Transcript

00:00:01 Speaker 1

Okay.

00:00:02 Speaker 1

Hello, everyone.

00:00:04 Speaker 1

Nice to see you all.

00:00:09 Speaker 1

Welcome to our last Israel Studies Seminar of the term, week eight, and we're finishing with a strong finish with a grand finale with our visit with our presenter today, Dr.

00:00:23 Speaker 1

Eir Vallach, which his short bio is, let's say, a small vessel that can hold a great amount.

00:00:30 Speaker 1

So Dr.

00:00:31 Speaker 1

Vallach is a reader, or as some would call it, an associate professor in Israeli studies and the head of the SOA Center for Jewish Studies.

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He has written on urban and material culture in modern Palestine, Israel, and more recently on race and migration.

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His book, A City in Fragments: Urban Text in Modern Jerusalem,

00:00:54 Speaker 1

published by Stanford University Press in 2020, won the Jordan Schnitzer Book Prize in 2022.

00:01:02 Speaker 1

Yair, the floor is yours.

00:01:04 Speaker 1

Thank you for coming.

00:01:08 Speaker 2

Okay, so thank you very much for the invitation.

00:01:13 Speaker 2

I'm very happy to be here, partly because I would really be interested to get feedback.

00:01:21 Speaker 2

This is something that I already published

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an article about this paper, but I do feel that I would benefit from more comments and feedback in this regard.

00:01:33 Speaker 2

So this is what I'm presenting today is part of a project I've been working on the last few years, which looks at Ashkenazi integration and acculturation into

00:01:48 Speaker 2

Arabic-speaking societies and cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean.

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So that's kind of the broad topic is to look at the migration of Yiddish-speaking Jews from Central and Eastern Europe to the Middle East, to the Eastern Mediterranean, which is of course a topic that has been studied considerably, but look at their integration and acculturation into Arabic-speaking societies, and that's

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received very little interest.

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And indeed, I think the assumption that is taken for granted in the study of Jewish history in the region is that that kind of integration is impossible by nature.

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So my project is just to show that this is not the case, that we can talk historically about the integration of Ashkenazim.

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In this context, I think before we start talking about Ashkenazi integration in Arabic-speaking societies, we have to ask who are Ashkenazim?

00:02:59 Speaker 2

What is this group that I'm talking about and what are its limits?

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What counts as Ashkenazi?

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And this is a question that bothered me

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When I started doing this, I realized that I'm talking about people who come from quite a diverse array of backgrounds, of origins.

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And the question of calling them as a single group, I think, is something I thought I shouldn't be taking for granted.

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Now, this is very much kind of the-- you know, if you had to explain the Jewish world in a nutshell,

00:03:45 Speaker 2

that you would kind of say, oh, Jews are either Sephardi or Ashkenazi, okay?

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So that's the kind of the typical, you know, it's kind of, if you had to explain who, like, what is the sociological division of Jews in like three sentences?

00:04:05 Speaker 2

You would say there's Ashkenazi Jews from Europe, Eastern Europe, and you would say Sephardic Jew from other places.

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Okay, and that's kind of very common, right?

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And oh, you can find this map.

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Yeah, it's very clear.

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You have Ashkenazi, you have Sephardic Mizrahi, kind of what's the, how do you differentiate it and others, okay?

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In Kochi and in China and Italians are also Italian Jews are kind of...

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This is a...

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shame to say this is for my website called map ****.

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And it's so it's not scholarly authority.

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But it's a very common way.

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There's there was a comprehensive survey of American Jews a few years ago, and one of the things people had to identify themselves.

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So about two thirds identified as Ashkenazi and then

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And then a much smaller share is Sephardi or Mizrahi.

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These are the three possibilities.

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And American Jews identify generally if their heritage is from Yidish-speaking Europe, they would say I'm Ashkenazi.

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And I would say, I would put to you that this is something very new, that 80 years ago they would not call themselves Ashkenazi.

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This is a modern category, in the same way that Sephardic is a modern category.

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I think there's Yuval Ivry's

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work on this is relevant.

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So these kind of ways of thinking is 20th century thinking, and we should at least be skeptical about using these overarching categories that explain it to each world.

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And I'll give you one quote to show this from this person, who knows who this is.

