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Sephardi Jews and the Visual Culture of the Ottoman Balkans

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The significance of Sephardi Jews for the understanding of visual culture of the Ottoman Balkans is one of the completely neglected topics. Sephardi culture is not featured in the surveys of art history of the Balkan countries, which is the reason why its influence and presence in the corpus of Balkan visual culture is scarcely known. On the other hand, the geographic, political, and social context of the development of Sephardi visual culture in Serbia, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Albania, and Macedonia is frequently omitted in Jewish studies. Therefore, it is necessary to bridge the gap between Jewish and Balkan studies, and to see Sephardi culture in the Balkans in the context of time and space. This paper is based on the premise that the visual culture of the Ottoman Balkans constitutes a unique cultural unity. Many factors contributed to its creation–the Ottoman Empire, but also different religious, ethnic, and national communities and individuals.[1] Like other religious and ethnic communities, Sephardi Jews also had their place in the visual culture of the Balkans. Here we will highlight only a few basic characteristics essential for understanding the importance of Sephardi Jews in the creation of visual identity in the Ottoman Balkans.

The Ottoman conquest of the Balkan Peninsula coincides with the arrival of banished Sephardi Jews into the Ottoman Empire.[2] At the end of the fifteenth century,

1 Nenad Makuljević, "From Ideology to the Universal Principles: Art History and Visual Culture of the Balkans in the Ottoman Empire", in Jaynie Anderson (ed.), *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence*, The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne 2009, pp. 98-103.

2 On Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire, see: Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, Princeton University Press 1984, 113-181; Esther Juhasz (ed.), *Sephardi Jews in The*

the ethnic and religious picture of the Balkans altered, and Sephardi Jews became one of many Balkan communities. Although the Sephardi community was relatively small compared to other religious communities, it represented a notable minority, which held an important place in Ottoman society. Therefore, all cultural aspects of the Ottoman Balkans, including visual, engaged the Sephardi community and its members in a double role. Their community implemented legally coded norms, and at the same time adjusted to the forms of visual conduct and took part in the creation of visual culture in the Balkans. This is clearly stated in the analysis of three important segments of Sephardi life and activities in the Balkans. First, they participated in the creation of the visual identity of the Balkan cities. Secondly, Sephardi Jews accepted and adopted Ottoman visual norms, and thirdly, they are seen as active creators of the Balkan visual culture.

A Visible Minority: Sephardi Jews in the Balkan Cities

The arrival of Sephardi Jews altered the social structure and appearance of the Balkan cities. Although the Jewish Romaniote community had been present in this region for centuries, Sephardi Jews had a new, more prominent position in the urban city center and were not forced to live in a single building or part of the city.[3] Sephardi Jews became eminent members of Ottoman society, in which they had a distinguished social position. They provided important public services as doctors, money changers (sarafs), craftsmen, and traders. The mobility and activity of Sephardi Jews led to their settlement throughout the Balkan Peninsula, and for this reason they were present in big, as well as smaller, mostly commercial towns. This is confirmed by many European travel writers. The significance of Sephardi Jews for the visual identity of the Balkan cities is clearly seen from the example of well-known Balkan commercial cities such as Salonika, Sarajevo, or Belgrade.

Ottoman Empire: Aspects of Material Culture, The Israeli Museum, Jerusalem 1990; Esther Benbassa-Aron Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans: the Judeo-Spanish community, fifteenth to twentieth centuries*, Blackwell 1995; Avigdor Levy (ed.), *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, The Darwin Press, 1994; Esther Benbassa-Aron Rodrigue, *Geschichte der sephardischen Juden: Von Toledo bis Saloniki,* Winkler, Bochum 2005.

