Daria Kovaleva

THE TROPE OF *KYRA* AS A JEWISH FEMALE INTERMEDIARY IN THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY OTTOMAN IMPERIAL HAREM: THEORY AND PRACTICE, FICTION AND HISTORY

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization
in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies.

Central European University

Budapest

May 2014

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by

Daria Kovaleva

(Russia)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Thesis Supervisor

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Examiner

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I, the undersigned, **Daria Kovaleva**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 6 June 2014

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Signature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am not really sure the right words exist to express the depth of my gratitude to Tijana Krstić, my teacher and mentor, for everything: from having accepted me to the 2YMA program under her supervision and the classes that were most helpful in advancing my understanding of the thesis sources to endless support, patience, and encouragement in the moments of crisis, not to mention invariably expert and inspiring guidance.

Moreover, this work could not have been completed without essential contribution on the part of many teachers, colleagues and friends. I thank Yaron Ben-Naeh and Carsten Wilke for particularly fruitful and instructive suggestions in the course of conducting the many-stage research; Gerhard Jaritz, Tolga Esmer, as well as Gábor Klaniczay for insightful conversations; Ferenc Csirkes, Tolga Esmer, and Ahmet Bilaloğlu for having exposed me to the intricacies and beauty of Ottoman Turkish archival documents, narrative prose, and poetry on the advanced level I could have never dreamt of before coming to CEU; Eszter Lénárt for the training in Venetian paleography; Domagoj Madunić for expert guidance on how to approach and not to get lost in the archive; many staff members of the State Archives of Venice for their patience, help, and encouragement; Leslie Peirce and Günhan Börekçi for stimulating interest in my research project; Emrah Safa Gürkan, Fatma Özden Mercan, Halil Evren Sünnetçioğlu, Margaretha Boockmann, Alexei Sivertsev, Ahmet Bilaloğlu, and staff members of CEU Library for procuring pieces of primary and secondary source material otherwise inaccessible to me. In addition, I want to thank the Department of Medieval Studies, both staff and faculty members, for making my two-year experience in CEU in general so pleasant and rewarding.

I am indebted to my family for being with me whenever I need them regardless of the distance. And I thank Nika for guiding me through these last three months.

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INTRODUCTION

> …an enormous woman, a Jewess dressed all in pink and carrying a bundle, appeared out of nowhere and accosted me. She was as large and wide as an armoire. Yet she was boisterous, lively and even coquettish. …
>
> "Would you deign to buy a silk handkerchief for your secret lover from Esther, Istanbul's premier peddler of fine cloth?"
>
> … Her body lengthened like the slender form of an acrobat and she leaned toward me with an elegant gesture. At the same time with the skill of magician who plucks objects out of thin air, she caused a letter to appear in her hand. … [Esther has] made letter-delivery a matter of commerce and custom…[1]

The above-mentioned Sephardi (namely, of Iberian origin) Jewess Esther serves as one of the point-of-view characters in the novel *Benim Adım Kırmızı* (*My Name is Red*) by Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk (1998).[2] As the plot of the novel unfolds in the second half of the sixteenth century, one should assume that Pamuk drew her character from the historical figure known in academic literature and popular fiction as Esther Kyra, who will serve as the point of departure for the thesis.[3] An imagined biography of the very same woman – her colorful life story and its bloody end – underlies the plot of another contemporary Turkish novel, *Kiraze*, written by Solmaz Kamuran, herself both an author and translator of modern English popular novels depicting sixteenth-century Ottoman society.[4] Following the expulsion of Sephardi Jews from Iberia and their migration to and settlement in the Ottoman realms from 1492 to 1598, *Kiraze* presents the saga of Esther Kyra's family: her parents' tragic separation and reunion, her own unfortunate love and unhappy marriage, her commercial activity and entrance into the Ottoman palace service, family collisions and

[1] Orhan Pamuk, *My Name is Red*, tr. Erdağ Göknar (New York: Random House, 2006), 34, 37.
[2] Her grandmother is said to have emigrated from Portugal.
[3] In his autobiographical book Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, tr. Maureen Freely (New York: Random House, 2006), 154-155, the author allegedly recalls leafing through *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (*Encyclopedia of Istanbul*) by Reşat Ekrem Koçu. As a matter of fact he refers here to the non-existent entry of the never-completed encyclopedic work, of which only eleven volumes were published, with the last entry being "Gökçepınar, Mehmed," although the entry on "Kira Ester" had been announced in the penultimate volume under the letter "E:" Reşat Ekrem Koçu, *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* [Encyclopedia of Istanbul], vol. 10 (Istanbul: Koçu Yayınları, 1971), 5367. I thank my mother for drawing my attention to this mention of Esther Kyra by Orhan Pamuk.
[4] Solmaz Kamuran, *Kiraze* (Istanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 2000); Ann Chamberlin, *Safiye Sultan* [Sultana Safiye], vols. 1-3, tr. Solmaz Kamuran (Istanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 2000); Colin Falconer, *Bir Hürrem Masalı* [The tale of Hürrem], tr. Solmaz Kamuran (Istanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 2002).

reconciliations, as well as the dramatic juicy slaughter of the female protagonist together with her sons that marked the beginning of the massacre in the Jewish quarter.[5]

These modern literary enterprises, in fact, carry on a much earlier tradition. Although romanticizing Esther Kyra's figure in literature dates to the second half of the nineteenth century, when Marcus Lehman first published the short story *Esther Chiera: eine historische Erzählung* (1878),[6] it was the development of earlier scholarship that predetermined successful fictionalization of this character. In 1829, on the basis of unpublished Venetian diplomatic reports and two Ottoman chronicles, Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, the author of the first scholarly history of the Ottoman Empire, identified Kyra the Jewess as a provider of the Ottoman Imperial harem, diplomatic intermediary, and royal favorite (active since 1570s, d. 1600).[7] In 1846, Heinrich Graetz published the first comprehensive work on Jewish history, presenting to the readers two Hebrew sources mentioning Esther Kyra, the widow of a rabbi Elijah Handali from Istanbul (1560s-1570s) and thus provided the scholarly community with the first sketch of Esther Kyra's biography as the harem favorite.[8] Finally, in 1895, V. D. Smirnov discovered a *berat* from 1618 confirming a tax exemption and some other privileges granted to a Jewess Kyra and her whole family in 1548.[9] This discovery extended the chronology of Esther Kyra's relation with the Ottoman court even further,

[5] The novel had great success, while Kamuran, in turn, became considered a connoisseur of the subject and was invited, among other writers, to the conference on Sephardi Jewish history and literature organized by the Sorbonne University (2003). *Solmaz Kamuran. Biography* (solmazkamuran.com, 2010), http://www.solmazkamuran.com/eng/biyografi.html (accessed May, 1, 2014).

[6] Marcus Lehmann, "Esther Chiera: eine historische Erzählung," *Der Israelit* 19, no. 2 (January 9, 1878): 27-28.

[7] Joseph von Hammer, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, vol. 4: 1574–1623 (Pest: C.A.Hartleben, 1829), 38, 156, 159, 303-304.

[8] Heinrich Graetz, "Note 7-II. Die Favoritin Esther Kiera," *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 9 (Leipzig: Fries, 1866), 584–586.

[9] [V. D. Smirnov] В. Д. Смирнов, "Грамота султана Османа II-го семейству іудейки Киры" [The charter issued in favor of the family of the Jewess Kira by Sultan Osman II], in *Восточныя Заметки* [Oriental notes], ed. В.П. Васильев [V.P. Vasilyev], (St-Petersburg: Императорский С.-Петербургский Университет), 1895. 35-78.

which was subsequently recorded in the biographical essay by Abraham Galante (1926), who took into consideration most of the available sources up to that point.[10]

Simultaneously, other sources mentioning Jewish women in relation to the Ottoman palace household without, however, calling them *kyra* started appearing, thus paving the way for groundbreaking reconsideration of the previously accumulated evidence.[11] This circumstance affected both the understanding of *kyra* and the biography of Esther. Thus, *kyra* became conceptualized as a collective title for women, generally of Jewish origin, who "handled the relations of the wives in the sultan's royal harem in various external matters" and "acted as commercial intermediaries between the women in the harem and the world beyond it," while Esther was only supposed to be one of them.[12]

As for her life story, as early as 1929 Johannes H. Mordtmann suggested that the biography might in fact have been constructed out of at least three biographies of different women: Esther herself as well as a Jewish woman who had received a tax exemption (before 1548) and another one who had been murdered together with her family in 1600.[13] This working hypothesis has gradually been proven as the scholars uncovered two more figures,

[10] Abraham Galante, *Esther Kyra d'après de nouveaux documents* (Istanbul: Société Anonyme de Papeterie et d'Imprimerie (Fratelli Haïm), 1926). Galante, however, mixed up the dates while converting them from Jewish and Muslim calendars into the Christian, and, therefore, suggested the period of 1539-1592 instead of 1548-1600. His dating created further confusion in subsequent scholarship.

[11] For instance, Shlomo Rosanes referred to the account of a Jewish woman, who, according to a late sixteenth-century Hebrew chronicle, cured the young sultan, Johannes H. Mordtmann examined two previously unknown early modern Western narrative sources, Cecil Roth, in turn, quoted three addiitonal Western travelogues, and Salo Baron: [Shlomo A. Rosanes], *קורות ימי ישראשל בתוגרמה. שלמה אב. רוזאניס* [History of the Jews in Turkey], vol. 3 (Husiatyn: Filip Kawalek, 1913–14), 70-71; Johannes H. Mordtmann, "Die jüdischen Kira im Serai der Sultane," *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalischen Sprachen an der Königlichen Friedrich Wilhelms-universität zu Berlin* 32 (1929), 2-3; Cecil Roth, *The House of Nasi: Dona Gracia* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), 202.

[12] Cecil Roth, Aryeh Shmuelevitz, "Kiera," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1st ed., vol. 10, ed. Cecil Roth, Geoffrey Wigoder. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), 990.

[13] Johannes H. Mordtmann, "Die jüdischen Kira im Serai der Sultane," 12-17.

called *kyra* like Esther: Stronghyla, daughter of Elijah Gibbor (d. 1548)[14] and Esperanza Malchi (d. 1600).[15]

The evidence of the status, wealth, and prominence in the Jewish community of the woman/women bearing the title of *kyra* guaranteed that encyclopedias of Jewish history, religion, and culture designated a separate entry to "kyra" and made significant contributions to the conceptualization of the issue. While the first entry in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia* from 1906 was only about Esther Kyra, the Jewish favorite of the Ottoman sultana,[16] the first edition of the authoritative *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971) presented her biography in the longest version (1530s-1600) as the most notorious example of Jewish female intermediaries called *kyra*.[17] In the second edition of the same encyclopedia (2007) as well as the subsequent enterprises, the updated entry finally included the names of Stronghyla and Esperanza, as well as some figures of anonymous Jewish women who did not bear the title. Nevertheless, it called all of them *kyras* and advanced *kyra* as a position of female intermediary, generally of Jewish origin.[18]

Therefore, once the sources about other Jewish women came into picture, and the single biography of Esther Kyra fell apart, scholars replaced it with a social category of *kyra*, while continuing to handle the primary material as a source of "hard data" and simply combining the available evidence.[19] This suggested social category provides an integrated

[14] Minna Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul: The Formative Years (1453–1566)* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 204-205.
[15] Susan S. Skilliter, "Letters from the Ottoman 'Sultana' Safiye to Queen Elizabeth I," in *Documents from Islamic Chanceries*, ed. Samuel M. Stern (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1965), 119–157.
[16] Herman Rosenthal, J. G. Lipman, "Kiera (Esther)," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, ed. Isidore Singer (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1903), 487.
[17] Cecil Roth, Aryeh Shmuelevitz, "Kiera," 990–991.
[18] Leah Bornstein-Makovetsky, Cecil Roth, Aryeh Shmuelevitz, "Kiera," *Encylopaedia Judaica*, 2d ed., vol. 12, ed. Fred Skolnik, Michael Berenbaum (Farmington Hills: Gale, 2007), 147-148. A similar approach was also taken in the chronologically next encyclopedic entry: D. Gershon Lewental, "Kira (Kiera, Kyra)," *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ed. Norman A. Stillman (Brill Online, 2013), http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world/kira-kiera-kyra-SIM_0013000 (accessed November, 1, 2013).
[19] An important exception is Minna Rozen's attempt to solve the contradictions in primary material and put the *kyras* chronologically into the context of other Jewish personalities: Minna Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 204-207.

analytical framework that collapses all the instances of Jewish women appearing in the sources in relation to the palace household into a flexible explanatory model, obfuscating a variety of significant contexts and ignoring the different perspectives of the sources. This thesis will argue that such framework is reductionist in that it takes *kyra* for granted as a preexisting and unchanging category and ignores its situational variations, as well as the meanings targeting different audiences. Operating, moreover, in a chronological vacuum, the model claims immutable validity through a long period of the sixteenth century and beyond, that was, in fact, a time of profound changes and transformations taking place in the Ottoman society, in the structure of governmental institutions, and in the organization of the imperial household, not to mention the outlook of the Ottoman Jewish communities that also underwent crucial changes.

This work problematizes the very concept of *kyra* as a social category in order to overcome its inherent explanatory limits for future research. It approaches this question taking into account the chronological perspective, revealing and comparing the meanings of the term *kyra* and observing the evolution of its association with the practice of mediation. The work will be based on a careful juxtaposition and dialogue of the available evidence, revising the already known and exploring previously neglected early modern European, Jewish, and Ottoman narrative sources and archival material. Serial evidence from the three groups of sources – regular ambassadorial reports, seven letters written by one of the Jewish women and Western narrative accounts of the harem – are of particular significance, since they allow for insights into the progressive change in the meaning of the term.

Such an approach to the topic – taking *kyra* as a concept while identifying its "temporal layers"[20] and crystallizing or changing meanings – was influenced by various

[20] [Reinhart Koselleck] Райнхарт Козеллек, "К вопросу о темпоральных структурах в историческом развитии понятий" [On the issue of temporal structures in the historical development of concepts], in *История понятий, история дискурса, история метафор* [Conceptual history, history of discourse, history of metaphors], ed. Ханс Эрих Бёдикер [Hans Erich Bödeker] (Moscow: НЛО, 2002), 25-29.

schools of historical semantics, including the German school of *Begriffsgeschichte* or conceptual history. The methodological utility of *Begriffsgeschichte* for this research is based on the fact that conceptual history emerged in opposition to the traditional political history[21] and drew attention to the processual nature of constructing meanings.[22] While practitioners and theorists of the field address crucial concepts of the political-social vocabulary, believing that change in social reality reveals itself semantically in the evolution of these concepts, I intend to perform a reverse operation. Although I am interested in how different layers of the concept of *kyra* reflect respective social realities, my analysis will be focused on the concept itself, on its instrumentality and on the construction of the social category of *kyra*. Since, as Reinhart Koselleck concludes, the world of concepts is always more rigid, static, and less flexible than the intensively changing reality,[23] a thorough analysis of the sources that confusingly anonymize their protagonists and careful distinction among the individuals will facilitate problematizing the *kyra* paradigm.

In the basis of any semantic analysis lies a linguistic triad of words (terms), their meanings (people's understanding), and particular realities or objects that they refer to, with all three components being able to develop and change independently from one another.[24] All three elements of the "*kyra* paradigm" – the term *kyra*, the harem female intermediary, as well as particular Jewish women – are equally significant for this study. Moreover, once they become detached from each other in some of the contexts, they form separate concepts that may intersect, overlap, or complement each other in the primary sources, but not in constant, consistent, and predictable ways. Since the sources of the thesis, despite being varied, are still strictly limited, the three concepts can be considered as forming a semantic network, in which

[21] [Hans Erich Bödeker] Ханс Эрих Бёдикер, "Размышления о методе истории понятий" [Reflections on the methodology of conceptual history], in *История понятий, история дискурса, история метафор* [Conceptual history, history of discourse, history of metaphors], ed. Ханс Эрих Бёдикер [Hans Erich Bödeker] (Moscow: НЛО, 2002), 37.
[22] Ibid., 51.

their mutual configurations vary in context and situation[25] and shape each other's meaning, as well as the experience and expectations of active participants who are directly related to the use of these practical concepts.[26]

Setting off to problematize the concept, model or explanatory framework one inevitably needs to resort to a microanalysis that generally aims at rethinking and revising abstract concepts, standard generalizations as well as grand narratives in order to avoid misleading stereotyping and construction of "saccharine images," as Carlo Ginzbirg wittily puts it.[27] The practice of contextualization (and, consequently also of re-contextualization) becomes crucial for this work since it is essential for both conceptual analysis[28] and microanalysis.[29] While operating with the notion of context, in turn, it is essential "to think of them [contexts] in the plural," as Peter Burke elucidates, since "they are not found but selected or even constructed" and depend "on what one wishes to explain."[30] Therefore, taking into account all the above-mentioned methodological implications, I suggest detaching

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[23] [Reinhart Koselleck] Райнхарт Козеллек, "К вопросу о темпоральных структурах в историческом развитии понятий" [On the issue of temporal structures in the historical development of concepts], 24.
[24] Ibid., 22.
[25] Rolf Reihardt, "Worfelder – Bilder – Semantische Netze, Beispiele interdisziplinärer Quellen und Methoden in der Historischen Semantik," in *Die Interdisziplinarität der Begriffsgeschichte*, ed. Gunther Scholtz (Hamburg: Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte, 2000), 111-133.
[26] [Jacques Guilhaumou] Жак Гийому, "Лингвистическая история концептуальных словоупотреблений, проверенная на опыте лингвистических событий" [Linguistic history of conceptual word usage, tested by the experience of linguistic events], in *История понятий, история дискурса, история метафор* [Conceptual history, history of discourse, history of metaphors], ed. Ханс Эрих Бёдикер [Hans Erich Bödeker] (Moscow: НЛО, 2002), 97.
[27] Alf Lüdtke, "Introduction: What is the History of Everyday Life and Who Are Its Practitioners?" in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 22; Edward Muir, "Introduction: Observing Trifles," in *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, ed. Edward Muir, Guido Ruggiero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1991), viii, xv; Carlo Ginzburg, *Cheese and Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1980), xvi.
[28] Contextualization as practice is particularly underscored by the Cambridge school in the works by Quentin Skinner and J. G. A. Pocock. See for instance a literature survey by [Mark Bevir] Марк Бивир, "Роль контекстов в понимании и объяснении" [The role of contexts in understanding and explanation], *История понятий, история дискурса, история метафор* [Conceptual history, history of discourse, history of metaphors], ed. Ханс Эрих Бёдикер [Hans Erich Bödeker] (Moscow: НЛО, 2002), 114. In addition, according even to Reinhart Koselleck, although the meaning is inherent in the word, it is also formed by the oral and written context[Hans Erich Bödeker] Ханс Эрих Бёдикер, "Размышления о методе истории понятий" [Reflections on the methodology of conceptual history], 50.
[29] A general theory can only be rendered intelligible by being properly contextualized, as noted by Giovanni Levi, "On Microhistory," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 106-108

from each other and exploring separately *kyras*, Jewish women, and the Jewish harem (especially commercial) intermediaries from various points of view.

