even have enough chairs for sitting! She had to borrow extra chairs to seat them all—tall, hefty, and covered in gold embroidery. Sinyor Daniel was no less impressive: He was quite fat and tall, wore a silk turban around his head, and his body was wrapped in a loose robe of red damascene fabric, an alpaca robe with a sash from Tripoli. He sent his employees to the market to bring bolts of embroidered fabric. They brought in about forty to fifty bolts of this fabric to make about a dozen shirts each. When my sinyora mother took a look at this fabric, she reacted by saying that her original price was inadequate because this is a thicker fabric, hard to sew. Ham Daniel agreed on three altılıks to get half of it for himself. As for the customers, they had no interest in these price changes, beyond what he told them, especially because Chilibi Menahem’s coffers paid any bill that came.9 My sinyora mother took the measurements of every one of them for the fabrics they chose, making sure to set aside one-tenth of the fabric from each dozen shirts, [all of which equaled a] sum total [of] two robes, five half-shirts, and five jackets for my wedding. As soon as they left, my sinyora mother with her three daughters and three helpers started the work, and within a month they finished eight dozen shirts.


### 34. A BLOOD LIBEL IN RHODES (1840)

The year 1840 saw not one but two major blood libels, the first in Damascus and a few weeks later a second on the island of Rhodes. In Damascus the torture and killing of Jews who were accused of the ritual murder of a Capuchin friar and his servant attracted international attention. The lesser-known incident in Rhodes was no less devastating however. The following testimony of four Jewish witnesses from Rhodes depicts the persecution of their coreligionists as a heinous scheme by the island’s Christian consuls to eliminate a commercial rival. The second source presented here, a letter sent by the Ottoman chief rabbi to the empire’s foreign ministry, refutes the ritual murder accusations against the Jews while praising the Ottoman government on whose protection these Jews relied.

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9. Chilibi, or Çelebi, a title of respect for men.
The [three] men who, on the day of the alleged kidnapping, had walked through Trianda on their way to the city of Rhodes were summoned by the pasha and the consuls, who asked what they had done with the boy whom they had met on the way from the village to the city. The poor men were greatly astonished and insisted that they had not met any boy. Upon providing this negative response, they were flogged and thrown unconscious into the prison, where the unfortunates were tortured through the night.

After these three Jews had been questioned and tortured, the rabbi, Jacob Israel, who was an Austrian subject, as well as four representatives of the community were brought in. The interrogation began as follows: “Tell us finally, where did you leave the Christian child whose blood was used for your Passover bread?” The main investigators were the English and Swedish consuls. “We know nothing at all about this child,” was the answer, “but none of our laws or religious books require the horrible and unnatural sacrifice of which we are accused, and we are incapable of such a crime. We would be unworthy of being God’s children if now, after the Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane, which has bestowed upon us its benefits, we would cause the government the smallest unpleasantness by our behavior. Yusuf Pasha, strict master, let us explain to you why all of this has been said against us. Your own reason will tell you which of those present here is to blame.” When the rabbi wanted to continue, Wilkinson [the English consul] interrupted him: “Shut up! We did not summon you to listen to your false justifications or long-winded explanations, but to hear a short answer: where is the Greek boy?” After explaining that they knew nothing about the Greek child, the Jews were abused and ridiculed by the consuls and thrown out of the room with the words, “Go for now, Jewish dogs!” The pasha added, “Remember that I expect the boy from you Jews.”

On Sunday night after the rabbi and the elders were released, the pasha, prompted by the consuls, had the Jewish quarter surrounded by ten kavases, so that nobody could enter or leave and so that the Jews-

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10. Although he belonged to a rabbinic dynasty established in Rhodes since 1714, the rabbi held a berat, or patent conferring upon him the status of an Austrian subject, which granted him various extraterritorial benefits, including tax privileges and the protection of the Austrian consul.

11. The Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane (Noble Rescript of the Rose Chamber), proclaimed on November 3, 1839, guaranteed all Ottoman subjects equality and security of life and property without distinction of race or religion.

ish population would be locked inside. This caused great consternation and lamentation in the community, because the unfortunate besieged inhabitants, unprepared for this outrageous violence, lacked basic supplies, particularly bread. On Thursday evening the poor experienced shortage and hunger. The subaşı, chief of the gendarmes, who felt sorry for the hungry and beleaguered Jews, bought two baskets of bread with his own money and distributed it among them. When the Christian Protestant [sic] English consul Wilkinson learned about it, he regarded the kindness of the Muslim subaşı as a crime and denounced him to the pasha, who had the compassionate Turk flogged, then fired him from his job!