00:06:02 Speaker 2

Yes?

00:06:04 Speaker 2

Yes, so this is David Ben-Gurion as a law student in Istanbul.

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Okay, so the founder of the Jewish state said, Ashkenazim are not a congregation or a da, or a kind of ethnic subdivision of Jews.

00:06:20 Speaker 2

I'd never heard anyone described as a member of the Ashkenazi congregation.

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Others made me Ashkenazi.

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I didn't know I was Ashkenazi.

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Until I arrived in Salonika where I was born, not to say I was Ashkenazi because the term was associated with pimps.

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And indeed, if you know the kind of the trafficking of women to Istanbul, to Alexandria, to Buenos Aires and others was seen as a kind of Ashkenazi or East European Jewish profession, and especially in a place like Salonika, predominantly Sephardic,

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community, that was the sense.

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Now, I think, okay, so Ben-Gullen, I think we shouldn't take his words for granted.

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And this is something that he says in an internal discussion in the 50s or 60s, and part of kind of ethnic relations in Israel and questions about how, you know,

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question about the migrants for Arabic-speaking countries to Israel.

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So there's a lot there to unpack.

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This is a more declarative statement, but I think it does make sense, the sense that if you're in Plonsk, it didn't make sense to describe yourself as Ashkenazi to all the people around you, right?

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I mean, they were all, you know, I mean, it's kind of within the Ashkenazi world, it just,

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plays no role to describe yourself as such, and it's not clear that you think of yourself as such.

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Rather, it's Ben-Gurion's encounter with a Sephardic city, like Salonika, which makes him suddenly into Ashkenazi, and this is kind of my argument.

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Okay, so let's start with a kind of general standard narrative of

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Ashkenazim, and again, I'm a modern historian, this is not my field, but I'm kind of building on the kind of the consensus.

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So Ashkenaz is Germany, specifically Rhineland, maybe comes from Saxony, but the classic center is the Rhineland around 9th to 11th centuries.

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And from there, kind of with the Crusades movement to Bohemia and Austria,

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And then the Black Death pushes Jews further to Eastern Europe.

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That's kind of a classic narrative to what is later Poland and so forth.

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By the 19th century, of course, the overwhelming majority, about 90% of Jews are in Central and Eastern Europe and are Yiddish-speaking Jews.

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So that's a kind of common narrative.

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Now, but the question, what makes them into a single thing?

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Why do we talk about them as a single thing?

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Again, I mean, this is something that is surprisingly not discussed so much in historiography.

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So one thing is to say the question of origin, like they all come originally from the Rhineland and .

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And there you have a lot of kind of discussions of how much we're talking about

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you know, in communities in Eastern Europe where there's Slavic speaking Jews that then become Yiddishized.

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And if you can also go into this whole kind of subfield of genetic studies, which is quite unpleasant in many ways about questions of origins.

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And that doesn't really interest me so much.

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Yeah, the question of how kind of established genetically the genealogy

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There are the things that I'm going to touch about, the question of the prayer rite, the nusach and the minhag, the custom, then translates to alacha, to law, and the Ashkenazi form of alacha, we'll talk about it in a second.

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And of course, language.

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I think this is kind of one of the maybe overarching

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common denominator is the speaking of Yiddish.

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I think that's something that could be seen as Yiddish-speaking Jews.

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But I have to say, by the 20th century, I do have, of course, also Ashkenazi Jews who do not speak Yiddish, like the Russified Jews that can't speak Yiddish.

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I can think of examples.

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So how do I, I can say that they come from the Yiddish-speaking world and so forth, but it's kind of, it becomes more,

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contentious.

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I think for me, the question is, the question I'm interested is the question of identification.

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This goes back to Rogers Brubaker's idea of kind of focusing on the act of identification as something that creates an imagined community.

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And can we talk about an Ashkenazi imagined community?

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And is there a sense of

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personal investment in this kind of category that sees that the Ashpenazi world is a...

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And as I said, okay, so there's remarkably little historiographical discussion on this question.

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And I pointed out two studies.

