyed a considerable degree of individuality within the Jewish community during the first half of the fifteenth century.[47] In addition to the traditional religious authority of rabbis both in communal and intercommunal affairs, an executive body called *maʿamad (*p. *ma'amadim),* was charged with the administration of communal affairs in each town.[48] While composed of elected members from different walks of life, *ma'amadim* were dominated mostly by wealthy businessmen and the middle class.[49]

A remarkable development concerning the leadership in Ottoman Jewry was the appointment of a Romaniot Rabbi, Moses Capsali (d. 1495), as a chief rabbi

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[46] Ibid., 6f; Hacker, "The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth Century," 120f; Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 37–45.
[47] Haim and Geller, "İstanbul," 776.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Hacker, "The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth Century," 119.

(*hahambaşı*) by an imperial decree following the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans. However, the literature is divided when it comes to the exact role played by the chief rabbis. Evidence from the relevant chronicles and archival documents has proved to be inconclusive in specifying the limits of the chief rabbi's authority over the Jews of the empire. Despite the account of Elia Capsali (ca. 1483-1555) who tended to exaggerate the importance of his great uncle Moses Capsali's position,[50] it has generally been accepted in the light of the contemporary sources that the chief rabbis political and judicial authority was limited to the Jewish congregations in Constantinople and that outside the capital other rabbis continued to lead the congregations in their provinces.[51] Furthermore, during his long tenure, Capsali a number of times had to deal with the Romaniot challenges to his leadership manifested by both religious and secular leaders of the Jewish community.[52]

The death of Moses Capsali in the late fifteenth century marked the end of some forty-year strong leadership exercised by the chief rabbinate. Capsali was followed by another rabbi of Romaniot origin, Eliya Mizrahi, whose tenure was characterized by a lesser degree of involvement in the relationships between the Jewish community and the Ottoman court. Mizrahi's own account suggests that he renounced the fiscal function of the chief rabbinate concerning the taxation of the Jewish community on the grounds that other Jewish leaders would be more effective in carrying out this duty.[53] With the appointment of the Jewish merchant Sha'altiel as *kahya* in the early 1500s, and his being entrusted with the task of making agreements on the financial obligations on behalf of his community, a novel type of leadership

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[50] See. Shmuelevitz, "Capsali as a Source for Ottoman History, 1450-1523."
[51] Epstein, *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and Their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, 56; Hacker, "The Sürgün System and Jewish Society in the Ottoman Empire during the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries," 118-9.
[52] Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 70.
[53] Epstein, *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and Their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, 61.

emerged in the Jewish community. Acting as an intermediary between the Jewish community in Constantinople and the imperial court, the *kahya* was supposed to defend the financial responsibility of the Jewish community to the state.[54]

The sixteenth-century transformation of the Jewish leadership brought to an end the imperial and communal attempts to form a centralized Jewish leadership by appointing a chief rabbi.[55] In the wake of Mizrahi's death, the Jewish community was unable to propose a candidate to the Ottoman sultan. The response of the Ottoman court to the intra-communal disagreement about the successor to Mizrahi was simply to leave the position unoccupied.[56] Subsequently, the authority of the chief rabbinate was replaced by a number of local rabbis who assumed the leadership of communal affairs, undertaking the judicial and spiritual functions, as the heads of the Jewish congregations.[57] In this context, one can observe different organizational patterns that appeared by the sixteenth century in the Ottoman cities with Jewish congregations.

Just as the way in which the Ottoman Jews were organized transformed substantially over time, the Jewish communal structures of the same period changed significantly from one city to another. Emphasizing the absence of a single pattern of communal leadership, Hacker specifies two models of organization that were practiced by the sixteenth-century Ottoman Jewish communities. While cities like Salonica, in which a Jewish community had not existed before the coming of Iberian Jews, accommodated a relatively strong and autonomous community leadership, the

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[54] Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 204.
[55] Hacker, "The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth Century," 123; Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 69.
[56] Epstein, *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and Their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, 68-9.
[57] Ibid., 69.

diverse composition of Jewish population in Istanbul hindered the centralization of rabbinic authority.[58]

## 2.5 Intellectual milieu

The revival of Rabbinic scholarship and religious education, sponsored by the prospering Jewish merchants from the sixteenth century onwards, gave birth to the emergence of new centers of Sephardic culture within the Ottoman lands such as Istanbul, Salonica, and Safed.[59] Hacker points out the spread of Torah studies among the general public of the Jewish community in Constantinople based on the contemporary Jewish scholarly writings in the second half of the sixteenth century.[60] The emergence of public interest in the higher levels of religious knowledge, he maintains, was enabled primarily by the arrival of Iberian Jewish scholars to the Ottoman lands and the extending use of the printing press in reproducing the religious literature in Hebrew starting from the sixteenth century.

The advent and rapid proliferation of Hebrew printing after the flow of Iberian Jews to the Ottoman cities vividly illustrate the dynamics and character of the sixteenth-century revival of Jewish intellectual life in the Empire. The first printing house in the Ottoman lands was established in 1493, or 1504, by the Ibn Nahmias brothers who had fled Spain and arrived at the Ottoman capital ensuing the Expulsion.[61] In just two decades after the Ibn Nahmias brothers' initiative; there were eight Jewish printing houses in Constantinople alone, established largely by the

[58] Hacker, "The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth Century," 118.
[59] Ibid., 17-8.
[60] Hacker, "The Intellectual Activity of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," 99-100.
[61] Offenberg, "The Printing History of the Constantinople Hebrew Incunable of 1493," 226.

second generation of the same family.[62] The printing houses in the capital city published 115 Hebrew books until 1530.[63] The Constantinople printing house was followed by new ones in the other Jewish cultural centers of the Empire such as Salonica, Cairo, Adrianople and Safed during the sixteenth century.[64]

A closer look at the first books printed in the Jewish printing houses in the Ottoman Empire gives us some clues about the aims and characteristics of the early printing activities of the Jewish community. *Arba'a turim* (Four columns), a well-known Hebrew Halakhic code composed by Jacob ben Asher (d. 1340), was the first book published in Constantinople printing house.[65] The voluminous work, which covers basically every aspect of Jewish life from the Halakhic perspective, had become a basic reference book in Jewish law among European Jews.[66] *Arba'a turim* was followed in 1505 by the printing of the Torah and other selections from the Hebrew Bible such as *Hamesh megillot* (Five scrolls) and *Haftarah*, which were publicly recited in the synagogue as part of the Jewish liturgy.[67] Maimonides' (d. 1204) seminal code of Jewish law, *Mishneh Torah* (The repetition of the Torah), was another classical Hebrew text published by Constantinople printing house in 1509.[68] The selection of the books to be reproduced in Constantinople suggests that the printing houses undertook the mission of transferring the religious classics that had been known to the Iberian Jews to the Ottoman lands.

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[62] Hacker, "Authors, Readers and Printers of Sixteenth-Century Hebrew Books in the Ottoman Empire," 49.
[63] Ibid., 24.
[64] Ibid., 17.
[65] Ibid., 22.
[66] Kupfer and Derovan, "Jacob Ben Asher," 30.
[67] Meral, "Osmanlı İstanbulu'nda Yahudi Matbaası ve Basılan Bazı Önemli Eserler," 458.
[68] Ibid., 459.

## 2.6 Jews in the Ottoman court

The birth of the Sephardi courtier class dates back to the tenth-century Muslim Spain in which the educated Jews had been serving the Andalusian caliphs mostly as physicians, but also as advisors, financiers, and even high-ranking administrators.[69] The Jewish presence in the court continued after the end of Muslim rule in Spain. A number Jewish courtiers attended high positions particularly in the Kingdom of Castile during the twentieth century.[70] The early Aragon monarchs, who had established themselves in lands newly conquered from the Muslims, also favored Jews at the court during the same period. However, the attitudes of the Christian rulers dramatically changed in the early thirteenth century when the Jewish courtiers were forced to convert to Christianity to keep their positions.[71]

The presence of Jews in Ottoman court was not an exception even before the coming of Sephardim. Ottoman chronicles recorded many Jewish subjects who served the Sultan in different occupations and ranks during the fifteenth century. An outstanding example was the glittering career of a Jewish physician Jacopo of Gaeta, later known as Hekim (Physician) Yakub or Yakub Pasha (c. 1430-1484), at Mehmed II's service. After identifying him as a competent physician and a Jewish convert, Taşköprizade (d. 1561) reported in his biographical work *Shaqā'iq al-nu'mānīya* that the sultan had appointed Hekim Yakub as *defterdar* (treasurer) and then vizier.[72] Later in the same century, Mustafa Âli claimed that Yakub had been allowed by Mehmed II to remain Jewish under his service, but had become Muslim later on.[73] The *şeyhülislam* and historian Kemalpaşazade (d. 1534), on the other

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[69] Stillman, "The Emergence, Development and Historical Continuity of the Sephardi Courtier Class," 17–20.
[70] Schwarzfuchs, "Spain," 73.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Taşköprizade, *Osmanlı Bilginleri (Eş-Şakâyıku'n-Nu'mâniyye)*, 192.
[73] 'Ali, *Künhü'l-aḫbār*, 2:221.

hand, lengthily praised Yakub's piety and scholarship with no mention of his Jewish past.[74] Additionally, he maintained that Yakub had demanded his dismissal from the position because of health problems and that he was then given the governorship of Salonica (*Selanik emâreti*), a city inhabited mostly by Jews, indicating Ottoman willingness to benefit from his previous connections with the Jewish community.[75] The intriguing relationship between Yakub and the Jewish community was also raised by a contemporary of Yakub, Aşıkpaşazade, in his magnum opus, *Tevârih-i âl-i Osmân.* In marked contrast with the two later historians, Aşıkpaşazade criticized Yakub for favoring the Jewish community and violating the traditional Ottoman policy of keeping Jews out of the administrative circles:

> He brought about innovations (*bid'at*) that had been previously unheard of and unseen throughout the Ottoman land. Until his time, they had not assigned Jews to the Sultan's personal service on grounds that they were troublemakers. When Hekim Yakub became vizier, all the destitute Jews became involved in the Sultans' service.
>
> A Joke: It is reported that when Hekim Yakup arrived one day at the Friday mosque, the Jews of Istanbul got very upset.[76]

This joke is interesting as demonstrating a sense of skepticism towards the converts' social belonging to the Muslim community on the side of the learned Muslims. A further example for Aşıkpaşazade's apprehension about the non-Muslim converts to Islam who gained a positon in the imperial administration is his remarks on Rum Mehmed Paşa, a *devşirme* grand vizier of Greek origin in the time of Mehmed II. He accused the grand vizier, who is identified as "a son of infidel", of conspiring with the Greek community to halt the reconstruction of Constantinople following the conquest.[77] Rum Mehmed's contacts with the members of his former community were considered as a peril to his loyalty to the sultan. These examples

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[74] Kemalpaşazade, *Tevârîh-i Âl-i Osmân VIII. defter*, 236.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Aşıkpaşazade, *Âşıkpaşazâde Tarihi*, 297-8.
[77] Ibid., 193.

might also be connected with increasing emphasis on the sharia principles by the Ottoman scholars, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

This chapter has discussed some features of the Ottoman Jewry until the first decades of the sixteenth century. It has demonstrated that the Sephardic influx to the Ottoman lands brought about significant changes in the administrative, religious and intellectual patterns of the community. It also increased the visibility of Jews in the Ottoman imperial court. The changes discussed in this chapter were fundamental for the broader socio-cultural, political and intellectual context in which Muslims and Jews encountered each other in the Ottoman realms in this period. However, to properly understand Muslim-Jewish relations in the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Bayezid II, we must examine more broadly the Ottoman politics of religion in this period. This will be the task of the following chapter.

