

committees of three to five members who assisted the rabbi and were supposed to deal mostly with tax issues, although it is possible that the committees had more sway than the rabbi in some places. The Bulgarian communities also featured traditional institutions, including societies (Heb. *hevrot* or *havarot*) that provided services of a charitable nature. *Hevrot* providing primary education, known elsewhere as Talmud Torahs but in Bulgaria as *meldari*, could be found in all the large Jewish centers, Sofia, Nikopol, Vidin, Plevna, and Plovdiv, and later Kyustendil, Dupnitsa, and Samokov. Funding for the *meldari* came both from donations and from tuition paid by parents.

Jews in Bulgaria, like their coreligionists elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, paid taxes of two basic types, a head tax and a communal tax, the latter being divided among the notables of the community. From time to time, special taxes could be levied, such as a customs tax on merchandise during the reign of Selim I (r. 1512–1520), which primarily affected the Jewish population. To pay the salaries of communal functionaries and fund institutions, communities collected internal taxes (see → Taxation), the most important one being the tax on the sales of kosher wine and meat (*gabella*). Such funds went to provide salaries for individuals associated with the synagogue, as well as the maintenance of the building. Other income came from charity and donations by wealthy members of the congregation. The *havarot* that assisted orphans, widows, the sick, and the poor operated largely from charity and charitable endowments. Likewise, other functionaries of the community—including the ritual slaughterer (*shoḥet*) and the teachers in the *meldari*—received their salaries from the public coffers.

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D. GERSHON LEWENTAL

Burla, Yehuda

Yehuda Burla was born in Jerusalem in 1886 to a highly educated Sephardi family, originally from → Izmir, that had been rooted in Palestine for three hundred years. Educated in yeshivot and at a teachers college in Jerusalem, he worked from 1908 as a teacher and educational administrator, including five years as the director of Hebrew schools in Damascus after the First World War, during which he was drafted into the Turkish army as a translator. Subsequently he held high posts in the civil service and was the chairman of the Hebrew Writers Association. Burla's first published story, "Luna" (1919), was about a rich forty-year-old Sephardi man who is attracted to a very young woman and wants to marry her. Burla soon became an important contributor to all the Hebrew periodicals of his time, and he continued publishing for fifty years, until his death in 1969. He won the Bialik Prize in 1939 and again in 1954, and the Israel Prize. His collected works were published in eight volumes in 1962 (Tel Aviv: Masada), and his writings have been translated into English, Yiddish, Arabic, and Russian.

Burla was one of the first Hebrew authors to portray Sephardi and Near Eastern Jewish characters. He wrote about them realistically and without idealization, describing their virtues and weakness, and their struggle against a complicated fate, in narratives imbued with

Sephardi folklore, customs, and cultural ambience. His novels and stories are noted for their "eastern color" and sympathetic characters. Love and fate are frequent themes. Burla also sometimes wrote about non-Jews and set his tales in many different places, including Israel (especially Jerusalem, where there was a long-time Sephardi settlement), Germany, Damascus, Arabia, Trans-Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Spain, and Anatolia. His voice was something new in modern Hebrew literature; readers in Eastern Europe were surprised and delighted by the opportunity he provided to enter a Jewish world that was not Ashkenazic.

Burla's stories have tense, intriguing plots, with surprising twists and turns. They are usually set in a realistic, authentic, exotic, all-encompassing imaginative world, focus on love, fate, sensuality, emotion, innocence, and drama, and persuade readers to feel the plight of the characters—all this against a background of Near Eastern "color." Some critics emphasize the beauty, nobility, grace, and valor of his characters. They describe his work as reflecting the influence of fellow Hebrew writers, both in Israel and the Diaspora, but also of German, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic literature. His greatest achievement, some maintain, was his imaginative and mythic depiction of the exotic Eastern way of life.

Burla was close to the Zionist and labor movements, and some of his Sephardic characters find self-fulfillment on a kibbutz. Many of his them, both men and women, wrestle with a cruel fate, wander from place to place, and experience turbulence and suffering, but others enjoy stable, traditional lives. Love is a strong force for Burla's characters. Very often their romantic lives are unfulfilled because of arranged marriages or because the match they desire is forbidden by national origin, religion, or social class. From Burla's perspective, love sometimes inflict pain and suffering, and is constrained by tradition, prejudice, and social pressure.

Burla's 1939 Bialik Prize was given for *'Alilot Akavya* (The Adventures of Akavya), which recounts the loves, struggles, and heroic acts of Akavya, first in Turkey and then in Jerusalem, where he becomes a courageous defender of

the Jews in the Old City. In *Ishto ha-Senu'a* (His Hated Wife), a novel published in 1928, Burla describes the unhappy life of a man who gives in to his mother and marries a woman he does not love. *Naftulei Adam* (Eng. trans. *In Darkness Striving*, 1968) describes the unfulfilled love of a Jewish man and an Arab woman in Damascus. *Bi-Kedusha* (In Holiness), published 1935, is a story of love, fear, and envy, in which a barren woman decides to have her husband marry a second wife to prevent him from leaving her.

Burla's work is a rich trove of proverbs, phrases, and idioms from the interweaving of Ladino, Arabic, and Turkish.

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LEV HAKAK

Bursa (Prousa)

Bursa (ancient Prousa), in northwestern Anatolia, was the first capital of the → Ottoman Empire, between 1326 and 1365. When the Ottomans captured the city from the Byzantines, it had a small → Romaniot Jewish presence. In the first half of the sixteenth century, newly arriving Spanish exiles were soon in the majority. Culturally and numerically dominant, the Sephardim fairly quickly assimilated the Romaniots, and → Judeo-Spanish became the day-to-day spoken and written language of the city's Jews. The community paid its poll tax