



Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era

Julia Phillips Cohen

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The Ottoman-Jewish story has long been told as a romance between Jews and the empire. The prevailing view is that Ottoman Jews were protected and privileged by imperial policies and in return offered their unflinching devotion to the imperial government over many centuries. In this book, Julia Phillips Cohen offers a corrective, arguing that Jewish leaders who promoted this vision were doing so in response to a series of reforms enacted by the nineteenth-century Ottoman state: the new equality they gained came with a new set of expectations. Ottoman subjects were suddenly to become imperial citizens, to consider their neighbors as brothers and their empire as a homeland.

Becoming Ottomans is the first book to tell the story of Jewish political integration into a modern Islamic empire. It begins with the process set in motion by the imperial state reforms known as the Tanzimat, which spanned the years 1839-1876 and legally emancipated the non-Muslims of the empire. Four decades later the situation was difficult to recognize. By the close of the nineteenth century, Ottoman Muslims and Jews alike regularly referred to Jews as a model community, or *millet*-as a group whose leaders and members knew how to serve their state and were deeply engaged in Ottoman politics. The struggles of different Jewish individuals and groups to define the public face of their communities is underscored in their responses to a series of important historical events.

Charting the dramatic reversal of Jews in the empire over a half-century, *Becoming Ottomans* offers new perspectives for understanding Jewish encounters with modernity and citizenship in a centralizing, modernizing Islamic state in an imperial, multi-faith landscape.

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