The first chapter challenges the meaning of the term *kyra* as suggested by the explanatory framework and examines the best known *kyra* figures and their connection to the palace household, as well as the scope of their roles and influence, reflecting on the issue of Jewish women's affiliation with the palace household and connection to palace service.

The second chapter, consequently, approaches instrumentality and operativeness of the *kyra* model. After having brought to the fore the problem of two women's figures being still conflated with each other and thus advancing the thinking about two more *kyra*s instead of one, it then inquires into the nature of the title *kyra* and examines issues pertaining to the titulature of Jewish women associated with the Imperial harem.

The third chapter, in conclusion, engages in the concept, practice, and trope of the Jewish harem intermediary and its conflation with the concept of *kyra* in the context of "cross-confessional diplomatic"[31] relations around 1580s. First, it identifies the model of mediation that provided the *kyra* framework with its content. Second, it explores the process of construction of the meaning of the term *kyra* that lead to the creation of the social category. Third, it illuminates the bond between the real figures of Jewish women from the palace and pre-modern Western literary images in order to identify the conceptual backbone that prevents the *kyra* paradigm from falling apart.

[30] Burke, "Context in context," 172, 174.
[31] Emrah Safa Gürkan, "Mediating Boundaries: Mediterranean Go-betweens and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in Constantinople, 1560-1600," forthcoming in *Journal of Early Modern History* (2015).

CHAPTER ONE

EXPOSING THE LIMITS OF A SOCIAL CATEGORY I: THE MANY PROFILES OF THE JEWISH WOMEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE IMPERIAL PALACE

> I never dwelt long on such questions, preferring to move on to [reading about] Ester Kira, the sixteenth-century "tax collector" who was said to be Safiye Sultan's bribe collector; killed during another rebellion, she was cut into pieces and a bit of her was nailed to the doors of each of those who had bribed her. I examined the drawing of a hand nailed to a door with some trepidation.[32]

Although fake, this romantic recollection by Orhan Pamuk,[33] nevertheless, connects his Sephardi peddler Esther from the novel *My Name is Red* to Esther Kyra whose biography was constructed by the scholars in the course of the nineteenth century. The details from the passage, however, belong to the life of another woman, Esperanza Malchi (or *la Chiera Speranza*[34]). Her murder together with other family members on March, 30, 1600[35] was recorded in a number of colorful eyewitness accounts, some of which later underwent the process of literary adaptation and were used by different audiences – Western European, Jewish, and Ottoman – for their respective ideological purposes.[36]

With the exception of isolated pieces of evidence,[37] the sources speaking about her do not indicate her name and call her simply *kyra* or "Jewish woman," thus obfuscating her individual occupational and status profile. As a result, not only has not her personality been exposed to conceptual analysis in the context of the period in comparison to earlier times, but

[32] Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul: memories and the city*, 154-155.
[33] The counterfeit nature of evidence was suggested in the beginning of the introduction to the thesis.
[34] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 12, no. 41.
[35] [John Sanderson,] *The Travels of John Sanderson in the Levant 1584–1602. With his Autobiography and Selections from his Correspondence* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1931), 201; Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 51, 83v, 97v.
[36] E.g: Orhan Burian, ed., *The Report of Lello, Third English Ambassador to the Sublime Port* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu), 1952; É.Sz Simon, "Zsidó epizód az «Osmán Válság» idején – «kira-gyilkosság» a Szultáni szerájban" [The Jewish episode during the "Ottoman crisis" – "the murder of kyra in the Sultan's palace"], *Levéltári Szemle* 4 (2002): http://www.natarch.hu/szemle/20024/simon.htm (accessed May, 1, 2014); [John Sanderson,] *The Travels of John Sanderson in the Levant 1584–1602*, 85-86; Meir Letteris, ed., *עמק הבכא* [The vale of tears] (Krakow: Joseph Fischer, 1895), 193-194; Selānikī Mustafa Efendi, *Tārih-i Selānikī* [Selaniki's history] (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1991), 854-857; Naīmā Mustafa Efendi, *Tārih-i Na'īmā* [Naima's history] (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2007), 162-163.
[37] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 11, no. 75, 172, 181, registro 12, no. 41; Henry Ellis, ed., "Esperanza Malchi, a Jewess, to Queen Elizabeth, accompanying a Present of certain Articles of Dress from the Sultan Mother at Constantinople," in *Original letters, illustrative of English History;*

there is no scholarly consensus concerning her biography. In a study of the Ottoman Queen Mother Safiye's letters it was suggested that the murdered *kyra* should be Esperanza,[38] while a recent attempt to distinguish clearly between Esther Kyra and Esperanza demonstrated that there is still much room for confusion.[39] While *Encyclopedia Judaica* has accepted that the later pieces of evidence (from the 1590s) relate to the figure of Esperanza (without, however, offering a critical consideration of the sources), one may still encounter the works treating Esther Kyra and Esperanza Malchi as the Jewish female court figures contemporary to each other, confusing them as a result.[40] Part of the problem, as I will argue in this thesis, is that most of the scholars working on studies related to the two Jewish women have not utilized the Venetian ambassadorial accounts that clarify the picture by using the personal names and offering details concerning the involvement in economic and political issues.[41]

Another *kyra* who has long remained anonymous and whose name has been discovered only recently is Stronghyla, daughter of Elijah Gibbor.[42] Previously she had only been referred to as Fatima Hatun – this being the name she obtained as a convert to Islam[43] – which resulted in her confusion with Esther Kyra as well. The exemption from taxes obtained for the whole family and future descendants marks her individual life story for the scholars. It is known, moreover, that the privileges had been regularly renewed till the second half of the nineteenth century,[44] suggesting that they were continuously in use throughout this period.[45]

including numerous royal letters from autographs in the British Museum and one or two other collections, with notes and illustrations, vol. 3 (London: Harding Triphook and, 1824), 52–55.

[38] Susan S. Skilliter, "Letters from the Ottoman 'Sultana' Safiye to Queen Elizabeth I," 152.

[39] Minna Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 206-207.

[40] Yaron Ben-Naeh, "Handali, Esther," *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ed. Norman A. Stillman (Brill Online, 2014), http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world/handali-esther-SIM_0009230 (accessed May, 1, 2014); D. Gershon Lewental, "Kira (Kiera, Kyra);" Marinos Sariyannis "Of Ottoman Ghosts, Vampires and Sorcerers: An Old Discussion Disinterred," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 30 (2013): 210 ft. 45.

[41] The exceptions are few: Maria Pia Pedani-Fabris, "Veneziani a Costantinopoli alla fine del XVI secolo," in *Veneziani in Levante, musulmani a Venezia*, ed. Francesca Lucchetta (Rome: Herder, 1997), 73-79.

[42] Minna Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 204-205.

[43] V. D. Smirnov] В. Д. Смирнов, "Грамота султана Османа II-го семейству іудейки Киры" [The charter issued in favor of the family of the Jewess Kira by Sultan Osman II], 76.

[44] Abraham Danon, ed., "Documents Relating to the History of the Karaites in European Turkey," *The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series* 17, no. 3 (1927): 246.

In the absence of additional evidence, the issue of her connection to the ruling family has not been raised in scholarly literature. Moreover, although it has recently become known that Stronghyla was a member of a Karaite congregation and therefore belonged to a different Jewish sub-confessional group than the later two *kyras*,[46] the significance of her distinct origin seems to have escaped the attention of the scholars as well.

Despite the fact that scholars have adopted the term *kyra* and extrapolated it conventionally to other women, the primary sources do not record its use after the death of the above-mentioned Esperanza Malchi. Similarly, one does not encounter any Jewish *kyra* associated with the Ottoman palace household before Stronghyla, whose presence in the social space around the members of the ruling dynasty dates to the 1520s-1540s. These two figures, therefore, mark the entire period when available primary sources applied the term *kyra* to certain Jewish women supposedly related to the palace – 1520s-1600s.

As for the scholarly understanding of the *kyra* as a provider of the Ottoman Imperial harem and diplomatic intermediary, von Hammer-Purgstall initially came to such conclusion on the basis of some diplomatic reports from the middle of this period (1580s) that are kept in the State Archives of Venice.[47] In his time final reports of the Venetian diplomats (*relazioni*) had gradually acquired "unique reputation among historical testimonies" thanks to Leopold von Ranke, the author of the famous positivist historian's credo *wie es eigentlich gewesen*.[48] Von Hammer-Purgstall, in turn, had free access to the archive and the secret documentation

[45] [Haim Gerber,] חיים גרבר. *יהודי האימפריה העות'מאנית במאות ה-16 - 17. כלכלה וחברה* [Economic and social life of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries] (Jerusalem: מרכז זלמן שזר להעמקת התודעה ההיסטורית היהודית, 1983), 119; Stephane Yerasimos, "La communauté juive à Istanbul à la fin du XVI[e] siècle," *Turcica: Revue d'Études Turques – Peuples, Langues, Cultures, États* 27 (1995): 111; Abraham Danon, ed., "Documents Relating to the History of the Karaites in European Turkey," 264, 292-295, 309-212.

[46] The Ottoman sources pointing to her were kept by members of the Karaite congregation: Abraham Danon, ed., "Documents Relating to the History of the Karaites in European Turkey," 245-246.

[47] *Die Jüdinn Kira, welche das Harem mit Waaren und Putz versah* in: Joseph von Hammer, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, vol. 4: 1574–1623, 102.

[48] Eric Dursteler, "Describing or Distorting the "Turk"? The Relazioni of the Venetian Ambassadors in Constantinople as Historical Source," *Acta Histriae* 19 (2011): 231.

(far beyond final reports) due to his own diplomatic status.[49] His conclusion, however, could not be automatically extended either to earlier, or to later decades of the investigated period. Therefore, in order to understand the scope that the concept of *kyra* embraces, one needs first to examine comparatively the two *kyras* – "first" and "last" – in the appropriate contexts.

A. *Kyra* the Jewess as an Ottoman Royal Favorite

One should not be surprised by the fact that the two women who mark the beginning and end of the *kyra*-era, Stronghyla and Esperanza, were initially confused and conflated. Their personal names that, as was stated previously, came into light only gradually, are invariably found in the sources that originated from outside the palace – accounts of Western diplomats[50] and a *vakıfname* (religious foundation act) from 1547[51] in the case of Stronghyla, and Venetian secret reports[52] as well as her own letter to the Queen of England in case of Esperanza.[53] In contrast, the Ottoman discourse – epitomized by an imperial *berat* and several narrative sources,[54] – has anonymized these women, labeling both as *kyras* and only specifying their shared Jewishness. While mention of the Jewish origin of women in Western sources may have resulted from surprise at the freedom that Jews enjoyed in Ottoman realms in comparison to contemporary Europe, for the Ottoman sources, as I would argue, it was

[49] Maria Pia Pedani, "Safiye's Household and Venetian Diplomacy," *Turcica: Revue d'Études Turques – Peuples, Langues, Cultures, États* 32 (2000): 10.

[50] Antun Vrančić, "Paulo Jovio Novocemensi, antistiti Nucerino, Antonius Wrancius Sibenicensis Dalmata S.P.D.," in *Összes Munkái* [Complete works], vol. 1 (Pest: Ferdinand Eggenberger, 1857), 193; Eugène Charrière, ed., "Troisième extrait de la correspondance de Venise, de janvier à mars 1541," in *Négociations de la France dans le Levant*, vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1848), 470; Jovan Radonić, ed., "Извештај Франа Гундулића Папи Гргуру XIII о приликама у Турској [Report by Fran Gundulić about the situation in Turkey]," in *Dubrovačka akta i povelje* [Ragusan acts and charters], vol. 2 (Belgrade: Srpska kraljevska akademija, 1938), 323.

[51] Abraham Danon, ed., "Documents Relating to the History of the Karaites in European Turkey," 245.

[52] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 11, no. 75, 172, 181; registro 12, no. 41.

[53] Henry Ellis, ed., "Esperanza Malchi, a Jewess, to Queen Elizabeth, accompanying a Present of certain Articles of Dress from the Sultan Mother at Constantinople".

[54] Abraham Danon, ed., "Documents Relating to the History of the Karaites in European Turkey," 246; [V. D. Smirnov] В. Д. Смирнов, "Грамота султана Османа II-го семейству іудейки Киры" [The charter issued in favor of the family of the Jewess Kira by Sultan Osman II], 75-78; Ludwig Forrer, ed., *Die Osmanische Chronik des Rustem Pascha* (Leipzig: Mayer & Müller, 1923), 155; Selānikī Mustafa Efendi, *Tārih-i Selānikī* [Selaniki's history], 854-857; Abdülkādir Efendi, *Topçular Kātibi 'Abdülkādir (Kadrī) Efendi Tarihi* [The history by Topçular Kātibi 'Abdülkādir (Kadrī) Efendi] (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003), 272-273; Naīmā Mustafa Efendi, *Tārih-i Na'īmā* [Naima's history], 162-163; as well as others, quoted in: Abraham Galante, *Esther Kyra d'après de nouveaux documents.*

important to distinguish those women from Ottoman palace servants many of whom were initially of Christian origin, the *kul*s.[55]

Another reason for conflation and emergence of the *kyra* paradigm is the close association of both Esperanza and Stronghyla with the female members of the ruling dynasty. The very execution of Esperanza occurred because of her proximity to the Queen Mother Safiye. In the passage quoted as the epigraph Orhan Pamuk refers to a later Ottoman trope of Jewish *kyra* as the bribe collector that developed in the course of the seventeenth century,[56] but neither Selaniki, the eyewitness of the execution from the Ottoman side, nor early Ottoman accounts fashion her in this way.[57] Contemporary rumors, however, reflected in Western eyewitness accounts and some other non-Ottoman sources unambiguously say that she intervened on behalf of the Queen Mother in the governmental appointments in exchange for money, which provoked the anger of the military. The English ambassador Henry Lello refers to the position of the *kadiasker* (*Cadiliskerie or cheeffe Iudg of Asia*), suggesting that there were also others.[58] Similarly, already several years earlier exceptional familiarity of Esperanza with Safiye became the reason for a Venetian ambassador's distress. In a number of secret reports to the Senate during autumn and winter 1596 he expressed great fear of her activity against the Republic and instigations with the sultana.[59]

[55] Recent study has suggested to consider not only male servants, but also female servants as *kuls*, having paid attention to the parallelism im practices of recruitment, education, and employment Leslie P. Peirce, "An Imperial Caste: Inverted Racialization in the Architecture of Ottoman Sovereignty," in *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*, ed. Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo, Maureen Quilligan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 27-47. I will come later to the issue of parallel of this institution to the institution of *kuls*.

[56] Ottoman chronicles, starting from Solak-zade, quoted in: Abraham Galante, *Esther Kyra d'après de nouveaux documents.*

[57] Selānikī Mustafa Efendi, *Tārih-i Selānikī* [Selaniki's history], 854-857; Abdülkādir Efendi, *Topçular Kātibi 'Abdülkādir (Kadrī) Efendi Tarihi* [The history by Topçular Kātibi 'Abdülkādir (Kadrī) Efendi], 272-273; Kātib Çelebi, *Fezleke* (Istanbul: Ceride-i Havadis Matbaası [Publishing house "Chronicle of events"], 1869-70), 289.

