

Forgotten Soldiers: Jewish Conscripts in the Last Habsburg-Ottoman War (1788-1791)

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The decision of Joseph II to expand conscription to Jewish subjects of the Habsburg Monarchy is commonly seen as part the emperor's comprehensive modernisation program. Consequently, existing works about the beginning of Jewish military service treat the subject either as part of a broader discussion of Josephinian enlightened absolutism, or focus on the reactions of prominent Jewish observers and intellectuals to this novelty. In the meantime, the actual experiences and fates of the first Jewish conscripts of modern history remain completely ignored.

My lecture presents my research on the Jewish soldiers drafted into the Austrian army during the last Habsburg-Ottoman War. Following Joseph's decision, Jewish recruits were allocated primarily to the military train. However, the first surviving records of the 'Imperial-Royal Transport Corps' (*k.k. Fuhrwesens-Corps*) date to 1802. In order to discover the earliest Jewish soldiers, one must look to the monthly reports: the so-called *Standes- und Diensttabelle* of the individual army units. Having combed through every surviving monthly report of each of the army's 57 line infantry regiments, together with their associated transfer papers, I located almost 200 Jewish soldiers. I then compiled their service records into a digital database which will be presented as an integral part of my talk.

Despite the fragmentation of the surviving archival evidence, some general observations can be made. As with their Christian neighbours, Jewish communities tried to fill their initial recruitment quota with as many weak and dispensable social elements as possible. A noticeable minority among the conscripts were immigrant Polish Jews. Nevertheless, it seems that many of the recruits from this cohort – local and foreign alike – entered service willingly. The number of deserters among the Jewish soldiers during the Last Habsburg-Ottoman War was much lower than the army average. One possibility for this higher motivation was the fact that the Transport Corps was a professional army branch, and its soldiers were better paid. For poor Galician recruits and migrants, this additional income could be an incentive. Last but not least, up to three dozen Jewish conscripts were drafted directly into the infantry. The long-established taboo against Jewish fighters was thus broken.

National Indifference Across Imperial Borders: Sephardi Jews between the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empire

In 1938, when completing her emigration questionnaire (*Auswanderungsfragenbogen*) for the Jewish Community of Vienna, Rachel Levy—who had lived in Vienna since the end of World War I—was asked about her nationality. She responded simply, “Saloniki,” referring to a city that had been Ottoman until 1913 and was now part of Greece. Even in a time of upheaval, Levy’s response reflected a reluctance to claim a fixed national identity.

She was not the only one. Many Sephardi Jews from the Ottoman Empire who settled in the Habsburg Empire exhibited similar indifference to national membership. For example, although the Sephardi community in Vienna, established in the mid-18th century, was officially called the “Community of the Turkish Israelites” (*Türkisch-israelitische Gemeinde*, later *Verband der türkischen Israeliten*), the Viennese correspondent for the Judeo-Spanish newspaper *La Epoka* referred to it as either the “Sephardi community” (*Komunita sefardi*) or the “Oriental community” (*komunita orientala*). This terminology contrasted with the community elite’s strong advocacy for identifying as Ottoman (*Turkish*).

While studies on national belonging in the Ottoman Empire have occasionally invoked “national indifference,” they have done so descriptively rather than as an analytical framework. Although this concept holds potential for Ottoman studies, it has only recently and rarely been applied. Moreover, Ottoman and Habsburg studies have remained largely unaware of each other’s scholarly debates.

This paper explores the stance of Sephardi Jews in the Habsburg Empire vis-à-vis the question of nationality through the lens of national indifference. In doing so, it highlights the analytical value of this concept for Ottoman studies and seeks to promote and participate in a long-overdue dialogue between Ottoman and Habsburg historiographies.

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Education of Jews in the 19th-century Galicia. A proposal for a methodological shift

The legal emancipation of Jews and the development of mass education were two processes that shaped the social history of 19th-century Europe and were intertwined: Jews were expected to educate their children in modern institutions, which concurred with the traditional educational system in cheders, which had functioned for centuries.

Typically, the “history of Jewish education” is wedged between three fields of research: "the history of education", "Jewish education" and "Jewish history". It does not occupy a prominent position in any of these fields. The "history of education" rarely includes a Jewish perspective, studies of "Jewish education" focus on contemporary challenges, and "Jewish studies/history" usually treats the subject of education on the margins of other topics, rarely putting it in the center of analysis. Such position limits the scope of both the methods and sources used in this research field.

The paper will discuss those research trends and demonstrate how this field could benefit from a broader methodological approach. Implementing perspectives of “historical anthropology” with its multidimensional outlook on historical reality, as well as of “social history” are particularly important. Such methodological shift leads to establishing history of education as one of the main themes in modern Jewish history.

In the paper I would like to focus on the education of Jews in Galicia (1772-1914). Galicia, a crownland situated on the northern-eastern borderland of Habsburg Empire, established after the first partition of Poland in 1772, was home to the largest Jewish population in Cisleithania. In terms of size, it was a third Jewry in after Russian and Hungarian, therefore by analyzing it we focus on significant part of Jewry inhabiting Central Europe.