3 Benbassa-Rodrigue, *Jews of the Balkans* (Note 2), p. 33.

Salonika was the city-port that first accepted Sephardi refugees and was also the place from which Sephardi Jews spread further over the Balkans.[4] The Sephardi population was dominant in the city, while religious life particularly flourished, with about 40 synagogues. This is why Salonika was named "Mother of Israel" and "Jerusalem of the Balkans". In Salonika, Sephardi Jews settled in the city district, and therefore many travel writers noted their presence, customs, and appearance. Sephardi domination over Salonika accounted for the fact that the city was recognized as Jewish. For this reason, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Georgina Mackenzie and Paulina Irby emphasized that Salonika was "historically Greek, politically Turkish, geographically Bulgarian, and ethnically Jewish".[5] Events in Salonika attracted the attention of the Ottoman and European public in the seventeenth century. Namely, the activities of Sabbatai Sevi had a distinguished role in the city, and thus the life of the Jewish community in Salonika and the Sabbatean sect became the object of close inspection.[6]

Certain Sephardi Jews were among the richest people in Salonika, which affected their public conduct and the development of their private culture. In the second half of the nineteenth century, after the Tanzimat reforms, the Sephardi from Salonika also had a prominent role in the process of Europeanization. Connections were established with European fashion centers, and as was stated in the Irby-Mackenzie travelogue, the wives of European consuls were ashamed in the company of lavishly and trendily dressed young Sephardi women: "Then if one gives parties, the Jewish ladies come so apparelled that the Europeans feel *genées* in meeting them".[7] The presence of Sephardi Jews in the city and their importance to the visual presentation of the Ottoman Salonika was shown in a photo album, *Les costumes populaires de la Turquie en 1873*, which was commissioned by the sultan for the Vienna World Exhibition in 1873. In it, the citizens of Salonika were portrayed as men and women from Slavic, Greek, and Sephardi communities.[8]

4 Joseph Néhama, *Historie de Israélites de Salonique*, vols .1-7, Thessaloniki-Paris 1936-1978; Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews 1430-1950*, HarperCollinsPublisher, London 2004, pp. 46-95.

5 Georgina Muir Mackenzie and Adelina Paulina Irby, *The Turks, The Greeks & The Slavons. Travels in the Slavonic Provinces of Turkey-in- Europe*, Bell & Daldy, London 1867, p. 10.

6 Mazower, *Salonica* (Note 4), pp. 71-79.

7 Mackenzie-Irby, *The Turks, the Greeks & the Slavons,* (Note 5), p. 11.

8 *Les costumes populaires de la Turquie en 1873. Ouvrage publié sous le patronage de la Commission impériale ottomane pour l'Exposition universelle de Vienne*, Constantinople 1873, Part I, Plate XXI-XXII, pp. 84-86.

In the Balkan hinterland, Sarajevo proved to be the city with one of the biggest Sephardi communities. There, Sephardi Jews were first placed in pasha Siyavush's foundation (*Sijavuš-pašine daire*), where the old synagogue Il Kal Grandi was also erected at the end of the sixteenth century.[9] In Sarajevo's urban structure, the Sephardi community had a distinguished role. *Sijavuš-pašine daire* was located close to the traders' and craftsmen's market and the most famous Muslim holy place, such as Gazi-Husref-Beg's Mosque, and the Old Serbian Orthodox Church. The power of the Sephardi community in Sarajevo was attested during the restoration of the Il Kal Grandi synagogue, which burned down in a conflagration at the end of the eighteenth century. Although the Ottoman laws forbade the enlargement of non-Muslim religious establishments, the synagogue was restored and it was considerably higher than the previous one. The significance of Sephardi Jews in Sarajevo's visual identity was confirmed at the end of the nineteenth century. At that time, Bosnia was under Austro-Hungarian occupation, and many postcards, which portrayed the Jewish cemetery and Sephardi Jews in Sarajevo, were printed using orientalist visual poetics.