[58] Orhan Burian, ed., *The Report of Lello, Third English Ambassador to the Sublime Port*, 5-6; É.Sz Simon, "Zsidó epizód az «Osmán Válság» idején – «kira-gyilkosság» a Szultáni szerájban" [The Jewish episode during the "Ottoman crisis" – "the murder of kyra in the Sultan's palace"], Meir Letteris, ed., *עמק הבכא* [The vale of tears], 193-194.

[59] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 11, no. 75-76, 172-173, 181-182, 195-196.

As for Stronghyla, she is known to have been generously rewarded by Sultan Süleyman (r. 1520-66) himself upon request from his mother, Hafsa, as early as 1521, as is testified by a decree that was issued several months after his accession. Since neither the Sultan nor his mother had resided in the capital during the previous years, this fact caused speculations among the scholars that the Karaite Stronghyla had become sultana's confidant during Süleyman's princely governorship in Kaffa (Crimea), before 1513.[60] This hypothesis, however, does not sound particularly plausible, as she belonged to a Karaite congregation of Constantinople subjected previously to a forced migration from Edirne by the Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1451-81).[61] Consequently, in order to trace her relation to the ruling dynasty one should rather carefully investigate subsequent years.

There is no certain evidence that Stronghyla had any sort of relationship with her first royal patron after this decree was issued but before the latter died in 1534, although she might be the anonymous Jewish woman in Hafsa's service mentioned in a Venetian source from 1532.[62] It is only in the late 1540s that the Ottoman sources imply anew Stronghyla's proximity to the ruling circles. From a chronicle attributed to Grand Vizier Rüstem Paşa one learns about her conversion to Islam in 1548.[63] As soon as she died shortly after, her grandson apparently obtained the confirmation of the privileges on the ground of his grandmother's services as well as his father's and his own.[64] The Ottoman sources, therefore, leave a gap of more than twenty-five years, the latter part of which occurs during the "age of

[60] Johannes H. Mordtmann, "Die jüdischen Kira im Serai der Sultane," 10; Mahir Aydın, "Osmanlı Dünyasında Yahudi Kira Kadınlar" [Jewish female kyras in the Ottoman realms], *Belleten Türk Tarih Kurumu* 243, no. 65 (2002): 626; Leah Bornstein-Makovetsky, Cecil Roth, Aryeh Shmuelevitz, "Kiera," *Encylopaedia Judaica,* 2d ed., vol. 12, ed. Fred Skolnik, Michael Berenbaum (Farmington Hills: Gale, 2007), 147.
[61] Joseph R. Hacker, "The "Sürgün" system and Jewish society in the Ottoman Empire during the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries," in *Ottoman and Turkish Jewry: Community and Leadership,* ed. Aaron Rodrigue (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1992), 1–65.
[62] Marino Sanudo, *I diarii*, vol. 57 (Venice: F. Visentini, 1903), 264. I thank Leslie Peirce for drawing my attention to this source.
[63] Ludwig Forrer, ed., *Die Osmanische Chronik des Rustem Pascha* 155.
[64] [V. D. Smirnov] В. Д. Смирнов, "Грамота султана Османа II-го семейству іудейки Киры" [The charter issued in favor of the family of the Jewess Kira by Sultan Osman II], 75.

the favorite" – to borrow the term coined by Leslie Peirce to define the period when the sultan's spouse Hürrem began to exercise unprecedented influence and power.[65]

The complementing evidence from the diplomatic circles in Constantinople reveals that in the early 1540s Stronghyla was a powerful courtier drawing her influence from the Imperial harem in general and from Hürrem in particular. In his letter to Paolo Giovio, a humanist from Rome, Anton Vrančić, a nobleman and diplomat from Venetian Dalmatia, reports that by being Hürrem's confidant she had helped the release of the Moldavian voivode Petru Rareş, as well as the diplomat Hieronym Laski from their captivity in Constantinople.[66] Her name was also mentioned to a French Ambassador in Venice by Antoine de Rincon who had just terminated his ambassadorial duties in Constantinople.[67] In the context of the present discussion it is noticeable that both Renaissance diplomats clearly present Stronghyla as a courtier by fashioning her as a royal favorite in line with the Ottoman sources: Rincon sees her as the favorite of Sultan Süleyman, while Vrančić as the favorite of *haseki* Hürrem.

The overview of the two Jewish *kyra*s' relationships with members of the dynasty suggests that the concept of a palace favorite might serve as a suitable explanatory framework for the phenomenon of *kyra* throughout the whole period under investigation. The later isolated evidence can strengthen this approach even further. Political assistance or political hindrance[68] were integrated elements of individual Jewish women's occasional contacts with

[65] Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New-York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 57-91.
[66] Antun Vrančić, "Paulo Jovio Novocemensi, antistiti Nucerino, Antonius Wrancius Sibenicensis Dalmata S.P.D.," 194.
[67] Eugène Charrière, ed., "Troisième extrait de la correspondance de Venise, de janvier à mars 1541," 470.
[68] The case of Esperanza and the Venetian ambassador is curious, since it reveals the conscious manipulation of the symbolic capital acquired from the proximity to the sultana. While Esperanza herself was trying to convince the ambassador in her support (*l'hebrea mi ha mandate a salutare cosa non piu' fatta da lei et a dirmi che ha fatto con // la Regina officio a favor della Signoria*), her husband secretly told him that in fact she engaged in the activity against the interests of the Republic (*l'hebrea habbia fatto contro // la Serenità Vostra officii cattivi con la Regina*) that was also confirmed to the ambassador by other sources of information: Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 11, no. 173, 196. In fact, she adopted the same approach towards the English, fashioning herself as the supporter of their economic and political interests in

foreigners in the Ottoman capital: in the 1620s an anonymous Jewish woman supported a political adventurer from Venice Zuanbattista Locadello who sought the Moldavian throne by helping him to establish relevant connections;[69] another anonymous Jewish woman assisted to the servant of the Swedish king Charles XII before his arrival to Istanbul in 1709 to gain favor with the Queen Mother in order to secure the support of the Ottoman sultan during the war with the Russians.[70]

Nevertheless, the *ad hoc* nature of the rise of the royal favorites (not to mention their uncertain future and potential downfall) turns the concept into a very changeable and unstable one. Thus, although both Stronghyla and Esperanza are presented by and for the audiences outside the Ottoman palace as favorites, one may judge by the available materials that the scopes of their fortune and influence were incomparable.[71] This can be explained by the fact, that by the 1580s profound changes occurred in the power distribution within the Ottoman Imperial household, giving rise to the proliferation of imperial courtiers and favorites on a new scale.[72] The redistribution of power, moreover, expanded the share of harem servants and royal women[73] creating figures of powerful female royal favorites (Raziye, Beatrice, Esperanza[74]) alongside the male ones.

Constantinople: Henry Ellis, ed., "Esperanza Malchi, a Jewess, to Queen Elizabeth, accompanying a Present of certain Articles of Dress from the Sultan Mother at Constantinople."

[69] Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, ed., *Documente privitóre la Istoria Românilor* [Documents on Romanian history], vol. 8: 1376-1650 (Bucharest: Ministerul Cultelor și Instrucției Publice, 1894), 398; Eric Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 139-140.

[70] François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *Histoire de Charles XII. roi de Suede*, (Genève: Cramer, 1757), 216.

[71] Esperanza, for instance, could exert her influence with the sultana to press the Venetian goverment mistreating Levantine Jewish congregation in Venice: Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 12, no. 38-41. In addition, one of the circumstances that struck the eyewitnesses of her execution, was the size of the fortune appropriated by the government: [John Sanderson,] *The Travels of John Sanderson in the Levant 1584–1602*, 201-202; Selānikī Mustafa Efendi, *Tārih-i Selānikī* [Selaniki's history], 856.

[72] Günhan Börekçi, "Factions and Favorites at the Courts of Sultan Ahmed I (r. 1603-1617) and His Immediate Predecessors," PhD. thesis (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2010).

[73] Leslie P. Peirce, "Beyond Harem Walls: Ottoman Royal Women and the Exercise of Power," in *Servants of the Dynasty: Palace Women in World History*, ed. Anne Walthall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 81-95.

[74] E.g. Maria Pia Pedani, "Safiye's Household and Venetian Diplomacy;" Eric Dursteler, "Fatima Hatun née Beatrice Michiel," in his *Renegade Women* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011), 1-34.

It is not surprising, therefore, that while the Ottoman palace discourse maintains a neutral to positive attitude towards the Jewish *kyra* in the first half of the sixteenth century, the tone of the narrative changes dramatically by the end of the century and the criticism of Esperanza's influence becomes a part of the dominating decline discourse in the seventeenth-century Ottoman chronicles.[75] This evolution is symbolically articulated even in the orthography of the word *kyra*, although the circumstance cannot serve a true argument remaining on the level of speculation. In the first half of the seventeenth century two distinct versions of the word existed in various Ottoman sources: while recurring confirmations of the decree of exemption granted to Stronghyla preserve the archaic form *Kīra/Kīre/Keyra/Kiera* (كيره),[76] the chronicles invariably operate with a more recent form *Kirā/Kerā* (كرا).[77]

The comparison of the two female Jewish *kyras* would not be complete without looking at the Jewish perspective on the question, which allows making certain observations that have escaped the attention of the scholars. Despite her usage of Italian as the language of personal and diplomatic correspondence, judging by the Spanish elements in her writing,[78] Esperanza seems to have belonged to the Sephardi immigrants or their descendants who are believed by certain scholars to have imported into the Ottoman Empire medieval Western traditions of court Jewry.[79] In contrast, as it has been revealed, Stronghyla belonged to a different Jewish sub-confessional group, the Karaites. In case of the Ottoman Empire this meant linguistic and cultural affiliation with the local Romaniot, namely indigenous, former

[75] A parallel change of tone – from neutral or positive to articulately negative - occurs during the sixteenth century in the attitude of Ottoman sources towards dwarfs and mutes. See: Ayşe Ezgi Dikici, "Imperfect Bodies, Perfect Companions? Dwarfs and Mutes at the Ottoman Court in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," MA thesis (Istanbul: Sabanci University, 2008), 113-115.

[76] [V. D. Smirnov] В. Д. Смирнов, "Грамота султана Османа II-го семейству іудейки Киры" [The charter issued in favor of the family of the Jewess Kira by Sultan Osman II], 74-76.

[77] E.g.: Selānikī Mustafa Efendi, *Tārih-i Selānikī* [Selaniki's history], 854; Abdülkādir Efendi, *Topçular Kātibi 'Abdülkādir (Kadrī) Efendi Tarihi* [The history by Topçular Kātibi 'Abdülkādir (Kadrī) Efendi], 272-273; Kātib Çelebi, *Fezleke* , 289.

[78] E.g. *nacione* instead of *nazione*, or Esperanza instead of Speranza, as was written by the embassy's official's hand: Henry Ellis, ed., "Esperanza Malchi, a Jewess, to Queen Elizabeth, accompanying a Present of certain Articles of Dress from the Sultan Mother at Constantinople."

[79] Norman A. Stillman, "The Emergence, Development and Historical Continuity of the Sephardi Courtier Class," *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma* 6 (1993): 17–30.

Byzantine and Greek-speaking Jewish community, as also suggested by her name: Stronghyla seems to come from Στρογγύλα, meaning "roundish."[80]

Although the comparison of two female figures from different epochs does not yet bring to the fore the issue of the competition between the local Greek speaking Jews and those who immigrated from Europe and gradually took over positions of community leadership and probably in the Imperial palace as well, the two women, nevertheless, represent two distinct type of Jewishness. In line with this, it is important to draw attention to the fact that while Stronghyla adopted Islam several months before her death (it is difficult to speculate about her reasons for doing so), identity, or at least the self-presentation of Esperanza in front of the Queen of England can be characterized as articulated Jewishness.[81] The lack of evidence about Stronghyla's status and authority in Jewish community, therefore, becomes particularly telling in this respect, as well as do the instances of Esperanza's contribution to the welfare of the Jews.[82] The significance of Stronghyla's Greek origin will be further problematized in the second chapter.

B. The Hidden Scope of Jewish Female Service in the Palace

One should surmise that the scholarship has not contrasted the descent and the cultural affiliation of the two female Jewish figures because the competition of the Greek and Spanish Jews inside and outside the patriarchal Jewish community has been traditionally problematized only with reference to men, while women, on the other hand, are believed to

[80] Evangelinus A. Sophokles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods (from B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100)* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 1015-1016; Hjalmar Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1960), 810-811.

[81] *Questo dico io per me, che essendo io Hebrea di legge et nacione diferente di sua maesta, da la prima hora che piache al S-r Iddio di mettere nel cuore di questa nostra serenissima Reggia Madre servirse di me, sempre sonno stata desiderosa che me venisse hocasion di potter mustrar a sua Maesta mia vollunta* in*:* Henry Ellis, ed., "Esperanza Malchi, a Jewess, to Queen Elizabeth, accompanying a Present of certain Articles of Dress from the Sultan Mother at Constantinople," 53.

[82] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 12, no. 38-41, 45, 209.

have been able to transgress the boundaries of Jewish society more easily. [83] The gender opposition, however, tends to overshadow significant aspects of the problem and proves misleading even in the contexts of arguments that seem to take social stratification along the status lines (instead of gender lines) as their point of departure. As an example one can refer to the analysis of the nature of the Jewish elite. Considering the female alongside the male figures it observes that unlike men, powerful *kyras* were unable to "found a dynasty of similar female agents." Therefore, it concludes that, outside of this particular circumstance, their careers rarely shared a common pattern.[84] On the one hand, this observation points to the explanatory limits of the *kyra* paradigm. On the other, however, it discards the very potential of Jewish women's contribution to the understanding of the characteristic features and peculiarities of the Ottoman Jewish elites and Jewish subjects in the Ottoman Imperial service.

Although the Jewish women and *kyras* among them, as observed by Minna Rozen, are not known to have found female dynasties in particular, the concept of a dynasty should not be entirely discarded. After the death of Stronghyla, her grandson Kurd obtained the confirmation of the privileges previously enjoyed by his father, due to the services Stronghyla had rendered to the mother of the sultan, but also because of his own service similarly to his father's.[85] Much later, John Sanderson, who came to Constantinople first as a worker of the Levant Company and later became affiliated with the English diplomatic mission, reported that Esperanza's sons (at least two) dealt with customs, while the older one among them was even said to be *Chefe Customer*[86] that is confirmed by the nature of complaints that soldiers

[83] Yaron Ben Naeh, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans, Ottoman Jewish Society in the Seventeenth Century* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck Press, 2008), 377-380.
[84] Minna Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 207.
[85] [V. D. Smirnov] В. Д. Смирнов, "Грамота султана Османа II-го семейству іудейки Киры" [The charter issued in favor of the family of the Jewess Kira by Sultan Osman II], 74.
[John Sanderson,] *The Travels of John Sanderson in the Levant 1584–1602*, 188, 201.

expressed towards Esperanza, according to Mustafa Selaniki.[87] The son of yet another Jewish woman known in the palace, the wife of the palace physician Solomon Eskenazi (also *Tedesco* or *Alamanoglu*, all the three nicknames meaning "German;" d. 1602), was also supposedly engaged in palace service.[88] If one begins to think about *kyras* as well as other Jewish women and their male relatives in terms of dynasties and broader kinship networks at the Imperial service,[89] this would suggest a totally different perspective on the nature of known Jewish women's affiliation with the palace household.

It is the figure of the above-mentioned wife of the Jewish physician that guides the direction of this investigation.[90] Her example is outstanding, since it is known that she herself managed to cure the young sultan of smallpox (1604). Although the Hebrew chronicle which serves as the traditional source about this episode leaves much room for ambiguity,[91] the account repeats itself in two other disconnected sources – a contemporary Venetian dispatch and a letter sent by a French diplomat to the king of France (1606). While the latter briefly mentions the event, confusing her identity with that of murdered Esperanza Malchi,[92] the former specifies that this was "a Jewish woman, who professed the medicine,"[93] therefore suggesting if not institutionalized then at least professional practice.

Some scholars of Ottoman medical institutions believe that *kyras* as a group were directly connected to medical practice, but they do not work with primary sources and

[87] Selānikī Mustafa Efendi, *Tārih-i Selānikī* [Selaniki's history], 855.
[88] Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 9, 441. The son of the second *kyra*, whose figure serves the center of Esther Kyra's biography, was also said to be sevant of the government or the palace in: Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato Dispacci Costantinopoli, filza 18, 58r-60r. His figure together with his mother will be discussed in further details in the last chapter of the thesis.
[89] For instance, Mustafa Selaniki reports that as early as in December 1594 some relative of Jewish *kyra* (probably already Esperanza) entered the palace service (*Yahūdiyye Kerā karının çırak-ı efrūhtelerinden Harem-i muhterem mensūbātından oldı*): Selānikī Mustafa Efendi, *Tārih-i Selānikī* [Selaniki's history], 419.
[90] I thank Yaron Ben-Naeh for repeatedly drawing my attention to the figure of Solomon Eskenazi's wife.
[91] Meir Letteris, ed., *עמק הבכא* [The vale of tears], 197-198. Jewish historians attempted to reconcile the ambiguities, but contextualizing the evidence still remained on the level of speculation: Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 18 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 131, 494.
[92] Comte Théodore de Gontaut Biron, ed., *Ambassade en Turquie de Jean de Gontaut Biron, Baron de Salignac, 1605 à 1610* (Paris: Honoré Champion & Alphonse Picard, 1889), 102.

consequently cannot substantiate the relation by any source material.[94] Considering the figure of the physician's wife, yet without specifying *kyras* as a category, Yaron Ben-Naeh too intuitively explains the "presence of Jewish men and women in the Sultan's court during the second half of the sixteenth century" in terms of "the large number of Jewish doctors in the palace, as well as women who gave various kinds of treatments."[95] In support of this argument, he discusses the trope of a Jewish midwife who exchanges the newly born princely baby girl for a Jewish boy, suggesting that the trope should "reaffirm" the Jewish men and women's involvement into the medical system of the palace.

