

THE CYPRIOT JEWS UNDER THE VENETIAN RULE (1489–1571)

In 1291 the sultan of Mamluks Al-Malik as-Ashraf took from the crusaders Acre, the last significant redoubt of the Kingdom of Jerusalem.¹ Since then Cyprus became the easternmost outpost of Christianity. For centuries, Cyprus had been a place of rest for crusaders, pilgrims, sailors and merchants on their way from Europe to Palestine, Syria, Anatolia or Egypt. The island was a kind of tower at the point of junction of three continents and its closeness to the Muslim coast made it play a significant role in the exchange between the Christian world and the East, attracting also numerous Jews.²

Venice had been interested in Cyprus for a long time. Already in 1464 the king of Cyprus James II of Lusignan (1460–1473) reigned in agreement with Venice and, to tighten the relations between the two countries, he married a Venetian Catherine Cornaro. In 1473 king Jacob II of Lusignan died. From then on, Catherine Cornaro ruled on her own and Venice gained stronger and stronger influence on the island. In 1489 Queen Cornaro, in the face of growing Turkish threat, handed over the control of the island to the Republic of Venice. The period of the rule of Venice finished in 1571 along with the Turkish conquest of Cyprus. In the period of Venetian dominance over the island, Jews became an important part of the society, taking a strong position in the economy of Cyprus. They were present in soap, oil and carpet trade, they dealt with usury and maintained commercial relations with Rhodes, Chios, Ephesus, Damascus and Alexandria.³

The basic studies concerning the presence of Jews in Cyprus during the Venetian reign on the island are the studies of S. Panteli⁴ and B. Arbel,⁵ based on search queries in Venetian archives. Moreover, we have the works of J. Starr⁶ and C. Roth,⁷ who drew from the accounts of merchants and pilgrims visiting Cyprus in the 13th–16th century.

¹ Hauziński 2005, 580.

² Braudel 1992, 93; Panteli 2004, 13; Coureas 2005, 129–130.

³ *Chronique de l'île de Chypre par Florio Bustron*, publiée par M. René de Mas Latrie, Paris 1886, 453–460; de Mas Latrie 1852/61, 394–451; Hill 1948, 765–877; Simeoni 1950, 584–585; Arbel 1993, 67–85; Quirini-Popławska 1997, 151; Panteli 2004, 55.

⁴ Panteli 2004.

⁵ Arbel 1986, 203–213; Arbel /Veinstein 1986, 7–51; Arbel 1987, 163–197; Arbel 1989a; Arbel 1989b, 89–94; Arbel 1991, 109–128; Arbel 1995; Arbel 1996, 185–192; Arbel 1997, 161–174; Arbel 1998, 328–331; Arbel 2000a, 151–164; Arbel 2000b, 23–40; Arbel 2000c, 183–213; Arbel 2001, 73–96.

⁶ Starr 1949.

⁷ Roth 1960, 8–20; Roth 1964, 238–294; Roth 1967, 460–472.

When in 70 the Romans bloodily suppressed the uprising in Palestine, a large group of Jews moved to nearby Cyprus. In 115 they rose against the Roman power, which ended with an edict banishing all Jews from the island.⁸ It was not until the 12th century that Jews started to come to Cyprus, this process escalated with the beginning of the rule of the French dynasty of Lusignan (1192–1489). By the end of the 15th century larger Jewish settlements existed in Nicosia, Famagusta and in Paphos.⁹ One of the earliest account concerning Cypriot Jews is *The Book of Travel*, a report from 1159–1172 of a Spanish traveler Benjamin of Tudela.¹⁰ During his stay in Cyprus he found settlements of Jews who were considered heretics by their compatriots. Called by others *Kaphrasin*, that is, Cypriots, they profaned Saturday's Sabbath and celebrated it on Sunday. This departure drew on them the contempt of orthodox Jews who excluded them from their community.¹¹ *Kaphrasin* were also mentioned by a Jewish theologian Abraham ibn Ezra, who visited the island before 1158.¹² Under the rule of the Lusignan dynasty the Jewish rights were regulated according to *Assizes de Jérusalem*, a code borrowed from the Kingdom of Jerusalem and transferred onto Cyprus.¹³ However, in accordance to the regulations specified in it, Jews were discriminated against and their rights were less extensive than those of Christians, Greeks or even Muslims.¹⁴ Moreover, in 1298 the synod of Limassol forbade the Jewish doctors to treat Christians, what, of course, was not followed.¹⁵ In the middle of the 14th century, during the reign of Hugo IV of Lusignan (1324–1359), a group of Jews from Crete came to Cyprus encouraged by the development of Famagusta and the benefits of running trade in this city.¹⁶ However, only Peter I of Lusignan (1359–1369) saw the advantages of Jewish settlement and encouraged Jews living in Egypt to come to Cyprus, promising to treat them in a just way.¹⁷