# CHAPTER 3

# BAYEZID II AND THE OTTOMAN JEWS

Considering that the two polemics studied in this thesis were written during the reign of and dedicated to Bayezid II, it makes sense to look in some detail at the relations between this sultan and the Ottoman Jews. The present chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, I point out some contextual features of the interplay between politics and religion during Bayezid's reign, while in the subsequent part I discuss the state of the Ottoman Jewry in the wake of the Sephardic influx to the Ottoman lands with particular emphasis on the imperial attitudes towards the ongoing arrival of the Sephardim. The primary objective of this chapter is to offer a contextual background for the discussion of the two polemics and their writers.

## 3.1 Religion and politics during Bayezid II's reign

To clarify the imperial concerns of the Ottomans vis-à-vis the political challenges in the east and the west, a brief account of the imperial relations with neighboring powers is in order. This section is followed by a more detailed part devoted to the changing dynamics of the politics of religion in the empire following the rise of Bayezid II to the power.

### 3.1.1 Inter-imperial politics

It is generally held both by Ottoman historians and modern scholars that the reign of Bayezid II was characterized by a shift from his father Mehmed II's policy of constant campaigns in the west and the east to a reluctance to involve in war, though the explanations regarding the underlying reasons vary significantly. Perhaps the new

sultan wanted the Ottoman treasury to recover from the exhausting repercussions of the successive wars that intensified during the past several decades.[78] The more apparent reason for Bayezid's policies of appeasement towards the neighboring powers was his brother, Cem (1459-1495), who following the death of Mehmed II in 1481 had taken refuge first in the Mamluk Sultanate and then with rival European powers. The presence of Cem in the hands of the Pope, Hungary, and Venice created a real threat to Bayezid's rule and forced Bayezid to compromise with them.[79] Therefore, it was possible only after the death of Cem in 1495 for Bayezid to engage in warfare against Venice and Hungary. The rift between the Ottoman Empire and its European rivals continued until the first years of the sixteenth century when the involving parties signed peace treaties again.

As for the east, Bayezid II was preoccupied with the challenges from two Muslim rival dynasties: the Safavids and the Mamluks. Controlling Egypt, Syria and the holy lands of Islam, the Mamluks had been a major rival in the east since the 1460s, the period in which Mehmed II had gradually shifted his focus from Christian Europe to the Muslim East.[80] It was during the reign of Bayezid II that this rift between the two Muslim powers transformed into warfare. The protection provided to Cem in Cairo and the Mamluk support to the latter's second attempt to seize the Ottoman throne in 1482 triggered further hostility on the Ottoman side and paved the way for successive Ottoman offensives to the Mamluk territories in southeastern Anatolia and Syria starting in 1485.[81] According to the Ottoman ruling discourse, the Mamluks with non-Muslim slave origins had no right to rule the Holy Cities of

[78] Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650*, 37.
[79] İnalcık, *Devlet-I 'Aliyye*, 131.
[80] Har-El, *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East*, 79.
[81] Boyar, "Ottoman Expansion in the East," 91-2.

Islam.[82] Exhausted by six years of inconclusive warfare the two sides agreed to return to the pre-war situation and put an end to the war in 1491, which confirmed Bayezid's lack of success in undertaking the initial goal of containing the Mamluks. The conciliatory period marked the rise of the imperial diplomacy between the two Muslim powers, which lasted until Bayezid's abdication from the Ottoman throne in 1512.[83]

An emerging cause of concern in the east for Bayezid was the consolidation of Safavid rule under the charismatic leadership of İsmail who had taken advantage of the power vacuum caused by the waning of Akkoyunlu authority in Iran and eastern Anatolia. When İsmail had proclaimed himself Shah in 1501 the news caused excitement not only in Iran but also in the Ottoman lands, where there were many followers of the Safavid sheikh/shah known as *kızılbaş.* This dynastic confrontation with Safavids led the Ottoman administration to take measures against the dissemination of Ismail's ideas among Ottoman subjects, a key aspect of the broader process of what is called "Ottoman Sunnitization".[84] While one can trace Bayezid's anti-*kızılbaş* attitudes as far back as 1488,[85] clearer signs of precautions such as the sultanic orders for the registration and punishment of alleged Safavid sympathizers and prohibition of passing through the lands of Iran emerged following İsmail's ascendancy.[86]

[82] Yüksel Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 135.
[83] See Ibid., 156–75.
[84] See Terzioğlu, "How to Conceptualize Ottoman Sunnitization."
[85] Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict*, 84-5.
[86] Emecen and Şahin, *II. Bayezid Dönemine Ait 906/1501 Tarihli Ahkam Defteri*, 8 (hüküm no:27), 126 (hüküm no:154).

### 3.1.2 The consolidation of Sunni identity

During the second half of the fifteenth century, the role enjoyed by state mechanisms in implementing the Sunnitization project was accompanied by the strengthening of the position of the madrasa-trained ulema as champions of “Sunni orthodoxy” as opposed to “heresy”.[87] Policies applied by Bayezid II shortly after his rise to the Ottoman throne were appealing to the prevalent objections raised against the practices of Mehmed II, which were condemned for their incompatibility with the sharia. Contemporary chroniclers, Tursun Bey, Aşıkpaşazade, and Kemalpaşazade praised Bayezid II who, they wrote, restored the primacy of the sharia by revoking the controversial financial measures and land reforms implemented by his father.[88]

The transformation of the religiopolitical milieu under Bayezid II’s rule was manifested in the changing urban landscape of the Ottoman capital. While the number of churches converted to mosques was rather limited during the reign of Mehmed II, it became a more common practice under Bayezid II.[89] Furthermore, the same period witnessed a marked increase in the number of Sufi convents in the capital city. This was a corollary of more inclusive policies towards the Sufis during the reign of Bayezid II. This architectural practice was in striking contrast with the architectural patronage of Mehmed II, that was characterized by the separation of Sufi lodges from the mosque in the Complex of Mehmed II as a manifestation of Sufis distance from the state.[90]

This wave of Islamization in the time of Bayezid II leads us to look at the imperial policies concerning the non-Muslim population of the empire. By testing whether this period witnessed similar measures against non-Muslims, particularly

[87] Terzioğlu, “How to Conceptualize Ottoman Sunnitization,” 309.
[88] Atçıl, *Scholars and Sultans in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, 91-2.
[89] Kafesçioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 204.
[90] Ibid., 191.

Jews, we can discuss how far it is possible to interpret the polemics under study as belonging to a broader imperial project of Islamization.

### 3.2.3 Imperial policies concerning Christian communities

In the same vein with the imperial recognition of the head of the Jewish community in Constantinople following the conquest, the Greek and Armenian Orthodox Churches in the new Ottoman capital had their leaders, who were held responsible for the state-community relationships.[91] According to the model of the *millet* system, from the formative period of the Ottoman Empire, the non-Muslim subjects (*zımmi*s) had been defined primarily with reference to their membership to particular religious communities, which were granted autonomy in their communal organization. However; recent literature, bringing the archival evidence into primary focus and keeping a distance from the widespread use of the *millet* framework, has critically revisited the Ottoman administrative relationships with the non-Muslim communities.

The archival documents demonstrate that even though the appointment of Greek Metropolitans by the Ottoman government had been already practiced at least since the beginning of the fifteenth century, the first patriarch was appointed by a decree of Mehmed II in the wake of the conquest of Constantinople.[92] Emerging historiography on the legal status of the Greek Orthodox community has convincingly questioned what was in fact granted to the appointed patriarchs, who have been supposed to enjoy extensive ecumenical rights all over the Ottoman territories.[93] In the light of these revisionist considerations, it has been argued that the Greek patriarch was not appointed as the leader of all members of the Greek

[91] İnalcık, "The Status of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch under the Ottomans," 408.
[92] Ibid., 415.
[93] See Papademetriou, *Render Unto the Sultan*, 19–62.

Orthodox community in the empire during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[94] An imperial order (*berat)* issued by Bayezid II in 1483, for example, counted the names of the limited number of metropolitan sees over which the authority of the appointed patriarch was recognized. As specified in the same document, the rights of the patriarch were also specifically defined as the appointment of his servants, control over the church property, collection of taxes from the community and judicial authority in intracommunal issues including marriage, divorce, and inheritance.[95] The privileges provided by the Ottoman rulers to the patriarch came in turn for the financial responsibilities of community leadership. The basic obligation of the patriarchs, who were basically considered as tax-farmers (*mültezim*) by the Ottoman authorities, was to collect and hand in the taxes imposed on the members of the community to the imperial treasury.[96] This suggests that the relationship of the Greek communities with the Ottoman administration was to a great deal limited to the affairs concerning the fulfillment of financial obligations as defined by the Ottoman authorities.

The second major Christian communal organization recognized by the Ottoman administration as of the late fifteenth century was the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchy. The widespread historical narrative has maintained that unlike the Greek Orthodox Church, which had already existed during the Byzantine period, the Armenian Patriarchy was a corollary of the Ottoman takeover of Constantinople.[97] It follows that the Armenian Patriarchy was first established with the selection of the bishop of Brusa (Bursa), Joachim, as the communal leader in Constantinople by Mehmed II in 1461. However, this account, K. Bardakjian contends, stands

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[94] Greene, *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks, 1453 to 1768*, 29-30.
[95] Ibid., 30-1.
[96] See Chapter II "The Patriarchal Tax Farm" in Papademetriou, *Render Unto the Sultan*, 105–78.
[97] Kenanoğlu, *Osmanlı Millet Sistemi*, 105.

unfounded despite its popularity on the grounds that it is mostly based on an eighteenth-century Armenian narrative instead of relying on contemporary sources.[98] He argues that extant historical sources do not provide satisfactory information about the status, rights, and obligations defined to the Patriarchate of Constantinople by the Ottoman government. Armenian sources dating from the period between the 1460s and the turn of the eighteenth century, he maintains, did not refer to the Patriarchate of Constantinople as superior to the other ones across the empire.[99]

While the scarcity of the authentic historical evidence blurs the characteristics of state-community relationships, this may also indicate that Ottomans did not implement a single set of policies, like *millet* system, concerning the administration of non-Muslim subjects as for the fifteenth century. Highlighting the lack of a single pattern for the imperial attitude towards the communal organizations of Greeks, Armenians, and Jews in the Ottoman lands, B. Braude concludes that "the Ottomans had no consistent policy toward the non-Muslims in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries".[100] He also argues that non-Muslim accounts narrating "foundation myths" of their communal organizations were mostly characterized by an attempt to relate their leaders to Mehmed II, which might be for tactical reasons rather than describing a historical fact.[101]

## 3.2 Ottoman Jews during Bayezid II's reign

The primary aim of this section is to reveal some features of Bayezid II's relations with Jews as well as Jewish converts. The historical sources pertaining specifically to the issue, however, are both quantitively and qualitatively inadequate to offer a

[98] Kevork B., "The Rise of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople," 89.
[99] Ibid., 92.
[100] Braude, "Foundation Myths of the Millet System," 83.
[101] Ibid., 75.

proper understanding of the contacts between the sultan and his Jewish subjects. Apart from the few documents that will be quoted in the present chapter, the Ottoman archival sources remain generally silent about the characteristics of the Ottoman-Sephardi encounter. While the rabbinical sources express the viewpoint of the Jewish scholarly elite concerning the Jewish conversions to Islam, there are only few sources that give us insight into the interplay between the imperial authorities and the Jewish community. Among them, we can mention Jewish chronicles that discuss Bayezid II and his time, but which tend to project a rather idealized picture and to give conflicting information.

Considering both the methodological pitfalls stemming from the lack of historical sources and the necessity to look at the issue from a broader perspective, the present section frequently makes use of our knowledge about the sultan's contacts with Christians and Christian converts. The section starts with some remarks on non-Muslim and converted courtiers during Bayezid II's reign. This is followed by a contemporary Jewish narrative including some interesting comments on Bayezid II's attitude towards the Iberian Jews. The third and last section deals with the Jewish conversions to Islam, a significant phenomenon which was directly related to the two polemicists studied in this thesis.

