THE JEWISH QUARTER AND SYNAGOGUE IN THE OLD URBAN CONTEXT OF ANKARA

FÜGEN İLTER

In almost all regions of Anatolia throughout the centuries, along with the Moslem population, in the ethnic composition of many cities and peripheral settlements the Greeks, Armenians and Jews had an undeniably important part in the social, cultural and economic structures and relationships.

For centuries, an interrelated way of life has been experienced between communities in the cities and towns, where minorities were in considerable numbers together with the Muslim population. With respect to ethnic groups and religions Ankara had a cosmopolitan structure; in some quarters of the city the different communities used to live in a mixed state, while in others they tended to have an ethnic orientation. Their contribution to the cultural formation and urban context was realized thus.

The Jews in Ankara:

The existence of a Jewish community in Ankara as far back as the reign of Augustus (63 B.C.-14 A.D.) has been established by Galanti, who also pointed out the existence of a community in the city during the Middle Ages. It is noted that "a small and ancient Jewish community was present" when Sultan Murat captured Ankara (1361).

Some of the Jews who migrated from Spain in 1492 and a few years later from Portugal (the sefarad) settled in Ankara. The newcomers found there a Jewish community who had inhabited Ankara for a long time and had a synagogue of their own. As the newcomers increased in numbers they built two more synagogues, one for the Spanish immigrants and one for the
Portuguese. However, as the Portuguese community decreased considerably after about a century, they closed their synagogue and joined the Spanish Jews.

It became necessary for the Turkish speaking, indigenous Jewish community to learn Spanish as their population decreased and the newcomers increased in numbers3.

During the late Ottoman period many travellers wandered about the Ottoman lands with the object of learning about the place of the minorities within the Ottoman society, the rights which the State recognized for the minorities, and also, to estimate the Muslim and non-Muslim populations. We find that the number of travellers had especially increased after the proclamation of the Reformation Act in 1839.

It is known that the Reformation Act of the Ottoman State involved the adoption of principles towards a new legal order which aimed, among other things, to provide peace and security to the Christian and Jewish subjects as well as the Muslims. This is clearly expressed in the following words of Mahmut II: "I differentiate my Muslim subjects in the mosque, the Christians in the church and the Jews in the synagogue. Otherwise there is nothing to differentiate between them"4. This new and different approach was brought to life by the creation of new religious structures and caused many travellers to visit Anatolia and so Ankara. The travellers have contributed to the statistical estimations related to the past of Ankara.

According to one such traveller, Pockocke, the population of Ankara in about the middle of the XVIII. century is 100,000 (!) or so, of which nearly 10,000 are Christians; he notes that the Jews are only about 40 families"5. On the other hand Evliya Çelebi who recounts the notable characteristics and especially the famous "sof (mohair)" produced in Ankara, describes the population as follows: ".. most of the inhabitants are travellers and merchants. There are many Armenians and Jews. The Jews consist of only

5 R. Pockocke, A Description of the East and Some Other Countries, London 1743-45, 2 Volume, p. 304-305.
twelve quarters". On the other hand Mordtmann notes that out of 12,000 households 80 are Jewish.

According to Perrot who visited Ankara in the second half of the XIX century, the proportion of the Turks and the minorities in the population composition is as follows: nearly 25,000 Turks, 16,000 Armenians, 3,000 Greeks and 1,000 Jews.

The first general census of population was taken in 1830 in the reign of Mahmut II, which was the preparation period for the "Reformation" through its search for a new order of things. According to the results of the census in Ankara, in the urban center there were 6108 Muslims, 5050 reaya (Armenians and other Christians) and 135 Jews; these numbers covered only the 'male' population.

The notes and evaluations related to the population went on. At about the end of the XIX. century the Jews were established to be 50 "households", and numbered a total of 413.

In the period before the Republic in Anatolia, the numerical data related to the minorities and thus the Jews in Ankara are not very consistent. However they are still able to give us an approximate proportion of the "Jewish population" in Ankara.

In the first decades of the Republic we understand that there were about 100 Jewish families in Ankara, a total of about 500 people. In relation to this figure it appears that the Jewish population has decreased notably.

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11 V. Guinet, La Turquie d'Asie, Paris 1890, I, p. 258-260.
For the present, the members of the Jewish community in Ankara number only about 100 people.

The Jewish Quarter:

The Jewish quarter of Ankara today is below Samanpazarı in the space between Denizciler and Anafartalar streets. It is adjacent to the Yeğenbey quarter.