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And Davis's article from 2002 is really extremely good, extremely interesting, looking at the 16th century and arguing there's the

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the reception of the Shulchan Aruch and by the Rabbi Israel and the Rhema and the tablecloth, the Mappah, his kind of canonical rendering of the Shulchan Aruch, it becomes the kind of ground upon which the Ashkenazi world is defined.

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This is in argument, but crucially,

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I think the question is most relevant in places where it is contentious.

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It is places outside the Ashkenazi world where this question becomes most relevant because if you have an Ashkenazi community, again, I'm using the term retrospectively, in Venice.

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And the question, what kind of customs should it follow?

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And should it not just kind of join

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dominant communities.

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And maybe Venice is not the best example because in Venice, the Ashkenazi community is the first.

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The Sephardic is later and the Levantine is later.

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But in other cases, if a Jewish community suffered from the 16th century, what kind of custom should it follow?

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Does it have a responsibility to follow the halakhas, which practice in

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in Eastern Europe, or should it kind of adopt local ways of being Jewish?

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So, and I think we'd see this throughout, kind of the Ashkenazi identity is primarily an issue in places where Ashkenazim form a minority, and it's in multilingual Mediterranean settings.

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Usually, so we can think of Salonika, we think of Italy, but also Amsterdam and later London.

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These are settings in which Ashkenazim encounter a Sephardic world and therefore have to negotiate within that.

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Where identity becomes an issue, and then also people start to talk about Ashkenazim as, and the term in the 16th century,

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is Bnei Ashkenaz, the sons of Ashkenaz becomes a way to think of themselves.

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Now, Davis enumerates various ways to think about Ashkenazi-ness.

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One is the question of genealogy that your

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ancestors came from the Rhineland, or that your rabbis came from the Rhineland, that might be sufficient.

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It doesn't have to be you specifically, but you trace yourself to that.

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Second is, of course, language in Yiddish.

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Third is Minhag, and we talked about it.

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And lastly, I think the most interesting is the idea of corporate affiliation.

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So it is by virtue of being part of an Ashkenazi

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community that makes you Ashkenazi.

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It's not necessarily your genealogy and so forth.

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Because you are part of that community, then it's a kind of-- then the community of the congregation follows the Ashkenazi rites and so forth.

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But it's not a naturalized thing.

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It's a social form of differentiation.

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And I'll talk to this in a second.

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What is very important for me to highlight is that Ashkenazim in 19th century, in 20th century Hebrew means, do not mean what we mean when we say today.

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In the Hebrew press, until the Holocaust, when Ashkenazi appears, and when somebody is called Ashkenazi, the reference is for Germans and usually for non-Jewish Germans.

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Okay, so Shaul Chernihovsky's short story, Ashkenazim, talks about Christian Germans as an ethnic minority in, not in Germany, but I think somewhere in Poland.

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So this is what he talks about.

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And this even, sorry.

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Yeah.

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And on the left, this is more extraordinary.

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This is an article by Abba Himeir, the right-wing intellectual,

00:16:36 Speaker 2

in Palestine, and this is from 1946, he talks about the Third World War of Ashkenaz, he talks about the Second World War, and he calls the, I think in here he talks about the Ashkenazi army.

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He's talking about the Nazi army.

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Now, in some ways it's not a big mystery, like today we say the , the Sephardic army, we don't mean Sephardic Jews, we mean

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We mean Spanish army.

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We say .

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We mean France.

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We don't mean French Jews.

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But it is the Holocaust which kind of divides this, or is like a very clear line of differentiation, after which we don't really find Shkenazim to refer to Germans, non-Jewish Germans.

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I've given another one you can see here on the below, and this is quote from Hamelitz from a Jewish newspaper in 1897.

00:17:41 Speaker 2

And here they talk about German Jews.

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Ashkenazim is German Jews.

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They talk about the US.

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What kind of Jews live in the US?

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You have from Russia, Poland, Galicia, Romania, and half a million German Jews, Ashkenazim, or one that's Germanized.

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here they mean were not necessarily from those German speaking community but became integrated to the um to the German Jewish Elite in the United States who became yes yeah basically so is became Ashkenazi which uh today means something quite different right but you can see the use of this so um so you see here it's a very clear and and there's no

00:18:30 Speaker 2

confusing of Polish-speaking Jews with Ashkenazim.

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Ashkenazim is very limited.