### 3.2.1 Non-Muslims and converts at the service of Bayezid II

The sultan's servants of non-Muslim origin were composed mostly of former Christians who had become Muslim as part of the *kul* system. The major source of recruitment to the palace service in the late fifteenth century was the collection of the Christian war prisoners at early ages, i.e. *devşirme*, which had been practiced since the early fourteenth century to select and train those who will serve the Ottoman

palace and Janissary army. It is also known that many members of the Christian elites in the Balkans served in the Ottoman palace in high ranks after the Ottoman takeover of the cities that they had inhabited.[102] While the Ottoman recruitment policies had been systematized and centralized to a great deal during the reign of Mehmed II,[103] further attempts in the same vein were made by Bayezid II, who issued a decree regulating the practice of making levies from the war captives in the Balkans.[104] Under the rule of Bayezid II, *devşirme*s attained high positions in the imperial service, an element of continuity with the policies of his father. The relationship between Bayezid and the *devşirme* courtiers draws further attention considering the key role they played in the course of his ascendancy to the Ottoman throne. Among the prominent supporters of Bayezid's sultanate against his brother were *devşirme* courtiers including *muhafiz* of Istanbul İshak Pasha, *Beylerbeyi* of Anadolu Sinan Pasha and *Aga* of the Janissaries Kasım Pasha.[105] Their support, according to İnalcık, was a response to the resentment among the *kul* during the last years of Mehmed II's reign. Eliminating the grand vizier Karamani Mehmed Pasha who was accused of keeping the *kul* outside of the high-ranking positions, *devşirme* courtiers enabled Bayezid II to attain the Ottoman throne. Moreover, Cem's succession, İnalcık argues, was fiercely opposed by the members of the *kul* based on their impression that he would maintain his father's warlike policies.[106]

The previous chapter has demonstrated that the Ottoman palace hosted a multitude of Jewish courtiers qualified mostly in medicine. The Jewish influx from Iberia to the Ottoman lands paved the way for the increasing visibility of Jews in

[102] For remarkable examples of the members of The Byzantine elite who served the Ottoman imperial court during the period after the conquest of Constantinople see, Greene, *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks, 1453 to 1768*, 23–28.
[103] Özcan, "Devşirme," 254-5.
[104] Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650*, 132f; Akgündüz, *Osmanlı Kanunnameleri ve Hukuki Tahlilleri*, 2:123-5.
[105] Turan, "Bayezid II," 235.
[106] İnalcık, *Devlet-I 'Aliyye*, 129-130.

Bayezid II's court. Among the Iberians moving to the Ottoman land were the distinguished families whose members served in the Christian and Muslim kingdoms in Spain and neighboring countries. Their arrival at Constantinople in the early sixteenth century aroused the interest of the Ottoman palace in a short while. In the 1510s, a member of a notable Sephardi family from Granada, Joseph Hamon, entered the service of Bayezid II.[107] His position in the imperial court marked the beginning of the successive family members' employment as physicians of the Ottoman sultans.[108] Before arriving in the Ottoman lands, the Hamon family had already been a family of widespread renown in Spain for their ranks in the courts, including Joseph's father who had served the Muslim ruler of Spain as a physician.[109] Joseph's quick rise in the Ottoman palace shares the family's ability to continue the hereditary career in medicine in their new land.

### 3.2.2 Iberian Jews and Bayezid II as reflected in a Jewish chronicle

Eliya Capsali (c. 1483–1555), who had completed his chronicle, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* (The Little Order of Elia) in 1523, was the first Jewish chronicler to pen a sizable work devoted exclusively to the history of Ottoman Empire.[110] As a member of a leading Jewish family in Crete, Eliya was a rabbi who cultivated a strong interest in the history of Venice and the Ottoman polity, and in the struggle of the two powers for the domination of the western Mediterranean.[111] Despite being a subject as well as a servant of Venice, the Capsalis were well acquainted with the Ottoman dynasty thanks also to Eliya Capsali's great uncle, Moses Capsali, who was appointed as the

[107] Şişman, "Hamon, Joseph."
[108] Murphey, "Jewish Contributions to Ottoman Medicine, 1450-1800," 64-5; Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*, 87.
[109] Marcus and Bornstein-Makovetsky, "Hamon," 311-2.
[110] Jacobs, "Exposed to All the Currents of the Mediterranean: A Sixteenth-Century Venetian Rabbi on Muslim History," 34.
[111] Paudice, "Elia Capsali," 2.

first chief rabbi by Mehmed II. In the *Seder,* glorifying the Ottoman victories over Christian Europe as well as over the Muslim Mamluks as messianic events, E. Capsali provided heroic accounts of the Ottoman sultans, Mehmed II, Selim, and Suleyman, with a special emphasis on the benefits that the Jewish community enjoyed during their reigns.[112]

E. Capsali's account on Bayezid II, however, was not as simple as those of the three victorious sultans. On the one hand, he seems most appreciative of the sultan's welcoming attitude towards the Jews expelled from Iberia:

> Just as God deliberately brought evil upon the King of Spain, so He brought good upon Sultan Bayezid –for he receiving the Jews cordially, with love and brotherhood and great affection.[113]

He narrated that the sultan ordered the local governors to accept the demands of the Jews to move to the Ottoman lands and to treat them in a good manner.[114] Ottoman archival documents dating from the same period support E. Capsali's account in terms of the approval of the sultan for the European Jews' settling in the Ottoman towns. Two imperial orders (*ahkam,* s. *hüküm*) sent to Rumeli qadis in the summer of 1501 report the cases of two Jews from the Italian cities of Korfoz and Apulia (Pulya) requesting to settle in the Ottoman lands with their families.[115] Both orders stipulated that the two Jews and their families should be allowed to reach whatever Ottoman port they prefer, and that their safe and easy arrival should be sustained by the local governors.

On the other hand, in the parts dealing with the period after the arrival of the Jews to the Ottoman lands, E. Capsali depicted Bayezid II in a significantly different

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[112] Bahar, *Jewish Historiography on the Ottoman Empire and Its Jewry from the Late Fifteenth Century to the Early Decades of the Twentieth Century*, 46-7.
[113] Elia Capsali, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta,* quoted in Hacker, "The Sürgün System and Jewish Society in the Ottoman Empire during the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries," 20.
[114] Elia Capsali, Seder Eliyahu Zuta, quoted in Arslantaş, *Yahudiler ve Türkler*, 255, 271.
[115] Emecen and Şahin, *II. Bayezid Dönemine Ait 906/1501 Tarihli Ahkam Defteri*, 15, 58.

way. The following section deals with the Jewish resentments that emerged during the rule of Bayezid II and which lie beyond E. Capsali's negative remarks about Bayezid II.

### 3.2.3 Jewish conversions to Islam

The phenomenon of Jewish conversions to Islam in the context of the early modern Ottoman Empire has been rarely echoed in the historical sources on the both sides of archival documents and Jewish writers. For this reason, we have to make use of the sources dealing indirectly, as well as briefly, with the Ottoman Jews who converted to Islam.

Ottoman archival documents include examples of Jewish conversion to Islam, albeit limited in number. Two imperial *ahkams* sent in 1501 to the qadi of a town in Rumeli, Kesriye (Kastoria), deal with the case of two girls who were entrusted by their Jewish father to a Muslim during his travel. The Jewish plaintiff claimed that the Muslim refused to give his daughters back claiming that they had both become Muslim. While the first *hüküm* demanded that the girls be released, if the Jew is right, another *hüküm* sent some ten days following the former one ordered the qadi to send the girls to Istanbul for further investigation.[116]

When it comes to Jewish sources from the period one comes across complaints by several writers. For example, for all his general depiction of Bayezid II as welcoming and favorable to the Iberian Jews, E. Capsali's chronicle contains remarks concerning the restrictions and coercions that the Ottoman Jewish community was more subjected to during the reign of the same sultan. He claimed, for example, that Bayezid II ordered the closure of the synagogues that had been

[116] Ibid., 62, 101.

built during Mehmet II's reign.[117] Referring to the period when the Sephardim arrived at the Ottoman lands, he mentions the forced conversion of some Jews to Islam, a clear divergence from his previous remarks on the era of Bayezid II:

> He [Sultan Selim] even restored to Judaism many Jews whom the Turks had forced to convert contrary to their own wishes [118]

Albeit the unreliable aspects of Capsali's account, his remarks stand interesting as they demonstrate negative image of Bayezid II in the eyes of some Jewish writers. A closer look at the responsa literature of the sixteenth century reveals a parallel sense of apprehension on the side of rabbinic authorities about an existing wave of conversion. The responsas of the Salonican rabbi, Samuel de Medina (c. 1505-1589), for example, contains a number of cases concerning Jewish conversions to Islam.[119] While the active years of Samuel as rabbi of Salonica did not coincide with the reign of Bayezid II, his collection is still worth mentioning as it includes firsthand accounts of cases of conversion during the same century from a rabbinic perspective. Jews becoming Muslims were depicted, and stigmatized, as acting out of their immediate personal interests such as being able to divorce and marry another person. At this point, there is no mention made by Rabbi Samuel of direct involvement of the Ottoman administrators in forcing the Jews to embrace the Muslim faith.

In the same vein, a contemporary of Samuel and the leading rabbinic authority in Cairo before and after the Ottoman takeover, David ibn Abi Zimra (1480-1573), complained about the members of the Jewish community who threatened the rabbinic authorities with conversion in the case that the latter attempt

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[117] Elia Capsali, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta,* quoted in Epstein, *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and Their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, 29.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Goodblatt, *Jewish Life in Turkey in the XVIth Cntury as Reflected in the Legal Writings of Samuel de Medina*, 104.

to punish them for their sinful deeds.[120] In a question addressed to Rabbi David the situation of Jews who were being forced to convert to Islam is asked:

> Suppose a Jew is forced to turn to Mohammedanism. Should he be ready to sacrifice his life rather than accept Mohammedanism? Or since this religion is not idolatrous but holds strictly to Monotheism, should a Jew not sacrifice his life, but adopt it? [121]

The reply given by R. David begins with a complaint that many Jews in his time consider it to be permissible to embrace the Muslim faith in such cases of compulsion. According to R. David embracing Islam means approval of Muslim disrespect for the Torah of Moses and "a Jew should be ready to sacrifice his life rather than violate one single commandment".[122]

As a conclusion of this chapter, the presence of a shared concern for the conversion in the side of Jewish accounts indicates a perceived phenomenon of the Jews embracing the Muslim faith in the Ottoman lands. However, I could not detect an imperial role in the conversion of Jews to Islam. While the reign of Bayezid II was characterized by a wave of prosecutions against heterodox Muslim groups, especially the *kızılbaş*; there is no evidence for the exposure of the Ottoman Jews to imperial attempts of Islamization. Except for the few aforementioned imperial orders, which deals with issues involving several Jewish converts, no archival source, as far as I know, recorded the involvement of the imperial authorities in their conversions to Islam. Neither do we know of a wave of prosecution or of forced conversions of Christian communities *en masse* during the reign of Bayezid II. In this regard, this chapter goes against a premise of the framework of "the Ottoman Age of Confessionalization", which emphasizes social disciplining accompanying with confessional polarization. More importantly, there is no ample evidence to

[120] Goldman, *The Life and Times of Rabbi David Ibn Abi Zimra*, 130.
[121] Ibid., 62.
[122] Ibid.

suggest that converts became a target of imperial indoctrination based on “the true” interpretation of Islam. Furthermore, we do not have signals demonstrating that there emerged a social reaction on the side of Muslim subjects directed against Jews in the same period. This explains why the discourse of “confessionalization from below” also fails to explain the rise of anti-Jewish polemical genre in the Ottoman Empire. In conclusion, this chapter has suggested that the explanatory power of confessionalization paradigm substantially decreases when it comes to the case of the polarization between Muslim and Jewish doctrines.