Significant Sephardi population was also found in Belgrade.[10] There the Sephardi community settled in Jalija, a coastal area along the Danube. This space within the Belgrade suburbs was situated close to the most important trading street–Zerek–and the Muslim district. A great number of Sephardi people in Belgrade were noted in the Austrian or German engraved panorama of the city, probably from the eighteenth century. In the lower part of the engraving are the names of the Belgrade citizens: "Belgrade in welcher allerhand Nationen, als Turken, Juden, Griechen, Ungarn, Dalamtier und andere mehr wohnen ..."[11]

Travelogues, such as the one by Siegfried Kapper, also depict the costumes and appearance of the Belgrade Sephardi Jews. Kapper describes entering the Jewish district, Jalija, and notes a different visual appearance of the citizens in this part of Belgrade:

9 Moritz Levi, *Sefardi u Bosni (Prilog istoriji Jevreja na Balkanskom poluostrvu)* [Sephardi Jews in Bosnia (Contribution to the Jewish History in the Balkans)], Beograd 1969, pp. 8-17.

10 See Ženi Lebl, *Do "konačnog rešenja": Jevreji u Beogradu 1521-1942* [Until the "Final Solution", The Jews in Belgrade 1521-1942], Čigoja štampa, Beograd 2001.

11 See "*Beograd –pogled sa ugarske strane*": http://digital.nbs.rs/scc/browse.php?fol=gravire&ime=gr-beograd&order=DI&page=10

> Women and girls were almost dressed as the Serbian ladies, but they were somehow distinguished from them with their silk scarves, which were shrouded around a small fez, striving to cover their hair as much as possible. However, others adorned their dark braids with ducats of different sizes, as if they wanted to display their opulence. Men were dressed in long, dark kaftans, which differed from the Turkish ones. They wore beneath them some kind of underdress made from striped cloth, and they wore black caps from cloth or turban or a fez on their heads.[12]

Kapper undoubtedly recognizes the identity of the Sephardi community in Belgrade and emphasizes that they reproach "German Jews" in Europe for not adhering strictly to the customs and rules of the Jewish faith and for quickly abandoning many customs, which is the reason why they are not seen as valid followers of the Law of Moses.[13]

The significant role of the Sephardi population in Belgrade and the importance of their visual culture were confirmed at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. In the one of the first printed and illustrated Belgrade tourist guides, the Jewish district "Old Belgrade street-Jewish mahalla" was noted as one of the city's landmarks. [14] At the same time, the Jewish quarter became a motif for a number of Serbian painters, such as Nadežda Petrović (*The Jewish Quarter*, 1908), Paško Vučetić (*Entrance to the Jewish Quarter*, 1907), Miodrag Petrović (*Old Belgrade-Jewish Quarter*, 1924), Veljko Milošević (*Old Houses in Jewish Street*, 1925), Luka Mladenović (*The Jewish Quarter*, 1926), Dušan Kokotović (*Jewish Street*, 1927).[15]

The examples of Salonika, Sarajevo, and Belgrade clearly show that Sephardi Jews were compelling contributors to the visual identity of the Balkan cities and a visible minority in the Ottoman Balkans.

12 Siegfried Kapper, *Südslavische Wanderungen*, Band I, Leipzig 1853, pp. 329-330.

13 Ibid., pp. 331-332.

14 *Beograd*, Izdanje opštine beogradske, Beograd 1911, p. 14.

15 Jasna Marković, *Belgrade Landscapes in 20th Century*, Belgrade City Museum, Beograd 2006, pp. 45-46, 96, 101, 107, 121.

Between Mimicry and Law: The Codes of Visual Identity

Public and private identity of Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Balkans was defined by the processes of mimicry, imitation, respect and compliance with the Ottoman norms. In the Ottoman Empire, a wide spectrum of behavior and visual use was restricted by legal norms. Visuals were used as one of the crucial means of identifying different religious, social, and ethnic groups. Over the multi-century duration of the Ottoman Empire, the laws were more or less consistently enforced. This is also reflected in the research into the costumes and visual presentations of Sephardi Jews.[16] Public mimicry and adjustments to the ruling social and political stratum affected the behavior and visual culture of all non-Muslims, and Sephardi Jews were no exception to such actions.