After the fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, Cyprus assumed the role of a link between the Christian West and the Muslim East. Merchant republics, whose position was based on sea trade, started to search for new ports after they lost their posts on the Syrian or Palestine coast. The ideal place to start a new commercial centre was Famagusta, a port city located in the eastern part of Cyprus. Étienne of Lusignan (1537–1590),¹⁸ a chronicler of the island, wrote that the king of Cyprus Henry II of Lusignan (1285–1324) fortified Famagusta, similarly to Acre, thus creating a large

⁸ Purcell 1969, 104.

⁹ *Chroniques d'Amadi et d'Strambaldi*, publiées par M. René de Mas Latrie, Paris 1891–1893, vol. I, 406; Starr 1949, 101, 103–104; Roth 1964, 292; Arbel 2000b, 24–25; Coureas 2004, 131–132; Panteli 2004, 58.

¹⁰ Johnson 2000, 173–175.

¹¹ *Excerpta Cypria. Materials for a history of Cyprus*, translated and transcribed by C.D. Cobham, Nicosia 1969, 5; Hill 1948, 5; Purcell 1969, 104–105; Johnson 2000, 174; Panteli 2004, 39.

¹² Hill 1948, 5.

¹³ Hill 1948, 1143; Coureas 2002, 12–28.

¹⁴ Panteli 2004, 58.

¹⁵ Hill 1948, 397; Edbury 1991, 200; Panteli 2004, 58–59.

¹⁶ Jacoby 1977, 171–172; Coureas 2004, 132.

¹⁷ Hill 1948, 397; Edbury 1991, 200; Panteli 2004, 41, 58–59.

¹⁸ Étienne de Lusignan, *Chorographia*, Bologna 1573 [in French: Étienne de Lusignan, *Description de toute l'île de Cypre...composee premerement en Italien, et imprimee à Bologne la Grasse, et maintenant augmentee et traduite en François*, Paris 1580].

commercial center.¹⁹ After 1291 large groups from Ancona, Catalonia, Pisa, Provence and, most importantly, from Genoa and Venice settled there.²⁰ It did not take long for Famagusta to become one of the most prosperous trading ports in the eastern part of the Mediterranean.²¹

The first to notice the strategic position of Cyprus in the light of new configuration of Muslim and Christian powers in the eastern part of the Mediterranean was Genoa, which, after the conflict with the rulers of the island from the Lusignan dynasty, on the basis of treaties of 21st October 1374 and 19th February 1383, took control of the island.²² The Genoese forced the king of Cyprus Peter II of Lusignan (1369–1382) to pay huge amounts for war damages to the citizens – the sum of 1 million ducats. The burden of collecting this payment rested on the shoulders of Jewish merchants, that is, the wealthiest group out of all inhabitants of the island. The damages were reduced at a later time to 100 000 ducats.²³