# CHAPTER 4

# ANTI-JEWISH POLEMICAL LITERATURE

# BEFORE AND AFTER THE OTTOMANS

The following chapter proposes a historical survey of Muslim polemical literature directed against Judaism from the first centuries of Islam to the fifteenth-century Ottoman Empire. In the following pages, I will attempt to shed light on the formation and transformation of Muslim polemics as a literary genre. Identifying the characteristics of the Muslim apologetical texts would help us to situate the two Ottoman treatises under study of this thesis in the literature of interreligious polemical writing.

## 4.1 Muslim polemical literature against Judaism

The history of anti-Jewish polemical literature in the Islamic world dates back to the early ninth century in which Muslim scholars of various disciplines penned treatises devoted exclusively to the refutation of other religions. While the earliest texts are not extant, we know of them because they are mentioned in a tenth-century bibliographical work, *Al-fihrist*. Based on this knowledge, the earliest polemical tracts against Judaism can be identified as having been written by *the Mu'tazilī* theologians al-'Asam (d. ca. 815), Bishr bin al-Mu'tamar (d. ca. 825), and Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf (d. ca. 840). They were titled *Kitāb al-radd a'la al-Yahūd* (A book of reply to the Jews) and *Kitāb a'lā al-Yahūd* (A book on the Jews), which later became generic names for mediaeval polemics.[123]

[123] Adang and Schmidtke, "Polemics (Muslim-Jewish)."

‘Alī ibn Sahl Rabbān al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 865)’s *Dīn wa dawla* (Religion and empire) stands out as the earliest extant writing that can be classified as a polemical work.[124] The author identified himself as a Christian convert to Islam who had served at the courts of Karinid and Abbasids rulers.[125] Despite his renown primarily in medicine, his polemical book deserves particular attention as it set the pattern followed by the medieval Muslim polemicists writing against Judaism. *Dīn wa dawla* was his second polemical work preceded by the refutation of his former religion in *Al-radd a’lā al-Naṣāra* (A reply to the Christians). In the opening pages of *Din wa dawla*, al-Ṭabarī argued that doubts about the history of the Prophet of Islam are among the fundamental reasons given to explain people’s objections to Islam, and therefore, must be refuted by telling the true history.[126] Attributing the conflict of various religions to contradictory historical accounts, al-Ṭabarī attempted to show how the believers of other religions distorted the stories of the past. He included the miracles of the Prophet Mohammad to prove his prophethood and then mentioned the prophecies of previous prophets about Mohammad. In the latter section, the author made extensive use of biblical scriptures, which would become prevalent in the medieval polemics written by Muslims.

While many Muslim scholars followed these early examples when composing anti-Jewish treatises, it is only with the works of the Andalusian *ẓāhirī* polymath, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) that we can talk about the formation of a genre of Muslim polemics against Judaism. Even though the argumentative methods used by Ibn Ḥazm had been already employed in earlier polemical treatises and kalam works, his systematic criticism of biblical texts served as a model for the Muslim polemicists in the

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[124] For a brief account of the early-20th century controversy on the authenticity of the work see Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*, 1997, 27-8.
[125] Thomas, “Al-Ṭabarī.”
[126] Tabari, *The Book of Religion and Empire*, 4-5.

following centuries. His magnum opus *Kitāb al-fisāl fī al-milāl wa al-nihāl* (The book of groups and sects) proposes a detailed critical examination of other religions from both a theological and historical perspective. *Al-radd 'ala Ibn al-Naghrīla al-Yahūdī* (A reply to Ibn al-Naghrila the Jew) is another polemical work written by Ibn Ḥazm in response to an anti-Islamic polemic penned by a contemporary Jewish scholar known Ibn Naghrīla, or Shemu'el haNagid. Ibn Ḥazm's significance for Muslim polemical literature lies mostly in his theoretical discussions. There he made use of textual evidence from the Bible, on *takhrīf* (distortion of the Torah), and argued that the Jews had not only corrupted the meaning of their scripture (*takhrīf al-ma'nā*). in the act of interpreting it, but had also corrupted the text itself (*takhrīf al-nass*).

A later influential polemical text directed against Judaism was penned by Samaw'al al-Maghribī (d. 1175), a Jewish convert from Morocco. *Ifhām al-Yahūd* (Silencing the Jews) includes themes that became prevalent in Muslim polemics following Ibn Ḥazm such as *takhrīf*, *naskh* (abrogation of previous laws), and *bashara al-nubuwwa* (the announcement of the coming of Mohammad in the Bible). Al-Maghribī also introduced new arguments such as the rejection of the alleged Jewish belief that Ezra was the son of God.[127] A further peculiarity and pioneering aspect of *Ifhām al-Yahūd* was the attachment of the conversion narrative of the writer to the polemical text.

In the autobiographical part of *Ifhām al-Yahūd*, al-Maghribī gave an account of his course that had led him to embrace the Muslim faith in a gradual way. Having been brought up in a religious Jewish family, he was rather astonished when he read basic Islamic texts from the Qur'an to the life story of the Prophet Mohammad, as

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[127] Taş, "Yahudi Asıllı Mühtedî Bilgin Samuel Bin Yahyâ El-Mağribî'nin (Ö. 1175) Yahudiliğe Reddiyesi," 248.

Islam presents an alternative to the Jewish religion, which was as convincing as the latter.[128] He argued that "making reason the supreme arbiter" he came to see no difference between the self-referential claims of any religion, which relies exclusively on the knowledge transmitted by their believers, on the grounds that no one historical account is more reliable than the others.[129] He narrated that this period of uncertainty in his life was abruptly changed with 'the divine guidance' in the form of dreams in which the prophets Samuel and Mohammad awakened him. Al-Maghribī noted that it was not the dreams that led him to embrace Islam, but they encouraged him to adopt and declare the truth that he had reached through his intellectual efforts.[130]

Later polemicists defending Islam against Judaism seem to have stayed loyal to the model set by Ibn Ḥazm and al-Maghribī's well-known polemical works. One can easily discern that both the content and the way of argumentation of these writers did not change significantly following the thirteenth century. A survey of the biblical passages quoted as testimonies to Prophet Mohammad indicates that the six polemicists very rarely used biblical quotations other than the verses that appeared in Tabarī's *Din wa dawla*.[131]

Neither were the later polemicists innovative in terms of the format of their works. Their way of arguing mostly adhered to Ibn Ḥazm's systematic format.[132] Furthermore, the personal narrative of a learned Jew's intellectual path to Islam, frequently supported by a dream, appeared in the works of many medieval Muslim

[128] al-Maghribi, *Ifḥām Al-Yahūd*, 79.
[129] Ibid., 80.
[130] Ibid., 87-8.
[131] Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*, 1997, 164-6.
[132] Adang and Schmidtke, "Polemics (Muslim-Jewish)."

polemicists, who integrated autobiographies into the argumentative corpus of their texts following the example of al-Maghribī.[133]

## 4.2 Other literary genres using polemical arguments

The argumentative style adopted by Muslim writers on Judaism cannot be limited to the polemical literature consisting of works devoted entirely to the refutation of other religions or beliefs. Possibly inspired by the Quran's way of countering the believers of other religions, many scholars of kalam and tafsir from the very first centuries of Islam incorporated arguments directed against other religions, including Judaism, into their works.[134] Such concepts as *naskh* and *takhrīf* that we come across in the polemical tracts were widely discussed in the Quranic exegeses and theological works starting in the early Islamic period.[135]

In addition to the literature of religious disciplines, several medieval Muslim historians presented their own accounts of the Jewish people and their beliefs in a critical tone. The ninth and tenth-century historians al-Ya'qubī and Al-Mas'ūdī, for example, incorporated narrations of Jewish history into their universal histories with an emphasis on intra-religious discussions among Jewish denominations.[136]

## 4.3 Ottoman-Muslim polemics against other religions until the 1500s

From the end of the fourteenth century, polemical literature in the Islamic world lost its popularity in general. A bibliography providing a comprehensive list of Arabic polemical and apologetical tracts demonstrates a steady decrease in the number of

[133] García-Arenal, "Dreams and Reason," 97–99.
[134] Adang, "Medieval Muslim Polemics against the Jewish Scriptures," 143.
[135] Adang and Schmidtke, "Polemics (Muslim-Jewish)."
[136] Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*, 1997, 38, 78–83; Tarakçı, "Tahrif," 422-4.

polemics written between the early fifteenth and late sixteenth centuries.[137] As for the Ottomans, I have found no mention of a polemical text written against Judaism before the last years of the fifteenth century either in pre-modern or modern bibliographical studies or in the catalogs of manuscript libraries. In the same vein, these sources did not record any copies or translations of the such medieval polemical works, which had widely circulated across the Arabic-speaking regions.

This does not mean that Ottoman intellectuals had not been engaged in the religious discussions in any way until the late sixteenth century. It is known that early Ottoman sultans were interested in polemical conversations between Ottoman and Byzantine religious scholars. The late-fifteenth century revival of polemic as a literary genre must be connected with these earlier face-to-face theological discussions, some of which written down by the contemporaries. The earliest ones of such dialogues are narrated to have taken place between Byzantine nobles or clergymen and Ottoman scholars. In the first example, the Metropolitan of Thessalonica, Gregory Palamas, who had been taken hostage by the Ottomans in 1354 engaged in several debates about various religious topics with the Muslims in front of the members of Ottoman dynasty including the sultan, Orhan, himself.[138] The second example is from 1391 in which the Byzantine Empire, Manuel II Palaeologus was reported to engage in a lengthy theological discussion with a group of Muslim scholars in the presence of Bayezid I during a joint campaign to the east.[139] There was also a hagiographical narrative of a later interreligious polemical

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[137] Steinschneider, *Polemische und Apologetische Literatur in Arabischer Sprache Zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden*, 426.
[138] Zachariadou, “Religious Dialogue between Byzantines and Turks during the Ottoman Expansion,” 292.
[139] Ibid., 294.

dialog in 1439 that involved a Christian soldier in the Ottoman army and educated Muslims.[140]

From the mid-fifteenth century, in which the Ottoman scholarly production was flourishing, one can discern growing interest in the intrareligious polemics. A remarkable work, in this sense, was Khojazāda (d. 1488)'s *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (The incoherence of the philosophers) composed by the order of Mehmed II who demanded a refutation of Islamic philosophy taking al-Ghazzali's famous treatise with the same name as model. Adhering to al-Ghazzali's method of argumentation he pointed out logical flaws in thoughts of the mediaeval Muslim philosophers, as well as in al-Ghazzali's counter-arguments, from a rational perspective adopted by kalam theologians.[141]

Muslim and Christian polemical narratives that widely circulated from the fifteenth century especially in the Balkan regions of the empire should also be mentioned. Many Muslim hagiographies, i.e. *menakıbname*s and *velayetname*s, depicted Christians, being a priest, soldier or layman, who embraced Islam at the end of debates about religious matters with Muslims. The Muslim debater in such narratives appeared mostly as Sufi saints or heroic characters with deep knowledge about the Bible.[142] In such stories, the Christian arguments were mostly refuted with references to the biblical passages, which, unlike other parts, were claimed to be not distorted by Christians.

This chapter has explored the anti-Jewish polemic literature in the Islamic world until the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire. It has suggested that while the Muslim authors from early centuries of Islam penned polemics within a specific

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[140] Ibid., 290.
[141] See Shihadeh, Ayman. (2011). Khojazāda on al-Ghazālī's Criticism of the Philosophers' Proof of the Existence of God. In International Symposium on Khojazada (22-24 October 2010 Bursa): Proceedings (pp. 141–61). Bursa.
[142] Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam*, 67–69.

structural form, writers from different branches of religious disciplines, as well, discussed and refuted the Jewish faith in their works. The Ottomans were from an early period interested to discuss the beliefs of other religions, particularly Christianity. Nevertheless, coming to the late fifteenth century, Ottoman intellectuals still had not composed interreligious apologetical works following to the structure of the polemical genre. Instead, the polemical literature of the period seems limited to the inner-Islam debates given that the refutations of other religions had been written integrated into other popular genres, particularly hagiographies. It has been suggested in this chapter that the appearance of the first Ottoman polemics against Judaism was connected with the increasing numbers and visibility of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire. This chapter had also revealed that among the known Muslim polemical, or pseudo-polemical, texts Jews had never been targeted by Ottoman writers until the late fifteenth century. In other words, the simultaneously appeared treatises by Abd al-Salam and Abd al-Allam stand out as the first known Ottoman apologetics directed against Judaism.

