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## EDIRNE

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**EDIRNE (Adrianople)**, town in Turkey located in Eastern Thrace near the Turkish-Greek-Bulgarian frontier. According to the 2000 census, the city's population was recorded as 119,316. The city was named after the Roman emperor, Hadrian (125 C.E.). Individual Jews went to Adrianople even before the destruction of the Second Temple, but certain knowledge of a Jewish settlement comes only from the beginning of the **\*Byzantine period**. The Adrianople Jews then traded in textiles, leather goods, and wine. The community is mentioned in connection with the opposition to the messianic ferment in the Byzantine Empire at the time of the First Crusade (1096), and the synagogue of the Greeks (or **Romaniots**), burnt down in 1905, probably dated back to that period.

**After the Ottoman capture** (1361) [rather 1369 or 1370-71] the city, now renamed Edirne, became the new Ottoman capital and the main administrative and military base from where the **\*Ottomans** set off to conquer the Balkans. The city maintained this latter position even after the capital moved to Constantinople/**\*Istanbul** following the conquest of the Byzantine city in 1453. The Ottomans populated Edirne with many immigrants; among them there were a large number of Jews arriving from the newly conquered lands in the Balkans. **The community developed further following the influx of immigrants from Hungary after the expulsion of 1376 and from France after 1394.** R. Isaac Zarefati, the leader of the **Ashkenazi community**, issued an appeal to West European Jews to settle in the **\*Ottoman Empire** (after the capture of Constantinople in 1453). He and his descendants held office until 1722. The Ottomans transferred some of the local Jews to

Constantinople. **After 1492** many exiles from Spain came to Edirne followed by refugees from Portugal, and Italy as well. These new immigrants, who had different customs from the Romaniots, established their own congregations (*kahal*, pl. *kehalim*) according to their place of origin. **In 1656 there were 15 different kehalim**, most of them named after locations in Spain, Portugal, and Italy. On the basis of Ottoman fiscal registers, we can estimate that the city's population in 1580 was around 30,000 inhabitants. During the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the general population grew to about 100,000; many of them arrived in Edirne following the temporary transfer of the sultan's residence to the city (until 1703). At the time the Jewish population of the city grew from **2,500 people to about 5,000**.

\*Shabbetai Zevi was brought to Edirne for questioning before the sultan in September 1666, and after his apostasy, some of his disciples in Edirne also converted to Islam. Shabbetai lived another ten years after his conversion, mostly in Edirne. His influence lingered in the city: Samuel \*Primo (d. 1708), the leading rabbi of Edirne, was a secret adherent of Shabbatean mysticism, covertly giving instruction in it to small groups of followers.

The decline of the Ottoman central authority brought new burdens on the local Jewish community, which had to accommodate itself to the changing local political circumstances. Nineteenth-century developments, encouraged by the new policy of reforms (*tanzimat*) led to the emergence of **a new bourgeoisie** in the non-Muslim communities of Edirne. The Jewish economic elite was composed of moneylenders and traders. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was also marked by deterioration in the relations between the Jews and their Christian neighbors: the Jews suffered, for example, from \*blood libels, spread by the Armenians (1871–72). **The rise of nationalism** in the Balkans was another and much more menacing threat to the community: when the Bulgarians temporarily occupied Edirne during the First Balkan War (March 1913), following a six-month siege, the Jews suffered and many of them found temporary shelter in Istanbul.

**The Ottoman census of 1831**, which counted only the adult male population, registered 1,541 Jewish men in the city. In **1873** there were approximately 12,000 Jews in the city; a report submitted to the

\*Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris in 1897 on the various handicrafts and occupations in the Jewish community mentioned some 815 workers in 47 different categories. The community developed further following the arrival of refugees from the newly established Balkan states. The Ottoman census of **1906–7 put the number of the Jews in Edirne at 23,839**. They lived in various neighborhoods according to their professions. Each neighborhood maintained its own community organization, synagogue, and *bet din* under the general supervision of the city's chief rabbi (the first chief rabbi, *hakham bashi*, was appointed in 1836 as part of the formal recognition of the Ottoman Jewish community as an official one).