Looking for other quarters that were possibly inhabited by the Jews we found out only one that was noted by Galanti. This is the non-Muslim quarter of Hacı Hindi and was described as a quarter where the Jews and Muslims shared the conveniences or lived side by side. In the first population census realized in 1830 there is data related to "Jews in Hoca Hindi and Öksüzce". Eventually the name Hoca Hindi was transformed into Hacendi.

As we noted above, the Jews do no longer live in the only known Jewish quarter of Ankara which is below Samanpazarı (III.1A). The few Jews who remain in the city have moved to other districts of the city. Some of the houses in the quarter are empty. Most of them have been sold and now have new inhabitants (III.2). The houses are built adjacently on narrow streets and have courtyards which are closed to the street. The inhabitants' access to the street is through the courtyard gates. Some of the houses are partly closed to the streets by walls that surround their small courtyards at the front. The houses usually have two floors; the top floor contains rooms which open to the hall while on the lower floor the service units such as the kitchen and the storeroom are located.

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13 Data given by Prof. Dr. Yüdük Yürek in relation to the Jewish community in Ankara.


15 R. Özdemir, XIX. yüzyılın ilk yarısında Ankara (1785-1840), Ankara 1986, p.84. The author notes that between the years 1785-1840 there were 27 non-muslim quarters with established names where the inhabitants were Christians or Jews. He adds that in another 23 quarters the Muslims and non-Muslims lived together. Hacendi was in the latter group (p.94-97).

16 "This quarter became depopulated in time", relates Mehmet Kemal; he notes that some families moved to Şişliye (to the section between Atatürk Lisesi and İhlamur Street), some moved into various parts of the city and "the poorer families are said to have moved to Israel". (Türkiye’nin Kalbi Ankara, Istanbul 1983, p. 263).
A part of the houses, some of which are dilapidated or abandoned, have been included in the "Street Renovation Project in Old Ankara", undertaken by the Central Municipality. The object of the project is, among other things, to improve and revitalize the old urban structure, to encourage the owners of the historical houses which are part of our culture to take better care of them, to encourage people to contribute to the protection of our common cultural heritage, and to reintegrate this ancient and not fully functioning part of the city; the Municipality has taken the lead in order to realize these goals.

The houses of the Jewish quarter are thus being restored and renovated inside out and are taken under protection as living documents of the past (III.3).

Among the Jewish houses whose windows nostalgically gaze down the streets which bear names like Kargi, Eskici, and Birlik there is also a Synagogue (III.4). Across the street from the synagogue stand the two most handsome houses of the street which had been built at the same time with it, in a similar style and by the same Italian architect (III.5). The houses are adjacent and have two floors built on a basement. On the facade which faces the Synagogue, the lower floors have a landing on the entrance. The top floors project out over the courtyard and to the street with rooms with abundant windows built over the landing, at the center there is a folded roof with a triangular pediment (III.6). The house is reached from the courtyard by a pair of antithetic staircases that lead up to the landing. The staircase landing of the house on the upper part of the street is especially interesting because of the paintings made in the "kalem işi" technique which ornament its straight wooden ceiling (III.7). There are interesting knobs on the staircase banisters. The same materials and technique is observed on the wall which separates the courtyard from the street. This wall has common characteristics with the courtyard wall of the synagogue with respect to material and the knobs used (III.8). In both houses the courtyard walls, the staircase and the cellar wall facings are built with smooth cut stones, which is Ankara stone (III.9). The building technique used in the upper floors, on the other hand, is the use of a wooden carcass filled with mudbricks. On both floors, the floors and the ceilings of the reciprocal rooms which open to the hall are wooden. The staircase that link the floors is also built of wood; the basement contains the service units.
Before going on to describe the synagogue, I would like to note briefly the place of the Jewish quarter in the modern Turkish literature as it has been reflected in memoirs and was mentioned in interviews and conversations. In his book "Türkiyenin Kalbi Ankara" Mehmet Kemal describes his childhood which was spent in the Küçük Öksüzce quarter along Denizciler street, near the Jewish quarter. In the recollections of the author about his childhood the place of the Jewish quarter is prominent. M. Kemal relates that "the Jewish quarter was below Samanpazarı. When one descended the slope in front of the Kurşunlu mosque, the quarter that was immediately below was entirely inhabited by the Jews. The quarter contained fine houses. We were on very good terms both with the Jews and the Armenians." The author then remembers the friends with whom he had gone to school and played: Yako, Yantof, Raşel, Roza, Salamon and David17.