# CHAPTER 5

# THE TWO POLEMICAL TEXTS AND THEIR AUTHORS

This chapter focuses on two late-fifteenth century polemical treatises directed against Judaism and their authors. First, I will explore the two polemicists, Abd al-Salam al-Muhtadi and al-Salam Abd al-Allam, who penned the two earliest Ottoman interreligious polemical text available to us. To this end, I will primarily make use of the contemporary Ottoman chronicles in addition to the short autobiographical notes in the two polemicists. This will be followed by some remarks on the available copies of the two treatises. The second part is devoted to the textual analysis of the two texts under study. The textual examination concentrates on the methods of argumentation as well as the formal features that the two polemicists adopted.

## 5.1 About the treatises and their writers

### 5.1.1 The author of *Hādiya*: Abd al-Salam al-Muhtadi

*Hādiya* provides rather limited information about its writer. Following the starting lines of praising God and the prophet Mohammad, the writer introduces himself as Abd al-Salam al-Muhtadi al-Muhammadi.[143] The text does not include any further information about his occupation or family background. The autograph manuscript of *Hādiya* bears the date of 1497, when Bayezid II had been on the throne for sixteen years. Additionally, an explicit reference to Bayezid Khan as the name of the current sultan also confirms that Abd al-Salam lived during the reign of Bayezid II.[144]

Aşık Çelebi who completed his famous *tezkire*, *Meşairü'ş-şuara* in 1568, is the earliest Ottoman writer to provide additional information about Abd a-Salam. In

[143] Abd al-Salam, "The Rightly Guiding Epistle (Al-Risāla Al-Hādiya) by ʿAbd Al-Salām Al Muhtadī Al-Muḥammadī: A Critical Edition," 446.
[144] Ibid., 447.

an anecdote about the poet Basiri, he tells a joke Basiri made about a *kazasker* (military judge), Sarıgörez Nureddin Efendi (d. 1522) whose son married a daughter of Abd al-Salam.[145] According to the anecdote the marriage was viewed in a *meclis* as unreasonable on the ground that while Sarıgörez's son came from a *sipahi* (cavalry) family, Abd al-Salam's daughter was from among scholars (*ehl-i ilm).* It is interesting that Aşık Çelebi does not accept Sarıgörez as a scholar despite his renown, whereas he identifies Abd al-Salam's daughter coming from an ulema family. In fact, normally a defterdar would not be considered a scholar. This might be an indicative for Abd al-Salam's scholarly credentials independently of his position. After introducing Abd al-Salam as a *defterdar* who converted to Islam from Judaism, Aşık Çelebi pokes fun at the marriage by ascribing its reason to the Jewish background of Abd al-Salam. He maintains that what relates the two family was "the association of his head with the color of yellow (*başdan sarı münasebeti*)", an implication to the same colors of Sarigörez's hair with Jewish turban.

The well-known Ottoman bureaucrat and historian Mustafa Âli (d. 1600) in his chronicle, *Kunh al-akhbār* yielded additional information about the author of *Hādiya.* Listing the *defterdars* and *nişancıs* of the period of Selim I he includes Abd al-Salam. He identifies Abd al-Salam as a Jewish convert in the position of defterdar and he qualified him as a rich benefactor who had an imaret and medrese in Küçükçekmece neighborhood of Istanbul.[146] Mustafa Âli narrates a conversation that took place between Defterdar Abd al-Salam and Selim I about the construction of a pavilion for the sultan in Istanbul.[147]

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[145] Aşık Çelebi, *Meşa'irü'ş-Şu'ara*, 1:423.
[146] "*Hayli mal-dar ve bül'l hayrat namıyla bizzat iştihar bulmui adem idi*" Mustafa Âlî, *Kitâbü't Târih-i Künhü'l-Ahbar*, 2:1187.
[147] Ibid.

Katip Çelebi (d. 1657) in his bibliographic encyclopedia, *Kashf al-zunun,* refers to Abd al-Salam's polemical text under two titles. In the section of the title of *al-Hādiya,* the epistle is described as following:

> A tract that refutes Judaism. Its writer is the defterdar Abd al-Salam who converted to Islam from Judaism. He had memorized the whole Torah; after that he was appointed as *defterdar* in the period of Sultan Selim. This person has a mosque and several foundations.[148]

In the other section, in which the title of the work is given as *Risāla al-hādiya*, Katip Çelebi describes Abd al-Salam as a Jewish covert again and informs about the content of his polemical work by listing the titles of its three chapters.[149]

In the same period, Evliya Çelebi (d. ca. 1684)'s famous travel account makes a brief mention of Abd al-Salam in the chapter he wrote on the *defterdar*s and ulema in the period of Selim I. In the same vein with the earlier sources, he introduces Abd al-Salam as a Jewish convert who became defterdar owing to his expertise in accounting.[150] Unlike Katip Çelebi, Evliya does not mention about *Hādiya* or any other work written by Abd al-Salam.

Both the physical leftovers of the buildings and archival documents confirm the information yielded by Mustafa Âli and Katip Çelebi about Abd al-Salam's philanthropic activities. According to the *vakfiye* of Abd al-Salam's waqf dating 931 (1525) the complex contained a number of buildings including a medrese, an imaret, a tomb and a fountain.[151] The only surviving building of the original complex today is the tomb of Abd al-Salam. The inscription (*kitâbe*) of the tomb recorded that Abd al-Salam died in 933 (1526-7).[152] Another building constructed by Abd al-Salam was

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[148] Kâtip Çelebi, *Keşfü'z-Zünun*, 2:1626.
[149] Ibid., 2:731.
[150] Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi*, 1:143.
[151] 14. Harameyn vakfiyesi, 420 as cited in Pakalın, *Maliye Teşkilatı Tarihi (1442-1930)*, 1:140; Şahin, "Küçükçekmece Tarihi," 79.
[152] *Tesbih edip melekler eder dua ve tarih / Abdüsselamına olsun darüsselam mesken 933*

a mosque in Hasköy, called as Abdüsselam Mescidi.[153] This neighborhood in Istanbul stands out as a remarkable selection as it was inhabited predominantly by Jews including the newly arrived Sephardim.[154] A further example of Abd al-Salam's interest in the Jewish quarters of the city appears in S. Yerasimos' study on the Jewish communities in Constantinople in the sixteenth century. His examination of the waqf registers reveals that Abd al-Salam was among the Muslim ruling elite who showed an increasing interest in buying properties in the Jewish neighborhoods in order to sustain their waqfs.[155]

The aforementioned historical sources dating to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries provide largely consistent information about Abd al-Salam and his work. They completely agree that Abd al-Salam was a Jewish convert who served as a *defterdar* in the court of Selim I. Later sources, however, draw a different picture of Abd al-Salam, as a *seyyid* from Egypt who was brought to Istanbul following Selim I.

Among the sources of this rather different depiction of Abd al-Salam was the *kitâbe* of a fountain in the Abdüsselam Complex. According to this *kitâbe,* the fountain was constructed in 1795/6 by a trustee of the Abdüsselam Waqf, who was also a descendant of Abd al-Salam.[156] Far from mentioning the founder's Jewish origins, the *kitâbe* identifies Abd al-Salam as a *seyyid* denoting his lineage to the Prophet Mohammad.

The nineteenth-century bibliographer Mehmed Süreyya's *Sicill-i Osmani*, perhaps relying on the inscription, provides similar information about the person he identifies as *Seyyid* Abd al-Salam with no reference to *Hādiya*:.

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[153] Ayvansarayi, Sâtı, and Besim, *Hadıkatü'l-Cevâmi'*, 394.
[154] Göncüoğlu, "Hasköy," 388-9.
[155] Yerasimos, "La Communauté Juives d'Istanbul À La Fin Du XVIe Siècle," 126.
[156] Aksu, "Küçükçekmece'de Emini Çeşmesi'nin Kitabesi," 61-2.

> He is a son of *Seyyid* Abd al-Allam. Brought to Istanbul after the conquest of Egypt, employed in accounting affairs and ascended to the position of *defterdar*. In 932 (1526) he left [his position] and died when residing in Küçükçekmece. He was buried in his [complex containing] medrese and imaret that he had constructed. He has a mosque in Hasköy and a school in Küçükpazar. He was a skillful person who changed the rules of *siyakat* script.[157]

While the polemicist refers to Bayezid II as the sultan of his time and the autograph manuscript of his polemical text is dated 1497, other sources seem to agree that he lived during the reign of Selim I who was on the throne between 1512 and 1520. It would be reasonable to explain this difference by supposing that he had not yet been a *defterdar* when he penned *Hādiya,* but, he was later appointed as *defterdar*, during or after Bayezid II's reign, and served Selim I.

E. İhsanoğlu argues that there are in fact two people by name of Abd al-Salam, who have been mistakenly deemed as the same person. He maintains that *Defterdar* Abd al-Salam was a Muslim-born person who came from Egypt and who endowed many charitable foundations including the one in Küçük Çekmece. In his opinion, the other person, Abd al-Salam al-Muhtadi, however, was a Sephardic convert who served both Bayezid II and Selim I, and also penned *Hādiya.* Additionally, İhsanoğlu speculates that Abd al-Salam al-Muhtadi should be the same person with the famous Iberian Jewish scholar specialized in medicine and astronomy, İlyas bin İbrahim (Abram), who converted to Islam and became known later as Hoca İlya(s) al-Yahūdī following his arrival to Istanbul.[158] When attempting to reconcile the conflicting information about Abd al-Salam, İhsanoğlu's equation of Abd al-Salam with Abram is completely unfounded as he fails to provide any supportive evidence. When it comes to his second claim that *Defterdar* Abd al-Salam

[157] Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmanî Zeyli*, 3:337.
[158] İhsanoğlu, *Büyük Cihad'dan Frenk Fodulluğuna*, 89.

and convert Abd al-Salam were two different people, İhsanoğlu ends up disregarding Abd al-Salam's introduction of himself as a *defteri* in *Hādiya.*

At this point, it is likely that the narratives in later sources tracing Abd al-Salam's lineage to the Prophet Mohammad were fabricated by his descendants who attempted to conceal the Jewish past of the Abd al-Salam. My contention is based on the fact that the earliest source mentioning Abd al-Salam as an Egyptian *seyyid* is a *kitâbe* constructed by a descendant of Abd a-Salam. It is also remarkable that these sources do not mention Abd al-Salam's composition of *Hādiya* in which he proclaimed himself to be a former Jew.

### 5.1.2 The author of *Ilzām*: Al-Salam Abd al-Allam

Right after introducing himself as al-Salam Abd al-Allam, the writer of *Ilzām* tells that he was a Jewish convert to Islam who "had been from the Israelites (*banī israʾil*) and the group of rabbis (*zumra aḥbārahum*)".[159] The multitude of references to the views of Jewish scholars in the text and his acquaintance with the intra-religious discussions support his claim of being a former Jewish scholar. While the exact years of birth and death of Abd al-Allam are not known, several references to Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512) in the text, including his dedication of the epistle, indicate that he was a contemporary of the sultan who ruled from the year 1481 to 1512.

Unlike Abd al-Salam's *Hādiya* we are unable to trace *Ilzām* and his writer in the Ottoman bio/bibliographic sources. Therefore, the name Al-Salam Abd al-Allam might be a pseudonym the writer used to imply his being a scholar as well as a convert. The Arabic word *al-salām* shares the same root with *Islam. Abd al-ʿallām* literally means the slave of the All-Knower (God). The lack of historical evidence

[159] MS Fatih 2994, 2b.

about our polemicist lead us to think the possibility that the polemicist created a fictitious character in order to make the arguments more convincing by constructing the text as if written by a former Jewish scholar. Therefore, the text remains as the only means to test the self-narrative of the writer, which will be discussed when it comes to the textual analysis of *Ilzām* in the following sections.