If one considers another trope – the Jewish sorceress – similarly to the way in which Ben-Naeh's study dealt with the trope of a Jewish midwife, it is possible to come indeed to a similar conclusion about Jewish women associated with the Imperial household and healing. To start with, Stronghyla's activities in the context of the Ottoman Moldavian relations in the early 1540s were later anachronistically disguised by a completely different political context, and her symbolic power resources drawn from the proximity to the figure of Hürrem made her an active contributor to the intrigue that lead to the execution of Prince Mustapha (1553).

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[93] *Una Donna Hebrea, la quale fa professione di Medicina, et fu moglie di quel Salamon Hebreo* in: Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 59, 81r-v. I thank Günhan Börekçi for drawing my attention to this source.

[94] Gül A. Russell, "Physicians at the Ottoman Court," *Medical History* 34 (1990): 264; Miri Shefer-Mossensohn, *Ottoman Medicine: Healing and Medical Institutions 1500-1700* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 132. Instead of the primary sources both scholars refer to the presentation of the problem of Jewish women in the palace household by Johannes H. Mordtmann who pays attention to Gerlach's testimony discussed below and refers to it in the introductory discussion about Jewish intermediaries in the Ottoman palace household. In this context, Mordtmann quotes another Western source, the history of the Ottoman Empire by Venetian diplomat and historian Giovanni Sagredo, *Memorie istoriche de monarchi ottomani* (Venice: Sebastiano Combi & Giovanni La Noù, 1677), 615, who mentions *haseki* Safiye, a privileged concubine of Sultan Murad III (r. 1574-1595), and relates that "assisted by certain Jewish female confidants [she] tried by means of sorcery and magic to prevent him from intercourse with the new favourite" (*Col mezzo d'alcune Ebree confidenti tentò con incanti, e malie d'impedirgli il commercio con la nuova Fauorita*). Other sources that record this famous harem intrigue do not suggest a connection of these Jewish women to folk healing. The contemporary Ottoman chronicler Mustafa Ālī does not mention them at all, while the secret diplomatic report by the Venetian ambassador explains that the two Jewish women involved acted only as intermediaries and couriers of the letters: Mustafa Ālī of Gallipoli, *Künhü'l Ahbār* [The essence of histories], vol. 4 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2009), 475v; Emiglio Spagni, "Una sultana veneziana," *Nuovo archivio Veneto* 19 (1900): 342-345.

[95] Yaron Ben-Naeh, Giacomo Saban, "Three German Travellers on Istanbul Jews," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 12, no. 1 (2013): 43-44.

Ascribing from early on Hürrem's influence on the sultan to her supernatural powers,[96] Western authors came to the conclusion that "she used [the services] of a Jewish sorceress in order to charm the spirit of Süleyman and to avert him finally by means of sorcery from that incomparable son [of his] destined for the Empire according to the natural order [of things]."[97] While some of the authors call the woman by name, Trongilla, Stronghyla's fashioning as a Jewish sorceress by the Renaissance writers could disguise in particular her being a practitioner of medicine in the Ottoman palace household.[98]

Only one Western European literary trope is certainly not enough to substantiate such a hypothesi; however, there are other examples. One of the Ottoman chronicles, while

[96] Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, *The Life and Letters*, vol. 1 (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1881), 114, 140.

[97] *Elle employa une sorciere Juifve afin d'ensorceler l'esprit de Soliman en luy donnant par les sortileges la derniere aversion pour cet incomparable fils, destine selon l'ordre naturel à son Empire* in: Jean-Baptiste de Rocoles, *La fortune marastre de plusieurs Princes & grands Seigneurs de toutes Nations*, (Leiden: Jean Prins & Adriaen Marstor, 1684), 118. The explanation invoking the contribution of an anonymous Jewish sorceress dates back to the first European narrative of Mustafa's death (mid-1550s) that sets the framework for future works – the Latin pamphlet by Nicolas de Moffan, *Soltani Solymanni Tvrcarum Imperatoris horrendum facinus, scelerato in proprium filium, natu maximum, Soltanum Mustapham, parricidio, anno domimi 1553 patratum* (Basel: I. Oporini, 1555), 33, who had heard the story while in Ottoman captivity. The English adaptation of de Moffan's account by William Painter, *The Palace of Pleasure*, vol. 3 (London: David Nutt, 1890), 404, anonymizes the Jewish sorceress as well. Others, however, call the Jewish sorceress Trongilla. According to the results of my investigation, the earliest mention of her name in this context is to be found in Book Forty of Paolo Giovio, *Historiarvm Svi Temporis Libri*, vol. 2 (Paris: Michael Vascosan, 1554), 256. See also: Jean-Jacques Boissard, *Vitae et icones svltanorum Tvrcicorvm, principvm Persarum aliorum* (Frankfurt am Main: Theodore de Bry, 1596), 206; Richard Knolles, *The Generall Historie of the Turkes*, vol. 1 (London: Adam Islip, 1603), 760.

[98] The particular vocabulary used by the authors is interesting: Stronghyla is invariably associated with magic tricks and love potions and is presented as *maga* (Giovio), *incãtatrice* (Giovio's early Italian translation), *incantatrix* (Moffan), *enchanteresse* (Moffan's early French translation), *venefica* (Boissard) and eventually *sorciere* (de Rocoles): Paolo Giovio, *Historiarvm Svi Temporis Libri*, 256; idem, *Istorie del svo tempo* (Venice: Biovanni Maria Bonelli, 1560), 582; Nicolas de Moffan, *Soltani Solymanni Tvrcarum Imperatoris horrendum facinus*, 33; idem, *Le mevrtre execrable & inhumain, commis par Soltan Solyman, grand Seigneur des Turcs, en la personne de son fils aisné Soltan Mustaphe* (Paris: Jean Caveiller, 1556), http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/danielle.trudeau/Constant/meurtre.html (accessed November, 1, 2013); Jean-Jacques Boissard, *Vitae et icones svltanorum Tvrcicorvm*, 206; Jean-Baptiste de Rocoles, *La fortune marastre*, 18.).
Despite the semantic kinship, my choice to define the trope as a Jewish sorceress in the Ottoman Imperial harem (in contrast to a Jewish witch relies upon the distinction (suggested by anthropologists) between "witchcraft" as an involuntary personal trait or psychological peculiarity and "sorcery" as a practice, the deliberate use of rites, spells or potions by anyone "who knows the correct formula." Although the relevance of this conceptual distinction for wider geographical and chronological contexts beyond the Azande society in Africa has been much disputed, it, nevertheless, serves as a helpful framework illuminating the frequently emphasized linkage between the magic beliefs and medicine, with the trope of poisoning being traditionally the most obvious intersection of the two. See: Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971), 551; Gábor Klaniczay, "A Cultural History of Witchcraft," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 5 (2010): 200-201.

commenting on Esperanza's execution, presented her as a "treacherous and filthy sorceress," who manipulated the knowledge of spells.[99] Another piece of evidence, however, exists suggesting the relation of Stronghyla to the healing practice. The *berat* issued in her favor does not specify the "prominent" service(s) (*ḫidmetī sebaḳ*) that she had rendered to the Queen Mother.[100] In contrast, the oral tradition seems to have preserved the answer to this enigma. According to the legend circulating among the Karaite Jews of Istanbul and reported by the Jewish ethnographer Abraham Danon, an "old Karaite woman named Kiera" had long ago cured the mother of the sultan from an eye disease and had been generously rewarded for this.[101] Putting together the two sources discussed above might suggest that the figure of Stronghyla as a royal courtier who acquired influence progressively between the 1520s and 1540s and preserved her relation to healing practice in the palace (at least on the level of reputation), was appropriated differently by the two different audiences (Western writers and

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As Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Medieval Conception of the Jews and Its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 88-108 suggests, the linkage was particularly relevant for medieval perceptions of the Jews.

[99] *Fāside, sāhire-pelīd ... efsūnları mübālaga* in: Abdülkādir Efendi, *Topçular Kātibi 'Abdülkādir (Kadrī) Efendi Tarihi* [The history by Topçular Kātibi 'Abdülkādir (Kadrī) Efendi], 272-273. While undermining the hypothesis, this evidence, in fact, may equally support it if one considers Esperanza's initial occupation as healing. However, the invokation of sorcery in this context can also testify to the confusion with physicians wife, similarly to the way the French ambassador did in: Comte Théodore de Gontaut Biron, ed., *Ambassade en Turquie de Jean de Gontaut Biron, Baron de Salignac, 1605 à 1610*, 102.

[100] *Merḥūm Sulṭān Süleymān ḫān 'aleyhu'l-raḥmatu v'al-rıḍvān zamānında Kīra-nām yehudiya vālideleri ōlān Sulṭāna ḫidmetī sebaḳ etmekle ḫidmetī muḳābelesinde* in: [V.D. Smirnov,] В.Д. Смирнов, "Грамота султана Османа II-го семейству іудейки Киры" [The charter issued in favor of the family of the Jewess Kira by Sultan Osman II], 74.

[101] Abraham Danon, "The Karaites in European Turkey," *The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series* 15, no. 3 (1925): 323-324. The event is presented as a miraculous cure by the Jewish courtier of her/his royal patron – a widely spread migrant subject in both Jewish and Karaite folklore, the latter tradition discussed, for instance by Mikhail Kizilov, "Karaite Joseph Ezra Dubitskii and King John III Sobieski: on Jewish Physicians, Christianity, and a Fifteenth-Century Illuminated Manuscript from Windsor Castle," *East European Jewish Affairs* 38, no. 1 (2008): 52. Nevertheless, the unverified testimony, originally oral in nature, should not be entirely rejected. Before being written down in the early twentieth century, the legend was current among the members of the narrow ethno-confessional community at the very period when the tax exemption received by the family of the Jewess Kiera from Sultan Süleyman on behalf of his mother was contested for the last known time; in 1849 forty Karaite Jews presented themselves to the legal authorities, claiming their rights as her descendents. The matter was even delivered to the Imperial Council; later on, Sultan Abdülaziz I (r. 1861-1876) renewed the tax exemption again. The Karaite legend has escaped the attention of scholars with exception of studies on the Karaites in wider geographical and chronological perspective. See: Abraham Danon, ed., "Documents Relating to the History of the Karaites," 246, 309-312. The documentary material is discussed in more detail in: [D.A. Kovaleva,] Д.А. Ковалева, "Султанский *фирман* 1521 года в истории, источниках, историографии" [The Imperial decree of 1521: (Hi)story, Sources, and Literature], *Тирош – труды по иудаике* 10 (2010): 37–47.

Jewish coreligionists) and was turned into the figure of a Jewish sorceress in the first case, and a miraculous healer from outside the palace in the second.

These two representations of Jewish women in the Ottoman palace household are also similarly related to each other in a contemporary source – the travel diary (or a literary piece chosen to be presented in this genre) kept by Stefan Gerlach during his visit to Istanbul in the 1570s as a member of the diplomatic mission on behalf of the Holy Roman emperor. Upon arrival in Constantinople in 1574 he relates that "Jewish men and women are very well off at the Turkish court" and "are exceedingly favored due to their superstitious and magical arts that they teach the Sultanas, or wives of the Turkish emperor."[102] Three years later, however, he writes that "the Jewish women, certain quasi-doctors,[103] everyday attend the Sultanas for this reason and receive a good fortune from them."[104] Although it is unclear to what extent Gerlach was originally influenced by the literary or other conventions and later by his exposure to the power of rumor, his presentation evolved in the course of his stay in the Ottoman capital and the change of description in the source parallels the expansion of his experience and his growing familiarity with the Ottoman court society. Comparing the evidence about the physician's wife, Strongyla, and female "quasi doctors" (healers) from Gerlach's diary, one can conclude that Jewish women in the Imperial household seem to have engaged in healing on the systematic basis.[105]

[102] *Die Juden und Jüdinnen / sind am Türckischen Hof sehr wol daran / und über alle Massen angenehm / wegen ihrer Abergläubischen und Zauberischen Künsten / die sie die Sultaninnen (des Türckischen Kaisers Weiber) lehren* in: Stephan Gerlach, *Aelteres Tage-Buch* (Frankfurt am Main: Johann David Zunner, 1674), 59.
[103] I thank Gerhad Jaritz who suggested the reading of the source *so halben Doctorinnen sind* as "quasi-doctors."
[104] *Die Jüdischen Weiber / so halben Doctorinnen sind / haben desswegen bey den Sultaninnen täglichen Zuwandel / und erhalten viel bey ihnen* in: ibid., 381.
[105] In her study on the Ottoman medical institutions and another article on the medical services available to the female members of the Ottoman dynasty, Miri Shefer-Mossenson develops a model according to which the imperial palace had two medical systems – the official male and the informal female. While the former was provided by the corpus of salaried palace physicians, the latter included female healers who practiced folk medicine, as well as midwifes and wet nurses. Complementing the formal services available to the female members of the ruling family they might also occasionally serve the sultan or the princes. The evidence presented on Jewish women in the Ottoman palace household and their association with the practice of medicine is in line with the model that effectively accommodates the details from the sources (such as Stronghyla's fashioning as a miraculous healer, the trope of a Jewish midwife, the episode of curing the sultan, etc.). Furthermore, this approach, defining the complementing female medical system of the palace as *unofficial*, may

Irrespective of whether healing was the main or only one of the occupational practices that the Jewish women in the Imperial harem were engaged in, their relation to the palace household seems to have been much more deeply institutionally embedded than the framework of *kyra*s as commercial intermediaries might suggest. For instance, according to the testimony from a French ambassador, Stronghyla faced significant material losses in the conflagration that burst out in the Old Palace (1541).[106] Not only does this information situate Stronghyla into the female space of the Imperial household, but also implies that she might have lived in the Old Palace together with other women. Furthermore, the existence of Jewish women practicing medicine in the palace alongside Jewish male physicians contributes to understanding the Ottoman imperial experience as resting in part upon the parallelism and balanced interplay of the gender roles in Ottoman society.[107]

In addition, details from the sources about Stronghyla and Esperanza might serve as a departure point for an investigation into the parallelism between the employment of Jewish subjects (as one of various local and immigrant minority groups) in the palace service and the *kul* institution. For instance, tax exemptions, which were among other privileges that Jews used to receive in European countries, were intended for elevating the social status of the privilege recipient. Similarly, in the Ottoman milieu the practice of tax exemption was extended to the ruling elite (governmental, military, and religious officials), significant part

well explain the general silence in the sources about Jewish women's involvement in healing practices. See: Miri Shefer-Mossensohn, *Ottoman Medicine*, 131-132; eadem, "To Be a Sick Sultana in the Ottoman Imperial Palace: Male Doctors, Female Healers and Female Patients in the Early Modern Period," *HAWWA: Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 9, no. 3 (2011): 281–312.

[106] As Pellicier states in his letter to the French king, "*le XXVII-e du mois de janvier, le serrail viel, où estayent les dames du G[rand]. S[eigneur]. s'estoit bruslé avec la valleur dedans de plus d'un million d'or et demy en joyes et aultres choses, et à la sultane estoit bruslé tout le plus beau et le meilleur qu'elle eust, et à une juifve nommeé Stranhilla, favorite du G.S. s'estoit bruslé pour plus de XXV m[ille] ducatz*" in: Eugène Charrière, ed., "Troisième extrait de la correspondance de Venise, de janvier à mars 1541, 470.

[107] For instance, relying on the results of her comprehensive study of the Imperial harem, Leslie Peirce theorizes about the parallel between male and female slaves in the ruling class: Leslie P. Peirce, "An Imperial Caste: Inverted Racialization in the Architecture of Ottoman Sovereignty."

of which were *kuls*, the non-hereditary elite unlike European nobility,[108] whose privileged status resulted from their service. It was already mentioned that Stronghyla had received a tax exemption by an imperial decree. Moreover, the fact that all the fortunes acquired by Esperanza and her sons were confiscated after their execution, in accordance to the custom operating in relation to the downfall of governmental officials, suggests that Jewish servants of the palace were subject to the same rules as the *kul*s. Thus, fashioning the Jewish figures – women and men alike – at the Imperial service in the way that echoes patterns of the local regular elites enables one to perceive those servants who did not hold official positions – *kyra*s or other Jewish women – as pseudo- or quasi-official members of the palace household. These conclusions show that the *kyra* paradigm, which is narrowly focused on the notion of commercial and/or diplomatic mediation between the palace and the outside world, cannot account for all forms of Jewish women's service in the palace and obfiscates a significant variety of services and contexts in which Jewish women interacted with the palace household.

[108] Metin Kunt, "Turks in the Ottoman Imperial palace," in *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective*, ed. Jeroen Duindam, Artan Tulay, and Metin Kunt (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2011), 311.

