

= Rhodes blood libel =

The Rhodes blood libel was an 1840 event of blood libel against Jews , in which the Greek Orthodox community accused Jews on the island of Rhodes ( then part of the Ottoman Empire ) of the ritual murder of a Christian boy who disappeared in February of that year .

Initially the libel garnered support from the consuls of several European countries , including the United Kingdom , France , the Austrian Empire , Sweden , and Greece , although later several supported the Jewish community . The Ottoman governor of Rhodes broke with the long tradition of the Ottoman governments ( which had previously denied the factual basis of the blood libel accusations ) and supported the ritual murder charge . The government arrested several Jewish subjects , some of whom were tortured and confessed . It blockaded the entire Jewish quarter for twelve days .

The Jewish community of Rhodes appealed for help from the Jewish community in Constantinople , who forwarded the appeal to European governments . In the United Kingdom and Austria , Jewish communities gained support from their governments . They sent official dispatches to the ambassadors in Constantinople unequivocally condemning the blood libel . A consensus developed that the charge was false . The governor of Rhodes sent the case to the central government , which initiated a formal inquiry into the affair . In July 1840 , that investigation established the innocence of the Jewish community . Finally , in November of the same year , the Ottoman sultan issued a decree ( firman ) denouncing the blood libel as false .

= = Background = =

= = = Jewish community = = =

The existence of a Jewish community in Rhodes was first documented toward the end of the Hellenistic period . In a Roman decree dated to 142 BC , Rhodes is listed among the areas notified of the renewal of the pact of friendship between the Roman senate and the Jewish nation . The Jews of Rhodes are mentioned in documents at the time of the Arab conquest of the island in the 7th century . In the 12th century , Benjamin of Tudela found some 400 Jews in the city of Rhodes .

In 1481 and 1482 , earthquakes destroyed the Jewish quarter , so that only 22 families remained in the city . After an epidemic of plague in 1498 ? 1500 , the Knights Hospitaller , who ruled the island at that time , expelled those of the remaining Jews who would not be baptized . In the next two decades , the Hospitallers brought to the island between 2 @, @ 000 and 3 @, @ 000 captured Jews who were kept as slaves to work on fortifications .

In 1522 , these Jews and their descendants helped the Ottomans seize Rhodes . Under the Ottoman rule , Rhodes became an important Sephardi center , home to many famous rabbis . By the 19th century , the wealthier Jews were merchants in cloth , silk , sulfur , and resins . The rest were small shopkeepers and artisans , street vendors , and fishermen . The community was governed by a council of seven officials . Sources give the number of Jews during the 19th century between 2 @, @ 000 and 4 @, @ 000 .

= = = Blood libel against the Jews in the Ottoman Empire = = =

The blood libel against Jews originated in England in 1144 with the case of William of Norwich . The accusation that Jews used the blood of Christian children to prepare matzos for the Passover became a staple of Christian antisemitism of the Middle Ages , with the total number of recorded ritual murder accusations reaching 150 . With the strengthening of standards of evidence in legal cases , the number of charges began to decline , and few blood libel cases reached European courts after 1772 . Nevertheless , some instances of ritual murder accusation arose as late as the 19th century .

In the Middle East , the blood libel was deeply ingrained in the consciousness of local Christian

communities . Accusations of blood libel were commonplace in the Byzantine Empire . After the Ottomans conquered the Byzantine lands , Greek communities were usually the source of ritual murder charges against Jews , often at times of social and economic tensions . The first appearance of the blood libel under Ottoman rule took place in the reign of Mehmet II . Subsequently , accusations of ritual murder were only sporadic and Ottoman authorities usually condemned them . In the 16th century , Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent issued a firman , formally denouncing blood libel charges against the Jews .

With the increase of Christian influence in the Ottoman Empire , the standing of the Jews declined . The sultan 's Hatt @-@ i Sharif of Gulhane , proclaimed in 1839 , ushered in an era of liberal reforms known as Tanzimat . This period further enhanced the status of the Christians and eroded the power of authorities to protect the Jews . Before 1840 , cases of blood libel occurred in Aleppo in 1810 and in Antioch in 1826 .