In 1447 the administration of Famagusta was handed over to the Genoese bank of San Giorgio.²⁴ In a document of 1st October 1447, in which all citizens pledged loyalty to the representatives of the bank, 18 Jews were mentioned, among others, representing single households.²⁵ Later, in 1481 rabbi Meshullam ben R. Menahem of Volterra, a son of a Florentine usurer, embarked on a trip to Jerusalem. Traveling via Rhodes, Alexandria and Cairo, he got to Cyprus, where he found 250 Jewish families.²⁶ We also know a report of an admiral of Venetian fleet who stayed in Famagusta in 1477 and described the city as depopulated and ruined. This description is confirmed by an account of an anonymous Jewish traveler from 1495, who met just one usurer in Famagusta.²⁷

At the turn of the 16th century we can observe Jewish migration from Nicosia to Famagusta connected with the development of this port city. In 1510 governor Giustiniani mentions large migration of Nicosia's citizens arriving in Famagusta.²⁸ Étienne of Lusignan explains the cause of Jews leaving the capital of the island. In his opinion, the reason lay in the events that habitually occurred during Easter. At that period Christians persecuted and committed acts of violence and robbery against the Jewish community living in Nicosia.²⁹ Moreover, it was not unremarkable that Famagusta attracted Jews with its cosmopolitan character. The city was populated with Copts, Greeks, Venetians, the Genoese and other nations. As the second largest Cypriot city, Famagusta also offered a financial market large enough for their usurious activity.

¹⁹ Edbury 1994, 337.

²⁰ Balletto 1996, 35–36; Arbel 2000a, 151–164.

²¹ Jacoby 1977, 159–188; Jacoby 1984, 143–179; Edbury 1994, 337; Arbel 2000a, 151–164.

²² *Chronique de l'île de Chypre...*, 292–332; *Chroniques d'Amadi et d'Strambaldi*, vol. I, 432–462; vol. II, 133–224; Hill 1948, 419, 433; Richard 1972, 221–229; Balard 1984, 27; Balard 1985, 277; Balletto 1994a, 84; Balletto 1994b, 121; Balletto 1996, 35–36; Coureas 2001, 196–199; Edbury 2005, 336.

²³ L. Makhairas [Machareas], *Recital Concerning the Sweet Land of Cyprus Entitled Chronicle*, ed. and transl. by R. M. Dawkins, vol. I, 377, 437; *Chroniques d'Amadi et d'Strambaldi*, vol. I, 469; vol. II, 161; Hill 1948, 397; Balard 1993, 16–18; Edbury 1991, 200; Panteli 2004, 58–59; Coureas 2004, 132.

²⁴ Balletto 1992, 205–207; Balletto 1996, 36.

²⁵ Balletto 1992, 207; Balletto 1996, 37–38; Arbel 2000b, 25.

²⁶ Panteli 2004, 40.

²⁷ Arbel 2000b, 31; Arbel 2000c, 198.

²⁸ Arbel 2000b, 24, 30; Arbel 2000c, 198.

²⁹ Arbel 2000b, 24.

What is more, at the end of the 15th century the wave of persecution of Jews in Europe, especially in Spain, Portugal and Italy, made Jews search for shelter in the Ottoman Empire. It is among Turks that the refugees from the West – Joseph Nasi, called the Great Jew and Salomon Ashkenazi, achieved great success. Some of the refugees reached also Cyprus, which increased the Jewish population living there.³⁰ This influx was so significant that in 1497 the Venetian administration, facing the problem of numerous Jews arriving at the island, was forced to regulate the migration, making some number of Jewish families leave the island.³¹

During the whole period of the Venetian rule of Cyprus there is practically no information on Jews living outside Famagusta. In 1554 the captain of Nicosia did not certify the presence of Jewish community in the capital of the island. For this reason one may assume that the preponderant part of Jewish community was gathered in Famagusta. The number of Jews living in the city was changing. In 1521 rabbi Moshe ben M. Bassola of Ancona mentioned only 12 families that came from Sicily. Later, a large number of Jews immigrated to the city and at the end of the Venetian period about 34 Jewish families resided there. In 1563 a Jewish traveler Elijah of Pesaro did not find any Jews on the island apart from the port city, where lived 25 families from Sicily, Portugal and the Levant. There is only one account of Jews living outside Famagusta. In 1561 a Portuguese traveler Pantaleão de Aveiro met a Jewish doctor living near the city of Saline (now Lamaca).³²