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Okay, where we do see, start seeing at the same time, we do see in some settings, we see the use of Ashkenazim as a broad category that refers to Jews from a variety of Central European and Eastern European origins.

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So this is an example.

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The most common is examples from Palestine.

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I think this is more striking.

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I can find also a bit from London.

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So it's not unique.

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And I'm careful here not to argue that it's completely unique.

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But what's interesting about this-- and this is from in 1875.

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And this is an article about the situation of Jews in Jerusalem.

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And the author explained, and this is probably Brill, the editor and the publisher of the newspaper.

00:19:34 Speaker 2

And he says, we have a number of kind of different communities and those who are called Ashkenazim, he explains, their homelands or the homelands of their forefathers are the lands of Russia, Poland, Austria and Hungary, Germany, he uses Ashkenaz specifically, and the Netherlands, while those who are known as Sepharadim,

00:19:56 Speaker 2

And Moroccans, their homelands, or the homelands of their forefathers, are the lands of the Turkish Sultan and the land of Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

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So Mugabe Jews, North African Jews, obviously come from Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

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It's interesting that Sephardim, in his account, are basically Ottoman Jews.

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He does not mention the Iberian Peninsula, which again shows how

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You know, in this moment, you do not need to bring the story of the expulsion from Spain to explain what Sephardim is.

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You talk all the bottom and Jews, and the Ashkenazim are the broad grouping of this people.

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Okay?

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But I think, and I see it, and I have a number of examples of this in the Hebrew post.

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When, and also not in also in English, in Jewish newspapers in English,

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is that when they use the term as an overarching category, they need to explain it to the readers because they assume that for the readers, if they say Ashkenazim, they wouldn't understand or they would think that they're referring specifically to German Jews rather than Egypt-speaking Jews more generally.

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Now, okay, so how does this, how is this created?

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So I think that's a kind of, how is it?

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And again, I'm asking a question that I think should be asked, because we think of somebody that comes from Bavaria, and somebody that comes from Lithuania, and somebody that comes from Romania, and they meet in Jerusalem.

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And they haven't thought of themselves as one thing, and sadly, they haven't thought of themselves as Ashkenazim.

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What makes them come together and say, we are now Ashkenazim?

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And I think that we shouldn't assume that exists before they meet, or that they immediately recognize themselves.

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And indeed, in the case of Jerusalem, we know that what we call Ashkenazim were extremely splintered to lots of sub-communities.

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Still, nonetheless, they all refer to themselves as in this overarching way.

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So I talked about these kind of different ways to explain.

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So maybe I think the most you can talk about language and you can talk about Minhag, but there's also significant differences, of course, between Hasidim and Litvak and Mitmagdim and

00:22:40 Speaker 2

There's a big difference between the Yiddish you speak in Bavaria and the Yiddish you speak in Lithuania.

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So it's not clear that they would suddenly become this new overarching community.

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There's a very interesting article by Matthias Lehmann.

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We talk about Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire.

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And his argument there is,

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Again, he reads Sephardic Jewish community in Palestine not as a thing of a community that keeps its tradition and customs, but rather as a corporate body that sees itself as Ottoman local community and defines itself against any migrants, any Jewish migrants that come and seeks to either integrate or maintain some kind of level of autonomy.

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So for him, it's a corporate identity that in this case, in the case of Sephardim in Jerusalem, it's not about, again, Iberian Peninsula, but rather, but their status as local citizens of the Ottoman Empire that have a privileged status and want to maintain it in this regard.

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And I can, I don't think he used the term political economy, but a lot of what he talks about is effectively political economy, the political economy of the Sephardic community that kind of seeks to maintain itself

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by maintaining these boundaries and definitions.

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So that's one way to think of what makes a

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what the kind of incentives to create an Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem or elsewhere.

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And here the idea is that by maintaining outreach and connections with communities in Eastern and Central Europe as Ashkenazim, that has economic benefit for these communities.

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Especially in a place like Palestine where there's

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There's a claim that is accepted generally by diaspora communities.

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The diaspora communities have a responsibility to maintain, to help Jews in Palestine.