In 1840 , contemporaneous with the affair in Rhodes , a more famous case of blood libel , known as the Damascus affair , was developing in Damascus , while the city was under the short @-@ lived control of Muhammad Ali of Egypt . On February 5 , Capuchin friar Thomas and his servant Ibrahim Amara went missing , and the Jews of Damascus were accused of murdering them to collect their blood for Passover matzos . The local Christian community , the governor , and the French consul , who received full support from Paris , actively pursued the ritual murder charge . The accused Jews were tortured , and some of them confessed to having killed Father Thomas and his servant . Their testimonies were used by the accusers as the irrefutable proof of guilt . The case drew international attention , arousing active protests from the European Jewish diaspora .

= = Accusation = =

= = = Disappearance = = =

On February 17 , 1840 , a boy from a Greek Orthodox family in Rhodes went for a walk and did not return . The next day his mother reported the disappearance to the Ottoman authorities . The island 's governor , Yusuf Pasha , ordered a search , but several days ' efforts proved fruitless . The European consuls pressed the governor to solve the case : the boy 's family was Christian , though without foreign protection . The Greek Christian population of Rhodes , meanwhile , had no doubts that the boy had been murdered by the Jews for ritual purposes . An eyewitness reported : " It was firmly believed that the child in question was doomed to be sacrificed by the Jews . The whole island was agitated from one end to the other . " The assurance of the local Christians having been impressed upon the Ottoman authorities , they began searching the Jewish quarter , again in vain .

= = = Arrests , interrogations , and torture = = =

Several days later , two Greek women reported having seen the boy walking towards the city of Rhodes accompanied by four Jews . The women claimed that one of the Jews was Eliakim Stamboli , who was arrested , questioned , and subjected to five hundred blows of the bastinado . On February 23 , he was interrogated again and tortured in the presence of many dignitaries , including the governor , the qadi ( Muslim judge ) , the Greek archbishop , and European consuls . Jews of Rhodes reported that Stamboli was " loaded with chains , many stripes were inflicted upon him and red @-@ hot wires were run through his nose , burning bones were applied to his head and a very heavy stone was laid upon his breast , insomuch as he was reduced to the point of death . " Under torture , Stamboli confessed to the ritual murder charge and incriminated other Jews , opening the door to further arrests . Some half dozen Jews were accused of the crime and tortured , and the chief rabbi was intensely questioned as to whether Jews practice ritual murder .

= = = Blockade = = =

At the instigation of the Greek clergy and the European consuls , the governor Yusuf Pasha blockaded the Jewish quarter on the eve of Purim and arrested Jacob Israel the chief rabbi . The inhabitants could obtain neither food nor fresh water . The Jews thwarted a subversive attempt to smuggle a dead body into the Jewish quarter . The Muslim authorities , on the whole , were not keen to pursue the ritual murder accusation against the Jews . The Muslim official in charge of the blockade was found smuggling bread to the imprisoned residents ; at the insistence of the British consul , he was bastinadoed and dismissed from service . The qadi openly sympathized with the Jews . At the end of February , he initiated further hearings on the case , after which evidence was declared insufficient to convict the prisoners . The governor , on the other hand , refused to lift the blockade of the Jewish quarter , though he seemed to waver somewhat . In early March he sent to Constantinople asking for instructions . Only after the blockade had lasted for twelve days was the governor forced to lift it by a high treasury official who visited the island on a tour of inspection . At that point , the Jews thought that the affair was over and " returned thanks to the Almighty for their deliverance " .

= = = Influence of the Damascus affair = = =

The relief , however , was dashed in early March by news of the Damascus affair . Reports that the Jews of Damascus had confessed to having murdered Father Thomas reinforced the belief of the Christian community in the ritual murder charge . The British consul reported that " the Greeks cried loud that justice had not been rendered to them and that the rabbi and chiefs ought to have been imprisoned ? In order to keep the populace quiet ? it was decided that these should be arrested . " Eight Jews were arrested , including the chief rabbi and David Mizrahi , who were tortured by being suspended swinging from hooks in the ceiling in the presence of the European consuls . Mizrahi lost consciousness after six hours , while the rabbi was kept there for two days until he suffered a hemorrhage . Nevertheless , neither confessed and they were released after a few days . The other six Jews remained in prison in early April .