For the Sephardi Jews the arrival in the Balkans meant a significant change of cultural environment. The move from the Catholic world into state-owned Islamic space required changing the rules for all aspects of public conduct. Preserved sources tell of the necessity for even the foreign travelers to adjust to the Ottoman norms, and this shows that the adaptation was the precondition of survival.

One of the earliest examples indicating the adjustment of traditional Sephardi culture to the rules and customs in the Balkans was the old Sephardi cemetery in Sarajevo.[17] In this cemetery, whose oldest grave is that of Rabbi Samuel Baruh (seventeenth century), there are a few graves whose shape completely departs from traditional Sephardi funeral practice. Traditionally, and most usually, Sephardi tombstones are horizontal, but in Ottoman Istanbul several types existed.[18] The typology of old Sarajevo Sephardi graves differs from the traditional as well as the Istanbul practice. Sarajevo tombstones are marked with elevated stone plates, which resemble to a great extent the Bosnian practice of erecting and shaping tombstones known as "stećci". It is possible to understand this practice only in a context of

16 See Esther Juhasz, "The Material Culture of Sephardi Jews in the Western Empire (Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries)", in Levy, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire* (Note 2), pp. 575-583.

17 Levi, *Sefardi u Bosni* (Note 9), pp. 96-97; the Old Jewish Cemetery in Sarajevo is protected as a "national" cultural monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina. See http://www.aneks8komisija.com.ba/main.php?id_struct=6&lang=1&action=view&id=2502

18 On Istanbul Jewish tombstones, see Minna Rozen, "A Survey of Jewish Cemeteries in Western Turkey*", The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, v. 83, (1992), p. 86.

space and local political circumstances. It is very likely that Sephardi Jews adopted this model of grave marking so as to emphasize their sacred properties to the local government and population, or perhaps they accepted the most representative segment of the funeral culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to publicly display their power.

A similar model of tombstones can be found on the grave of the highly respectable Rabbi Moša Danon, near Stolac. His grave, built at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is in the shape of a standing tombstone.

Special regulations and mimicry characterized their dress code. The prohibition against wearing certain kinds of clothes or certain colors or the need for the visible marking of the members of the Jewish population was present throughout Europe. It seems that Ottoman culture was more tolerant to the Jews than Christian Europe at the beginning of the early modern period. This is what French Jew Isaac Zafrati wrote in Edirne letter, from the fifteenth century:

> Is it not better for you to live under Muslims than under Christians? … Here you are allowed to wear the most precious garments. In Christendom, on the contrary you dare not even venture to clothe your children in red or in blue, according to your taste, without exposing them to the insult of being beaten black and blue, or kicked green and red, and therefore are ye condemned to go about merely clad in sad colored raiment …[19]

Despite the praises of the Ottoman tolerance, non-Muslims did not enjoy complete freedom. They were not allowed, according to the interpretation of the Sharia (Islamic code of law), to ostentatiously display their clothes or affluence.[20] It was also forbidden to wear certain colors, such as green. Green was interpreted as a heavenly color, and thus it was saved for the Muslims as a privilege. The Ottoman dress codes were frequently disobeyed. This is clearly indicated in the notes of the Sephardi municipality in Sarajevo. They reveal that Sephardi women often disobeyed certain norms, such as the prohibition against wearing yellow footwear.[21]

19 Quoted from Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Note 2), p. 136.

20 Ibid. (Note 2), 137; Donal Quateret, "Clothing Laws, State, and Society in the Ottoman Empire 1720-1829", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 3, (1997), pp. 403-425.