From interviews and conversations we learn that some famous writers and politicians had also lived in the fine houses of the Jewish quarter. One of these writers is Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu. Nazif, one of the characters in his novel "Ankara" relates that he had lived in a Jewish house as a boarder for some time and notes: "You cannot think what that means to a man living in Ankara, no better fortune can be imagined"18. Again Yahya Kemal, who stayed at Taşhan on his visits to Ankara as most of the strangers did, was advised by a friend to rent a room in one of the very good and comfortable houses in the Jewish quarter. Yahya Kemal acted upon this suggestion and lived for a while in a rented room in the quarter19. İ.S. Çağlayangil who lived in various houses in Ankara in the years 1931-35 had rented a house in the Jewish quarter for 30 TL20.

The Jews of Ankara who lived in such fine houses were usually engaged in commercial activities and manufacture. The Turks who lived near by relate that the Jewish women sewed well and some worked as seamstresses. Another one, who learnt the art of carpentry from his Jewish master relates today with affection that he had learnt many things from him and the days past were enriched with friendship.

17 M. Kemal, op.cit., p. 48, 262-263.
While the people lived amicably together, many Jewish scientists who have contributed to our cultural life and scientific activities have lived in Ankara as well as in İstanbul. I would like to remember here Prof. Landsberger, Gerngross and Ruben who worked for Ankara University, and also Samoil Abravanel. I would also like to mention Karl Ebert, Prof. Eckstein and Melchior and also Dr. Franz Hillinger, Dr. Baeher and Bodenheimer who have made valuable contributions to the state institutions.

The Synagogue:

The Synagogue is in Birlik street, which is at the end of the slope descended by a staircase near the Institution for the Protection of Children in Anafartalar street; it is built among the houses that form the quarter (III.10). In order to reach it from the opposite direction, it is necessary to go through Kargılar street next to the Leblebicioğlu mosque on Denizciğil street and turn into Birlik street (III.11) the Synagogue, whose courtyard is closed in with high walls is at the right hand side of the road (III.12). Opposite it, across the street there are the two fine houses built in 1907 at the same time with it and which we have described above. The school "Ravza-i Terakki" which used to be on the other side of the synagogue, built adjacent to it, has been demolished. It was built at the same time with the synagogue but only the wooden gate is left (III.13). In the early years of the Republic some families with comfortable circumstances sent their children to this school where the Frech language was taught and therefore tuition fees were charged.

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21 See A. Galanti, Türkler ve Yahudiler, İstanbul 1947, p. 138-139.
22 This is included in the part of old Ankara which is known as "Asağı yüz (Lower part)". We learn that, beginning from the XVII. century up to about the middle of the XIX. century the city was divided into two main districts. In the central urban settlement, the part including the citadel was defined as "Yukarı yüz (upper part)"; "Asağı yüz" (lower part) covered the area from down Anafartalar street and extended to the Hacıbayram mosque and the Karacakbey complex. (R. Özdemir, op. cit., p. 98).
23 M.Kemal, op.cit., p. 263. We find a brief note about the minority schools in C.Külebi's evaluation of the artists: "Before the republic the artists have all been educated in the minority schools. Children of the gentlefolk. After the republic they are all children of people from Anatolia. This is a significant social development. M.M. Doğan, "Cahit Külebi ile söyleşi." Çağdaş Türk Dili, Nr. 59, January 1993, Ankara, p. 14.

In his numerical evaluation of the minorities in Ankara, V. Quinet notes that the Jews had one school, attended by both boys and girls; there were 36 students. (op.cit. p.283).
The Synagogue is closed for the moment for restoration purposes. The courtyard wall is built with well cut, regular stones and topped with knobs; however, the space between the knobs were later filled and the courtyard was closed to the street further (III.14). The courtyard along the front face of the synagogue is edged with outhouses in the north and south; the doors of these units open to the courtyard (III.15).

The horizontal synagogue has stone walls built with irregular stones roughly shaped and is trapezoid in form (Plan). The courtyard is at the front. There are two doors that open to the street; the main entrance is the one down the road.

The synagogue door is constructed simply and placed at the center of the facade (III.16). On each side of the door there are three arched windows which result in a facade with considerable blank spaces. The arches are plasticized with profiled contours on the blank spaces. Between the windows the plasters reach to the arch spandrel and end in profiled capitals that widen upwards. On top of the three blank spaces at the middle there is a triangular pediment with an inscription space at the center (III.17). The following inscription is written in Hebrew on the pane over the door: "Let all the tribes come to me (Solomon) 1907". The entrance was later closed in with glass.

As it is known it is traditional to set up 'Sukas' in the Sukot festival celebrated by the Jews. At the festival the Jews gather at the Synagogue to set up a Suka, a tent-like shelter at the courtyard. This indicates the significance and necessity of the courtyard as part of a Synagogue.

