



The Jews of Edirne: the End of Ottoman Europe and the Arrival of Borders

by Jacob Daniels (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2025). 324 pp., bibliography, index; £112 (hardcover); £24.99 (paperback). ISBN 9781503642911; 9781503642911

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5. For example, Narges Bajoghli, *Iran Re-Framed: Anxieties of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019); Hesam Forozan, *The Military in Post-Revolutionary Iran: The Evolution and Roles of the Revolutionary Guards* (London: Routledge, 2018); Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam*; Samuel, *The Unfinished History of the Iran-Iraq War*; Bayram Sinkaya, *The Revolutionary Guards in Iranian Politics: Elites and Shifting Relations* (London: Routledge, 2017).
6. Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Defending Iran: From Revolutionary Guards to Ballistic Missiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p.3.
7. See also, Ehteshami, *Defending Iran*, p.146.

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In the last few years, there has been a renewed interest in Eastern Mediterranean Jewish communities and how they lived through the end of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of new nation-states: for example I am thinking of Dina Danon's *The Jews of Ottoman Izmir* (2020), Paris Papamichos-Kronakis's *The Business of Transition: Jewish and Greek Merchants of Salonika from Ottoman to Greek Rule* (2024), *Mi-bayit u-me-hutz: ha-haskalah ha-yehudit ba-'imperiah ha-'otmanit ba-me'ah ha-tesha'-esreh* (Hebrew: 'Home and Away: The Ottoman Jewish Enlightenment in the Nineteenth Century', 2025) by Tamir Karkason or Andreas Guidi's *Generations of Empire* (2022) on Jews, Greeks and Turks in the Italian Dodecanese. Other scholars have published important works on migration and population movements in the late Ottoman period: here, I am referring to Ella Fratantuono's *Governing Migration in the Late Ottoman Empire* (2024) or the fascinating work by Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, *Empire of Refugees: North Caucasian Muslims and the Late Ottoman State* (2024). Notwithstanding these additions, much remains to be researched and several cities and ethno-religious groups are still understudied. Jacob Daniels' *The Jews of Edirne: the End of Ottoman Europe and the Arrival of Borders* tries to fill this gap by focusing on the Jewish community of Edirne, in today's Turkey, between the early 1900s and the mid-1930s.

The book follows a chronological structure and is divided into five chapters, ending with an epilogue that discusses the impact of the Second World War and the Holocaust on the Jews of Edirne. After an introduction that contextualizes this Jewish diaspora in the history of (Jewish) borderlands – from Galicia to Thrace – the first chapter looks at the 'foundations of a borderland community' (p. 21) through an analysis of mobility, networks and economic life in the late nineteenth century and in the early 1900s. The author then moves, in the second chapter, to the investigation of political issues after the Young Turk Revolution and Bulgaria's declaration of independence (1908). These events, in fact, prompted changes in the Jewish community leadership and structure, as well as in associational life. In the third chapter, the Jews of Edirne are approached through the impact that borderland violence had on them in the crucial years between 1912 and 1918 and by analyzing the differences that the making of new borders had for them and for local Muslims and Christians. Zionism

and Hellenism as two not necessarily contrasting ideologies are at the core of chapter four, which confirms how in Thrace – similarly to what happened in other areas of the Levant and the Arab world, such as Egypt or even Iraq – minorities ‘could publicly express loyalty to the state *and* sentiments of communal nationalism’ (p. 148). This was to change from around the late 1920s, as demonstrated in the fifth and last chapter that shifts to borderland intolerance between 1923 and 1934 and how in those years old ethno-national rivalries and stereotypes, together with new forms of antisemitism, consolidated in Edirne and ultimately contributed to the decline of the city’s Jewry.

The Jews of Edirne is a fascinating study of a little-known yet historically relevant Sephardi Jewish community that sheds light on central themes in the history of borders and on how minorities – if one wants to utilize this category – negotiated the passage from imperial formations to nation-states, while living in areas characterized by intense socio-economic and political struggles. Contrarily to what is perhaps too often argued, this study also shows that the decline of the Jewish presence in the post-Ottoman context was not (or at least not exclusively) the consequence of the Arab-Jewish conflict over Palestine or of Zionism, but of a much more complex set of events and ideologies – such as the making of new political borders and the consolidation of stricter national identities in the post-Ottoman era – in which the Jews, as well as other ethno-religious groups, found themselves imbricated. The new socio-political environment that emerged from the 1920s slowly ended the ‘old Sephardi heartland’ that existed, as part of the Ottoman mosaic, from the great Jewish migrations from the Iberian Peninsula in the sixteenth century up to the Holocaust.¹

In addition to this, *The Jews of Edirne* returns to years and events – for example the Balkan Wars – whose historical legacy is still very relevant across Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria and beyond. This helps us broaden the borders of Ottoman and Middle East Studies to include cities and regions that are not so often taken into account. The book interestingly shows how a city at the borders of modern Turkey – and whose Jewish population suffered no major catastrophe, at least until the Second World War and the Holocaust – can constitute a privileged point of observation for reconsidering the history of the post-Ottoman world and its diverse population. Finally, as Daniels notes, *The Jews of Edirne* challenges both ‘lachrymose’ conceptions of Jewish history, but also the opposing narrative that views Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire as a group that ‘enjoyed a happy experience that was insulated from what befell their coreligionists in Eastern Europe and their Christian neighbors down the street’ (p. 181). The post-Ottoman Jewish past is actually much more shaded and cannot be reduced to these two dichotomies. At a time when old and new borders seem to play an increasingly crucial role in the Mediterranean and beyond, *The Jews of Edirne* is an important read that will hopefully be of interest not only to Jewish historians, but to scholars working on South-Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Note

1. Aron Rodrigue, ‘Sephardim and the Holocaust’, *Ina Levine Annual Lecture - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, 2004, p.4, available at: <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20050803-rodrigue.pdf>.

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