### 5.1.3 The circulation of the two texts: Notes on the manuscripts

A relatively high number of copies located in distant cities of the empire from Manisa to Erzurum shows that Abd al-Salam's *Hādiya* began to circulate beginning right after its composition to the nineteenth century. I could track *Hādiya* in eight manuscripts dating from the years between 1497 and 1851. It stands in contrast with Abd al-Allam's *Ilzām,* which is extant as a single manuscript.

The earliest copy of Abd al-Salam's treatises is held in the Collection of Bayezid II in Topkapı Palace Museum Manuscript Library.[160] Entitled, most probably by the librarian, fully as *Risāla al-hādiya fī ibṭāl hucac al-Yahūd ʿalā al-Islām min qibal ʿilm al-kalām* (A guiding epistle that refutes by the science of kalam the proofs of the Jews about Islam), the date of writing was noted as 19 *Gamada al-ākhir* 902 (22 February 1497) in its colophon placed on the opening page. The stamp of Bayezid II on the first and last pages demonstrates that it belonged to the collection of the sultan. The initial page also bears Osman III (1699-1757)'s stamp indicating that it was later recorded in the Nuruosmaniye Collection.

The collection of Manisa Public Library contains another early copy of *Hādiya* dated 905 (1499/1500).[161] The copy does not contain a colophon or stamp describing the manuscript or its holder. Its simple style and material used in this

[160] MS TSMK A. 1735.
[161] MS Manisa 8061.

manuscript give the impression that it was not intended for the use of the imperial elite as it was the case for the Topkapı copy.

A miscellaneous volume recorded in the catalog of Leiden University Library includes a copy of *Hādiya*. The volume with an unidentified *tughra* consists of Persian-Turkish vocabularies, a Persian treatise on arithmetic, Arabic epistles and grammar notes scribed in different hands.[162] Among them, the only dated text is a Persian-Turkish dictionary that was copied in 1568 according to its colophon. The content of the volume gives the impression that its intended readers were well-educated Turkish-speakers.

A copy of *Hādiya* appearing in a collective volume listed in the catalog of Erzurum Manuscript Library demonstrates the reception that the treatise attained even in the Ottoman lands far from the capital.[163] Copied in Constantinople in the year 1572, Abd al-Salam's polemical text was placed at the first in the array of the content which consists of epistles and literary works mostly written in Arabic and Persian. Among them, the works of three *şeyhülislam*s, Ebussuud, Ali Cemali and Ibn Kemal as well as the *divan* poet Lami Çelebi (d. 1532)'s Turkish commentary on *Gulistan* of Saadi Shirazi stand out.[164]

S. Schmidtke has identified that an untitled text in Süleymaniye Library is an incomplete copy of *Hādiya* the introductory lines are missing.[165] The colophon attached to the text indicates that it was composed in Constantinople in the year 1581. The voluminous composition contains forty-four texts written in Arabic and

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[162] MS Leiden Or. 17.054, 125b–127b as cited in Witkam, *Inventories of Oriental Manuscripts in Leiden University Library*, 18:18.
[163] MS Erzurum 24053/1; 1b-8b.
[164] MS Erzurum 24053.
[165] MS Laleli 3706/36, 385a–393a as cited in Abd al-Salam, "The Rightly Guiding Epistle (Al-Risāla Al-Hādiya) by ʿAbd Al-Salām Al Muhtadī Al-Muḥammadī: A Critical Edition," 444.

Turkish in a multitude of fields including fiqh, hadith, theology, history, and literature.

Two collective volumes from the eighteenth century held in the Süleymaniye Library include two additional copies of *Hādiya.* The volume dated 1719 shares the compositional elements of the preceding collections that included Abd al-Salam's work. It contains Arabic and Persian poems as well as Turkish essays on the Arabic language.[166] Dated 1790 the other copy is located in a volume which composed of other polemical texts.[167] Among them are the epitomes of thirteenth-century polemicists, al-Hussein al-Ca'farī (d. 1221) and al-Qarāfī (d. 1285)'s epistles on the alterations made in the Christian and Jewish scripts.[168] A Turkish apologetical treatise entitled as *Tabyīn al-rashād li ahl al-'inād* (The demonstration of the right path for the obstinate) within the same volume deals with what was framed as the misleading beliefs of the Christians and the Jews and proposes a survey of the Bibles.[169]

Princeton University Islamic Manuscripts Collection holds the latest dated manuscript copy of *Hādiya* from the year 1851.[170] The volume includes an epistle containing al-Ghazzāli's (d. 1111) answers to the eschatological questions and the Moroccan Christian convert Abdullāh al-Tarjumānī (d. ca. 1432)'s polemical treatise directed against Christianity.

As for Abd al-Allam's polemical work, we have a single copy held in Fatih Collection of Süleymaniye Library, which was entitled fully as *Risāla al-ilzām al-Yahūd fī mā zaʿamū fī' al-Tawrāt min qibal ʿilm al-kalām* (An epistle compelling the

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166 MS Reşid Efendi 01039/7, 68-86.
167 MS Esad Efendi 6/5, 203–210.
168 Ibid., 6/1-2.
169 Ibid., 6/3.
170 MS Garrett no. 974H.

Jews by the science of kalam concerning what they alleged about the Torah).[171] This undated manuscript consists of twenty-one folios. The stamps bearing the name of Bayezid II on the first and last pages, like the Topkapı copy of *Hādiya,* are indications that it belonged to the sultan's collection located in the Topkapi Palace. The title and name of the author at the top of the first page seem to be written by the same person, most probably the collection's librarian, who notes the same information about the text and its writer in the Topkapı copy of *Hādiya*. The rarity of the tract accords with the lack of any reference to the text and its writer in relevant historical sources. At this point, it appears that the treatise was far from reaching the level of reception that Abd al-Salam's epistle enjoyed.

## 5.2 Textual analysis

The two polemical works under study similarly divide their arguments into sections. In the starting pages of *Ilzām*, Abd al-Allam tells that he will discuss nine biblical verses in two sections. The first section deals with the verses concerning the prophethood of Mohammad, which is followed by another section on the biblical passages disproving the Jewish arguments for the perpetual validity of Jewish religion.[172] Right before involving in the polemical discussions, Abd al-Salam maintains that he divided *Hādiya* into three sections.[173] The first two sections of Abd Al-Salam's work are titled almost identically with *Ilzām* as the refutation of the Jewish arguments based on the Torah and the biblical proofs confirming the prophethood of Mohammad. Unlike Abd al-Allam's tract, however, *Hādiya* contains an additional section devoted to the alterations of some words in the Torah.

[171] MS Fatih 2994, 1a–21b.
[172] MS Fatih 2994, 3b.
[173] MS TSMK A. 1735, 8.

The parts in order examine the textual features of *Hādiya* and *Ilzām* from various aspects in comparative perspective. In the interest of the following pages, I will raise a number of points concerning both the formal structure and the content of the two polemical tracts. Among the chief points that will be raised in this section are the sources, ways of argumentation, linguistic characteristics and rhetorical tools adopted by the two Ottoman polemicists.

### 5.2.1 Narrating conversion: Learned Jews' path to Islam

In the opening pages of *Hādiya* and *Ilzām,* both authors briefly mention that they are converts to Islam from Judaism.[174] The ways in which the two Ottoman polemicists narrate their conversions to Islam are strikingly similar. Right after praising God and telling their names, both polemicists articulate that God guided them to embrace the Muslim faith.[175] Abd al-Salam maintains that as a result of his conversion he became friendly to Muslims and hostile to those who are neither scholars nor students. In a very similar vein, Abd al-Allam narrates that God reconciled his hearth to Muslims (*āhl al-imān)* while turning him away from unbelief (*kufr*) and sins (*athām*).

What differs remarkably in the two self-narratives is the role ascribed to the Torah in their conversions. For Abd al-Allam, the Jewish scripts as "sources of light" were still guiding to the truth even in its distorted form.[176] In contrast with Abd al-Allam, the author of *Hādiya* narrates that he became Muslim after he realized how the Jews had corrupted the Torah.[177] In other words, while in *Ilzām* the Torah is portrayed as a guiding book, the writer of *Hādiya* ascribes his conversion to his realization that the Torah was distorted by the Jews.

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[174] Ibid., 2; MS Fatih 2994, 2b.
[175] Ibid.
[176] MS Fatih 2994, 2b.
[177] MS TSMK A. 1735, 2.

As mentioned in the previous part of this thesis, Abd al-Allam, when describing his life before becoming Muslim, maintains that he had been among the Rabbinic scholars “who were knowledgeable about the verses of their book and traditions (*akhbār*)”.[178] In fact, the conversion of a Christian priest to Islam was a prevalent theme in popular Ottoman narratives about the life of the Muslim saints (*menakıb*) during the fifteenth century even though converted rabbis did not appear in the same literature.[179] Furthermore, I have already pointed regarding the earlier Muslim polemics that many medieval polemicists identified themselves as formerly well-educated Jews. Abd al-Salam and Abd al-Allam’s depiction of their conversion to Islam as an intellectual process particularly reminds of al-Maghribī’s conversion story, which he had integrated into his *Ifhām al-Yahūd*. In a similar manner with Maghribī, both Ottoman polemicists tell that they had closely examined the Hebrew Bible, which led them to embrace Islam.[180]

### 5.2.2 Addressing the Jews in the shadow of the sultan

Whereas Abd al-Allam does not speak to a specified group in his text, Abd al-Salam explicitly addresses the Jews and invites them to Islam. By directing his remarks toward a supposed Jewish audience, Abd al-Salam uses the second-person personal pronoun, i.e. “you”, in addressing the Jews throughout the entire text.

Abd al-Salam threatens his Jewish audience “who stubbornly refuse to [accept] the obvious truth” with a disastrous end in both worlds.[181] He maintains that Jews who refuse to embrace Islam despite the proofs proposed in *Hādiya* will face

[178] MS Fatih 2994, 2b.
[179] Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam*, 68.
[180] MS TSMK A. 1735, 3-4; MS Fatih 2994, 2b.
[181] Ibid., 5.

catastrophic consequences in this world prior to the afterworld punishment when they lose the protection of Bayezid II:

> If you convert to the truth and return to the belief in the book [of the Qur'an] you will be safe under the safety of Islam from the severe end of humanity. And if you do not become Muslim you are not safe from the strict constraints of the sultan, son of the sultan, Sultan Bayezid Khan, may God may help him back the religion and may perpetuate his empire for the sake of the fight against infidels (*kafara*) and unbelievers (*mulḥidīn*).[182]

Abd al-Allam narrates that he had become Muslim in "the shadow (*ẓill*) of a sultan" whom he identifies as "Sultan Bayezid bin Mohammad Han".[183] Bayezid II is described in *Ilzām* as a *mujāhid* and protector of Muslims who "suppressed the unbelievers with the sword of God".[184] In a strikingly similar vein with Abd al-Salam, the compliments to the sultan are followed by Abd al-Allam's lengthy prayer to God for assistance to the sultan's praiseworthy struggle against the unbelievers.[185] He appeals to God to help the sultan in consolidating the religion and divine law (*shari'a*). Furthermore, right before starting the polemical body of his texts, Abd al-Allam tells that he "presented these words to the deputies (*nuwwāb*) of his Sublime Porte expecting mercy and favor from the servants of the high gate".[186] Likewise, Abd al-Salam reveals that his refutation of Judaism served as a means "through which he reached his [the sultan's] service".[187]

Unlike *Hādiya,* it is evident in *Ilzām* that the author had been involved in the face-to-face discussion with Jewish scholars before composing his work. Abd al-Allam reports that the Torah directed him to Islam with the assistance of God following "debates and disputes with the Jewish scholars (*ʿulamā banī israʾil*)" on

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182 Ibid., 6-7.
183 MS Fatih 2994, 4a.
184 Ibid.
185 MS Fatih 2994, 4a-b.
186 Ibid., 4b.
187 MS TSMK A. 1735, 8.

the true interpretation of the biblical verses.[188] Nevertheless, he does not provide any additional information about the nature of these disputes.