The most precise source of information on the number of Jews in Famagusta is the account of the Venetian captain of the city of 26th July 1568.³³ It makes it possible to analyze the Jewish community living in the city at that time. A list made by him, necessary to appoint the people to leave the city, enumerates 37 men, including 3 young boys aged 17, 16 and 14. From among them 23 men, including 2 children, are described as immigrants to Famagusta. The remaining 14 people, including 1 child, were born in Famagusta. The document does not mention any women.³⁴ Assuming that from the above-mentioned group of 34 men every one of them had a household, we can assess the approximate size of the Jewish community in Famagusta. Following the results of research on the Jewish communities in Italy and Palestine in the 16th century, where the average number of members of a single family was 4.5 to 6 people, it can be estimated that the population of Jews living in Famagusta counted between 150 to 200 people.³⁵ This number has to be assumed for the whole Cyprus as at this time the Jewish community was concentrated in Famagusta.³⁶ At the end of the Venetian period

³⁰ Braudel 1973, II, 811; Israel 1989, 5; Shaw 1991, 8–9, 35–36; Cohen 1994, 49; Panteli 2004, 43. In 1376 to Turkish Adrianopol appeared Jews who were coming from Hungary. Also in 1394 Jews from France reached Adrianopol too.

³¹ Hill 1948, 813; Arbel 1997, 161–174; Arbel 2000b, 24–25, 30.

³² Arbel 2000c, 198–199.

³³ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Lettere ai Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci*, Busta 290, No. 273 (cf. Arbel 2000b, 34–35).

³⁴ Arbel 2000b, 30–31. From this group 6 men came from Italy, 4 from Cairo, 3 from Portugal, 2 from Syria, 2 from Saloniki, 1 from Safed in Palestine, 1 from Constantinople, 1 from Antwerp and 1 from Valony in Albania.

³⁵ See Bachi 1938, 271; Shulvass 1951, 17; Lewis 1952; Milano 1953, 29; Segre 1973; Hacker 1974, 105–157.

³⁶ Starr 1949, 105; Arbel 2000b, 31.

about 8 thousand people resided in the city and Jews constituted 2–2.5% of the population.³⁷

Similarly to other places in the Venetian Empire, also in Famagusta Jews lived in a separate district, the *ghetto*. It was located in the southern part of the city, to the right of the gate towards Limassol. In the centre of the *ghetto* there was a market square, with streets, along which houses were built, spreading away from it.³⁸ According to B. Arbel, there is evidence confirming the existence of the Jewish district in Famagusta long before the Republic of St. Mark took over the control of Cyprus.³⁹

In the Venetian period the majority of Cypriot Jews dealt with usury, for which they were famous in the whole island; they also engaged in small trade and dyeing silk valued in the region.⁴⁰ S. Panteli analyzed thoroughly the professions of the Jews of Famagusta from between the 15th and 16th century. According to his research, 35% of the community dealt with usury and trade, 15% found jobs in the Venetian administration, 15% were artists, 15% – physicians and craftspeople (the so-called freelancers), 8% were farmers and 5% did manual labour at the farms of rich Venetians or Greeks.⁴¹ In 1563 Elijah of Pesaro claimed that Jews from Famagusta were so famous that people needing a loan came to the city from all over Cyprus. The interest rate on loans was 20% for payment in gold or silver and 25% for all other forms of payment. Every loan was recorded in a special book and was confirmed by the seal of a Venetian clerk, which gave it official character. As B. Arbel reports, the Jews of Famagusta were able to lend even 50 thousand gold ducats within six months. This amount seems huge considering the fact that within a year the whole Jewish community of Famagusta paid only 26 ducats in taxes.⁴²