21 Levi, *Sefardi u Bosni* (Note 9), p. 50.

Sephardi costumes were not standardized over the entire territory of the Ottoman Empire. They depended on the elements of Sephardi-Spanish tradition, local characteristics, and the Ottoman cultural model.[22] The sources confirm that there were special features of Sephardi costumes, but the examples that have reached us reveal the versatile and non-static nature of the costumes. The appearance of Sephardi costumes in Sarajevo in the early nineteenth century was noted by Moric Levi, who even pointed out some similarities with the Christian costumes.[23] The change of the dress code in the Ottoman Empire occurred after the Tanzimat reform in 1829. It included Sephardi Jews, who, like the rest, accepted new reforms. One of the key characteristics and the symbol of the Tanzimat reform became the wearing of a fez as a sign of equality and of being law-abiding in the Ottoman Empire.

The obeying of Ottoman laws and the multi-century mimicry prompted the complete adoption and acceptance of the Ottoman rules. Literary sources indicate the attitude of Sephardi Jews towards the Ottoman costumes. On their visit to Salonika, Irby and Mackenzie spoke to a rabbi about Sephardi costumes. Reminding him of the appearance of the Jews in Krakow (Poland), they asked him about the relationship between religious feelings and clothing. The rabbi answered that "every dress has a religious value in the eyes of the people to whom it belongs", and he especially stressed "the curious out-door pelisses of the women".[24]

A positive attitude towards the Ottoman costumes is also attested by Laura Bohoreta Papo in her works, written in Ladino, and dedicated to the Sephardi women in the Balkans. She meticulously describes all aspects of the private lives of Sephardi women in Ottoman Sarajevo, which clearly shows, among other things, a complete acceptance of the Ottoman norms. She pays great attention to the costumes of the Sephardi women and justifies them from the moral and medical point of view:

> We were the queens in our comfortable, long, wide-sleeved jackets. Those beige shirts would cool our bodies in the summer. The jackets would spread and contract as an elastic rubber. It was not necessary to economize on cloths, they had beautiful folds, creases, and hems ... A long-sleeved blouse was adorned with gold and silver ribbons. A skirt was wide and long, tightly fitting to the blouse,

22 Juhasz, "Material Culture of Sephardi Jews" (Note 16), pp. 575-583.

23 Levi, *Sefardi u Bosni* (Note 9), p. 50.

24 Mackenzie and Irby, *The Turks, the Greeks & the Slavons* (Note 5), p. 12.

> with all the clothes in the same color. What embellished the entire raiment was certainly a white or beige shirt, open at the front in the shape of the capital letter V. This revealed a plunging neckline ... since we were girls, we had two or three pairs of şalvars. In the summer we would wear wide şalvars, a woolen cloth called milliflor with tiny flowers, and in the winter we would wear şalvars made from darker cloth. Saturday attire, for holidays and tea parties, consisted of a shrug of black satin decorated with ribbons–golden bands ... For warmer apparel, one would wear on top of all those dresses ... a little coat from silk or colored wool, quite short, padded with wool and cotton or embroidered. At the time, such a product was only exported from Istanbul, along with other products.[25]

Laura Bohoreta Papo notes that the main pieces of jewellery on Sephardi female costumes in Sarajevo were coin embellishments.[26] Such a manner of female adornment was completely accepted and developed among Christian as well as Muslim women in the Balkans.[27] Apart from coin embellishments, Sephardi women, like their Christian counterparts, used decorated clasps (paftas) for their belts. This is clearly evident on certain preserved photographs.[28] The use of coin jewellery and clasps shows that there were contacts between women of various religious affiliations, and that even before the domination of industrial fashion, common ideals of female visual culture were established in the Ottoman Balkans.