CHAPTER 2

EXPOSING THE LIMITS OF A SOCIAL CATEGORY II: THE MANY MEANINGS OF *KYRA* IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY CONSTANTINOPLE

> ...Esther took a handful of cherries from the dish on the table. She put a couple of them onto her ear as if they were her earings ... Eti, the daughter of the family Sibrikos, who was assisting Esther, exclaimed:
>
> "Kiraze, what a joy to have you in the kitchen!"
>
> Rachel looked at the young Romaniot girl attentively. The Romaniote Jews had been living in Turkish lands even before the Ottomans and had never left the place. They were Greek-speaking and learned the Spanish language from the Sephardi Jews, while teaching them in turn the Turkish.
>
> "Kiraze is a nickname, – explained her Eti. – "Kiraze," as you know, means in Turkish cherry."[109]

According to the plot of the recent Turkish novel about the life of Esther Kyra, its title, *Kiraze*, should be understood as "the little cherry." However, in order not to mislead the audience potentially familiar with the notorious figure of Jewish history it was instead translated into various languages as "Esther," "Kyra Esther," "Esther Kyra," "Kiraze, the Road to the Sultan's Harem" "Ester, the Lady of Harem," "Esther, the Lady of Sefarad," or "Esther, the Queen of the Promised Land."[110] Although the once constructed integrated biography, fictionalized in the above-mentioned literary piece, has fallen apart, having given rise to the scholarly examination of two other figures of Jewish *kyras* in the sixteenth-century Ottoman Imperial harem, Esther still occupies a solid place in the explanatory framework.[111] I therefore suggest revising critically all the evidence available about the figure of Esther Kyra and addressing the usage of her title outside the palace, in order to complete, subsequently, the overview of the scope of the *kyra* paradigm.

[109] Solmaz Kamuran, *Kiraze* (Istanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 2000), 116.
[110] *Solmaz Kamuran. Books* (solmazkamuran.com, 2010), http://www.solmazkamuran.com/eng/kiraze.html (accessed May, 1, 2014).
[111] Encyclopedic entries exist about her separately from *kyra:* Ruth Lamdan, "Handali Esther," *Encylopaedia Judaica 2*, vol. 8, ed. Fred Skolnik, Michael Berenbaum (Farmington Hills: Gale, 2007), 318; Yaron Ben-Naeh, "Handali, Esther."

A. One More Heretofore-Unknown *Kyra*

Esther's name was discovered by Heinrich Graetz in the dedication part of two Hebrew books that praise her generosity and philanthropic activities towards the coreligionists of Constantinople in need (the poor, orphans, widows, victims of the conflagration that occurred in 1569 etc.).[112] The evidence beyond her virtues in favor of the Jewish community, however, remains quite obscure. The first source presents her as "lady Esther, whose prominent and noble husband, honorable rabbi Elijah Handali, is known through God's grace at the gates."[113] It is noticeable that this source neither calls her *kyra*, nor implies that her activities had any connection to the palace household or its members.[114] The book, however, was published, according to the Jewish calendar, in 5326, corresponding to the period between August 1565 and September 1566, when Sultan Süleyman (d. September, 5/6, 1566) was still ruling the empire, while Nurbanu Sultan, whose confidant Esther is supposed to have become a decade later, was still living at Prince Selim's seat in Kütahya.

In contrast, the second book dates from 5537, corresponding to September 1576 - September 1577, when Nurbanu had already become Queen Mother in the reign of her son Sultan Murad (r. 1572-1595). The source provides evidence about the changes that occurred in Esther's life, presenting her as "the blessed lady called Kiera Esther, the widow of our teacher the rabbi Elijah Handali."[115] Does the comparison of the two sources indeed suggest

[112] Heinrich Graetz, "Note 7-II. Die Favoritin Esther Kiera," *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 9, 585–586.

[113] *…m[arat] Ester … nida' be-she'arim ba'ala kh[vod] ha-r[av] Eli'a Ḫandali* in [Samuel Šulam,] שמואל שולם, "ההקדמה" [Introduction], in [Avraham Zakhut,] אברהם זכות, *ספר יוחסין* [The book of genealogies] (Constantinople, 1566).

[114] On the basis of this quotation only her husband can be considered as being known in the palace or by the palace officials, although the expression "in known at the gates" taken from Proverb, xxxi, 23, might also mean just "is well-known by the people."

[115] *...ha-geveret ha-nikre't Kiyera Ester m[i-nashim] b[e-ohal] t[evorakh] almenat kh[vod] ha-r[av] Eliya Ḫandali* in: [Itshak Akriš,] יצחק עכריש, "ההקדמה" [Introduction], in *שלשה פירושים על שיר השירים* [Three commentaries on the *Song of Songs*] (Constantinople, 1577).

that Esther entered palace service between 1566 and 1577[116] and later acted as an intermediary who brokered most of the contacts between the Ottoman Queen Mother and the Venetian ambassador, as it is traditionally believed?

In the Venetian diplomatic documentation the *kyra* appears for the first time in February 1578.[117] The fact that the ambassador calls her sultana's "favorite" suggests that this woman had already spent some time in the service of her royal patron and, therefore, speaks in favor of a hypothesis that she might have been that very Esther.[118] Although, unlike the case of Esperanza a decade later, ambassadors never called this *kyra* by any other name or nickname, further evidence, nevertheless, exists suggesting that the accepted identification of this *kyra* as Esther, the wife and later widow of rabbi Elijah Handali, is problematic. The three of *kyra*'s personal letters found in the State Archives in Venice have been published to date (from 1582, 1583, and an abridged version of the letter from early 1586[119]), while at least four more unpublished letters are still kept in the archive together with the diplomatic documentation (from August 18 1586; March 1 1587; February 17 1587; and March 4 1588).[120] According to her signatures from these seven letters between 1582 and 1588 one can conclude that even if the woman had been called Esther by her coreligionists, she chose a different way to fashion herself in front of the Venetian representatives as well the authorities (some of the letters were directly addressed to the Senate of the Republic). The first three letters reveal the interchangeable use of "*Kyra*" (in the form of *chera* and *geira*) and

[116] E.g.: Susan S. Skilliter, "The Letters of the Venetian 'Sultana' Nūr Bānū and Her Kira to Venice," in *Studia Turcologica Memoriae Alexii Bombaci Dicata*, ed. Aldo Gallotta, Ugo Marazzi (Napoli: Istituto universitario orientale, 1982), 518.
[117] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 12, 502r, 515r, 518r.
[118] *Quella hebrea sua [dalla sultana] fauorita*: Ibid., 502r.
[119] Susan S. Skilliter, "The Letters of the Venetian 'Sultana' Nūr Bānū and Her Kira to Venice," 522-524, 529-532; Maria Pia Pedani, Patrizia Bortolozzo, ed., *Le carte del Sultano nell'Archivio di Stato di Venezia. Catalogo della mostra – Venedik Devlet Arşivi'nde bulunan Padişah Belgeleri. Sergo Kataloğu* (Venezia: Archivio di Stato, 2010), 50-51.
[120] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 23, 619r-620v; ibid., filza 25, 1r-2v; ibid., filza 26, 392r-v; ibid., Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 7, no. 1-2. The documents from the period between September, 1, 1586 and February 2, 1587 are currently inaccessible for the purpose of research due to the bad state of preservation.

"Sultana" as a name or nickname,[121] while during the last two years before her death[122] she signed the letters invariably as *Chiera de Xeres/Scieres.*[123] Although it was once pointed out that "Sultana" might be the translation of the "kyra," supposedly a noble title of Greek origin (to be discussed bellow),[124] both words appeared to be in use as female names among the Jews in the Balkans.[125]

An additional Hebrew source mentions *kyra* Sultana: similarly to the Venetian diplomatic correspondence, her figure and name were used to specify her son Solomon in the dedication of the book (1588) whose publication in Venice he had assisted. The formula employed in order to introduce her name – "the lady Kiera Sultana" – reminds the one used previously to introduce Esther ("the blessed lady called Kiera Esther).[126] To sum up, the fact that the Hebrew evidence about Esther and the Venetian evidence about Sultana do not overlap chronologically (and neither do any of their biographical details); that the name Esther does not appear in any of the archival documents concerning the mediating activity of the *kyra* (including her own letters characterized by the consistency of signature); and that there exist Hebrew sources presenting the lady Esther and the lady Sultana in a similar way points to the need to stop conflating the two women in future research. Furthermore, since no

[121] See: Susan S. Skilliter, "The Letters of the Venetian 'Sultana' Nūr Bānū and Her Kira to Venice," 522-524, 529-532; Maria Pia Pedani, Patrizia Bortolozzo, ed., *Le carte del Sultano nell'Archivio di Stato di Venezia*, 50-51.

[122] The news about her having passed away after several-month illness – *La chierazza e finalmente uscita dalle pene di questo mõdo* – came on December 19 1588: Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 28, 290r.

[123] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 23, 619r-620v; ibid., filza 25, 1r-2v; ibid., filza 26, 392r-v; ibid., Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 7, no. 1-2. The Italian orthography of the toponym – Scieres (as well as *Ceres* in Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 22, 329r) – provoked the initial hypothesis that *kyra* and her son originated from Serres in Thrace: Johannes H. Mordtmann, "Die jüdischen Kira im Serai der Sultane," 14–15, №1. It should, therefore, correpsond to the Sephardi diasporal habit to indicate the place of origin – in this case secondary origin, namely place of settlement in Ottoman domains. However, Spanish orthography – Xeres – might suggest that it was a short version of the Andalusian city Jerez de la Frontera, suggested in Sebastian de Covarrubias, *Tesoro de la lengva castellana, o española*, vol. 2 (Madrid: Luís Sánchez, 1673), 212v, and, consequently, specifies the initial Iberian origin of this family.

[124] Susan S. Skilliter, "The Letters of the Venetian 'Sultana' Nūr Bānū and Her Kira to Venice," 523 ft. 44.

[125] Minna Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 204, ft. 22 .

[126] *...ish navon ve-hakham kh[vod] ha-r[av] Shlomo de Seres y[ishmerehu] tz[uro] v[e-yikhayehu] … ve-ha-geveret Kiyera Sultana imo* in: [Gedalia Kordovero,] גדליה קורדובירו, "ההקדמה" [Introduction], *ספר חשק שלמה* [The

other evidence testifies to the relation of Esther to the Imperial harem, the scope of use and meanings of the term *kyra* seems to expand beyond the palace household in the Jewish society of Constantinople, thus, undermining the integrity of the paradigm in general and questioning the traditional understanding of the sources.

B. Towards a New Reading of the Sources

During the last two centuries, scholars operating within the framework initiated by von Hammer-Purgstall – of *kyra* as a commercial intermediary – have suggested various creative explanations of this term, connecting it to the Turkish word for lease/rent (*kira*),[127] to the corrupted use of the Ottoman Turkish word *karı* "indicating not only "a woman," but a skilled woman who could read and write and conduct correspondence in a foreign language,"[128] or to the Judeo Spanish expression for "he/she wants/demands" (*quiere*), which would be then the mirror translation of Turkish *ister* consonant with the name of the alleged first *kyra* Esther.[129]

The consensus is, however, that the origin of the term should be traced to the Greek title *κύρα,* the feminine form of the title *κυρ* or *κύριος.*[130] In Byzantine times this word was used to designate a noble or a wealthy and prominent woman, sometimes female member of the dynasty.[131] However, investigation undertaken by J.H. Mordtmann of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Balkan and Anatolian sources outside the Byzantine empire demonstrates

book of Solomon's desire] (Venice, 1588). I am particualrly grateful to Yaron Ben-Naeh for drawing my attention to this source.

[127] Fanny Davis, *The Ottoman Lady: A Social History from 1718 to 1918* (New York, Greenwood Press, 1986), 153 ft. 83.

[128] Gül A. Russell, "Physicians at the Ottoman Court," 264 ft.120.

[129] [Shlomo A. Rosanes], *קורות ימי ישראשל בתוגרמה. שלמה אב. רוזאניס* [History of the Jews in Turkey], vol. 3, 64.

[130] Identified as such by both Abraham Galante, *Esther Kyra d'après de nouveaux documents,* 5, and Johannes H. Mordtmann, "Die jüdischen Kira im Serai der Sultane," 18.

[131] Evangelinus A. Sophokles, *Greek lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine periods*, 724; Hjalmar Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2, 53; Erich Trapp, *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität besonders des 9.–12. Jahrhunderts* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001), 900.

that the same term was occasionally used not only as a title for local Christian princesses, but also as a title for women holding important positions in the early Ottoman harem.[132]

The latter circumstance suggests that originally the use of the title, although associated with the royal households, was not related either to Jewish women or to any precise position (for instance, to a mediating function). It could be, therefore, that the title was assigned to at least three known Jewish women (Stronghyla, Sultana and Esperanza) by the palace milieu that they joined. Although in the course of centuries the word lost its honorable connotations and acquired certain vulgar meanings in everyday usage (especially in the form *κυράτξα,*[133] consonant with *chirazza*, one of the versions from the Venetian documents, see Chapter Three), at the time of Esperanza the title was still understood as "lady" and was perceived as such by members of the French diplomatic mission who heard about her downfall.[134] Since one does not encounter further evidence of non-Jewish *kyra*s during the period under investigation (sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries), the labeling might suggest that the term in fact served for the use inside the palace household to designate specifically Jewish women. However, since other explored evidence points to the Jewish women's rather institutionalized relation to the palace household, the fact that known sources use the title only for three of them who had acquired outstanding influence implies that the term still might have been reserved only for women of high position. It would be, therefore, not particularly accurate to use it as a label for any Jewish woman associated with the palace service before additional documentation from the palace archive can testify to its wider application.

The use of the title *kyra* for Esther, whose connection to the palace is particularly problematic in view of the lack of evidence, requires an examination of the issue from the

[132] Johannes H. Mordtmann, "Die jüdischen Kira im Serai der Sultane," 18-19.
[133] Abraham Galante, *Esther Kyra d'après de nouveaux documents,* 6; Johannes H. Mordtmann, "Die jüdischen Kira im Serai der Sultane," 18.

Jewish perspective, looking especially beyond the confusing Ottoman palace discourse. While in cases of "*Kiera* Esther," "*Kiera* Sultana," and "Chiera Speranza"[135] the usage of the word reminds of an honorific title – tradition, brought by the Sephardi immigrants,[136] – the presentation of Stronghyla, whose linguistic and cultural affiliation with the Greek-speaking local Jewish community has been highlighted in the previous chapter, differs significantly from those later cases: "Stronghyla, daughter of Elijah Gibbor (?), known as Kiera."[137] In these circumstances one can offer several working hypotheses, none of which, however, could be conclusively confirmed. For instance, Stronghyla and her long-term presence around the ruling circles might have contributed to the crystallization of the title associated in the sixteenth century particularly with the Jewish women. Moreover, as for her own case, the palace title *kyra* might have been a trace of the local Romaniot Jewish presence in the Imperial household.

The indigenous Greek, namely Romaniot, factor in understanding the modalities of Jewish contribution to the palace life seems to have been generally overshadowed by the influx of Jewish immigrants from outside the Ottoman territories, the Sephardi diaspora, with its international scope and connections expanding into Mediterranean societies and beyond. Important role that they played throughout the period when the Ottoman Empire entered the global market as well as became a part of the European theater of Renaissance diplomacy is particularly striking. However, the problem question of Jewish women's situational relation to the palace household, including the issues of Stronghyla's descent and the very origin of

[134] *Ce mesme temps y avoit une femme juifve à Constantinople que l'on appelloit La Quira, comme quy diroit Madame* in: Comte Théodore de Gontaut Biron, ed., *Ambassade en Turquie,* 110.
[135] [Itshak 'Akriš,] יצחק עכריש, "ההקדמה" [Introduction], in *שלשה פירושים על שיר השירים* [Three commentaries on the *Song of Songs*] (Constantinople, 1577); [Gedalia Kordovero,] גדליה קורדוביר, "ההקדמה" [Introduction], *ספר חשק שלמה* [The book of Solomon's desire] (Venice, 1588); Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 12, no. 41.
[136] One of the such titles is *Dona*, see: Laura Minervini, *Testi giudeoespagnoli medievali (Castiglia e Aragona)*, vol. 1 (Napoli: Liguori Editore, 1992), 395; Yael Reshef, "Honorific Terms of Address," in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, vol. 3, ed. Geoffrey Khan et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 216-217.
[137] Abraham Danon, ed., "Documents Relating to the History of the Karaites in European Turkey," 245.

title *kyra*, brings to the fore the Greek, namely local element and suggests that we cannot discarding its significance throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[138]

In this context, some further observations could be made concerning the later part of the investigated period. Although a Hebrew chronicle, a Venetian dispatch and a French diplomatic letter (as well as later literary tradition) anonymize the wife of the palace physician Solomon Eskenazi, there exists a working hypothesis that her name was Bula Eksati, on the basis of one Jewish source that mentions him together with his wife.[139] Although he himself originated from among the German-speaking Jews from Northern Italy,[140] her name, in contrast, suggests her local descent. While the second part of the name was common female name among the Romaniots,[141] the first part can be traced to calling an elderly woman (or just a woman) widely spread throughout the region (originally meaning the wife of one's paternal uncle[142]). Thus, structurally, the name Bula Eksati reminds of *Kiera* Sultana, as well as *Kiera* Esther; in latter case this "game of titles," therefore, makes it impossible to judge if Esther got the title after 1566 because she also entered palace service or due to high esteem for her philanthropic activity within the community.[143]

In conclusion, the analysis presented in the previous two chapters demonstrates a much more nuanced picture than the *kyra* paradigm provides and problematizes it as a useful and convenient explanatory model accepted in the scholarship. Different sources suggest

[138] This problem In the long perspective aims at pointing out the necessity to better integrate the study of Jewish history with the study of Ottoman Imperial experience of which it was an integrated part.