Exacerbating the suffering of the unfortunate inhabitants, the Jewish quarter in the city of Rhodes lacked drinking water, since the two wells located there had brackish water that could be used only for cooking or washing. The besieged suffered from thirst and begged for water in vain. In order to ease their thirst and in order not to drink pure saltwater, they made it sour with lemon juice. Yet owing to the shortage of lemons, the prices rose from two to thirty para\textsuperscript{13} apiece. As this was unaffordable for the poor, one could see children and old people lying on the streets and at the gates [of the Jewish quarter], burning from the thirst caused by the salty water.

On the fourth day of this stringent blockade, the naib\textsuperscript{14} and the Muslim religious leaders met at the pasha’s palace, in the consuls’ presence, to pronounce a verdict on this sad matter. They summoned the rabbi, the four Jewish elders, and the plaintiffs (two Greek women and a priest), and no other defendants. The pasha demanded that the claimants once again announce what they knew about the kidnapping. They responded that they had seen the boy entering the city with a basket of eggs and a turkey but had not seen him since, which is why they assumed that he had been murdered by Jews. Upon hearing this statement, the naib requested that the city’s gatekeepers and customs officials be brought in and questioned in the plaintiffs’ presence. After the claimants had described the boy and indicated the day and the hour when he had entered the city carrying a basket of eggs and a turkey and never returned, the gatekeepers and the customs officials

\textsuperscript{13} A small Ottoman coin.

\textsuperscript{14} A Muslim judge of a rank lower than a gadi.
declared that such a boy had not entered the city through any gate. Having heard these contradictory statements, the *naib* and the Muslim religious leaders declared that under such circumstances, in the absence of any grounds for suspicion, it could not be proven that the case merited further investigation; they also concluded that the Jews deserved to be freed and their persecution halted immediately. Yet despite this decision, the blockade of the Jewish quarter continued, and during that time Wilkinson met with some Jews to whom he said hypocritically, “Ask God to create that child in heaven again and send him to you or else this is the end of you, because only such a miracle can save you, since you did murder the boy.”

Coincidentally, after the beleaguered Jews had suffered for twelve days from fear, hunger, thirst, and other afflictions, a *mubassîl*\(^\text{15}\) came from Constantinople to Rhodes to gather the collected taxes. As he passed by the besieged Jewish quarter he inquired about [the situation]. Upon learning what had happened he told the pasha that it was wrong to punish the whole community for an alleged crime of two people. Since the pasha did not listen to him, the *mubassîl* wrote to him saying that if he did not immediately lift the blockade, he would inform the authorities in Constantinople. For this reason, the *kavas* were removed, and the starving and half-dead inhabitants of the quarter rushed to the wells and bakeries to enjoy a piece of bread and a sip of water after twelve days of deprivation. But on their way out [of their quarter], the Jews were met by the Christians—namely the Greeks—who threw rotten lemons at them.

Everybody thought the matter would be forgotten, and the Jews thanked God for delivering them from the danger, shame, and misery. But two weeks after the siege was lifted the Austrian consul, Giulianich, and the English consul, Wilkinson, visited some Jewish shops, saying they were tired of waiting and if the boy was not found by the following morning, they would hang the rabbi on the synagogue gate. These words caused renewed alarm among the unfortunate people. Indeed the next morning, which was a Jewish holiday [Passover], a few *kavases* took the rabbi and four elders and brought them to the pasha’s palace, where the consuls were already waiting. A new interrogation began, and the

\(^{15}\) The official in charge of taxes and finances in an Ottoman administrative region known as a *sanjak* (or *sancak*, in Turkish).
pasha announced that it was time to put an end to leniency and that the Jews must finally confess what had happened to the missing child. The rabbi once again stated that both he and his community were innocent and cited the *naib*'s verdict. The English consul retorted, “What? You are still denying it? What do we care about the *naib*'s verdict after the same thing has happened in Damascus and it has been proven that the Talmud requires that you use Christian blood for your Easter bread?” The rabbi answered, “It is the same libel as in Damascus. But if you, Wilkinson, say that the Talmud requires that we use Christian blood for our Passover bread, tell me: Where did we get [such blood] when Christianity did not yet exist?” They were unprepared for this retort, and in response the Jews were flogged and thrown into separate prison cells.