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There's a history of charity from other places, but again, Lehman's work on this, on the Shadarim, on the emissaries, show that Palestine was particularly this kind of

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central node that allowed Jews in places as far as the Caribbean and Europe and North Africa to imagine a single Jewish imagined community in new ways.

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So in the same way, Ashkenazim had a material interest in first separating themselves from local Jews and maintaining ties with Centralism.

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So this is one a materialist.

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way to explain it.

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But what I would like to argue here is that it's the Ottoman state and engagement with the Ottoman state, there is also a crucial element in this story, because the Ottoman state knows that there is a congregation of Ashkenazim, it understands them as such, it knows them for a very long time, and it categorizes them.

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OK, that is very important.

00:26:12 Speaker 2

So in a way, because Ottomans know that Ashkenazim exists and know that they have a convocational autonomy, that means that any Yiddish-speaking Jew that arrives in Palestine is automatically put in that kind of rubric of Ashkenazi Jews with, and the authorities will liaise with them on that basis.

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And here I should--

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first of all say that I think the important here, important element is the centuries old history of Ashkenazim in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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This is a really important point.

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That Ashkenazim are not some aliens that land, you know, get off the boat in the 19th century and the local people are kind of, you know, are completely shocked by this new kind of Jews.

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No.

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We know that Ashkenazim, and again, I'm using, it's problematic 'cause I'm using the term retrospectively, but we know that Yiddish speaking Jews circulate in the Eastern Mediterranean from the 13th, 14th century, right?

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And these are in small numbers.

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They either integrate into Sephardi communities and become Sephardim, hence the name Ashkenazi as a Sephardi Sara name.

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That means that at some point, either in Syria or in Spain or elsewhere, an Ashkenazi Jew arrived and became a member of the Sephardi community.

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But where they can, they create their own congregations and maintain a certain autonomy.

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And one beautiful source to show that

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is the records of the Islamic court in Jerusalem, the sigilat.

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And the Islamic court in Jerusalem has a remarkable archive that goes back all to the beginning of the Ottoman Empire and even some material from the Mamluk period before that.

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So 400 years of records and the

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The records dealing with Jews, any kind of Jews, were translated to Hebrew and published in four or five volumes by Amba and several other scholars.

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So, and that is a wonderful trove of documents that allows to go and see that from the century onwards, Ashkenazim are recognized by the Ottomans as a different kind of Jews.

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So you have Jews, effectively Sephardic Jews, you have Mugabe Jews,

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And you have a .

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At that point, refer to Alman, German, because they speak a version of German.

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Later on, I think 17th or 18th century, the term changes to Shikhnaz.

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And Shikhnazi Jews are kind of an accepted part of the Royal Greek.

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And they have some limited autonomy in arguing their case.

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They never represent the entire Jewish community.

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They can represent their own congregation.

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Sometimes Sephardic community representatives represent them in some matters, but they appear frequently in the court and argue their case on a variety of them.

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These are usually a variety of cases around property, around divorces, around conversion, around, you know, if they sold alcohol to Muslims, various kinds of

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reasons why they would get to the court.

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It's in almost in some cases we have a mention of them arguing their case through an interpreter, but the vast majority they're not.

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So it's my conclusion is that I think we can safely assume that they were coming there and arguing their case in Arabic in front of the Islamic court.

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So for the Ottoman states, they are a known quality.

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They're not something new.

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And again, I mean, these kind of communities exist also in Safad, also in Egypt, they don't necessarily have continuity.

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So we see their nature and the composition changes with other waves of migration.

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But so they come and go.

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And that is also true to Sephardic Jews in Palestine, but they are

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a continuous familiar presence, and not just, I would say, in presence, also in Istanbul and in other places.

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To give you one example, I will talk about the Hurva synagogue.

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So in Arabic, it's called Dira Shiknaz.

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And Dir is monastery in Arabic, so it's kind of the Ashkenazi compound, it's kind of Ashkenazi religious compound.

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This is in the old city of Jerusalem, and today Ahurva, it's known as Ahurva, the ruin.

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And now it's the...

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One thing to say, it's the oldest synagogue in Jerusalem, so it predates Sephardic synagogue.

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It's from the 15th century, the earliest Sephardic synagogues are from the 15th century, sorry, 16th century, this is the 15th century.