[139] [Shlomo A. Rosanes], שלמה אב. רוזאניס *קורות ימי ישראשל בתוגרמה*. [History of the Jews in Turkey], vol. 3 (Husiatyn: Filip Kawalek, 1913–14), 285.

[140] Leah Bornstein-Makovetsky, Cecil Roth, "Ashkenazi Solomon," *Encylopaedia Judaica*, 2d ed., vol. 2, ed. Fred Skolnik, Michael Berenbaum (Farmington Hills: Gale, 2007), 577–578.

[141] [Shlomo A. Rosanes], שלמה אב. רוזאניס *דברי ימי ישראשל בתוגרמה*. [History of the Jews in Turkey], vol. 1 (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1929–30), 212.

[142] James W. Redhouse, *A Turkish and English Lexicon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1890), 407.

[143] In 1560, Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, the ambassador of the Holy Roman Emperor to Constantinople experienced an unpleasant episode potentially dangerous for his career with the involvement of a Jewish woman (apparently, she was Sephardi, since she had addressed to him in Spanish), who was a close acquaintance of Mihrimah Sultan, the wife of Grand Vizier Rüstem Paşa and the daughter of later Hürrem Sultan and Sultan Süleyman. Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, *The Life and Letters*, vol. 1 (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1881), 281-286. Although in fact the origin of Esther seems to be unclear, some scholars believe that she might be Esther, for instance Minna Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 205 ft. 28.

different meanings of the *kyra*, revealing that individual experiences and contextual circumstances contributed to labeling and shaping of the term's connotations. It seems impossible to track an unambiguous and linear trace of the development of this title and its appropriation by Ottoman and Jewish audiences inside as well as outside the palace household. Furthermore, in view of the previously neglected evidence, it appears equally impossible to argue that the term *kyra* designated a person associated with a certain function. Stronghyla, Esther, Sultana, and Esperanza, thus, seem to stand for different notions of *kyra*, which make sense and acquire explanatory power only in particular historical contexts.

In order to delineate the scope of the title *kyra* and to demonstrate its highly situationally determined application to the figures of Jewish women associated with the Imperial harem,[144] the chapters so far have deliberately avoided the discussion of the mediating activity of Jewish women in the palace household. It is the newly-discovered biography of the *kyra* Sultana, which will be the focus of the last chapter, that will enable me to problematize the association of this type of service with the Jewish women and to trace the intersection of the two concepts – the *kyra* and the harem intermediary – that inspired the development of the paradigm.

[144] There are other instances besides the cases explored or mentioned in the chapter, when Jewish women were said to have connections to the ruling elite without, however, specifying the precise nature of professional connection. Such woman, for instance, is mentioned in *responsa* by three different rabbis in Thessaloniki and presented as a powerful lady with extensive connections at the court. See: Minna Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 206 ft. 36.

CHAPTER 3:

CONSTRUCTION OF THE *KYRA* AS A SOCIAL CATEGORY: CONFLATING THE MANY INTO ONE

> …un de ses Amis… luy apprit qu'une Marchande Juifve nommée *Boul-Ester,* avoit un libre accés dans le Serrail, où elle vendoit quantité de pierriers aux Sultanes… Il se resolut de confier son amour à cette Juifve, & de la mettre dans ses interests… Il conjura cette Marchande d'employer toute son industrie, pour persuader à Gulbeyaz l'excés de son amour… La Juifve qui estoit extremement adroite, & prudente, venant au Serail à son ordinaire, prit son temps que la Sultane Validé n'estoit point visible, & cherchant l'occasion de parler commodement à Gulbeyaz… Boul-Ester demeura fort long-temps dans la Chambre avec la Sultane, qui la consultoit sur la qualité de certaines étoffes pour un ameublement, & en serrant une parfaitement belle aigrette qu'elle luy avoit montrée, elle pria Gulbeyaz de luy faite venir un verre d'eau dans l'antichambre afin qu'elle pust boire en sortant, ce qui voulait dire qu'elle souhaitoit une réponse… [145]

An old Jewess Boul-Ester from *Le secrétaire turc* (1688) published under the pseudonym of Du Vignau, Sieur des Joanots, supposedly a former secretary to the French ambassador to Constantinople[146] curiously resembles Sephardi "clothier-cum-messenger" Esther from Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red*.[147] The Jewish female character of this early modern romance novel plays a double role in the story – the principle informant as well as the matchmaker for a loving couple. The fact that an anonymous European author of the work invented her name in line with the titulature discussed at the end of the previous chapter is striking, although there is no apparent connection between her and Esther Kyra. Nevertheless, this literary figure represents the trope of a Jewish harem intermediary, just as the *kyra* model does. As this chapter argues, both examples – an almost forgotten literary piece and the explanatory framework dominating the scholarship – are based on the mediating activities of Jewish *kyra* Sultana between 1578 and 1588.

[145] Du Vignau, *Le secrétaire turc, contenant l'art d'exprimer ses pensées sans se voir, sans se parler, & sans s'écrire, avec les circonstances d'une Avanture Turque, & une Relation tres-curieuse de plusieurs particularitez du Serrail qui n'avoient point encore esté sceuës* (Paris: Mischel Guerout, 1688), 48-52, 72-73.
[146] On the fake identity of the author see John-Paul A. Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3-4 no. 8.

A. Jewish Women Transgressing the Boundaries

A niche for the activity of intermediaries is created when (at least) two parties are prevented from effective communication due to some type of a social gap (status, cultural, political, etc.), which produces the space necessary to be bridged and brokered. As recent studies show, irrespective of whether the channels are institutionalized or not, mediators find themselves in a favorable position that allows them not only to manipulate the space of their activity for various purposes,[148] but also to produce political boundaries and to shape the meanings of crucial categories through the vocabulary intended to verbalize and articulate the brokered space and even beyond it.[149] The situation of those known Jewish women associated with the Ottoman Imperial household as intermediaries is rather tangled from a socio-historical point of view, particularly in the context of the present discussion about the intersection and the resulting conflation of the two concepts, *kyra* and "intermediary." The fragmentary sources reveal traces of Jewish women's actual activities as well as fashioning of their position and perception of their roles as intermediaries fitting different models of mediation complementing or overlapping with each other – a royal favorite, a Jewish advocate, and a harem go-between.[150]

The first chapter touched upon the model that can be labeled as the "royal favorite" while examining Stronghyla's engagement with the fate of the Western prisoners (a Moldavian prince and a diplomat), Esperanza's promises in favor of, yet actual activity against Venetian interests, as well as two anonymous women's intervention on behalf of foreigners in the Ottoman capital in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A comparable

[147] Orhan Pamuk, *My Name is Red*, 132.
[148] This is particularly observable in the example of royal favourites, "intermediaries, formal and informal, between the sultan and those who governed in his name on the outside" (Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 11).
[149] Natalie E. Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Transimperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).
[150] Obviously, these models differ from the models of mediation identified in the sphere of dispute resolution. On this issue see David Spencer, Michael Brogan, *Mediation Law and Practice* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 100-107.

display of social capital characterizes the heretofore-unknown figure of *kyra* Sultana in the position of a royal favorite mediating the access to the members of the ruling dynasty. The two important instances of her involvement in matters of political significance mark the phase of her particular proximity to the Queen Mother Nurbanu Sultan (d. 1583): her role in the negotiations concerning the marriage of the sultan's daughter to the son of the pasha of Aleppo (1578)[151] and the recommendation to her royal female patron to assist the disgraced Koca Sinan Pasha (1582).[152]

The model of an advocate acting on behalf of Jewish coreligionists has never been institutionalized in the Ottoman realms, unlike in the case of Jewish communities living among the Christians, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, who could resort to the services of the so called *shatdlan* (from *shadlanut,* hebr. "intersection") who represented Jews before the local and state authorities.[153] Normally *shtadlan* acted as an "advocate and spokesman, … exerting personal powers of persuasion, often using flattery to the point of obsequiousness, in appealing to the non-Jewish authorities and in pleading the case for dealing fairly and mercifully with their resident Jews."[154] Ottoman Jewish communities did not have the custom of hiring *shatdlan,* perhaps, in part, because there was no comparable special royal or ecclesiastical legislation about the Jews or special taxation targeting the Jewish communities in Ottoman domains.[155] Therefore, the practice was that community members simply addressed other community members in position of influence among

[151] *…deto matrimonio e negotiato da sui còl mezo di quella hebrea fauorita della madre' di esso s[ignor]or* in: ASVe, Capi del Consiglio di Dieci, Dispacci (Lettere) ambasciatori, filza 5, 47r-v.
[152] Ibid., filza 6, 50r. She was characterized as a person procuring favours to numerous important figures of the government in ibid., Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 14, 15r.
[153] E.g.: François Guesnet, "Die Politik der 'Fürsprache': vormoderne jüdische Interessenvertretung," in: *Synchrone Welten: Zeitenräume jüdischer Geschichte*, ed. Dan Diner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 67-92. As a recent study by Aharon Klieman, "*Shtadlanut* as Statecraft by the Stateless," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 2, no. 3 (2008), 102, explains, "the concept of *shtadlanut* fits compatibly within the larger framework of asymmetrical superior-subordinate, patron-client relationships between many different classes of stronger and weaker actors."
[154] İbid., 99.
[155] Yaron Ben Naeh, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans,* 99-114, especially 102-103.

Ottoman officials in case they needed their assistance in handling various matters of personal of public nature.[156]

In the context of the present discussion, for instance, a template letter has been preserved from the seventeenth century with a plea from Jerusalem community to a Jewish lady with connections in the capital to assist them by using her divinely granted "approach to royalty," implying, probably, the palace household.[157] Another episode allegedly occurred in the 1580s when a man from Thessaloniki was pressed by his father-in-law to divorce his wife and to abandon the children: in case of refusal the older relative threatened to address and use the influence of a powerful lady (anonymous in the sources) acquainted with the sultan and his viziers. The case was eventually preserved in the *responsa* by three rabbis and coincides chronologically with the period of *kyra* Sultana's proximity to the ruling circles.[158]

The last relevant model of mediating activity – the harem go-between – acquires particular significance for the current discussion. As I will argue, its intersection with the concept of *kyra* investigated in this thesis gave rise to the meaning of the term *kyra* within the problematized conceptual framework. While contemporary scholarship exploring Ottoman society invariably emphasizes social over gender stratification, suggesting that the "degree of seclusion from the common gaze served as an index of the status of the man as well as the

[156] This briefly formulated conclusion is the result of a summer research project (2008) entitled "The theory of Jewish institution of *Shtadlanut* and its application towards the Ottoman Jewish communities" carried out under the supervision of Professor Yaron Ben-Naeh (Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel). The research was realized in the framework of Academic training program *Eshnav* at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Israel), organized by the Moscow Center for University Teaching of the Jewish Civilization "Sefer" (Moscow, Russia) and the Chais Center for Jewish Studies in Russia (the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel).

[157] [Minna Rozen,] מינה רוזן, " פעולתם של יהודים רבי השפעה בחצר הסולטאן בקושטא למען היישוב היהודי בירושלים במאה הי"ז" [Activities of influential Jews at the Sultan's court in Constantinople on behalf of the Jewish community of Jerusalem in the seventeenth century], *מיכאל* 7 (1981): 429–430.

[158] [Samuel de Medina,] שמואל די מדינה, *שו"ת* [Responsa] (Thessaloniki, 1594–98), 286a; [Abraham Hakohen,] אברהם הקהן, *שו"ת* [Responsa], vol. 2 (Venice, 1592), 93a; [Elijah Mizrahi, Elijah Ibn Haim,] אליהו מזרחי, אליהו אבן חיים, *ספר מאים עמוקים* [The book of deep waters] (Venice, 1647), 73a-b. In this context it might be telling that one of the earliest evidence about Sultana (April 15 1578) is precisely her involvement into the community affairs of the Jews in Thessaloniki – *ch[e] queste era donna molto cara alla madre del Ser-re, et ch[e] ultimam[en]te ella hauea fatto col suo mezzo, un grā seruitio alli hebrei di Salonichi, che Importaua forse*, in Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 12, 54r.

woman of means,"[159] *harem* as a "system of female seclusion" still served as fundamental "principle of spatial organization" in a Muslim society.[160] Being a gendered space constructed by social practices, the harem had a socio-economic niche for harem go-betweens such as female peddlers bringing various goods (*dellale*) or female commercial and financial brokers (*vekile*).[161] The latter could be even domestic slaves or poorer relatives, while the former always came from outside the household and belonged to poorer socio-economic strata or were recruited from among *dhimmi* women.

Perhaps the vulgar connotations in the everyday usage that the word *kyr*a and its diminutive acquired in the course of centuries can explain the curious and somewhat puzzling evidence from nineteenth-century Aegean islands, where people applied those terms to female peddlers.[162] While mediation between the elite harems and the outside world has no explicit connection to Jewish women, this very gender-specific model of mediation is highlighted in the studies of occupational professionalization among Jewish women, both local and immigrant, within the Ottoman domains in the early modern period.[163] Moreover, certain ambiguous Hebrew evidence from the first half of the seventeenth century suggests that such Jewish female peddlers were well received in rich households of Ottoman governmental officials.[164]

To what extent one may apply the same idea to the Imperial household is unclear in view of a near-complete silence in the primary sources. The evidence presented in the Chapter One seems to suggest a deeper institutionally-embedded affiliation with the palace of

[159] Leslie P. Peirce, "Beyond Harem Walls: Ottoman Royal Women and the Exercise of Power," in *Servants of the Dynasty: Palace Women in World History*, ed. Anne Walthall (Los Angeles, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 85. See also Minna Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul*, 198.
[160] Irvin C. Schick, "The Harem as Gendered Space and the Spatial Reproduction of Gender," in *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces*, ed. Marilyn Booth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 72. .
[161] Ruth Roded, "Gendering Ottoman History," in *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilisation*, vol. 2: Economy and Society, ed. Kemal Çiçek (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2000), 680-681.
[162] Abraham Galante, *Esther Kyra d'après de nouveaux documents*, 4.
[163] 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, no. 1 (2007): 49–67.

those few Jewish women mentioned in the texts. However, unlike the *kul* women serving in the palace, in most cases the circumstances of their recruitment to palace service remains vague. Thus, for example, in the case of Esperanza, one of the numerous chronicles speaking of her execution, by Abdülkādir Efendi, mentions the "ill-lucked Jews, revealing vices while selling certain jewels and carrying out devilish things."[165] While there is no room to question the end of Esperanza's service due to various eyewitness accounts of her execution (1600), her business with the Queen Mother Safiye can be unambiguously confirmed only for the year 1596.[166] It is known that anonymous female harem intermediaries appeared to be in contacts with diplomats already in the early 1590s – in 1591 a Jewish woman was sent from the Imperial harem with information to members of the Hapsburg mission before the war of 1593-1606,[167] while in 1594/5 a woman (it is unclear whether she was Jewish or not) brokered early contacts between Safiye and the ambassador of England.[168] One can only speculate whether Esperanza might be one of them,[169] as well as whether the Ottoman chronicler, invoking the trade in jewels in connection to her, knew something about the nature of her recruitment that no other source preserved.

Since the work by Abdülkādir Efendi refers roughly to the first half of the seventeenth century, he might have been exposed to contemporary rumors. In 1614 Italian traveler Pietro

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[164] The *responsa* is quoted in: ibid., 58 ft 47.

[165] *...şeytān ef'āli mukarrer ba'zı cevāhir fürūhti ile şerīr harām-zāde bed-baht oğulları Yehūdī ibn Yehūd* in: Abdülkādir Efendi, *Topçular Kātibi 'Abdülkādir (Kadrī) Efendi Tarihi* [The history by Topçular Kātibi 'Abdülkādir (Kadrī) Efendi], 273. I thank Ferenc Csirkes for suggesting such reading of this fragment from a longer ambiguous passage.

[166] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 11.

[167] *And not only were the imperial chamberlains (103) introduced by bribes to give information, but even the Emperor's mother herself made known to my lord the resident, through a Jewess, what she had heard from the Emperor with regard to Hungary. The Jewess was well-rewarded by my lord, and brought his treasonable intelligence not to out house, but secretly to another place* in: A.H. Wratislaw, ed., *Adventures of Baron Wenceslas Wratislaw of Mitrowitz* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1862), 102-103.

[168] *…her present was reteyned by the mediatrix betweene the Sultana and mee <…> yet because my selfe cannot come to speech of the Sultana, and all my business passe by the handes of the said Mediatrix, loosing her friendshippe, I loose the practick with the Sultana…* in: Edward Barton's letter [to Sir Thomas Heneage?] of April 1 1595, quoted by Susan A. Skilliter, "Letters from the Ottoman 'Sultana' Safiye to Queen Elizabeth I," 148–149.