The courtyard of the Ankara Synagogue also contains a fountain where hands are washed before prayers (III.18). The fountain is placed across the Synagogue door and is made of marble. The basin is sectioned with rounded corners and is set on two grooved stands with an 'S' profile. The horizontal, rectangular backstone is surrounded above with an ornamented relief band (III.19). The ornamentation consists of the 'C' motif which is placed

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24 Read by Y. Yürüm. The date 1907 was written with Hebrew letters also.
25 N. Güleryüz, on explaining this function of the courtyard: the name of the 'Sukot' festival derives from the 'sukos', the tent-like shelters which the Jews had set up on crossing the desert centuries ago. To commemorate this, the Jews set up sukos in the synagogue courtyard for seven days. Sukot also means the harvest festival (see, İstanbul Sinagogları, İstanbul 1992, p. 11, 125).
continuously in various ways on a horizontal direction. Apart from the inscription at the center of the backstone, emphasized with rosettes on either side, there is also a five line inscription above and outside the stone. Both inscriptions are in Hebrew.

The Synagogue is entered from the west, through the main door at the center of the facade (Ill.20). The inside of the building measures 21.00 m long and is 11.00 m at the south, 8.5 m at the north and consists of a single platform without partitions. The straight wooden ceiling ornamented with various floral motifs is heightened with a pseudo-cupola over the 'Teva'. At the center, the octagonal 'Teva (Pulpit)' and the 'Ehal' to the south, which is mounted with three steys are impressive with their structure and ornamentation. The interior is full of light due the many windows in the south and west, the benches surround the spaces in front of the windows. The windows have rounded arches ornamented with stained glass figures. The floor is paved with marble.

The chorus balcony placed opposite the 'Ehal' is projected forward (Ill.21). It displays a fine workmanship with its rounded structure and the railings.

The women's quarter is upstairs and is along the western and northern walls. The quarter has a straight wooden ceiling and opens to the prayer hall through galleries with wooden supports that have voluted capitals (Ill.22). The screening wall between the supports has wooden lattice-work railings at the top.

The most sumptuously ornamented element of the synagogue is the 'Ehal' (Ill.23). It is placed at the center of the southern wall and measures 2.50 to 2.60 m. and is mounted with three steps placed over a wide, rounded platform, calminating with the cabinet where the Sefer Toras are placed (Ill.24). At each side there are three wooden pillars set on high pedestals. They reach the wooden ceiling with their two sectioned capitals. The pillars are richly ornamented in the relief technique from the pedestals up to the capitals and are further enhanced with paint (Ill.25). On the faces of the square-sectioned pedestals, a motif of vine leaves and grapes are presented in a perfect composition (Ill.26). A floral composition of flowers and leaves

\[\text{Sefer Tora: Versions of the Old Testament handwritten on parchment rolls (see, N. Güleryüz, op.cit. p.125).}\]
is spirally arranged on the pillars where gilding was also used. The pillar capitals take their place in the ornamentation scheme with a composition of acanthus motifs surrounded by volutes. The upper section of the pillar capitals have, on each face, rounded rosettes filled with flowers.

The facade of the Ehal is crowned with a pediment ornamented in the rococo style which arises between the pillars. The ornamentation consists of leaves and flowers that emerge from a central vase and spread sideways and upwards; this motif is surrounded with voluted 'C' motifs placed antitethically. On the side corners the compositions formed by individual vases from which leaves and fruit emerge is interesting. The star symbol representing the seal of Solomen is added to the top of the center. On the sub-pediment corniche there is a single line of inscription in Hebrew.

The interesting feature here is the three steps leading to the Ehal, which appears in many synagogues. In synagogues where no figures or figured compositions represented, certain themes of the Old Testament are referred to with symbols. The three steps symbolizes the three angels who came to Abraham with the good news that his wife was with child. The structure and ornamentation of the Ehal is in the Italian style.

The Teva, surrounded with a row of benches on the outside, is placed below a pseudo cupola. The benches which are placed around its inner side is usually for children, except on the festival days when the assistants of the Rabbi are seated there. The pulpit which faces the Ehal displays concenctrated floral ornamentation in relief. At the center of the pane there is a bunch of leaves and flowers placed in a vase. From the horizontal band which is above, grapes and vine leaves emerge from a vase and spread sideways. The lower corners of the pane are filled with similar floral motifs.

The flat wooden ceiling, which is elavated with a pseudo cupola at the center, is completely ornamented with paintings. The motifs are painted on a streched cloth base. On a light blue background and using the 'kalem şiği' technique the leaf and flower motifs are painted with using white, grey, yellow, blue and dark green colours. The spaces between the floral motifs are spotted with small gilded bosses in the shape of stars.