Cypriot Jews were also subject to restrictions imposed on their co-believers in other parts of the Christian world. We are informed that in the 16th century a Venetian resolution of 1423 was followed. This resolution forbade Jews to own any estate outside the *ghetto*.⁴³ In 1550 the senate of the Republic of St. Mark issued an order to expel the Marranos, Jews who converted to Christianity, from all colonies, including Cyprus. This order reached the island, but it is uncertain whether it was executed. On 21st October 1553 the senate of the Republic of Venice, under the influence of Pope Julius III, prepared a decree banning the storing of Talmud in its vast empire. Within 8 days both Christians and Jews had to hand to the local Venetian administration all copies of Talmud and other works written on its basis. Venetians punished severely

³⁷ Hill 1948, 787; Papadopoulos 1965, 17–19; Iorga 1966, 214; Cheynet 1993, 68; Arbel 2000b, 25–31; Arbel 2000c, 183, 199–200; Panteli 2004, 40. See Ben-Zevi 1938. Thanks to reports of Venetian administration we know the number of inhabitants of Famagusta (and Nicosia): 6500 in 1510–1521 (16 000 in Nicosia), 7300 in 1523 (15 000 in Nicosia), 8417 in 1528, 9500 in 1529, 8000 in 1540 (21 000 in Nicosia), 7500 in 1548, 7814 in 1549, 6000 in 1559 (18 000 in Nicosia), 8000 in 1562. We have information about the total size of occupants of island in this period: in 1490 (106 000 contain 6000 Venetian soldiers), 1504 (110 000), 1510–1521 (148 000), 1523 (121 000), 1529 (126 000), 1540 (197 000), 1559 (150 000), 1562 (180 000), 1570 (200 000).

³⁸ Hill 1948, 992; Roth 1964, 287; Ballard 1985, 286; Balletto 1996, 39; Arbel 2000b, 26; Panteli 2004, 42.

³⁹ L. Makhairas [Machareas], *op. cit.*, vol. I, 436–437, 602–603; vol. II, 169; Arbel 2000b, 23–25.

⁴⁰ Arbel 2000b, 25.

⁴¹ Panteli 2004, 57–58.

⁴² Arbel 2000b, 25–26; Panteli 2004, 56–57.

⁴³ Starr 1949, 106; Panteli 2004, 42.

those who evaded this order. The decree reached Cyprus early in 1554 and on its basis about fifty books were burnt in Famagusta, and they were not to be printed again.⁴⁴

The influx of Jews coming from Italy, especially between 1556 and 1568 was caused by the burden imposed on them as a result of the Counter-Reformation. However, the case of Elijah of Pesaro shows that people coming to the island were not entirely certain of their final destination. When Elijah arrived in Famagusta in 1563, along with his seven-person family, he intended to travel further, to the Holy Land. However, the information incoming from Palestine and Syria on crop failure and diseases on the one hand, and the benefits found in Famagusta on the other hand, made Elijah of Pesaro stay on the island.⁴⁵ The Jewish migration from the island of Chios, in 1540–1541 suffering from the plague of diseases, made a large part of the local Jewish community move to Cyprus.⁴⁶ Similarly, Bedouin attack on Palestinian city of Safed in 1567 and the massacre of its citizens directed to the island a large wave of Jewish migration.⁴⁷

In 1571 Cyprus was captured by Turkish sultan Selim II (1566–1574), the son of Suleiman the Magnificent (1520–1566). During the reign of his father, Selim, notorious for his weakness for alcohol, administered the region of Kütayha (north-western Anatolia), where he tasted attractive wines and liqueurs from Cyprus.⁴⁸ Historians often mention that it could have influenced the Sultan's decision to take over the island. In the first half of the 16th century the relations between the Republic of Venice and Turkey were quite good and since 1540 they were based on a peace treaty. However, the situation became more and more tense.⁴⁹ On the one hand, Venetians could not handle Muslim corsairs called *Uskoks*⁵⁰ operating from the region of Senj in Dalmatia and attacking ships and Christian settlements. On the other hand, Cyprus was perfect quarters for pirates who assaulted Muslim pilgrims traveling to Mecca.⁵¹ Additionally, the closest entourage of Selim II persuaded the Sultan to capture strategically located Cyprus arguing that the island could be captured quickly.⁵² What is more, they used arguments that every new sultan should grace his ascension to the throne with a new conquest.⁵³