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So kind of a, and it's a, it's a common that is, you know, is there and

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with more or less, you know, in some moments we see it as quite segregated from its environment, in others we see it more socially integrated from its environment.

00:32:19 Speaker 2

Now, the issue becomes, the story that I'm telling is about the destruction of the synagogue, and this is in the early 1700s.

00:32:33 Speaker 2

So what happens in the

00:32:35 Speaker 2

Around the time of the 18th century, so around the late 17th century, a largish group of migrants comes to Jerusalem.

00:32:52 Speaker 2

This is the migrant Aliyat Rabbi Yudah Hasid, associated with Sabbatean sentiments.

00:33:03 Speaker 2

And the arrival of several hundreds of migrants to Jerusalem creates an economic crisis because they arrive a large number at once.

00:33:15 Speaker 2

They don't have sufficient funds to survive, and clearly they're not integrated into the local society and economy because they just arrive.

00:33:26 Speaker 2

And they go into debt quite quickly, and there's a spiraling

00:33:33 Speaker 2

crisis of debt which ends catastrophically in 1720 when Muslim debtors lose patience and storm the compound and ransack it and the Ashkenazim escape the city because they don't want to be put in prison for being in debt.

00:33:53 Speaker 2

The Sephardi community negotiates, it doesn't want to pay the Ashkenazi debt, it has its own debt,

00:34:02 Speaker 2

In the end, it reaches some kind of agreement with the debtors to settle this, but Ashkenazi cannot live in Jerusalem as a community as a result, because they feel that they would be held accountable for the debts that weren't paid.

00:34:25 Speaker 2

So we do know about Ashkenazi Jews who came to Jerusalem

00:34:30 Speaker 2

And, but they, and I think that everybody knew, they didn't come undercover, but they joined the Sephardi community and they said, We're not part of the Sephardi community.

00:34:39 Speaker 2

We pray the Sephardi sending on and so forth.

00:34:42 Speaker 2

We're not a nationalizing community, so you won't be able to hold us accountable.

00:34:48 Speaker 2

Now, in the 19th century, we see the arrival of the famous wave of migration of about 40 families

00:34:59 Speaker 2

from, broadly speaking, Lithuania, the students of the governor Villa that come to Palestine, and this is a very familiar story, become known as-- these Litvaks have become known as Perushim.

00:35:14 Speaker 2

And they become the dominant-- very quickly, demographically, they become the dominant community in Jerusalem.

00:35:20 Speaker 2

And then they set out to normalize their status and have official recognition.

00:35:28 Speaker 2

And they have to deal with the authorities to allow themselves to be recognized as a separate community.

00:35:34 Speaker 2

So they mention at this point, this is during the...

00:35:39 Speaker 2

So, okay, so it happens in several stages, first in 1824 with the Ottoman authorities, then in 1836, they liaise with the...

00:35:55 Speaker 2

with the Egyptian hadiv, which is there's a rebellion against the Ottoman Empire.

00:36:00 Speaker 2

So he's in charge of Jerusalem at this point.

00:36:03 Speaker 2

And they're able, and the representative of these communities, Rabbi Tzoref, is able to negotiate a permission to take over the compound again.

00:36:14 Speaker 2

I think this is really interesting because it's kind of the recognition is that this property

00:36:23 Speaker 2

belongs to the Ashkenazi congregation.

00:36:28 Speaker 2

Okay.

00:36:29 Speaker 2

You know, there is an Ashkenazi congregation that is not Jews in general and not Sephardic Jews that has claim to this.

00:36:39 Speaker 2

And these Jews that suddenly pop up from Lithuania who have no genealogical relation to the Jews that Ashkenazi, the Jews that were there in the early 1700s are now we give them

00:36:53 Speaker 2

the property because they're Ashkenazi.

00:36:56 Speaker 2

Okay, so there's a kind of sense that for the Ottoman authorities, we recognize a kind of broad Ashkenazi congregation.

00:37:06 Speaker 2

We don't particularly care where you came from, as long as you're Ashkenazi, and we're going to hand it over to you, which is a very significant act of acknowledgement and recognition.

00:37:18 Speaker 2

which enables them to build a community.

00:37:20 Speaker 2

And we're not going to hold you accountable for the debts because all this kind of was sorted out 50 years ago.

