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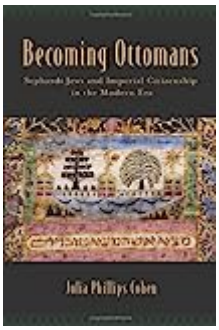

Julia Phillips Cohen. *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 256 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-934040-8.

Reviewed by Yasar T. Cora

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Commissioned by Ari Ariel (Bryn Mawr College)

The ideal of creating a nation of equal citizens from the empireâs multiple ethnoreligious groups (*millets*)âthat is, Ottomanism, which became a dominant ideology of the Ottoman state during the second half of the nineteenth centuryâdisappeared in 1915 with the genocide of Armenians that preceded the empireâs end in 1922. The catastrophic failure to hold the peoples of the empire together has been the point of departure in many studies on Ottomanism that approach the issue by considering the state and its policies, construction, and propaganda written by (mainly Muslim) intellectuals, or by asserting the alleged unwillingness of the Christian communities to pursue that ideology owing to their nationalist and separatist agendas. Julia Phillips Cohenâs book on the Sephardic Jewsâ ordeal with imperial Ottoman citizenship in the last decades of the empire and their active pursuit of patriotism should be considered among the most sophisticated and novel contributions on the topic. The book dismantles the myth that Jewish loyalty to the Ottoman Empire stemmed from the protection and privileges extended to the community after its expulsion from Spain in 1492, a narrative that âtreats modern Jewsâ expressions of allegiance to their empire within a premodern frame, thus bypassing the question of precisely what motivated the particular forms their allegiance took in different contexts and at different momentsâ (p. 138). In the words of its author, the study examines âparadoxes and tensions embedded in the project of grafting models of patriotism and new forms of belonging onto expansive and diverse imperial landscapesâ (p. 18).

Becoming Ottomans is divided into four chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion in which the author examines, respectively, political developments in the nineteenth century (particularly attending to the expansion of civic rights in the empire) and the commitment of Ottoman Jews to their âpatriaâ even after emigration to the New World. In the main body of the book, Cohen, by examining certain moments in the late nineteenth century, demonstrates how commitment to the ideals of Ottomanism, equal citizenship, and patriotism entailed not primordial but ongoing and contested projects. The first chapter, âLessons in Imperial Citizenship,â discusses the emergence of civic models of citizenship and their use by the Jewish elite in the context of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876 and the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877â78. The Jewish elite, as Cohen argues, followed simultaneous projects to âcatch upâ with the other non-Muslim communities in the empire, shaping members of their community into modern imperial citizens. These projects were fostering goodwill among all ethnoreligious com-

munities, raising the social status of their *millet*, and most notably proving that Ottoman Jews were true friends of the empire. The last policy was particularly important in the context of the war, as Jewish leadership not only organized public prayers and charity campaigns in support of the state but also actively participated in the Ottoman war effort. Cohen shows, too, the limits inherent to the project of imperial citizenship at this early stage by examining debates on the potential conflict between Jewish religious obligations and military service and the strike staged by Jewish gunpowder-factory workers in the middle of the war.

The second chapter examines two celebrations in which Ottoman Jews participated, namely, the four-hundredth anniversary in 1892 of the arrival of Spanish Jews in Ottoman lands, and Ottoman Jews representing the empire at the Chicago World Fair in 1893. By organizing and participating in these events, Ottoman Jews aimed âto reinforce their relationship to their state and fashion themselves anew as members of the civilized world and as citizens of their Eastern Empireâ (pp. 47â48). Cohen shows that the first event, initially declared a public festival by Ottoman Jews in the provinces, was transformed into a âdomesticatedâ event in the synagogues, and officially sanctioned by the chief rabbi. The whole episode crystallized the debate within the Jewish *millet* regarding a civic form of patriotism âfrom belowâ and from the provinces, one controlled by the religious hierarchy and central state apparatus. In the second part of the same chapter, the author contends that the Chicago World Fair morphed into a microcosm reflecting the ways that Ottoman Jews saw themselves in the world. They represented the Orient at the fair, and through their role there, Cohen argues, they questioned their identity and their search for an authentic collective self: part of the Orient and part of the Ottoman nation.