Before World War I their numbers rose to 28,000 but thereafter they declined in 1921–22 to 13,000, in 1927 to 5,712 Jews, the community being reduced by 1943 to 2,000. The decline can be explained in part by the changed status of the city which became a border town, in part by the impoverishment due to the wars, which resulted in immigration to \*Salonica, France, and America, and later to Palestine. Apart from the Rabbinate community there was also a \*Karaites community dating from the Byzantine period; among its members was the \*Bashyazi family which became famous in Karaite history. For a time, Edirne was one of the important Karaite centers in Europe. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century no trace of the Karaites remained.

**The Jews of Edirne played an important part in the city's economy.** They traded with Jewish and Christian merchants in other countries, either directly or through the latter's Jewish agents in Edirne. Local Jews held at times the lease (*iltizam*) of the import taxes and manufactured glass. Government taxes were paid on the basis of a fixed assessment which took into account one hundred families, although the number of Jews had increased. These taxes were imposed on the **13** congregations. In accordance with a special *firman* of 1783, the Jewish community was allowed to collect the *gabela*, a tax on meat which covered the poll tax (\**kharaj*), the clothing of the poor, and other communal needs. Tax collectors appointed by the general body apportioned the taxes among the congregations making evaluations every three years. Edirne was long **a center of learning**. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century Mordecai \*Comtino lived there and at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century R. Joseph \*Caro wrote most of his famous *Beit Yosef* commentary there. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century there lived

in Edirne the \*Ibn Verga family and the poet R. Avtalyon b. Mordecai (see Avtalyon \*Modena). In the court of Sultan Mehmet II (1451–81) there was a famous Jewish physician, Hekim Ya'akub, with widespread diplomatic connections. He later converted to Islam.

**The printers** Solomon and Joseph \*Jabez set up a Hebrew printing press in Edirne in 1554 when they fled from the plague in Salonica but returned a year later. During this short period they produced *She'erit Yosef* by Joseph ibn Verga; *Shevet Yehudah* by Solomon ibn Verga; and Joseph Jabez's own commentary on *Avot*. A press reappeared in Edirne only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The last of the rabbis of the **Zarefati** family was Abraham (d. 1722). After his death the jurisdiction of the Edirne Rabbinate was divided between Abraham **Gheron**, Zarefati's son-in-law, and Menahem b. Isaac Ashkenazi (Bekhemoharar), each of whom had his adherents; the **Bekhemoharar** family officiated for approximately 180 years and counted among its descendants halakhists and authors, and the Gheron family officiated for approximately 170 years. Each family maintained its own \**bet din*. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century R. Isaac Molkho, author of *Shulhan Gavoha* (1756), a popular handbook on the laws of *shehitah*, lived in Edirne. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *haskalah* movement penetrated Edirne through the philologist Joseph \*Halevy (1827–1917). While the role of Edirne's *maskilim* in diffusing these new ideas was only secondary when compared to the role of Istanbul or Salonica, we can still recognize some of their contributions: on the request of the *maskilim*, the \*Alliance Israélite Universelle opened a **school** for boys in 1867 and one for girls in 1870. The writer, historian, and poet Baruch b. Isaac Mitrani (1847–1919) taught at the Alliance schools. He endeavored to implement new methods of education. To achieve these aims he established a new school – Akedat Yitzhak – and published books on education in Hebrew and a grammar of spoken Judeo-Spanish. He edited the first **newspaper** that was published in Edirne: *Karmi* (1871–81) and *Kerem Sheli* (1890; in Hebrew and Ladino), calling for Jewish colonization in Palestine and national revival. Abraham \*Danon (1857–1925), a pupil of Joseph Halevy, established under the latter's influence the *Doreshei Haskalah* group and in 1888 edited the historical periodical *Yosef Da'at* (in Hebrew and Ladino) in order to collect and publish Jewish historical studies. The periodical was closed down by the government after a short time. In

1891, Danon opened a rabbinical seminary that taught both secular and religious subjects. The teaching was partly in Turkish – a major innovation for the period. The seminary moved to Istanbul in 1898 with its 11 students. In his writings, he attempted to reconcile traditional and Western knowledge. The **Ladino press** was the major printed product of the period: Joseph Barishak edited the major political-literary Jewish journal of Edirne: *La Boz de la Verdad* ("The Voice of Truth") in 1911–22. Nissim Behar published the weekly *L'Echo d'Adrianople* in French in 1921–22. Many of the graduates of the Alliance joined the newly founded alumni associations. A B'nai B'rith lodge was established in 1911. These associations – including reading clubs and mutual-aid fraternities – were chiefly meant to support and propagate the new trends of modernization among the community's members. In this capacity they contributed to the Westernization and secularization of the local community.