The acceptance of Ottoman visual forms was also present in Sephardi ceremonial art. Ottoman visual forms and decorations appear in synagogue interiors, along with the use of Ottoman products for Jewish ceremonial needs.[29] The representative examples of the Ottoman visual influence on the synagogue decorations are the interiors of the Ochrida synagogue in Istanbul and Bikkur Holim synagogue in Izmir.[30]

25 Laura Bohoreta Papo, *Sefardska žena u Bosni*, Connectum, Sarajevo 2005, pp. 52-53.

26 Ibid., p. 53.

27 Nenad Makuljević, "Moćna žena–egzotična pojava: Žena osmanskog Balkana u evropskim putopisima novog veka", in Djordje S. Kostić (ed.), *Evropska slika balkanske žene*, Kragujevac 2009, pp. 30-44.

28 Miriam Russo Katz, "Jewelry", in Juhasz, *Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (Note 2), picture 10, p. 182.

29 Vivan B. Mann, "Jewish-Muslim Acculturation in the Ottoman Empire: The Evidence of Ceremonial Art", in Levy, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire* (Note 2), pp. 559-573.

30 Juhasz, *Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (Note 2), "Synagogues", plates 3a, 6a.

Sephardi Jews and the Creating of Visual Culture on Balkans

The presence of Sephardi Jews on Balkan territory enabled them to become important factors in creating visual culture in the Balkans. As commissioners, craftsmen, and artists, they had an impact on the creation of many visual forms designated for religious culture, public ceremonies, and private life.

An integral part of the visual culture of the Ottoman Balkans included sacred as well as profane constructions and artefacts, built or made for the needs of Sephardi Jews. A large number of synagogues were erected during their multi-century stay in the Balkan region. Their appearance and fittings are only partially known,[31] as is the identity of their masters and workshops, which carried out such construction works. The entire production of the visual culture created for religious and private purposes of Sephardi Jews was a constituent part of the Balkan visual production, which often included craftsmen of different religious affiliations. Construction works and the erection of synagogues were carried out by builders' workshops (tajfas). According to well-known sources, there were no Sephardi builders' workshops, but such work was mostly carried out by Christians. Therefore, the construction and restoration of certain synagogues, like Il Kal Grandi in Sarajevo, must have been carried out by non-Jewish masters.[32] By employing masters and builders, Sephardi Jews were able to satisfy their personal needs and also to contribute to the development of the Balkan visual culture.

Along with the production and commission of visual works of art for their personal needs, Sephardi Jews took part in the creation of visual culture for the needs of other religious and ethnic groups as well. Their arrival was described as strengthening the military, economic, and cultural power of the Ottoman Empire. In a well-known comment, French agent Nicolas de Nicolay stresses that the Jews have among them workmen of all artes and handicraftes most excellent...

> who to the great detriment and damage of the Christendom, have taught the Turk several inventions, artifices and machines of war, such as how to make artillerie, arquebuses, gunpowder, cannonballs and other weapons.

31 See Ibid., pp. 36-59; Uwe Kornberger, *Raumkonzeption sefardischen Synagoge*, Inaguraldissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwurde der Hochschule für Jüdische zu Heidelberg, Heidelberg 1998, pp. 155-176.

32 Jewish builders and architects are not found in Sarajevo documents from the Ottoman period. See Hamdija Kreševljaković, *Guilds and Crafts in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Sarajevo 1961.

This quotation clearly shows a wide range of abilities among the Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire. Bernard Lewis emphasizes that their contribution to the Empire was cultural and economic, focused on the areas of medicine, performing arts, printing, trade, textile and mining industries, and military service.[33]

The many skills and social distinction of affluent individuals enabled Sephardi Jews to become active factors in the formation of the visual identity of the Ottoman Balkans. Their participation in the creation of visual culture had various aspects, which depended on social circumstances, but also on their attitude toward visual culture.