[169] Selaniki mentions Jewish *kyra* in 1594 who also might be Esperanza. See: Selānikī Mustafa Efendi, *Tārih-i Selānikī* [Selaniki's history], 419.

della Valle visited Constantinople and there acquired a manuscript of the account of *Seraglio*, Imperial harem, attributed to former Venetian ambassador Ottaviano Bon (served in 1604-1609).[170] According to another copy of Bon's account, first published in 1871,[171] Jewish women were coming to the Imperial harem to sell some jewelry and were cheating the sultanas while receiving items to sell outside the harem on their behalf.[172] In view of Bon's affiliation with the Venetian diplomatic service, however, his evidence is highly "suspicious" as it comes from a very particular narrow circle that provides the context for the activities of only one Jewish woman and only one *kyra* known explicitly for her mediation of commercial nature.

Impression from archival evidence about activities of *kyra* Sultana, formerly long identified with Esther Kyra, made von Hammer-Purgstall once describe her as an Imperial harem provider. Indeed, as first ambassador who got to know her, Nicolo Barbarigo, reported in April 1578, "one day there [namely, to Venetian embassy] came a Jewish woman who visits every day the royal palace of the sultan's mother and who assists her in purchasing jewelry, silk fabrics, as well as other items for the palace."[173] Being highly appreciated by the sultana,[174] she gradually became employed as her principal messenger, bringing the letters

[170] [Pietro della Valle,] *Viaggi di Pietro della Valle il Pellegrino*, vol. 1 (Brighton: G. Gancia, 1843), 37.
[171] I don't count the publication of corrupted English translations that appeared at the same time as original works, under the name of Robert Withers: Samuel Purchas, ed., "The Grand Signors Seraglio: written by Master Robert Withers," in *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrims: Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and others*, vol. 9 (1625, reprint Glasgow: MacLehose & Sons, 1905), 322–412; John Greaves, ed., *A Description of the Grand Signour's Seraglio, or Tvrkish Emperours Covrt* (London: Jo Ridley, 1653).
[172] *Nel serraglio' reale s'introduce per mezzo delle sultane … qualche ebrea … [che] si fanno così domestiche, che divengono padrone di tutte qualle donne, portando dentro e fuori ciò che vogliono per vendere e comprare, e da qui nasce che tutte le ebree che hanno praticato nel seraglio, si sono fatte ricchissime, perchè quanto portano dentro, comprano a buon mercato e vendono caro, e quando portano fuora di nascosto, che sono gioie per il più bellissime di ogni sorte, vendole quanto vogliono a forastieri, rispondono a quelle dome semplice, che non sanno e temono di essere scoperto quanto a loro pare: e per queste vie dal seraglio escono cose bellissime anco ad onesti prezzi…*, in: Nicolò Barozzi, Guglielmo Berchet, ed., "Descrizione del Seraglio del Gransignore fatta dal bailo Ottaviano Bon," in *Le Relazioni degli stati Europei lette al Senato dagli ambasciatori Veneziani nel secolo decimosettimo*, series 1 vol. 1 (Venice: Pietro Naratovich, 1871), 76.
[173] *Uno di questi giorni venne qui un'hebrea ch[e] và ogni giorno nel seraglio d[e]lla madre del S[igno]re et è adoperata a lei nel comprar gioe, panni di seta, et alter cose p[er] il seraglio* in: Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 12, 52r.
[174] E.g. in: ibid.

and notes (*teschere* or *polizza*) and oral orders to the ambassador and passing letters back.[175] Nevertheless, in view of a growing display of conspicuous consumption among the Ottoman ruling class of this period, passing luxury goods to the Imperial palace remained important aspect of her documented mediating activity.[176]

Kyra Sultana's personal business with Venice, developed as an extension of her service to Nurbanu Sultan, also preserved a commercial nature despite the fact that in the course of time it included passing intelligence and promoting political interests of the Republic.[177] For instance, she was actively involved in assisting Jewish merchants' interests and sent several letters of recommendation to the Senate on their behalf.[178] While one of the recommended figures was presented as her "agent,"[179] another lucky merchant who received not only her own support but also involvement of Safiye Sultan, was actually *kyra* Sultana's relative.[180] Her whole family's close association with trade business is further revealed in the figure of her son, Salomon. He first appeared on the scene in late 1583 when he was recommended to the ambassador by Nurbanu Sultan as a trustworthy merchant and old servant of the palace (*bāz̲ergānumuz*, *kūlumuz,* "our purveyor and servant," in her original letter, and *nostro antico mercante è fidel schiauo* in secretary's translation).[181] In the mid-1580s many efforts were made and much ink was spilt by *kyra* herself, as well as by both her

[175] E.g. in: ibid., filza 12, 360r-361r, 518r, ibid., filza 20, 259v, 276r, 324r; ibid., filza 21, 61r; ibid., filza 22, 152r, 190r; ibid., filza 23, 131r.
[176] Maria Pia Pedani, "Safiye's Household and Venetian Diplomacy," 12; Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 21, 61r, 381r.
[177] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 18, 56v; ibid., filza 23, 619r-620v; ibid., filza 25, 1r-2v; ibid., filza 26, 392r-v; ibid., Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 7, no. 1-2; Eugenio Alberi, ed., "Relazione di Paolo Contarini bailo a Costantinopoli letta in Pregadi l'anno 1583," in *Le relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato,* series 3, vol 3 (Florence: Società editrice fiorentina, 1855), 236; Horatio F. Brown, ed. Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, And in Other Libraries of Northern Italy, vol. 8: 1581–1591 (London, 1894), 357–358.
[178] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 26, 392r; ibid., filza 27, 1r-v.
[179] Ibid., filza 26, 392r.
[180] Ibid., filza 22, 17r; ibid., filza 23, 513r.
[181] Ibid., filza 18, 58r, 60r, 62r.

female patrons, Nurbanu Sultan and Safiye Sultan, in order to persuade the Venetian government to allow him to sell in Venice a number of precious stones.[182]

B. A Negotiated Articulation of Categories

Although precise circumstances of *kyra* Sultana's entering the palace service are unclear, as far as the evidence suggests, she had become Queen Mother's confidant (*sua fauorita*) before having established solid relations with the Venetians and their embassy.[183] Therefore, similarly to many known male Jewish figures close to the palace,[184] her diplomatic brokerage as well as her engagement in foreign politics[185] became an extraordinary extension of a much more customary service (commerce in her case, healing in others) that illuminates the generally *ad hoc* nature of most harem intermediaries' mobilization into the diplomatic sphere.

This recruitment process problematizes the understanding of *kyras* as "women who handled the relations of the wives in the sultan's royal harem in various external matters."[186] In 1532, for instance, an anonymous Jewish female intermediary – likely Strongyla, who was at that time associated with Hafsa Sultan – acted on behalf of the Ottoman Queen Mother and was sent for information to the Venetian ambassador in Istanbul, Pietro Zen.[187] European diplomatic and early orientalist discourse of the first half of the sixteenth century had not yet appropriated the palace title *kyra* endowing it with the meaning of a "diplomatic

[182] E.g.: ibid., filza 18, 56v, 58r, 60r, 317v; ibid., filza 20, 324r, ibid., filza 22, 182r, 329r, 340v; ibid., filza 23, 619r-620v; ibid., filza 25, 1r-2v, 528r-v; Joseph von Hammer, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, vol. 4: 1574–1623, 159 d. Commercial fame of both the mother and the son was known beyond the Venetian ceircles of Constantinople, as they were also mentioned in the late 1570s by member of the Habsburg diplomatic mission, Stefan Gerlach, in his travel diary: Stephan Gerlach, *Aelteres Tage-Buch*, 471.

[183] First mention of hers dates February 19 1578 suggesting that the ambasador encountered her for the first time being sent by the queen mother. See: Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 12, 502r.

[184] Emrah Safa Gürkan, "Espionage in the 16th Century Mediterranean: Secret Diplomacy, Mediterranean Go-Betweens and the Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry," PhD. thesis (Washington: Georgetown University, 2012). It was, moreover, Salamon Eskenazi, who introduced Sultana to the Venetian ambassador and recommended him to seek her friendship. Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 12, 52v, 54r.

[185] Maria Pia Pedani, "Safiye's Household and Venetian Diplomacy," 16.

[186] Cecil Roth, Aryeh Shmuelevitz, "Kiera," 990; Leah Bornstein-Makovetsky, Cecil Roth, Aryeh Shmuelevitz, "Kiera," 147.

intermediary" and left the woman mentioned in the dispatch anonymous (or, on another occasion, revealing her personal name). However, by the end of the century the title *kyra* became widely known outside the palace among Venetian diplomatic servants and governmental officials, and acquired particular connotations. The serial archival evidence documenting *kyra* Sultana's service through 1578-1588 allows one to track the development of the *kyra* concept demonstrating how the term became associated with the figure of a particular Jewish female intermediary.

In order to facilitate understanding of how the trope was constructed, I suggest a three-step periodization of the process. The first phase, between 1578 and 1582, marks the high period of Nurbanu's participation in the conspicuous consumption drawing on the Venetian market and everything the Venetian government could offer in order to establish a firm basis for an informal promotion of their political interests. Documentation of this period unambiguously reveals that the title *kyra* had not been previously known in the embassy, supporting the hypothesis of its use being confined to the palace milieu. While secret dispatches by Nicolo Barbarigo (1578) invariably present Sultana as the Jewish woman (*un'hebrea*, *l'hebrea*, *quella hebrea,* or *deta hebrea*, in line with the vocabulary of the above-mentioned report from 1532),[188] Nurbanu, in contrast, introduces her as *Kirâ*, servant of the Sublime Porte (*la qual serua alla fellice Porta,* as well as *nostra schiaua*).[189] The famous dragoman Matteo Marucini translated (or rather transliterated) the Jewish woman's nickname as *Chirà* and *Chierà*, thus giving rise to a new word in the Venetian diplomatic language that came into common use under ambassador Gabriel Cavazza (1580).[190] Paolo Contarini (1580-1582) does not mention her in his dispatches, but in the final report delivered upon the return

[187] Marino Sanudo, *I diarii*, vol. 57, 264.
[188] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 12, 52r, 54r, 150r-v, 187v, 360v, 391v, 502r, 515r, 518r; ibid., Capi del Consiglio di Dieci, Dispacci (Lettere) ambasciatori, filza 5, 47r.
[189] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 12, 158r, 159r, 518r.

to Venice – *relazione*, the type of a secret document whose copies, nevertheless, were flooding the European black market of information and intelligence throughout the period[191] – he introduces her to the wider audience as "Jewess Chierara, a confidant of the Ottoman Queen Mother" (*Chierara, ebrea che pratica seco famigliarmente*).[192]

The second phase, between 1582 and 1585, is marked by the diplomatic service of the ambassador Gianfrancesco Morosini who was in charge of the communication with the Imperial harem through the mediation of *kyra* Sultan. This period reveals further individual contributions to the construction of the meaning of the title. The variations of Sultana's signature in her first two personal letters written in Spanish to the Senate of Venice are telling in this respect. Although the Queen Mother had already introduced her as *Kirâ* and a servant, Sultana seems to hesitate about the way to fashion herself and even reluctant to use a palace label that does not seem particularly familiar and comfortable. In Hebrew script she signed the letters as *Geira* and *Sultana,* then added *Bula* into her Latin signature and subsequently substituted all these with *Chera.*[193] Since other sources explored in Chapter One, as well as notes written by Nurbanu, express the preference of the Ottoman palace parlance for the title *kyra*, Sultana's experimentation with the titulature might testify to her being an outsider to the palace, as also suggested by her association with commercial activity.

As for Gianfrancesco Morosini, his proper acquaintance with the *kyra* was made after she started writing letters: at the time of first contacts she was for him just an anonymous Jewish woman (*hebrea*) and sultana's servant (*Schiaua della Ser[enissima]ma Sultana*), yet by the time he had to authorize her second letter he had already adopted the diminutive form

[190] Ibid., filza 14, 5v, 15r. Venetian orthography in the translation by Marucini, stressing the ending vowel does not necessarily reflect the norms of pronounciation: it most probably simply marked the long vowel at the end ot Ottoman word.
[191] Filippo da Vivo, "How to read Venetian *relazioni*," *Renaissance & Reformation* 34, no. 1-2 (2011): 25-59, especially 35.
[192] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 13; Eugenio Alberi, ed., "Relazione di Paolo Contarini bailo a Costantinopoli letta in Pregadi l'anno 1583," 236.
[193] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 16, 427r; ibid., filza 17, 11 r-v.

of the palace title, *Chirazza*.[194] He used it later in absolute majority of his dispatches in order to indicate the sender of the letters as a privileged harem intermediary. In addition, the circumstances around the death of Nurbanu Sultan (in late 1583) reveal that the appropriation by the European diplomatic discourse of the Ottoman palace vocabulary was limited to the Venetian diplomatic circles. While Morosini labels another Jewish female messenger in the service of Safiye Sultan who did not even have the access to the Imperial harem as *chiarazza*,[195] contemporary dispatches by the French ambassador, who met *kyra* Sultana on several occasions to deliver presents from the French Queen Mother to the Ottoman sultana, presents her to his royal patrons exclusively as *la juifve*.[196]

The last phase, from mid-1585 to late 1588, further shaped the category of *kyra*. On the one hand, the style of Sultana's remaining five known letters evolves in comparison to the previous period: from July 1586 she switches from Spanish to Italian, changing also the orthography of her signature that gradually crystallizes as *Chiera de Scieres* (as opposed to *Bula*, *Geira*, *Sultana*, or *Chera*).[197] On the other hand, Morosini's *chirazza (*as an extension of Sultana's own *Chiera)* that was previously preserved only in his secret dispatches yet not in the potentially widely-accessible final report, enters the vocabulary of two later ambassadors' both *dispacci* and *relazioni*.[198] For both Lorenzo Bernardo and Giovanni Moro *kyra* Sultana acted as an agent and most reliable source of intelligence, continuing simultaneously to fashion herself the same way in letters to the government. Enciphering of

[194] E.g.: ibid., filza 16, 50r, 427r; ibid., filza 17, 11 v.
[195] *...Chiarazza ebrea della Sultana moglie che è un ebrea simile come quelle che entra dalla sultana madre alla quale non era possible entrar nel seraglio*, as quoted in Emiglio Spagni, "Una sultana veneziana," 343.
[196] Eugène Charrière, ed., "Correspondance de Turquie (Lettres de M. de Germigny, etc.)," in *Négociations de la France dans le Levant*, vol. 4 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1860), 273-275.
[197] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 23, 513r, 620v.
[198] Ibid., filze 22, 23, 25, 26, 28; ibid., Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 7; Horatio F. Brown, ed. *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, And in Other Libraries of Northern Italy*, vol. 8: 1581–1591, 357-358; Eugenio Alberi, ed., "Relazione dell'Impero Ottomano di Lorenzo Bernardo 1592," in *Le relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, series 3, vol 2 (Florence: Società editrice fiorentina, 1844), 360.

the word *kyra* in the dispatches,[199] according to the customary rules of maintaining secrecy,[200] symbolizes that the Venetian diplomatic discourse appropriated the palace title *kyra*, endowing it with meaning of a broker and an intermediary and connotations often pointing to a particular female individual.

I argue that Sultana's role as the harem intermediary was essential for the creation of the category of *kyra* — it delineated the space of *kyra*'s activity and identified a set of professional skills for the title-bearer. Nevertheless, her case clearly demonstrates that one should not overestimate the agency of cultural brokers, since the articulation of the *kyra* category and the consequent conflation of the concepts of *kyra* and harem intermediary was the result of a written and oral dialogue among various actors, preserved in three distinct types of written sources: regular Venetian ambassadorial dispatches, Sultana's Spanish and Italian letters to the Senate, and notes from two female members of the ruling dynasty written in Ottoman Turkish and translated in the embassy. In addition, it was the wide distribution of the final ambassadorial reports, *relazioni*, across Europe, especially on the black market of intelligence and espionage, that subsequently disseminated the concept of *kyra* beyond the boundaries of the Venetian diplomatic vocabulary.

The comparison between Sultana as the key regular intermediary between the Imperial harem and the outside world and Esperanza as an occasional one, underscores Sultana's exceptionality and, therefore, her centrality to the main argument of this thesis. Unlike Esperanza, and even Stronghyla, none of Sultana's names except the label *kyra* was known in the diplomatic circles. On the one hand, this circumstance can speak in favor of my reading of *Sultana* as her personal name: the rejection of such an appellation by the diplomats is easily explainable by the need to restrict this word to royal female figures (*sultana madre* and *sultana moglie*). On the other, the lack of a real name, which is substituted by an

[199] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 20, 276r; ibid., filza 22, 190r.

evocative palace title, facilitated the construction of the *kyra* category in both the diplomatic discourse of the 1580s and modern scholarship.