An important role in persuading the Sultan to wage war on Venice for Cyprus was played by Jiao Marquez (1524–1579), a Jew from Portugal, commonly known as Joseph (Josef) Nasi.⁵⁴ Due to the capital he gathered and the influence he gained at the Turkish court, he became a personal advisor of Sultan Selim II. In recognition of his

⁴⁴ Arbel 2000b, 28; Panteli 2004, 42. See Ya'ari 1954.

⁴⁵ Arbel 2000b, 32–33.

⁴⁶ Panteli 2004, 41.

⁴⁷ Arbel 2000b, 32.

⁴⁸ Hill 1948, 817; Panteli 2004, 44, 55.

⁴⁹ Arbel 1995, 55.

⁵⁰ Hill 1948, 884.

⁵¹ Hill 1948, 879, 884; Reychman 1973, 89; Pamy 1976, 108; Panteli 2004, 44–45.

⁵² Hill 1948, 879–880; Braudel 1973, II, 1074–1075; Pamy 1976, 108; Panteli 2004, 45.

⁵³ Hill 1948, 880; Braudel 1973, II, 1074–1075; Pamy 1976, 108; Arbel 1995, 55–56; Panteli 2004, 45.

⁵⁴ Hill 1948, 843, 878–879; Roth 1967, 460–472; Purcell 1969, 150; Braudel 1973, II, 815–816; Arbel 1995, 56–57; Arbel 2000b, 28; Panteli 2004, 46–47. See Levi 1859; Arce 1953, 257–286; Rose 1970, 330–344; Ravid 1983, 159–181.

service he was granted privileges and the city of Tyberias along with seven adjoining provinces.⁵⁵ He devised a plan to create in Cyprus a state that could provide refuge for Jews escaping from persecution in Western Europe. The wrongs done to him by Venice in the time of his youth made him seek revenge on Signoria. Conquering Cyprus, and, above all, taking control of the pearl of Levant – the port of Famagusta, was Joseph Nasi's goal.⁵⁶ The scale of his plans is confirmed by the fact that he offered the prince of Savoy, Emmanuel Philibert (1553–1580) the crown of Cyprus in exchange for his help in conquering the island.⁵⁷ Also, the famous fire that in 1569 devoured the Venetian arsenal⁵⁸ was ascribed to Joseph Nasi's agents.⁵⁹

Geographic discoveries caused the decrease of interest in trade with the East through Turkey. Suleiman I the Magnificent and Selim II were aware of the problem and for this reason they tried to strengthen economically the Ottoman Empire. Seizing Cyprus was an important factor in achieving this goal.⁶⁰

Already in 1567 Selim II renewed his peace with Venice, however, Turkish mufti Abū'l-Su'ūd issued a fatwa claiming that one should break all peace treaties to regain the areas lost by the Muslims.⁶¹ Moreover, when news of the great fire that destroyed the Venetian arsenal, reached Constantinople, the Sultan started war preparations. Sea forces of Signoria were largely weakened, which, in consequence, made it more difficult to defend Cyprus.⁶² At the turn of February and March 1570 Turkish diplomats arrived in Venice demanding the return of Cyprus, threatening to take over the island by force. On 27th March 1570 the Republic of St. Mark responded that they would not give Cyprus trusting in the justice of God who would not let the unfaithful capture a Christian domain.⁶³

On 15th February 1568 information on an uprising planned in Famagusta reached Venice. It was passed on by a Turkish slave who in Smyrna (now Izmir) shared this piece of information with Venetian sailors. He claimed that the insurrectionists were preparing a tunnel under the city's walls. The tunnel was supposed to have its beginning in the district populated by the Jews who, additionally, possessed the keys to city walls. Moreover, in the tunnel there was a large number of barrels that, instead of wine, contained gunpowder. The actions were allegedly supported by Joseph Nasi, to whom all information on the progress of works was passed. The explosives were to explode at the moment when the Turkish fleet would reach the roadstead of the port in Famagusta. In this way the landing Turkish troops would access the city through a breach in the walls. Similar news also reached Venetians in Constantinople.⁶⁴

⁵⁵ Arbel 1995, 60–61; Panteli 2004, 48.