Considering the writers' claim to be Jewish scholars with profound knowledge of the Hebrew Bible one would expect these polemics to have been composed in Hebrew instead of Arabic. The reason behind the language choice leads us to think more cautiously about the audience. Even though the texts are framed as if they are addressing the Jews, the expected audience of the polemicists might be learned Muslims. Indeed, it has been demonstrated in the previous section that the polemics were circulated primarily among the Muslim readers who were interested in scholarly and literary works mostly written in Arabic and Persian. Therefore, I consider it useful to make a differentiation between the intended audience and the audience as is presented by the writers. In other words, addressing the Jews might be for rhetorical reasons and, thereby, does not necessarily indicate that the texts were directed toward a Jewish audience.

#### 5.2.3 Using Hebrew sources

The general structure of *Hādiya* and *Ilzām* are based on biblical verses extracted from the Hebrew Bible to refute Judaism in favor of Islam. Before discussing each verse, both polemicists provided a transcription of the Hebrew passage in Arabic letters with vowel marks (*ḥarakāt*), which is followed by an Arabic translation. Compared to Abd al-Allam's treatise *Hādiya* contains a higher number of references to the Hebrew Bible as is shown in Table 1.

[188] MS Fatih 2994, 3a.

Table 1. Number of Biblical References in *Hadiya* and *Ilzam*

| Section Name | Number of Quotations | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Hādiya* | *Ilzām* |
| Invalidation of Jewish proofs | 9 [189] | 4 [190] |
| Announcement of Muhammad's prophethood | 6 [191] | 5 [192] |
| Alteration of the words of the Torah | 3 [193] | |
| Total | 18 | 9 |

The biblical passages quoted by both polemicists in the sections on invalidation of Jewish arguments, whose length vary from a few words to several sentences, are used to refute the eternal validity of Judaism and to prove the cessation of revelation with Prophet Moses. In the sections dealing with the announcement of Muhammad's prophethood it was argued in both treatises that the prophet of Islam had been confirmed by the Torah. In addition to these two common sections, the writer of *Hadiya* devoted an additional short section arguing for the alteration of the words in the Torah based on allegedly contradictory biblical statements.

A closer look at the common biblical references in the two polemics reveals a remarkable correspondence. In the sections about the confirmation of the Prophet Mohammad, three biblical verses were quoted in both *Hādiya* and *Ilzām*.[194] When it comes to the biblical passages used in refutation of the Jewish arguments in order to prove the abrogation of Jewish religion, one verse[195] is quoted by both polemicists. However, these similarities in the use of biblical sources does not necessarily indicate the presence of an interaction between the two texts. The biblical passages

[189] Exod. 31:16; Exod. 21:2-6; Exod. 25:8, 10, 40-42, Num. 23:19; Deut. 13:2-6; Deut. 5:22-24; Deut. 18:16-17; Deut. 5:24, 35, 27, 28; Exod. 20:19; Deut. 12:32; Deut. 33:4 extracted from footnotes by C. Adang in Abd al-Salam, "Guided to Islam by the Torah: The Risāla Al-Hādiya by ʿAbd Al-Salām Al-Muhtadī Al-Muḥammadī."
[190] Deut. 31:19-21; Deut. 30:12-13; Deut. 4:2; Deut. 33:4
[191] Deut. 18:18-19; Deut. 34:10; Deut. 33:2; Gen. 49:10; Lev. 16:3; Gen. 17:15, 20
[192] Extracted form the following verses with small alterations in several times: Deut. 13:1-5; Deut. 18:18; Deut. 34:10; Deut. 18:18-19; Gen. 49:10 compiled from the footnotes by C. Adang in al-Salam Abd al-Allam, "A Polemic against Judaism by a Convert to Islam from the Ottoman Period: Risalat Ilzam Al-Yahud Fima Za'amu Fi L-Tawrat Min Qibal Ilm Al-Kalam," 173-4.
[193] Gen. 12:6, 13:7; Deut. 34:1, 5, 6, 8; Deut. 34:6
[194] Deut. 34:10, Deut. 18:18-9, Gen. 49:10 Ibid.
[195] Deut. 33:4 Ibid.

quoted by both polemicists are already known to us from the previous Muslim polemical literature and, thereby, the appearance of the same verses was very likely in this genre.

Use of Hebrew sources, as well as the frequent references to the Jewish arguments in *Hādiya* and *Ilzām*, demonstrate that Abd al-Allam and Abd al-Salam were highly familiar with the Jewish religious literature. Both writers gave a brief account of how the Jewish exegetes (*mufassir*s) had interpreted the verses under discussion before arguing against their way of understanding of the biblical passages. However, the Jewish views were mostly framed without specifying the name of a scholar or book advocating them. There is a single explicit reference to a Jewish scholar, which was made by Abd al-Salam who quoted the medieval biblical commenter Abraham ibn Ezra (d. 1167). Introduced as "the greatest of the exegetes of the Torah among the Jews", Ezra was referred to as a Jewish scholar who admitted the alteration of the biblical words by calling the inconsistencies in the Torah as secrets rather than offering any explanation.[196]

The way in which the polemicists transliterated the biblical quotations into Arabic letters differs substantially in the verses quoted in both treatises. The same Hebrew letters were swapped with different Arabic letters especially when it comes to the conversion of close sounds. For example, Hebrew letter qof (ק) which was represented in *Ilzām* with the letter of qāf (ق) was transliterated in Hādiya with kāf (ك). More clear variances appear in the representation of the vowels in the two texts. As a result of such differences in transliteration, it became exceptionally rare that a Hebrew word was transliterated in the same way in the two texts. This distinction in the transliteration of the three verses quoted commonly in both texts gives the

[196] MS TSMK A. 1735, 64-5.

impression that the two polemicists had studied the Hebrew scripts independently of each other. Even if the two polemicists were contemporary servants of Bayezid II, an examination on the textual chrematistics of both epistles suggests that they were largely original works penned as products of different readings of the Jewish scripts.

Abd al-Salam reveals his competence in Hebrew and the Torah by making nuanced distinctions between the meanings of the Hebrew words that can be used interchangeably. In several instances, he explains the meaning of a verse by means of other verses. For example, in the invalidation of Jewish arguments regarding the eternal validity of the religion of Moses, he demonstrates that the Hebrew word for eternal is also used in other verses to imply long duration rather than infinity.[197] It is evident that the author of *Hādiya* was informed with the history of prophets as narrated by Jewish sources. In order to prove that abrogation had been already approved in Judaism, Abd al-Salam makes reference to the Jewish historical account to show how the Jews accepted the adjustments of the later prophets to the religion of Moses.[198] A further example for the use of Hebrew sources in *Hādiya* is the narration of a Talmudic story to demonstrate how the Jewish sources admitted that the Torah had been changed by the Jews.[199]

Unlike Abd al-Salam, Abd al-Allam's use of Hebrew sources raises doubts about his knowledge of Hebrew. Examining the language of *Ilzām*, J. Sadan comes to the conclusion that the writer is in fact not an educated Jewish convert contrary to his self-proclamation. His transcription of the verses in Hebrew to Arabic, he argues, indicates that the writer was a Muslim who faultily quoted the biblical passages from a Jewish convert.[200] Sadan interprets the self-representation of the writer as "a

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[197] MS TSMK A. 1735, 9-10.
[198] Ibid., 32-33.
[199] Ibid., 64, 69.
[200] Sadan, "Phonemes and Sounds as Criteria."

tactical step, useful for polemical purposes." In fact, a good deal of discrepancies between sounds in Hebrew and their representation in Arabic letters when transliterating the biblical passages is clearly evident. Therefore, Sadan aptly rejects the writer's claim that he has expert knowledge about the Torah, while his contention about the false conversion of Abd al-Allam requires sounder evidence.

An interesting theme situated in the intersection of the Jewish and Muslim religious literature is the use of numerology in *Hādiya*. In the articulation of the evidence for the Prophet Mohammad in the Torah, Abd al-Salam's last proof is based on gematria, the calculation of the numeric equivalent of letters in the interpretation of the Hebrew scripts. He calls the calculation system as *ḥurūf al-abjad* or *ḥurūf al-jumal al-kabīr*, a reference to a similar system used in the Islamic world to assign numerical values to the Arabic letters.[201] Abd al-Salam describes *ḥurūf al-abjad* as an accepted proof which had been employed by most Jewish scholars. After quoting a biblical passage which was translated by him as "God said to Abraham that I accepted your prayer for Ishmael, then, I blessed and increased their number very much (*bi-maod maod)*",[202] he calculates the numerical value of the word, *bi-maod maod,* announcing the enlargement of Abraham's lineage through Ishmael. According to his calculation, the numerical value of this word, is equal to that of the word Mohammad, who was descendent of Ishmael. Considering Bayezid II's personal interest in number mysticism, Abd al-Salam might also want to appeal the sultan in addition to the intended Jewish audience.

[201] MS TSMK A. 1735, 56.
[202] Quoted from Gen. 17:15, 20 with slight changes. Ibid., 58.

### 5.2.4 Refuting Jewish arguments from an Islamic standpoint

Both in *Ilzām* and *Hādiya* the alleged contradictions in the Jewish arguments stemming from conflicting interpretations of the biblical verses were problematized by pointing to inner contradictions to invalidate counter arguments. For example, Abd al-Allam criticizes the Jewish interpretation of two verses as it poses the problem that the words of God are situated in contradiction with each other.[203] He argues that Jewish explanations fail to propose a coherent understanding of the verses denoting the coming of the Prophet Mohammad. He promotes particular interpretations of the verses under discussion as the only way of reconciling the seemingly contradictory statements existed in the Torah in its present form. Abd al-Salam also pays attention to inconsistencies in the Torah. Differently from Abd al-Allam, however, he regards the problem of conflicting verses as insoluble. Instead of proposing better explanations that would favor the Muslim arguments as Abd al-Allam does, Abd al-Salam prefers to take the contradictions as signs demonstrating the alteration of the Hebrew Bible by the Jewish scholars.[204]

Neither the short autobiographies nor the other historical sources discussed in preceding parts tell anything about the education of the two polemicists after their conversion to Islam. The content and language of the two polemical tracts under discussion give the impression that the authors were well acquainted with the Islamic religious literature. Like the earlier examples of Muslim polemics, neither *Hādiya* nor *Ilzām* follows the structure of works adopted in any Islamic discipline including kalam, which deals with theological discussions. Nevertheless, when arguing against the Jewish interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, Abd al-Salam and Abd al-Allam frequently benefits from concepts borrowed from different branches of Islamic

[203] MS Fatih 2994, 7a-8a.
[204] For example, he argued relying on the inconsistencies in the historical account told in the Bible that the words of God were altered by the Jewish scholars. MS TSMK A. 1735, 62-9.

religious literature. For instance, according to Abd al-Allam, the historical account depicting that Mohammad was qualified with the features that the Torah had announced about the prophet-to-come was transmitted by *tawātur* (common report), a term used primarily in the science of hadith to indicate the broadest authentication of a report.[205] Among most recurrent references to the concepts from Islamic disciplines in two treatises are such technical terms such as *qiyās* (analogy), *tanāquḍ* (contradiction), *burhān* (decisive proof) and *dalīl* (sing).[206] Besides the use of such terminology, Abd al-Salam seems highly familiar with the principles of uṣūl al-fiqh, a religious discipline dealing with sources and methodology of Islamic jurisprudence. For example, arguing against the metaphorical understanding of the word brotherhood in a verse that he interprets as referring to the Prophet Mohammad, whose lineage came from the Prophet Isaac's brother, Ishmael; Abd al-Salam maintains that:[207]

> [U]nderstanding the brotherhood in metaphorical sense (*al-ma'nā al-majāzī*) is rejected given that the texts must be understood in literal sense if there is no necessity [to understand it metaphorically] [208]

At this point, Abd al-Salam alluded to an usul al-fiqh principle which prioritizes the literal interpretation to the metaphorical one in the analysis of religious texts.[209]

### 5.2.5 Originality of the contents

Given that both texts were constructed around the verses extracted from the Torah, a sensible way of testing the originality of the content of *Hādiya* and *Ilzām* is to look at the biblical passages quoted in the two treatises. Comparing the two Ottoman

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[205] MS Fatih 2994, 6a; Juynboll, "Tawātur."
[206] Arnaldez, "Manṭiḳ."
[207] MS Fatih 2994, 7b.
[208] Ibid., 8a.
[209] Koca, "Mecaz," 220-1.

polemicists' use of the Hebrew scripts to the earlier Muslim writers, one can observe the influence of the medieval Muslim polemical literature on the two Ottoman polemicists. Furthermore, an examination of the biblical references made in both texts provides us with significant clues about the similarities between the two treatises under study.