Following the **great fire of 1905** in which all the 13 synagogues of Edirne were burned to the ground, the community constructed a new synagogue in 1907 which was modeled on the synagogue of Vienna. It could accommodate 1,200 worshipers – 900 men and 300 women – and was designated to demonstrate the community's achievements and modernity.



The 1907 Synagogue, in 2009

[Simon Marcus / Eyal Ginio (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)]

**The demise of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Turkish republic put unprecedented pressure on all the Jewish communities of Turkey.** They were required to assimilate linguistically and culturally into Turkish society. This pressure must be seen as part of the overall anti-minority attitude in public opinion in the republic's first years. It seems that the lot of the Jewish community in Thrace (including Edirne) was the harshest. Living in a sensitive border area and remaining the only non-Muslim minority following the transfer of the Bulgarian, Greek, and Armenian populations, the Jews of Edirne suffered from verbal and sporadically physical assaults as well as from legal restrictions on their economic activities. The local Turkish press played a major role in inciting the local population against their Jewish neighbors. **This reached its peak with the outbreak of assaults on Jews in the major towns of Eastern Thrace in 1934.** The agitation of mobs in Edirne, which involved physical attacks on the Jews and threats against the community, caused panic among Edirne Jewry. Thousands moved permanently to Istanbul, although the government intervened to stop the attacks and assured the Jews of their safety.

**The community never recovered from this blow.** The conscription to labor battalions and the imposition of a discriminatory head tax caused impoverishment and further decline in the community. The town suffered economic crises after World War II. The community diminished through migration to Israel and other countries and also to Istanbul. In 1948, 2,750 Jews remained in Edirne, while by 1960 their number dwindled to 438, and in 1977 there were only 72 Jewish inhabitants in the city. In 1948 the community was still well organized and levied dues from its members. Its council maintained charitable institutions, a Bikkur Holim society (which then provided medical care for 730 patients), a Mahazikei Torah association (which provided Hebrew and religious education), the 'Ozer Dallim association (which cared for the needy), and several synagogues.

**By 1969** most of the institutions had closed and the community was left with only one synagogue. In **1971** the municipality prohibited the community from using its cemetery and in 1975 it confiscated it altogether. Subsequently the cemetery was destroyed. The shrinking

community used the synagogue until 1983. In 1998 there were only three Jews living in Edirne.



Abandoned graves at the old Jewish Cemetery, April 1996

[Hayyim J. Cohen / Eyal Ginio (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)]

## Music

Edirne was also a center of Jewish music. A choral society of Maftirim was founded in the seventh century. It sang every Sabbath at dawn from a book of religious hymns which were locally called *jonk* (the Persian-Arabic designation of "harp"). A great number of able cantors and assistant singers (*maftirim*, *mezammerim*) came from Edirne. Congregations from as far away as Bulgaria and Romania appealed to this community whenever there was need of a good synagogue singer. The activity and reputation of the Maftirim Society helped Edirne become a center for hymn writers. Among the best known were Aaron b. Isaac \*Hamon (18<sup>th</sup> century; possibly the composer called Yahudi Harun by the Turks), Abraham Zemah (late 19<sup>th</sup> century), and Joseph Danon (d. 1901). A large repertoire of Ladino folksongs from Edirne was collected

and published by A. Danon in 1896. Danon contended that the proficiency of the local Jews in Eastern music had been stimulated by, and modeled after, the style of the Muslim Dervish brotherhoods.

[Hanoch Avenary]

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#### **\*Karaism, Karaites**

Derived from Heb., *qara*, "scripture." A Middle Eastern heterodox Jewish group that arose in opposition to Rabbinic Judaism in the 8th century CE and emphasized the written scriptures while criticizing the rabbinic use of oral law."

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The Synagogue in Edirne; the interior of the Synagogue in Kırklareli, a town which had an active Jewish Community located east of Edirne (European Turkey).