00:37:28 Speaker 2

And of course, the Muslim debtors, I mean, they tried to get some money out of this, and the Islamic Court says, no, you're not going to get anything.

00:37:37 Speaker 2

So here you see a very fundamental kind of act of recognition, which then

00:37:42 Speaker 2

From the Ottoman perspective, there is this thing called Ashkenazim.

00:37:46 Speaker 2

We're not going to, once we recognize some group that is represented, we're not going to start meddling, you know, making subdivision.

00:37:56 Speaker 2

And that has legal implications, that has implications in terms of restitution of property.

00:38:01 Speaker 2

It has implications in terms of legal standing, as we see later on when they are given more and more autonomy on the basis of their difference from

00:38:11 Speaker 2

Sephardic community.

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Now, of course, again, I mean, the Hasidim who are present in Palestine at this point are unhappy about this because why should the Litvak get this prime property and not them?

00:38:26 Speaker 2

But here you have the kind, not for the first time, one group kind of claims to represent the rest of them and the others are

00:38:39 Speaker 2

marginalized on this basis and are unable to claim separate representation and their own kind of property claims on this basis.

00:38:53 Speaker 2

Okay, and I think, okay, my article has a number of other example in this case.

00:39:01 Speaker 2

I should say also,

00:39:03 Speaker 2

And this is also an important point, that the Ottomans not only know Ashkenazi Jews from the Eastern Mediterranean, they also know Ashkenazi Jews from the Balkans and from Romania, which was an Ottoman principality for centuries.

00:39:21 Speaker 2

And only in the 19th century, Ottomans lose control over Romania and places like Moldova, which were under Ottoman

00:39:32 Speaker 2

rule, even if not in the same level that other territories.

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And that allows Ashkenazi Jews to claim to be part of the Ottoman community of Ottoman identity, Ottoman citizens.

00:39:46 Speaker 2

We see this in examples where Romanian Jews seek to migrate on the basis of them being

00:39:54 Speaker 2

lost citizens of the Ottoman Empire.

00:39:56 Speaker 2

They say we want to be Mohajers, we want to be one of those like Muslim refugees from the Caucasus, we're also kind of Ottomans, lost Ottomans, we want to go back to the Ottoman Empire.

00:40:06 Speaker 2

So we do see this kind of, and that I think calls into question the kind of divides, very clear divides that we have in our mind between Ottoman, Mediterranean world and these Ashkenazi, the Ashkenazi as a European.

00:40:23 Speaker 2

I want to end with the option that was there for Ashkenazi Jews, or Egypt-speaking Jews, that arrived in Palestine.

00:40:32 Speaker 2

And this is something that was, as I referred to, was much more common in medieval or early modern time, of becoming Sephardic.

00:40:41 Speaker 2

So one of the ways of becoming...

00:40:45 Speaker 2

One way in which Ashkenazim

00:40:49 Speaker 2

gets defined as an overarching community of people of different needs, et cetera, is by the Ottoman authorities and against the existing Sephardic community, which has its own official recognition.

00:41:03 Speaker 2

Now, you can imagine a situation where they become part.

00:41:07 Speaker 2

And I do find these examples, and I will end with one of them,

00:41:14 Speaker 2

And this is Rabbi Yitzhak Prague Oplatka.

00:41:22 Speaker 2

So he was Prague, he's from Prague.

00:41:24 Speaker 2

So he comes to Palestine in the 1830s.

00:41:31 Speaker 2

And very quickly, he becomes completely fascinated with Sephardi ways of being Jewish.

00:41:38 Speaker 2

He prays in Sephardi synagogues, he marries a Sephardic woman, and he basically kind of,

00:41:45 Speaker 2

makes himself Sephardic.

00:41:49 Speaker 2

He taught himself Vadino and then he became a teacher in Sephardic institutions.

00:41:55 Speaker 2

And one of the most beautiful accounts, and this is by his, this account by his granddaughter, and she says that

00:42:12 Speaker 2

he would come to look after her and when she was a toddler and he would sing her lullabies in Ladino in a very strong Yiddishist accent with a not a but a and she said also very strange uh lullabies that she they were not Sephardic lullabies and she said they must have been

00:42:37 Speaker 2

some kind of Ashkenazi lullaby that he translated to Ladino.

