

Reflection of the relationship and halakhic authority between the rabbis of Jerusalem, Izmir, Tunis and Algiers in the controversy over the suicide of Yaakov Akarish in the late 19th century

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Yaakov Akarish's suicide from the city of Oran (Wahrān) in Algeria sparked a fierce polemic between 1881 to 1893 among the rabbis of Algeria, Tunisia, Izmir and Jerusalem. In this polemic, two books, pamphlets and some other halakhic responses from North Africa and the Ottoman Empire were published. Particularly noteworthy was the involvement in the dispute of Algeria, Jerusalem and Izmir rabbis. Most of them supported the claim that Akarish was not considered a suicide, and ruled against his removal from the grave by his city's officials and his burial in the Suicide Squad. The affair sparked discussions about the social-legal reality in Algeria in light of the legal and social transformations brought by the colonial government to the Jewish community, especially from 1870 onwards, and teaches us about the ambition of the dayanim in Oran to highlight their halakhic authority against famous spiritual authorities. The affair teaches us also about the status of the rabbis of Jerusalem, the dictatorial rule of the Head of the Consistory, and other social phenomena.