In *Hādiya* and *Ilzām* there are several biblical passages that had appeared in the Muslim polemical literature before. While the two tracts contain verses that quoted by a number of medieval polemicists, the influences of Ibn Ḥazm and al-Maghribī stand out as the most evident ones in both polemical texts.

Of the five verses that Abd al-Salam discusses in confirmation of Mohammad's prophethood, two verses had already existed in Ibn Ḥazm's *Kitāb al-fasl.*[210] Moreover, the numerological calculation of the biblical words that Abd al-Salam proposed to demonstrate evidence for the announcement of Mohammad in the Torah was a repetition of al-Maghribī's calculation in *Ifhām al-Yahūd* for the same verse.[211] Likewise, two of the five quoted verses in *Ilzām* concerning the announcement of the Prophet Mohammad in the Torah had been remarked in Ibn Ḥazm's apologetical works.[212] Another biblical passage in the same section of *Ilzām* had been included in *Ifhām al-Yahūd.*[213] Furthermore, one can easily discern the influence of Ibn Ḥazm on *Hādiya's* section on the alteration of words in the Torah. In this section, Abd al-Allam apparently adopts the literal understanding of the textual corruption of the Hebrew scripts *(takhrīf al-nass)*, which had been formulated first by Ibn Ḥazm.

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[210] MS TSMK A. 1735, 65, 67; Aasi, "Muslim Understanding of Other Religions," 134.
[211] al-Maghribi, *Ifḥām Al-Yahūd*, 46.
[212] Aasi, "Muslim Understanding of Other Religions," 118; Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*, 1996, 196.
[213] MS Fatih 2994, 5a; al-Maghribi, *Ifḥām Al-Yahūd*, 23.

When it comes to the parts concerning the abrogation of Jewish religion in both polemical texts, the use of the Hebrew scripts stands out as relatively original compared to sections on Mohammad's prophethood. I could specify only one biblical reference that had existed in earlier polemical texts and was also included by either Abd al-Salam or Abd al-Allam. A verse cited in refutation of the Jewish interpretation of the biblical passages by Abd al-Salam had appeared partly in the theologian al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013)'s polemical work.[214]

The common biblical references in the two polemics also show a remarkable correspondence. In the sections about the confirmation of Prophet Mohammad, three biblical verses were quoted in both *Hādiya* and *Ilzām*.[215] As to the biblical passages used in refutation of the Jewish arguments in order to prove the abrogation of Jewish religion, one verse[216] was quoted by both polemicists.

Given all the points in this section, the two Ottoman polemicists seem to produce a fair amount of original content within the structural framework adopted by the medieval Muslim polemic writers. In other words, one can hardly differentiate between the earlier refutations of Judaism and the two polemics in terms of formal elements including language usage and argumentation methods. Neither can they be considered as copies of medieval polemics as both writers included new biblical quotations never used before in this genre as far as I can trace. Furthermore, the frequent use of biblical quotations in these polemics supports authors' claim to be Jewish converts.

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[214] Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*, 1997, 211.
[215] Deut. 34:10, Deut. 18:18-9, Gen. 49:10
[216] Deut. 33:4

# CHAPTER 6

# CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have attempted to explore the revival of religious polemical literature directed against Judaism in the Ottoman Empire by focusing on its earliest examples. In particular, I have discussed the possibility of relating the intellectual interest in the interreligious polemics with the particular religiopolitical context in which the two treatises simultaneously emerged. My survey of the respective historical context points to several phenomena and events that might underlie the initiative of the two Jewish converts who were affiliated with the Ottoman government.

On the one hand, I find it significant that the first Ottoman polemical text directed against Judaism appeared precisely in a period when Iberian Jews were arriving at the Ottoman lands *en masse*. The visibility of the Jews in the empire had been already increased with the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, which resulted in the transfer of the Jewish population to the new capital of the empire. The particular context of the fifteenth century in which the Jewish influx from Iberia reshaping the Ottoman demography in favor of non-Muslims might have given rise to a consciousness to defend the Muslim faith on both sides of Ottoman statesmen and scholars. On the other hand, the Ottoman archival sources did not record traces of an imperial project to convert the Jews. Instead, it has been revealed in the third chapter of this thesis that the Ottoman court ordered the local governors to maintain the well-being of the Jews heading to the Ottoman lands. This gives the impression that the growing population of the Jewish community was not a significant source of worry for the Ottoman administration at the turn of the fifteenth century. Relying on these considerations, it would be misleading to relate the appearance of these

polemics directly to a perceived threat against the Jews on the side of the Ottoman state. In other words, the two anti-Jewish texts cannot be considered as a part of, or accompanied by, broader measures taken against the growing Jewish community in the Ottoman cities. Nevertheless, it is likely that the broader context of increasing emphasis on the sharia principles was connected to the appearance of these polemics. The convert courtiers might feel the necessity to prove their sense of belonging to Islam in such an atmosphere.

Personal motivations of the authors should not be overlooked especially when contextual explanations fall short. Given that the polemicists were Jewish converts at the service of the sultan they might intend to consolidate their positions by refuting their former religions. Considering negative connotations attached to the converts by the Ottoman elite it is likely that the authors viewed the composition of anti-Jewish treatises as an effective way of distancing from their Jewish past. While the limited out-of-text information about the two polemics makes impossible to specify the exact motives behind the initiatives of these polemicists, there are some features on which one can develop a discussion about their purposes. The two treatises are apparently structured so as to persuade the Jewish audience to embrace the Muslim faith by abandoning their former religion. However, the choice of Arabic as the language of the treatises suggests that the two treatises were supposed to be circulated primarily among the Arabic-speaking readers, who were predominantly Muslim. In the same vein, the sixteenth and seventeenth-century collective volumes in which *Hādiya* or *Ilzām* appeared were mostly composed of Islamic texts dealing with nuanced issues, which would expectedly interest the Muslims. Therefore, one can infer that these treatises worked primarily as tools for the Islamization of the Ottoman Empire's Muslim subjects more than the conversion of Jews to Islam. Nevertheless, the

popularity of the texts among the Muslim readers instead of the Jews might be an unintended consequence, thereby, does not reveal the initial motives of their authors. Thus, we are still unable to tell if it was an unsuccessful project of converting the Jews or aimed at the Muslims from the very beginning.

The flourishing writing culture from the second half of the fifteenth century might also be connected with the emerging Ottoman interest in the polemical works as manifested in the simultaneous appearance of the two epistles. As the new capital was becoming a cultural center for the Muslim scholars, one can anticipate this vivid scholarly milieu gave rise to the new literary forms. However, I would be still hesitant to call this intellectual context as a primary reason explaining the unprecedented Muslim concern for the Jewish religion. The chapter dealing with the earlier Ottoman apologetical texts has already traced the refutation of Christianity by the Ottoman scholars back to the fourteenth century. In other words, the chief novelty with *Hādiya* and *Ilzām* is not that they marked the beginning of the interreligious discussions. Instead, they stand out as the polemical works directed against Judaism for the first time. Furthermore, if the reviving cultural environment alone can explain the initiatives of the two Ottoman polemicists, then we must expect a parallel development on the side of anti-Christian polemics, which was not the case for the same period. This is why I believe that the primary focus should be laid on the growing visibility of the Jews in the empire to make sense of what was specific about the two treatises.

This study offers to enrich our understanding of the religious politics during the early modern period, and particularly in the time of Bayezid II. First, I contend that the Ottoman confessionalization should not be restricted to the context inter-imperial rivalry over the true Islam. The two anti-Jewish polemics under study

demonstrate that confessional polarization can also be observable in Ottoman Muslims' dialogue with religious groups, which had no direct link with the inter-imperial politics. Reducing confessional polarization primarily to the broader political setting would be misleading in the Ottoman context, a problem caused by uncritical application of the European politics of religion. I would accept that the concept of Ottoman confessionalization might help us understand the implications of Ottoman-Safavid encounter, especially for the social disciplining attempts in two Muslim empires. However, it requires substantial reconsiderations when it comes to the interreligious confrontations. In other words, I have substantial reservations about the use of confessionalization paradigm as a comprehensive theoretical framework for making sense of the broader politics of religion in the Ottoman Empire.

Related to this point, the second suggestion of this study is that there is no essential overlap between political concerns and intellectual ones, even in cases that the authors were courtiers who devoted his work to the sultan. This thesis suggests going beyond the perspective that treats polarization primarily as the repercussions of the regional politics. I have interpreted the two treatises as part of the religious polarization in the side of two Ottoman courtier intellectuals whose concerns were not reciprocated in the imperial policies towards the Jews on the ground. In other words, the intellectuals who were affiliated with the imperial administration might reflect the sharia consciousness of the scholarly elite that could be different, if not independently, from the ruling mentality. What was specific about the late fifteenth century, I believe, was not that it witnessed a growing apprehension of the Ottoman administration towards the Jews. Instead, it was a period when increasing social encounters between Jews and Muslims precipitated new ways of intellectual confrontation through the revival of a literary genre. This thesis, to put it in a

nutshell, has proposed to recognize multiple and asymmetrical roles and actors in the Ottoman politics of religion instead of an uncritical inclination toward confining the scholarly realm to the political sphere without illustrating necessary links between the two.

The significance of these polemics for the polemical literature in the Ottoman Empire is evident in the later examples of the same genre. Ensuing polemical works composed by Ottoman scholars against Judaism suggest that the two polemics under the study of this thesis marked the beginning of Ottoman intellectual interest in the Jewish faith. Taşköprülüzade's well-circulated anti-Jewish polemical text, which stands out as highly influenced by *Hādiya*, and Murat bin Abdullah's polemic directed against Christianity and Judaism are outstanding examples showing that the concern for Judaism on the side of the Ottoman intellectuals continued well into the sixteenth century following *Hādiya* and *Ilzām*. In other words, understanding *Hādiya* and *Ilzām* enables us to track the long-lasting Muslim scholarly perspective towards the Jews and their religion in the early modern Ottoman context.

The Ottoman-Jewish literature directed against the Muslim faith is beyond the scope of this thesis. I believe nevertheless that the issue of polemical dialogue between Muslim and Jewish writers in the early modern Ottoman Empire would only be partially understood if the Jewish side is neglected. Studies in the Jewish literature, however, must involve sources and methods that are substantially different from the examination of Muslim literature. A search for literary works composed by the Ottoman Jews for the refutation of other religions, particularly Islam, would be misleading given the obvious difficulties in writing directly against the dominant and imperially-backed religion. Instead, one must look at the other religious genres, especially exegeses and responsum, in order to trace the Jewish scholarly perception

of Islam in the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, it has been pointed out in this thesis that there was an emerging Rabbinic concern about the wave of Jewish conversion to Islam. This perceived threat on the side of Jewish authorities might lead them to refute the Muslim beliefs, if not in a direct way. Therefore, the illumination of the Jewish response to Muslim faith would require a close examination of the contemporary Hebrew sources which might be characterized by a lesser and ambiguous tone critical of Islam.

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