00:42:42 Speaker 2

It was about, it was in Moshe's wedding, we slaughtered a small bird, everyone ate it, and we had a little leftover.

00:42:50 Speaker 2

Maybe that's kind of the idea of precarity is kind of something Ashkenazi experienced.

00:42:56 Speaker 2

And then Sephardic lullabies were all about Spain, its kings, and its beautiful maidens, very, very different.

00:43:03 Speaker 2

So I think Oplatka is a very interesting case.

00:43:05 Speaker 2

His grand-grandson is Aleph Gurti Yehoshua, who was famously Sephardic, so complete success in terms of integration.

00:43:13 Speaker 2

However, Oplatka himself did have no problem to take from the Haluka, the charity of Ashkenazi Jews, and was involved in various other kind of Ashkenazi institutions.

00:43:22 Speaker 2

So he didn't kind of completely disassociate himself, but this was more a kind of ideological choice.

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I have to say, though, that

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At this point, this is a minority position.

00:43:39 Speaker 2

Very few stories like this also illustrate the benefit that declaring yourself Ashkenazi had for Jews coming from Central and Eastern Europe.

00:43:53 Speaker 2

And we see this as an example of these kind of Bavarian Jews.

00:43:56 Speaker 2

I mentioned that

00:43:58 Speaker 2

within a generation switch to Lithuanian Yiddish and become integrated into this kind of Lithuanian dominated Jerusalemite community.

00:44:11 Speaker 2

Now, I think, now, this is for me, for me, this stops here in a sense that I can say that in Palestine,

00:44:25 Speaker 2

The definition of Ashkenazim had much to do with the fact that they were a recognized entity by the Ottoman authorities, and that created a certain cohesion despite deep differentiation among Ashkenazim in Jerusalem.

00:44:43 Speaker 2

You know, there's about 70 colleges, different, every, and again, every, that there's also material interest in keeping these differentiation, but despite this differentiation,

00:44:55 Speaker 2

between Hasidim and Midtandim and so forth, the interest to maintain a coherent, overarching category is there.

00:45:07 Speaker 2

And also, I think it wasn't so much a question of choice, but the fact that when they dealt with the Ottoman authorities, they knew that they were Ashkhazim, regardless of whether they were from Hungary or from Lithuania or elsewhere.

00:45:21 Speaker 2

The interesting question that I leave open now is how much this variant Palestine-centric experience is important to then create an overarching Ashkenazi category that we know today.

00:45:35 Speaker 2

So how is it that throughout, you know, in North America, Ashkenazi Jews define themselves as such when in the early 20th century they didn't?

00:45:45 Speaker 2

Is it because the emphasis on Palestine, the interest and fascination of Palestine,

00:45:52 Speaker 2

exported this category to other places, or we can talk about dynamics in other places.

00:45:57 Speaker 2

I don't, it's an open question for me.

00:46:00 Speaker 2

But what is interesting, and here, this is from Raul Hilsberg's incredibly important book on the Holocaust.

00:46:10 Speaker 2

And I find it fascinating that this is, I think, this is one of the issues for the book, but the Jews that they choose

00:46:19 Speaker 2

are not Jews that suffered the Holocaust.

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These are Ashkenazi Jerusalemites.

00:46:24 Speaker 2

As you can see in the clothes, this is the Palestinian kombas that they're wearing.

00:46:31 Speaker 2

This is the kind of Ashkenazi Jerusalemite clothes, which kind of combined Eastern European shtreimel, the fair hats, with local Palestinian dress and created quite its own style that you can still see.

00:46:48 Speaker 2

in in in Jerusalem this the the last people that wear Palestinian kumbas on a on I think on a regular basis are those are Todot Palestinians only wear it for weddings and these kind of things and I think I mean I think it's striking that somebody chose this image to talk about the and that kind of shows exactly this kind of

00:47:15 Speaker 2

expansion of this category into what it is today.

00:47:20 Speaker 2

OK.

00:47:26 Speaker 1

All right.

00:47:28 Speaker 1

We're-- OK.

00:47:34 Speaker 1

All right.

00:47:35 Speaker 1

We're--