For example one of the activities carried out by some Sephardi Jews was participation in ephemeral public spectacles in the Ottoman Empire. Public ceremonies were important political events, with the purpose of displaying the power of the authorities. They were a notable, public manifestation of subjects' loyalty; political standpoints as well as the demonstration of state power. Citizens of all religious affiliations participated in Ottoman public ceremonies, and thus Sephardi Jews continually took part in them. The Jews also participated in a grandiose fifty-day Imperial festival in 1582, when Sultan Murad III celebrated the circumcision of his son, Prince Mehmed. Descriptions of the festival reveal that Jewish dancers took part in the celebration, and that they performed the dances of Spanish origin, *moresca* and *mattezina.* The festival also included processions of various social groups, Jews and Christians, who had won recognition for their appearance and craftsmanship.[34]

The acceptance of Ottoman ceremonial rules in public celebrations also confirms the attitude of some Sephardi Jews toward the fake messiah Sabbatai Sevi. According to a book by a Roman-Catholic Capuchin monk Michel Fèvre, after the inauguration of Sabbatai Sevi as the new messiah at the end of the seventeenth century, he began to dress as a ruler. He adorned himself in golden and silk clothes and held a scepter in his hand. The Jews in Smyrna spread out carpets before him, as a token of respect.[35]

33 The quotation of Nicolas de Nicolay is from Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Note 2), pp. 129-135.

34 Derin Terzioğlu, "The Imperial Circumsion Festival of 1582: An Interpretation", *Muqarnas* 12 (1995), pp. 84-100.

35 Giacomo Saban, "Sabbatai Sevi as Seen by a Contemporary Traveller", *Jewish History*, 7. no. 2 (1993), p. 112.

Mullah Mustafa Bašeskija, describes in his diary the life in Sarajevo in the eighteenth century. He writes about public events, and the conduct and experience of the Sarajevo citizens. He draws special attention to the events connected to the celebration of the birth of the daughter of Sultan Abdul Hamid I in February 1776. On such occasions, Ottoman cities were specially decorated. Sarajevo followed suit, and the stores of two Jews had extraordinarily beautiful embellishments.[36]

Sephardi Jews continued their tradition of embellishing their towns in the nineteenth century, as well as of taking part in public ceremonies dedicated to the celebrations of Ottoman rulers. In Monastir/Bitola, Sephardi Jews built a triumphal arch to mark the sultan's visit.[37] This arch, as a standard element of highlighting the ruler's triumphant entrance, was intended to visually indicate the presence of the Sephardi community in Bitola and their loyalty to the Ottoman emperor.

The Sephardi communities in the Ottoman Balkans were located in city centers and conducted, among other things, trading and craft businesses. Trade contacts played a significant role in the constitution of Balkan visual culture. Developed trading networks enabled transfers of different cultural commodities. Sephardi communities, which were present in all large Balkan cities, enabled the transfer of cultural commodities between Salonika, the Habsburg Monarchy, and Adriatic cities. In this manner, Sephardi Jews participated in the distribution of different materials and works of visual and material culture, and also assisted in cultural transfer between the Ottoman Empire and Europe. Trade was conducted by Sephardi men and women,[38] which enabled their intensive public presence. Trading objects were textile and jewellery, for men as well as women.

An important role in the construction of visual culture was taken up by craft and artistic works. Sources and literature indicate the great importance of Sephardi Jews in clothes production. The Sephardi Jews from Salonika had a special relationship with the elite janissary units in the Ottoman army, producing the uniforms for the

36 Mula Mustafa Ševki Bašeskija, *Hronika (1746-1804)* [Chronicle], Veselin Masleša, Sarajevo 1987, p. 144.

37 See Juhasz, *Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (Note 2), "Textiles for the Home and Synagogue" picture 38, p. 96.