The English consul pressed the pasha to use torture again for without it they would never get a confession. Yusuf Pasha promised to do so, and in the evening, when the consuls were gone, he went to the courtyard of his palace (where the prison was located) and ordered the rabbi to be suspended from the ceiling of one of the halls in the following way. A rope was tightly fastened under his arms, chest, and stomach. Afterwards they put two copper pans with smoldering coals under his feet. He swung this way all night. The next day, the cruel consuls amused themselves with this savage sight. When the rabbi realized this, he cried, “Giulianich! Austrian consul, have pity on me, I am an Austrian subject after all!” Giulianich’s response was blood-curdling: “Rabbi: What are you complaining about? You are not yet dead!” After the martyr had swung this way for forty-six hours, with the horrible burning coals under his feet and without food or water, his arms and legs started bleeding heavily. This infamy did not provoke him to confess anything, but he was reduced to the point of death. When the pasha learned of this, he ordered him removed from the hook, taken to prison, and thrown on straw. After the rabbi, they tortured and suspended from the ceiling the unfortunate Danish dragoman David Mizrahi. . . . Being weaker than the rabbi, Mizrahi reached the same condition within six hours but without confessing anything either. There was just enough time to inform the pasha about his imminent death. Already unconscious, Mizrahi was removed from the hook and
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taken back to his cell. Four days later the rabbi and the four elders were released. The rabbi’s tormented appearance must have moved the pasha because as the former was leaving the prison the pasha said, “I am sorry for you. It was Giulianich who demanded that I torture you.” The other accused men remained in prison.

Meanwhile, the chief rabbi of Constantinople was informed about the accusations against the Jews of Rhodes and their gruesome treatment. About a month later, after the chief rabbi had appealed to the Sublime Porte and made reference to the Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane, the pasha of Rhodes received an order from the government requesting that he send to Constantinople the child’s mother, the three Greek claimants, and four delegates chosen by the Jews from their community. These four delegates were the abovementioned Abraham Amato, Barukh Benatta, Isaac Capeluto, and Yakim Mizrahi. Before their departure Yusuf Pasha called them to his palace and strictly forbade them to say anything bad about him at the Sublime Porte because, he said, all of his regrettable actions had been prompted by the consuls. Two weeks after the delegation’s departure, on the order of Reşid Pasha the other Jewish prisoners were released. Since that time the community has been living in peace, though if the Jews do not want to be abused by the Christians, they should stay inside their quarter.

[Letter sent by the Ottoman chief rabbi to the Ottoman Foreign Ministry]

It is believed among the nations that we need human blood for the unleavened bread that we bake and eat as required by our laws. The use of blood that they speak of is absolutely forbidden by our religion. We had hoped to be acquitted of this libel and have been searching for ways to clarify our views on this matter.

We praise and glorify the Lord for this administration, which spreads wisdom and kindness.

Thanks to the infinite mercy and compassion of the Benefactor of

17. Mustafa Reşid Pasha (1800–1858), an influential Ottoman diplomat and statesman who served as grand vizier six times during the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid (r. 1839–1861)

* Letter sent by the chief rabbi to the Ottoman Foreign Ministry, 25 Ramazan 1256 (November 20, 1840), I. HR. (Irade Hariciye), 349, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Prime Minister’s Ottoman Archive). Translated from Ottoman Turkish by Kürşad Akpınar and prepared for publication by Olga Borovaya.
the World and the Protector of all Peoples, our Emperor, Emperor of the World, our Benefactor, our Lord, thanks to His Excellency’s abundant benevolence, and in accordance with the new and exalted laws, this case was investigated in the Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances and the aforementioned allegations were declared to be falsehoods and libel. Once the magnificent imperial order . . . was unfurled publicly and read aloud in the presence of the rabbis and the heads of the [Jewish] millet, its contents proclaimed and the good news announced as is required of us by the dhimma, it was received with prayers for the prolongation of His Sovereign Majesty’s prosperous and glorious days. . . .

A continuation of the auspicious prayers for His Imperial Majesty shall be announced to his servants of the Jewish millet in his imperial and protected domains for the imperial assistance and mercy that has been bestowed upon [us] . . . unworthy beings.

Your servant Mishon [Haim Moses Fresco], current chief rabbi


35. OTTOMAN AND BRITISH OFFICIALS SPAR OVER PROTECTION OF THE JEWS [ca. 1840]

*Over the course of the nineteenth century British interest in the Jewish communities of the Middle East was shaped both by imperialist ambition and the ascendency of a millenarian evangelical movement whose adherents sought the restoration of the Jews to their historic homeland in Palestine. These currents motivated Lord Palmerston (1784–1865), British secretary of state for foreign affairs, to advocate European Jewish settlement in Palestine under British protection, which he suggested would allow Jews to escape persecution in their home countries while also advancing British foreign policy in the region. In the summer of 1840, Palmerston asked Lord Ponsonby, British ambassador in Istanbul, to present his cause to the Ottoman authorities. The Ottoman grand vizier’s note to the sultan summarizes their failed negotiations.*

18. A pact of protection between Islamic rulers and their non-Muslim subjects.