CHAPTER 3

Immigrants in the Land of Their Birth: The Sephardi Community in Jerusalem. The Test Case of the Meyuḥas Family

For we are brothers
GENESIS 13:8

Each went his own way: countries, times, and different imprints on their personal memory separated them ...

RONIT MATALON, Facing Us (Tel Aviv: Am Oved and Sifriah Laʾam, 414, 1995), 121.
[* Translated into English by Marsha Weinstein (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henri Holt, 1998]

Modernization Processes in the Ottoman Empire

In the introduction to this volume, we mentioned the book by the Spanish senator, a physician by profession, Dr. Ángel Pulido Fernández, Españoles sin patria y la raza sefardí,¹ which appeared in Madrid in 1905. This was the second book by Senator Pulido to deal with Sephardi Jews, the descendants of the exiles from Spain, and their dispersal throughout the world. In this work, Senator Pulido focused on the situation of Sephardim the world over, at the beginning of the twentieth century, according to information he had collected as a result of extensive correspondence with the leaders of their communities. In his initial letters to them, the senator posed identical questions to his correspondents asking about the history of the community and its leaders. On pages 460–67 of his book, Pulido presented the information he had received about Sephardim in Palestine, especially in Jerusalem, which

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had come from Albert Antébi (1873–1919), the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) representative in Jerusalem,² and Moshe Azriel (1881–1916), a publisher.³ Mr. Antébi replied in French and Senator Pulido published his answers in Spanish translation. Mr. Moshe Azriel responded in “rather good” Spanish – as Pulido described it. Additional information was given to Pulido by Mr. Rafael Cassares, the Spanish consul in Jerusalem. At the start of the chapter on Jerusalem comes information about “the distinguished, Ya’akov Shaul Elyaschar [sic!] the chief Rabbi of Palestine” and a picture of the Rabbi at age 89 appears in it (photo no. 143).⁴

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² On him see E. Antébi, L’homme du Sérail. Albert Antébi 1873–1919 (Paris: Nil Éditions, 1996). This biography was written by his granddaughter. Albert Antébi was born in Damascus, Syria, was educated in Paris, and eventually became the principal of the AIU school in Jerusalem; he was known for having great influence in the Ottoman ruling circles there. In effect, he was the uncrowned leader of the Yishuv in Ottoman Palestine and the intercessor between it and the Ottoman masters of the country. Michelle Campos considers him a definitive example of the “assimilated Sephardi Jew.” See Michelle U. Campos, Ottoman Brothers. Muslims, Christians and Jews in Early Twentieth Century Palestine (Stanford, CA: University Press, 2011), 218.

³ On him see D. Tidhar, Encyclopedia of the Founders and Builders of Israel, 2: 1054 [Hebrew]. This encyclopedia is available on the Touro College website: http://www.tidhar.tourolib.org/tidhar/view/2/1054. The Azriel family’s printing house was founded in Jerusalem in 1900. Moshe Azriel published El Tresoro de Yerushalaim; Calendario de Yerushalaim; the newspaper El Liberal, which in time became the Hebrew daily Ha-Ḥerut; and novels in Ladino as well. On him, see also above, the Introduction, n. 3. On the newspaper Ha-Ḥerut, see also below n. 20 and ch. 6 n. 8.

⁴ Rabbi Ya’akov Shaul Eliachar – Yissa Berakhah – died in Jerusalem in 1906. The picture published in Pulido’s book was used for a stamp produced by the Israel Philatelic Service in honor of Rabbi Yissa Berakhah, at the initiative of Mr. Oded Eliashar [Eliachar] of Jerusalem, on July 25, 2006, for the hundredth anniversary of the Rabbi’s demise. On the course of Rabbi Yissa Berakhah’s life, see Abraham Yaari, Remembrances of the Land of Israel, pt. 1 (Tel Aviv: Masada, 1974) [Hebrew]: after the death of Rabbi Ḥaim Farḥi; N. Efrati, The Eliachar Family in Jerusalem: Selected Chapters in the History of the Yishuv in Jerusalem in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Jerusalem: Hebrew University and Rubin Mass, 1975), 45–143 [Hebrew]; E. Eliachar, Living with Jews, 607–20 [Hebrew]; G. Pozailov, The Sages of Four Holy Cities, v. 2: Sages of Jerusalem (Jerusalem: Religious Education Administration, 2001), 559–92 [Hebrew]; Z. Zohar, Luminous Face of the East: Studies in the Legal and Religious Thought of Sephardic Rabbis of the Middle East (Sifriyat Hillel Ben-Haim: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuḥad, 2001), 223–36 [Hebrew]. Ya’akov Sha’ul Eliachar lost his father, Rabbi Eliezer Yeruḥam Eliachar, head of the ritual slaughterers and examiners in Safed, when he was seven. His family suffered from the upheavals of the times and the changes in rule in mid-nineteenth century. His grandfather, Ya’akov Wilna, lived in Hebron, where he was called, owing to his integrity, by the byname “The Straight One”