For more details see, B.Gömert, Mitoloji ve Ikonografi, p.117-118; also, N.Güleyüz, op.cit., p.11.
The transition from the walls to the ceiling takes place through a gradual structure where bracketed supporting beams are used. The same technique is used on the pseudo cupola at the center. The arrangement is elevated by gradually narrowing the octagonal center at the heart, the center and the surrounding beams are ornamented with painted bunches of leaves and flowers. The lamps which are hung in to the bosses on the supporting beams of the cupola form the center of the internal lighting system together with the chandelier.

The Synagogue of the Jewish quarter in Ankara is a variation of the group of Anatolian synagogues with rectangular plans and is part of an ornamentation tradition where floral motifs are the main theme. The landscape observed in some synagogues are absent here. However, themes from the Old Testament are expressed symbolically such as the three steps leading up the 'Ehal', or the structure of the 'Teva' which is related to Noah's Ark. This is an interesting example of the place and effectiveness of using symbolism in expression.

In conclusion I would like to emphasize here once more that the Jewish quarter of Ankara, with its houses and Synagogue, is a distinguished part of Ankara's cultural mosaic.
Res. 1 — Ankara Mahalleleri (E. Mamboury'den).
The quarters of Ankara (E. Mamboury).
Res. 1A – Ankara Mahalleleri - (R. Özdemirden).
The quarters of Ankara - (R. Özdemir).
Res. 2 – Yahudi Mahallesi - Konutlardan genel görünüm.
The general view of the houses.

Res. 3 – Yahudi Mahallesi - Konutlar.
The Jewish Quarter - Houses.
Res. 4 – Birlik Sokak’ın görünüş.
View from Birlik Street

Res. 5 – Sinagog karşısında konutlar.
Houses opposite to the Synagogue.
Res. 6 – Sinagog karşısında konutlar
Houses opposite to the Synagogue.

Res 7 – Sinagog karşısında konutlar – Görünüm.
View from the houses opposite to the Synagogue.
Fügen İter

Res. 8 – Merdiven sahanlığının kalem işi bezemeli tavan.
"Kalem işi" ornamented ceiling from the staircase landing.

Res. 9 – Konuta girişte "babalar" ve "kapı".
Entrance of the house; Knobs and the door.
Fügen İltər

Res. 10 – Sinagog karşısında konutlara yolun üst tarafından bakış.
View from the upper part of the street.

Res. 11 – Birlik Sokak’tan genel görünüm.
"General view of the Birlik Street."
Res. 12 – Birlik Sokak'ta yüksek avlu duvarlarıyla Sinagog.
Synagogue with high walls of courtyard on Birlik Street.

Res. 13 – Ravza-i Terakki (okul) – Ahşap kapı.
The School "Ravza-i Terakki" - its wooden gate.
Res 14 – Sinagog - Genel görünüm.
Synagogue - General view.

Res. 15 – Avlunun sağında "Midraş".
"Midraş" on the right side of the courtyard.
Res. 16 – Sinagog kapısı.
Door of the Synagogue.

Res. 17 – Önyüz - Üçgen ahlık ve yazıt.
Facade Triangular pediment with the inscription.
Fügên İltər

Res. 18 – Avluda çeşme.
The fountain on courtyard.

Res. 19 – Çeşme - Ayrintı.
The fountain – Detail.
Res. 20 – İçte; Teva, bezemeli ahşap tavan ve oturma sıraları.
Inside; Teva, ornamented wooden ceiling and the benches.

Res. 21 – Koro balkonu.
Chorus balcony.
Res. 22 – Kadınlar mahfesi (Ezrat Naşım).
Womens quarter (Ezrat Naşım).

Res. 23 – Ehal.
Fügen İliter

Res. 29 - Ehtal - Zengin bezemeli sütunlar - Ayrıca.
Ehtal - Richly ornamented Pillars - Detail.

Res. 24 - Ehtal - Aynan.
Ehtal - Detail.
Res. 26 – Ehal - Sütun kaideleinde asma yapraklı, üzümlü kompozisyon.
Ehal - On the face of pedestals vine leaves and grapes in a perfect composition.

Res. 27 – Teva - Okuma kürsüsünde bitkisel bezeme.
Teva - The pulpit concentrated floral ornamentation in relief.
Res 28 – Teva - Okuma kürsüsü - Vazoda çiçek ve yaprak demeti.
Teva - Pulpit - A bunch of leaves and flowers in a vase.

Res. 29 – Teva - Okuma kürsüsü - Ayrıntı.
Teva - Pulpit - Detail.
Res. 30 – Ahşap tavan - Merkezde yalancı kubbe.
Wooden ceiling - Pseudo cupola at the center