38 Ruth Lamdan, "Jewish Women as Providers in the Generations Following the Expulsion from Spain", *Nashim: A journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, 13 (2007), pp. 51-53.

janissaries. They conducted this business until the abolishment of the janissary unit in 1826.[39]

Sephardi Jews were extremely skillful in textile production. This is also confirmed by Adelina Irby and Georgina Mackenzie. They bought products crafted in Salonika and wrote down that they were exquisite. They describe the Sephardi Jews' craftsmanship in a similar manner:

> Our dragoman assigned the task to Jews, and we, soon after coming into the corridor, were startled to behold two venerable patriarchs, looking as if they had walked bodily out of an old picture Bible. These patriarchs seated themselves on the floor with the large chest between them; their bare feet extended on each side of it, their hands holding the ends of a long piece of sacking whereof they purposed to make the cover, and which they wound and round the box by way of taking the measure.[40]

A few Serbian sources also stress great craftsmanship among Sephardi Jews. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a Serb called Maksim Evgenović came to a craftsman's workshop in Belgrade. He learned the trade, according to his memoirs, from a "Spanish Jew" in Belgrade, who was "the most skilled craftsman" and who manufactured goods not only for the Jews but also for the Ottomans and Serbs.[41]

It is possible to understand the significance of Sephardi Jews as craftsmen in the creation of visual culture of the Balkans only in the context of the importance of textile in the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans had a textile culture. The opulence of materials and the beauty of embellishments were the most important representative qualities. It is for this reason that the most lavishly adorned Ottoman soldiers were the janissaries, who used Sephardi products. One of the open questions which stems from this crafting activity, which certainly created space for cultural transfer, was to what extent Sephardi Jews could embed their own decorative tradition in the costumes of the Ottoman Balkans.

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the first educated artists, who sprung from the Ottoman-Sephardi population, emerged in the

39 Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* , 133. (Note 2)

40 Mackenzie and Irby, *The Turks, the Greeks & the Slavons* (Note 5), p. 17.

41 Životopis Maksima Evgenovića [Life of Maksim Evgenović], Budimpešta 1877, pp. 9-10.

Balkans. Those were painters such as Leon Koen (1859-1934) and Moša Pijade (1890-1957) from Belgrade, or a famous Parisian artist, Julius Mordecai Pincas, known as Jules Pascin (1885-1930), hailing from Vidin in Bulgaria. These painters were active even in the period prior to World War I and were the representatives of symbolic and modernist movements in art. Leon Koen dealt with various themes in his paintings. His work includes scenes from Serbian history as well as Jewish themes, with paintings such as *Joseph's Dream* and *Eternal Jew*.[42] Apart from his artistic works, Moša Pijade, later a high-ranking representative in communist Yugoslavia, was an active public speaker, art critic, and a theorist. Among other things, he advocated the preservation of Leon Koen's paintings and appealed to the wealthy Jews to redeem his works of art.[43]

Summary

The Sephardi community had a prominent place in the constitution of visual culture of the Ottoman Balkans. Sephardi Jews were a visible minority in Ottoman cities and were noted by numerous travel writers, the Ottoman authorities and local population. They functioned as a community which applied Ottoman rules and adopted the Ottoman cultural model. By erecting and decorating sacred objects, as well as taking part in trading and crafting activities, Sephardi Jews actively contributed to the creation of the Balkan visual culture. However, their community was not isolated from public codes and cultural developments, but rather they accepted and created visual culture of the Ottoman Balkans. During the Ottoman rule, Sephardi Jews were an integral part of the Balkan cultural life. Their presence, conduct, communication, and exchange of goods and services with the members of other communities had an impact on Balkan urban cities. For this reason, Sephardi culture cannot be completely understood without considering the Ottoman-Balkan context, just as the Balkan visual culture cannot be fully conceived without recognizing and including Sephardi culture.

42 Nikola Šuica, *Leon Koen: 1859-1934*, Jugoslovenska galerija umetničkih dela, Beograd 2001; Vesna Adić, "The Tragic Story of Leon Koen, the First Sephardi Painter from Belgrade: A Symbolist and Admirer of Nietzsche", *Ars Judaica*, 5 (2009), pp. 67-84.

43 Moša Pijade, *O umetnosti* [On Art] predgovor Lazar Trifunović, Srpska književna zadruga, Beograd: 1963, pp. 30, 61-63.