⁵⁶ Arbel 2000b, 28; Panteli 2004, 46–47.

⁵⁷ *Chronique de l'île de Chypre...*, p. 384–454; de Mas Latrie 1852/61, 82–152, 557–578; Hill 1948, 842–843; Alastos 1955, 212–213; Purcell 1969, 143–144; Galassi 1974, 66; Hunt 1990, 208–212; Housley 1992, 202.

⁵⁸ Arbel 1995, 63: It was on 13th September 1569.

⁵⁹ Quazza 1938, 36; Hill 1948, 883. See Tosi 1906.

⁶⁰ Panteli 2004, 48.

⁶¹ Alastos 1955, 127–129; Emilianidés 1962, 39–41.

⁶² Quazza 1938, 36; Hill 1948, 883; Arbel 1995, 63.

⁶³ Hill 1948, 882–883, 887–888; Pamy 1976, 108–109; Panteli 2004, 49.

⁶⁴ Hill 1948, 880–881; Arbel 1995, 62–63; Arbel 2000b, 28–29.

Because of the signals of the anti-Venetian insurrection and Turkish plans of the conquest of Cyprus, the senate decided to strengthen the forces on the island by additional 30 galleys and 1000 infantrymen. Moreover, an order was issued to the Venetian captain of Famagusta to investigate the news of the planned uprising coming from Italy and take the necessary precautions. He was also granted vast powers to deal with every arrested conspirator.⁶⁵

On 26th May 1568 the Senate sent a letter to the captain of Famagusta in which he was ordered to apprehend all Christians and Jews listed in the document as conspirators. The list also included four emissaries at the service of Joseph Nasi traveling between Famagusta and Constantinople. Moreover, the captain had to register all Jews living in Famagusta along with the information on their professions. First, Venetians secured all the gates and crucial parts of the Famagusta's fortification. All Jewish houses were searched and a part of buildings near the city gates were demolished. The captain of Famagusta reported in great detail on the execution of the instructions sent by the Senate. No tunnel was found under the city walls, and the names of potential conspirators were either fictional, or the suspects had already been dead for a long time. When in June 1568 the citizens of Famagusta spotted Turkish ships, no fragment of the wall was blown up. What is more, the Venetian soldiers gathered on the walls made such an impression on Turks that they left in peace. However, the situation in Cyprus was so tense that on 26th July 1568 the captain ordered all the Jews that had not been born in Famagusta to leave the city within fifteen days.⁶⁶

One can assume that the Venetian order for immigrant Jews to leave the city was executed.⁶⁷ They may have settled in other parts of the island, however, some Jews also left Cyprus. One of them, Eliaezer Ashkenazi, left with his family for Venice, where he lived until 1570, and then he moved to Cremona, Poznań and finally to Cracow, where he eventually settled.⁶⁸

On 1st July 1570 Turkish troops landed in Cyprus capturing the port of Limassol. On 8th August 1570, the capital of the island, Nicosia, fell after 48 days of siege.⁶⁹ Famagusta resisted the invaders much longer. Only after 10-month blockade did it capitulate on 1st August 1571.⁷⁰ During the siege many Jews as well as Copts, Maronites, Armenians and Syrians, considered incapable of fighting and suspected of favouring the enemy, were sent into the mountains to the castles of St. Hilarion and Buffavento.⁷¹ Cyprus remained in Turkish hands for the next 307 years until 1878. Not long after Selim II captured the island, there was a great sea battle near Lepanto. On 7th October 1571 Prince Juan de Austria, aged 25, leader of the Christian fleet, defeated Turks in great style.⁷²

⁶⁵ Arbel 2000b, 29.