Although the period of Esperanza's service preserved the concept of a harem intermediary, largely due to her own flirting with the Venetian embassy as well as due to her self-fashioning efforts in front of the English diplomats and government (see Chapter One), the conflation of the two concepts lost its consistency. Thus, before 1597 Venetians knew her as *Speranza hebrea* until the new ambassador Girolamo Capello reasserted the meaning of *chira/chirazza* as a harem intermediary and restored in his correspondence the previously dominant terminology.[201] As for the reason of Capello's linguistic innovation (in the context of the new period), one can only speculate. It is known that future Venetian diplomatic servants were exposed to secret reports as parts of their educational training before setting out on a mission.[202] Nevertheless, he might have been exposed to the use of the title because of his personal meetings with Esperanza, since it is during his service that she conducted a short correspondence with Levantine Jews in Venice using Venetian diplomatic postal system.[203]

As for non-Venetian diplomatic circles, neither of the two English ambassadors who encountered Esperanza during the very same period in the role of a harem intermediary promoting their political interests – Sir Edward Barton and Sir Henry Lello – presented her as *kyra*.[204] In contrast, John Sanderson, an English merchant later affiliated with the diplomatic mission, who had the chance to meet Esperanza in an informal setting together with her son, knew this woman exclusively as *kyra*, or at least preserved only her nickname for his

[200] Example of a document where only names are encichered is preserved in: Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 17, 429r.
[201] Ibid., Senato, Dispacci Constantinopoli, filza 51, 83v; ibid., Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 11, no. 75, 172-174, 181-184, 192-196; ibid., registro 12, no. 45, 209; Horatio F. Brown, ed. *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, And in Other Libraries of Northern Italy*, vol. 9: 1592–1603 (London, 1897), 432-437, 440-444.
[202] Filippo da Vivo, "How to read Venetian *relazioni*," 44-45.
[203] Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato Dispacci Decifrazioni, registro 12, no. 8-41.
[204] Susan S. Skilliter, "Letters from the Ottoman 'Sultana' Safiye to Queen Elizabeth I," 147-150; Orhan Burian, ed. *The Report of Lello, Third English Ambassador to the Sublime Porte*. 5-7.

business addressees and readers of the later published travel account.[205] The fact that Sanderson's orthography (*Chara*) is consonant with one of the phonetic versions of the Ottoman Turkish form of this title (*Kerâ*),[206] raises, in fact, the question of his actual source.

The thesis about the multiplication of the audiences appropriating the concept of *kyra* as a Jewish harem intermediary by the beginning of the seventeenth century is further supported by the later French diplomatic report to the king of France (1606). The Jewish female figure murdered by the soldiers (Esperanza) is described as a royal favorite (relevant equally for Sultana and Esperanza) who cured the young sultan (a gesture towards Bula Eksati discussed in previous chapters).[207] Her labeling as *kyra* (*La Quira, comme quy diroit Madame*) invokes the seemingly original Greek etymology of the palace title, yet simultaneously reflects the impact of either collective title's progressive conversion into the name for an individual tha I observed in the Venetian secret reports (known also to be smuggled on the intelligence market), or similar process that occurred in the Ottoman decline discourse.

C. Towards a Social History of Orientalism

The argument that the *kyra* framework owes its theory and content largely to the figure of *kyra* Sultana, her contribution to the construction of the category of *kyra* and to the appropriation of *kyra* concept by various audiences in the times of Esperanza would be incomplete without a brief inquiry into an early modern tropology of Jewish female figures associated with the harem, or *seraglio* in terminology developed in the genre of *Turcica*. While raising in the issue in Chapter One of how Stronghyla's public image was appropriated by the Western authors who wrote the history of the Ottomans, I outlined the development of

[205] [John Sanderson,] *The Travels of John Sanderson in the Levant 1584–1602*, 85-86, 201-202.
[206] E.g.: Selânikî Mustafa Efendi, *Târih-i Selânikî* [Selaniki's history], 854; Abdülkâdir Efendi, *Topçular Kâtibi 'Abdülkâdir (Kadrî) Efendi Tarihi* [The history by Topçular Kâtibi 'Abdülkâdir (Kadrî) Efendi], 272-273; Kâtib Çelebi, *Fezleke* , 289.
[207] Comte Théodore de Gontaut Biron, ed., *Ambassade en Turquie*, 102, 110.

a Western literary trope of Jewess sorceress. Although after the sixteenth century a Jewish woman did not disappear completely from the context of Hürrem Sultan's intrigues,[208] the tone of the narrative experienced progressive changes and the trope largely dissolved, as did the trope of a Jewish midwife.[209] Nevertheless, the works did not fall out of circulation, thus raising the question of their potential contribution to the much later trope of old Jewish female healer/poisoner appearing in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Oriental tales (especially the one by Gasparo Gozzi), whose plot similarly unfolds in the harem setting.[210]

Suggestion that the tropes of sorceress and midwife revealed particular Ottoman palace practices (Jewish women's engagement in the healing system of the household) provides the basis for a similar approach to the seventeenth-century tropes of Jewish female figures related to the harem. The ground for their development in Western literature on the harem was prepared by accessibility of the diplomatic literary production (smuggled secret reports, some of which mentioned the *kyra,* travel diaries and other fictitious works by actual travelers exposed to diplomatic circles), as well as by the great popularity of the Venetian ambassador Ottaviano Bon's literary account of the palace household alluding to the Jewish harem go-betweens.[211] Both circumstances point to the high receptiveness of the Western literary audiences to the latest developments in Constantinople generally and in the Ottoman

[208] Richard Knolles, *The Generall Historie of the Turkes*, 760; Jacques Auguste de Thou, *Histoire universelle depuis 1543 jusqu'en 1607*, vol 2 (The Hague: H. Scheurleer, 1734), 392.

[209] In comparison to the sixteenth century, in later works I have found only two hints at Jewish sorceress or Jewish women practicing some sort of sorcery: Jean-Baptiste de Rocoles, *La fortune marastre*, 118; Giovanni Sagredo, *Memorie istoriche de monarchi ottomani*, 615.

[210] To mention few found up to the present point: "The Generous Prince, an Eastern Tale," in *The Lady's Magazine, or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex* 1 (London, 1770), 61-62; [De Caylus], *Œuvres Badines Complettes Du Comte de Caylus*, vol 7 (Amsterdam: Visse, 1787), 420; Gasparo Gozzi, *Opere in versi e in prosa*, vol. 11 (Venice: Carlo Palese, 1794), 331; Alphonse Royer, "Le peau du renard vient toujours à la boutique du pelissier, proverbe turc," *Revue de Paris* 12 (1832): 29-56; "Aneddoti," *Glissons, n'appuyons pas: giornale di scienze, lettere, arti, teatri, cronache, varietà e mode* 34 (March 20, 1837): 139; "Histoire de Numan at de Zeineb," in *Les mille et un jours: contes persans* (Paris, 1840), 657; Michael Burke Honan, "Mustapha, the Miser," in *The Picnic papers*, ed. Charles Dickens, vol. 1 (London: Henry Colburn, 1841), 102-126; Charles White, *The Cashmere Shawl. An Eastern Fiction* (London: Henry Colburn, 1840), 291; Isabella Romer, "The Sultan Mahmoud and the Georgian Slave," in *Bentley's Miscellany*, vol. 9 (New-York: Joseph Mason, 1842), 122-142; Mirza Mahmoud Khan Saghaphi, *In the Imperial Shadow* (New-York, 1928).

palace specifically. The narrative tradition, thus, managed to remain in a close dialogue with the events because the works of various genres by members of the Eastern Mediterranean diplomatic circles effectively mediated between the demand of the European book market and the supply provided in the Ottoman social space satisfying the quest for curiosities.

My investigation resulted in identifying the development of two independent tropes in two parallel "traffics of narrative."[212] The first one seems to have originated precisely from the widespread early modern English translation of Bon's account of the grand signor's *seraglio*. The translation carried out in the best traditions of Renaissance "transadaptations"[213] obfuscated the echo of Jewish women's healing practices that are preserved in the original Italian text,[214] and articulated only their commercial and mediating calling.[215] Not only did the source, in turn, inspire afterwards a number of early modern authors who contributed to the progressive fictionalization as well as the stereotyping of a Jewish harem go-between (such as Boul-Ester from the epigraph),[216] but also it was later directly used (or rather abused) in the twentieth-century scholarship on the *kyra*.[217]

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[211] The account underwent two editions during the first half of the seventeenth century in a corrupted English translation ascribed to a fictitious author, while Bon's original manuscript was not known before late nineteenth century. See ft. 171.

[212] I borrow the term coined by Ros Ballaster in: Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orients: Fictions of the East in England 1662–1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

[213] Term coined by Peter Burke, quoted by Tijana Krstic, "Of Translation and Empire – Ottoman Imperial Interpreters as Renaissance Go-Betweens," in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (London: Routledge, 2011), 131.

[214] *Nel serraglio' reale s'introduce per mezzo delle sultane, che intercedono licenza dal re spesso qualche ebrea, sotto colore d'insegnare qualeche bel lavoro, ovvero di aver alcun secreto medicinale* in: Nicolò Barozzi, Guglielmo Berchet, ed., "Descrizione del Seraglio del Gransignore fatta dal bailo Ottaviano Bon," 76.

[215] *The Sultanaes have leave of the King, that certayne Jewes women may at any time come into the Serraglio unto them, who being extraordinary subtill Queanes, and coming in under colour of teaching them some fine Needle-worker, or to shew them secrets in making Waters. Oiles and Painting stuffes for theit faces; … doe make themselves by their craftie insinuation, so familiar with the Kings women, that they rule them as they please, and doe carrie out any thing to sell for them, or buy and bring in whatsoever the Sultanaes shall have a will to* in Samuel Purchas, ed., "The Grand Signors Seraglio: written by Master Robert Withers," 346. In addition, the English "transadaptator" converted the relatively neutral Italian "bel lavoro" into "fine Needle-worke" having created the association of Jewish women in harem with the needlework and embroidery. E.g.: Madeleine de Scudéry, *Ibrahim, ou l'illustre Bassa*, vol. 2 (Paris: Antoine de Sommavill, 1644), 358.

[216] E.g.: Tristan L'Hermite, *Osman* (Paris: 1656), 30; De La Guilletiere, *Athenes ancienne et nouvelle, et l'estat present de l'empire des Turcs* (Paris: Estienne Michallet, 1676), 71; De la Magdeleine, *Le miroir de l'Empire Ottoman, ou l'estat present de la Cour & de la Milice du Grand Seigneur* (Lyon, 1680), 159-160; Du Vignau, *Le secrétaire turc*; Guillaume-Joseph Grelot, *Relation nouvelle d'un voyage de Constantinople* (Paris: Pierre Rocolet, 1680), 93; De Chevremont, *La connaissance du monde. Voyages orientaux purement historiques* (Paris: Jean Guinard, 1695); Jean Baptiste De Chlevremont, *Histoire Et Les Avantures De Kemiski Georgienne*

The second trope, in turn, follows the lines of the French diplomatic report, collating into the image of the sultan's Jewish favorite called *Keira Kaden* or *Cheira Chadun* (from *kyra kadın*) the rumors about both the executed Esperanza and Bula Eksati who cured the sultan.[218] Although the invocation of both tropes was limited to genres of Oriental fiction, one can assume that their influence spread beyond. The impact of these tropes on literary tradition manifests itself, for instance, in the trope of a beautiful Jewess that converts the Jewish female character into the sultan's paramour.[219]

In addition, while looking at years of later editions, one can observe that the spread of Oriental fiction exploiting the stereotyped image of the Jewish woman in the harem overlaps chronologically with the first scholarly publications on the Ottoman palace household, not to mention the evidence that individual authors knew and read some of this fiction.[220] All those circumstances lead to a double conclusion. On the one hand, in line with recent trends in social history of early European Orientalism, establishing direct and indirect connection between real Jewish female figures active in the Imperial harem and the spread of fictionalized literary Jewish female characters undermines the very concept of a completely independent invention of the "Orient" by the European discourse. On the other hand, as the

(Brussels: Francois Foppens, 1697), 251; De Ville-Dieu, *Memoires du serial,* vol. 4 (Paris, 1720); Jean Baptiste Tavernier, *Nouvelle relation de l'interieur du Serail du Grand Seigneur* (Paris, 1724), 542-543; Alberto Bacchi della Lega, ed., *Viaggio a Costantinopoli di Tommaso Alberti (1609–1621)* (Bologna: Romagnoli Dall'Acqua, 1889), 102-103.

[217] Cecil Roth, *The House of Nasi: Dona Gracia*, 105, 202. Cecil Roth became the author of the entry on "kyra" in first edition of *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.

[218] E.g.: Michel Thevenin, *La conjuration de Conchine*, (Paris: Pierre Rocolet, 1618), 322; Michael Baudier, *Inventaire général de l'histoire des Turcs* (Paris, 1619), 642; idem., *Histoire générale du sérail et de la cour du grand Turc* (Paris, 1626), 61, 66, 85-89; Jacques De Lavardin, *Histoire de Georges Castriot, svrnomme Scanderbeg, roy d'Albanie* (Paris, 1621), 738; *Anecdoti o sia la storia segreta della famiglia Ottomana* (Naples, 1729), 329; *Dizionario storico delle vite di tutti i monarchi Ottomani* (Rome: Luigi Vascovi e Filippo Neri, 1756), 51; Gaetano Moroni Romano, *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica*, vol. 81 (Venice: Tipografia Emiliana, 1856), 335; Édouard Charton, ed., *Le tour du monde, nouveau journal des voyages* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1863), 11-12.

[219] *The Christian Turk, or the Instructive and Entertaining Adventures of Prince Jakaya* (London, 1735), 68-69.

[220] Smirnov, for instance, read short story of Keira Kaden in Russian version by [M.B. Čistyakov,] М.Б. Чистяков, "Беглый взгляд на настоящий и прежний сераль" [Short glance on the present day and the past day seraglio], *Журнал для детей: Духовное, нравственное, историческое, естествоописательное и литературное чтение* 14, no. 5-6 (1864): 68-95. See: [V. D. Smirnov] В. Д. Смирнов, "Грамота султана Османа II-го семейству іудейки Киры" [The charter issued in favor of the family of the Jewess Kira by Sultan

thesis concludes, the early modern fictitious works about the harem might have provided the later scholarship with stereotyped occupational profile and clichéd modalities of Jewish women's presence in the palace household, thus, shaping the understanding of scarce source material coming into light about *kyras* and having a profound impact on the construction of the conceptual framework.

Osman II], 56. Jouanin, in turn, is clearly influenced by the trope of a go-between: Joseph Marie Jouannin, *Turquie* (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1840), 182.

CONCLUSION

This thesis is the end result of a broader research project that in its early stages simply aimed at locating all possible evidence about the *kyras* – Jewish female intermediaries between the Ottoman Imperial harem and the outside world. In subsequent stages I had to struggle hard to hold together the available explanatory model while demanding that it accommodate huge amount of collected source material as well as the conclusions suggested by the evidence that contradicted the scholarly orthodoxy on the issue. Eventually I failed in my endeavor after I realized that approaching Jewish women associated with the Imperial harem as *kyras* not only conflicts with much of the evidence, but also limits the further potential embedded in primary sources. Once I identified the need to move beyond the confines of the existing framework, it appeared that the gradual advancement in dialogue with recent scholarship on the history of *pax ottomana* is, nevertheless, impossible without justification why one had to abandon a convenient and flexible explanatory model – the social category of *kyra*.

The aim of the thesis, therefore, was to find a means to problematize the very social category of *kyra* in order to overcome its inherent explanatory limits for future research. In the end, the work approached *kyra* as a concept and explored its elements by revisiting already known and scrutinizing previously neglected primary sources in a number of specific contexts. The Chapter One examined most of the known Jewish female figures associated with the Ottoman palace household and demonstrated that the *kyra* paradigm, which is narrowly focused on the notion of commercial and diplomatic mediation, cannot account for all forms of Jewish women's service in the palace and modalities in which Jewish women interacted with the Imperial household. The Chapter Two, then, suggested that the currently dominating framework still conflates the figure of Esther Kyra with one more woman, and,

that eventually four known women bearing the same title stand for different notions of *kyra*, which make sense and acquire explanatory power in different historical contexts.

The Chapter Three contextualized in detail mediating activities of the heretofore-unknown Jewish *kyra* Sultana and argued that the *kyra* framework owes its theory and content largely to this figure, revealing how a written and oral dialogue among various actors preserved in her personal letters, Venetian ambassadorial dispatches, and notes from the female members of the ruling dynasty resulted in the articulation of the *kyra* category and the consequent conflation of the concepts of *kyra* and harem intermediary. In conclusion the thesis identified in Western fictitious works about the harem the conceptual backbone that prevents the *kyra* paradigm from falling apart. It suggested that this literary corpus provided the later scholarship with stereotyped occupational profile and clichéd modalities of Jewish women's presence in the palace household, thus shaping the understanding of scarce source material coming into light about *kyras* and having a profound impact on the construction of the conceptual framework.

In order to achieve the goal of justifying the argument, the thesis had to analyze the *kyra* concept in a chronological perspective illuminating the anachronistic bonds between the elements of a two-dimensional explanatory framework. Therefore, being obliged to perform analysis in a wide geographical and chronological span I developed quite a complicated structure exploring at more depth problem questions that help to problematize the concept, while leaving others easily accommodated ones beyond the scope of the work. The very structural complexity of this written work as an outcome of the research, in fact, serves as a further argument against the *kyra* model, as well as against the collective notion of "Jewish women." Rather, I argue in favor of approaching the main protagonists of this narrative as individuals, and, therefore, I have outlined new contexts and inquiries for the future research into the modalities of various Jewish women's interaction with the palace household.

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