Cohenâs third chapter treats relations between Ottoman Jews and the empireâs Christian communities in the double context of the latterâs deteriorating interactions with the state during the Armenian massacres in Istanbul in 1896 and the Ottoman-Greek War of 1897, and the shift from a multiethnic definition of Ottomanism to a profoundly Islamic one. Cohen examines the difficulty that Ottoman Jews faced during this periodânamely, being caught between supporting a civic definition of Ottomanism and integrating into the stateâs Islamic discourses. Ottoman Jews eventually aligned themselves with the second option. The âexcessive patriotism,â Cohen demonstratesâfor example, Jews humiliating Greek prisoners of war while passing through Salonica and some Jews requesting mass conversions to Islam in Izmir while volunteering for the Ottoman armyâundermined the goals Jewish leaders held of being modern and civilized, on the one hand, and being both Jewish and Ottoman, on the other. The last chapter of the book studies various conflicting voices among Jews on the issues of patriotism, identity, and politics after the Constitutional Revolution of 1908. The author focuses on Sultan Mehmet Vâs visit to Salonica in 1911 as a moment when the main political groupsâassimilationists, Zionists, and socialistsâfound opportunities to demonstrate their own approaches to patriotism and loyalty to the Ottoman state in the presence of its head and the bureaucrats accompanying him. Examining public monuments and symbols erected in honor of the sultan by various political groups and individuals, as well as debates within the Jewish community involving the socialistsâ boycott of the visit and the assimilationistsâ alleged participation in their arrests, Cohen brings forward both public and behind-the-scenes expressions and conflicting representations of Ottoman Jewsâand the ways in which they belonged to their community, to the city, and to the empire during this period.

Though this book very aptly demonstrates its main arguments based on extensive research in a variety of archives and Ladino, Ottoman Turkish, and French newspaper collections and visual materials, as well as outstanding analyses of the developments, I draw attention to one particular issue: the formation of Ottoman Jewish political leadership in the period under examination. The author uses the phrase âpolitical leadershipâ to describe the group(s) of people who were active and influential in the politics that defined Ottoman Jewish patriotism; these included religious leaders, merchants, journalists, and representatives of political groups. Although Cohen rightly shows conflict between factions of the âpolitical leadership,â exemplified in the organization of a holiday in 1892 and during the sultanâs 1911 visit to Salonica, she does not intensely discuss whether any change took place in the definition or the constitution of Ottoman Jewish leadership in the period, resulting from great shifts in the Ottoman administration, the administration of the Jewish *millet*, the secularization of politics, and the rise of the press and its role in forming the public sphereâfactors that have been observed in the history of other *millets* to affect their adherence to Ottomanism or to separatist nationalism during this time.[1]

Becoming Ottomans is a very important contribution not only to the historiography of Ottoman Jews but also to nineteenth-century social and cultural history. The

bookâthrough its emphasis on civic agency rather than on state policy, on provinces rather than on the capital, and on a âview from belowâ that looks up from streets, fairs, and local celebrations rather than on official discoursesâis extremely useful to every scholar interested in the dynamics of nineteenth-century Ottoman society in general and in the history of Ottoman Jews in particular. It provides a basis for further debates on the ever-contested history of Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire.

Note

[1]. Dimitris Kamouzis, âElites and the Formation of National Identity: The Case of the Greek Orthodox Millet, Mid-nineteenth Century to 1922,â in *State-Nationalisms in the Ottoman Empire, Greece, and Turkey*: *Orthodox and Muslims, 1830â1945*, ed. Benjamin C. Fortna et al. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 13â47.