⁶⁶ Arbel 1995, 29–30.

⁶⁷ Arbel 2000b, 33.

⁶⁸ Braudel 1973, II, 805; Arbel 2000b, 32–33.

⁶⁹ Quazza 1938, 39; Hill 1948, 895–896; Reychman 1973, 89; Parny 1976, 109; Panteli 2004, 49.

⁷⁰ Quazza 1938, 39–40; Hill 1948, 957, 895–1037; Visconti 1958, 149–151; Panteli 2004, 50.

⁷¹ Hill 1948, 957; Panteli 2004, 50.

⁷² Quazza 1938, 40–42; Visconti 1958, 151–154; Reychman 1973, 89; Parny 1976, 109.

Peace treaty signed on 7th March 1573 obliged defeated Turkey to pay huge damages, and Venice had to accept the loss of Cyprus.⁷³ All Italians could freely leave the island. What is more, the Greek-speaking inhabitants of Cyprus who decided to stay on the island, were guaranteed personal freedom and the right to ownership. They were allowed two years to make a decision and, if after this period they decided to leave the island, they received safe-conduct guaranteeing them safe travel to their new place of residence.⁷⁴

Selim II wished to sustain the good economic situation of Cyprus, especially in Famagusta, and, for this reason, he decided to bring additional groups of Jews to the island. We know of three documents from this period that provide information about Turkish undertakings. The first one was issued on 8th October 1576 and contains instructions for the governor and the judge of Safed ordering them to send 1000 Jews to Famagusta.⁷⁵ The second one, issued on 22nd September 1577, conveys information on other Jewish families moving from Safed to the island. Another document issued on the same day and addressed to the Turkish governor of Cyprus informs us of the procedure of dealing with Jews coming to the island. These documents contained also instructions for Turkish clerks warning them that they should not, under severe punishment, accept bribes from rich Jews and send poor citizens of Safed to the island instead.⁷⁶ Under the Turkish rule the Jews living in Cyprus enjoyed significant privileges.⁷⁷ Moreover, G. Hill mentions that Turks were welcomed by local Jews as well as by Maronites, Armenians and Syrians, as liberators from the Christian oppression.⁷⁸ At the same time, accounts left by merchants, travelers and pilgrims visiting the island, described Cyprus in the 15th and 16th century as a refuge for Jews at the time of their persecution in Western Europe.⁷⁹ What is more, Jews reached the island also in times of famine and plagues that often struck Palestine and Syria. In the described period the Jewish community, though relatively small, influenced the island's economy to a large extent, thus creating good economic situation for commerce in Famagusta throughout the entire 16th century. However, the economic rivalry between Jews and Venice that grew stronger in the 1560s deepened the misunderstandings between them. The attempt to involve the Jewish community in the conflict between Venice and representing the Turkish interests Joseph Nasi, caused repressions against Cypriot Jews. For that reason Muslims celebrating the conquest of Cyprus in 1571 were welcomed by Jews as liberators.⁸⁰

⁷³ Reychman 1973, 90–91; Pamy 1976, 109–110; Mantran 1989, 156; Braudel 1992, 23; Panteli 2004, 52; Inalcik 2006, 54.

⁷⁴ Quazza 1938, 39–40; Hill 1948, 895–1037; Visconti 1958, 149–151; Panteli 2004, 50.

⁷⁵ Israel 1989, 26.

⁷⁶ Panteli 2004, 54.

⁷⁷ Panteli 2004, 55.

⁷⁸ Hill 1948, 808.

⁷⁹ Braudel 1973, II, 808; Kriegel 1979, 72; Israel 1989, 7, 25; Shaw 1991, 13–15, 33–34; Cohen 1994, 49; Panteli 2004, 61–63. See Cohen 1984; Bashan 1988; Arbel 1989a.

⁸⁰ Arbel 1996, 185–192; Arbel 2001, 73–96.

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