= = = Consular involvement = = =

The European vice @-@ consuls in Rhodes were united in believing the ritual murder charge . They played the key role in the interrogation , with J. G. Wilkinson , the British consul , and E. Masse from Sweden being involved . During the interrogation of the chief rabbi , Wilkinson asked , referring to the qadi 's decision to dismiss the case : " What signifies the Mollah 's judgment to us after what happened in Damascus and it is proved that , according to the Talmud , Christian blood must be used in making your Passover bread ? " The consuls were also present during much of the torture . When the chief rabbi , an Austrian subject , was tortured , he appealed to Austrian vice @-@ consul Anton Giuliani , who replied : " What rabbi ? What do you complain about ? So you are not dead yet . "

Some Jewish inhabitants of Rhodes accused the consuls of a conspiracy to exploit the case in order to eliminate Elias Kalimati , a local Jew , who represented the business interests of Joel Davis , a Jewish businessman from London . Davis was rapidly increasing his share in the profitable sponge exports from the island , and he was a major business rival of the European consuls . Elias Kalimati , however , was not among the persons held in the affair , calling that allegation into question . Other Jewish sources claimed that " [ t ] he consuls stated openly ? their purpose of exterminating the Jews of Rhodes or to compel them to change their religion . "

= = European diplomatic involvement = =

In the first days of the blockade , someone managed to smuggle a letter out of the Jewish quarter to the Jewish leadership in Constantinople . It was not until March 27 that the leaders of the Jewish community in the Ottoman capital forwarded it to the Rothschild family , together with a similar call for help from the Jews of Damascus . To these documents , the Jewish leaders attached their own

statement in which they cast doubt on their ability to influence the sultan .

The intervention of the Rothschilds bore the quickest fruit in Austria . The head of the Rothschild family bank in Vienna , Salomon Mayer von Rothschild , played the key role in raising financing for the Austrian Empire , and he had a very close relationship with the Austrian chancellor von Metternich . On April 10 , Metternich dispatched instruction regarding both the Damascus and Rhodes affairs to Bartholomäus von Stürmer , ambassador in Constantinople , and Anton von Laurin , consul in Alexandria . In his dispatch , Metternich wrote : " The accusation that Christians are deliberately murdered for some blood @-@ thirsty Passover festival is by its nature absurd ? " Regarding the Rhodes case , the chancellor instructed von Stürmer " to tip the wink to the Turkish regime , so that they instruct pasha of Rhodes accordingly and that you let [ our ] vice @-@ consul in Rhodes know that in such cases he should work in the spirit of sensible mediation . " Von Stürmer , responded , " [ T ] here have been no persecutions against the Jewish population , at least not by the authorities . "

In the UK , it took the Jewish community longer to react to the calls for help from Rhodes and Damascus . The Board of Deputies of the British Jews convened on April 21 to discuss the blood libels . They resolved to request the British , Austrian , and French governments to intercede with the Ottoman government and stop the persecutions . The resolution condemning the ritual murder charges was published as a paid advertisement in 35 British journals ; it appeared twice in the most important newspapers . On April 30 , a delegation elected by the Board met with the foreign secretary Lord Palmerston , who called the blood libel a " calumny " and promised that " the influence of the British government should be exerted to put a stop to [ the ] atrocities . " In his dispatch of May 5 , the foreign secretary told Lord Ponsonby , the British ambassador in Constantinople , to communicate the material on the Rhodes affair to the Ottoman government " officially and in writing " and to " request ? an immediate and strict inquiry to be made ? especially into the allegation that these atrocities were committed at the instigation of the Christians and the European consuls . "

A consensus formed within the European diplomatic community in Constantinople that the persecution of the accused Jews had to be stopped . This opinion was held not only by Lord Ponsonby , but also by von Stürmer , whose correspondence revealed that he was not at all convinced of the innocence of the Jews ; by the French ambassador Edouard Pontois , whose government stood by the French consuls who supported blood libels in Rhodes and Damascus ; and by the Prussian ambassador Hans von Königsmark . Consequently , the way was open for Lord Ponsonby , by far the most powerful diplomat in Constantinople , to intervene unopposed on behalf the Jews of Rhodes .

= = Investigation and trial = =

= = = Intervention of the Ottoman government = = =

In response to Yusuf Pasha 's request , the Ottoman government sent its instructions to Rhodes , where they arrived at the end of April . The government would set up an official investigatory commission before which representatives of the Jewish and Greek communities were ordered to present their evidence . In mid @-@ May , the government sent orders to release the six remaining Jewish prisoners . On May 21 , they were ceremoniously called before the court ( shura ) and freed under the guarantees of the elders of the Jewish community .

The Christians responded to these actions of the central government with a fresh wave of fury against the Jews so that in late May violence was in the air . The Jews described many cases in which they were assaulted or beaten by the Greeks , and the sons of the British and the Greek consuls were among those who beat up a number of Jews . When the Jews complained to the governor , he ordered the complainants subjected to four to five hundred blows of the bastinado . The qadi disassociated himself from the actions of the governor , who declared that he had acted upon the demands of the consuls . On top of that , the governor ordered five other Jews arrested .

= = = Acquittal = = =

The Greek and Jewish delegations from Rhodes , each numbering five , arrived at Constantinople on May 10 . In the capital they were joined by the qadi , the French consul , and the Austrian vice consul . On May 26 , the investigatory tribunal held its first open session chaired by Rifaat Bey . The qadi argued that " the entire affair is the product of hatred ; [ and ] was instigated by the English and Austrian consuls alone . " The consuls insisted on the guilt of the Jews , and they presented a concurring written testimony from their colleagues who stayed on Rhodes .

The case dragged on for two more months , as the British ambassador insisted on bringing to light the facts implicating the Rhodes governor of torture . Finally , on July 21 the verdict was announced . In its first part , the case between " the Greek population of Rhodes , the plaintiff , and the Jewish population , defendant " , the result was acquittal . In its second part , Yusuf Pasha was dismissed from his post as governor of Rhodes because " he had permitted procedures to be employed against the Jews which are not authorized in any way by the law and which are expressly forbidden by the Hatt @-@ i Sharif of 3 November " . The British ambassador praised the investigation as one during which " [ t ] he affair of Rhodes was examined with fairness " and called the verdict " a signal proof of the justice and humanity with which the Sublime Porte acts . "

= = = Sultan 's firman = = =

In July 1840 , a delegation headed by Adolphe Crémieux and Sir Moses Montefiore left for Egypt to save the Jews of Damascus . Crémieux and Montefiore requested Muhammad Ali to transfer the investigation to Alexandria or have the case considered by European judges . However , their request was denied . The delegation , concerned primarily with the release of the imprisoned Jews of Damascus , decided to accept their liberation without any judicial declaration of their innocence or formal denunciation of the blood libel . The liberation order was issued on August 28 , 1840 , and , as a compromise , it stated explicitly that it was an act of justice rather than a pardon granted by the ruler .

After completing his mission to Muhammad Ali , Montefiore was returning to Europe by way of Constantinople . On October 15 , 1840 , in the Ottoman capital he had a meeting with Lord Ponsonby , to whom Montefiore suggested that following the precedent set by Suleiman the Magnificent , the sultan should issue a decree ( firman ) formally denouncing the blood libel and effectively sealing the cases both in Rhodes and in Damascus . The British ambassador was enthusiastic about the idea , and within one week he arranged for Montefiore a meeting with Reshid Pasha . Montefiore prepared a draft text of the firman and had its French translation read to Reshid Pasha , who responded encouragingly .

Montefiore 's audience with the sultan took place at the palace late in the evening on October 28 . Montefiore described in his diary that as he and his party were driving to the palace , " [ t ] he streets were crowded ; many of the Jews had illuminated their houses . " During the audience , Montefiore read aloud a formal address in which he thanked the sultan for his stand in the Rhodes case . In turn , the sultan assured his guests that their request would be granted . The firman was delivered to Montefiore on November 7 , and a copy was subsequently provided to the Hakham Bashi . Citing the judgment in the Rhodes case , the decree stated that a careful examination of Jewish beliefs and " religious books " had demonstrated that " the charges brought against them ? are pure calumny . The Jewish nation shall possess the same privileges as are granted to the numerous other nations who submit to our authority . The Jewish nation shall be protected and defended . "