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Library of the History of the Yishuv in Eretz Yisrael

קונטרסים - מקורות ומחקרים

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JUDITH MONTEFIORE
PRIVATE JOURNAL
OF A
VISIT TO EGYPT AND PALESTINE

Photocopy of the London edition, 1836.
(pages 128-234)

Introduction: I. Bartal



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INTRODUCTION

Lady Judith Montefiore's diary of her journey to Egypt and Eretz Israel in 1827, though revealing for the study of the character and motivations of the Montefiores, is not an especially important source for the history of the Jewish Yishuv. Yet, the book acquires an added importance in that it was written in 1827-1828 and printed in 1836, prior to the world renown which Sir Moses Montefiore's later image attained; and unlike other diaries and writings, it was not tampered with by translators nor by others who sought to alter it.¹

The journey, which extended over nine months (May 1, 1827-February 20, 1828), took place during the days of the Greek Revolt at a time when naval war activities made sailing dangerous in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean (the Battle of Navarino in which the Egyptian fleet was defeated took place on October 28, 1828 when the couple was in Eretz Israel). As a result, the travelers were forced to tarry for a lengthy period in Egypt, where they had arrived by way of France, Italy and Malta, until a vessel was found which could reach the shores of the Holy Land. This also caused them to curtail their stay in Jerusalem.

Lady Montefiore kept travel diaries as was customary among ladies of the well to do families in European and English society.² Her diary reveals her European education and shows that her cultural and artistic tastes were no different from that of a traveling Christian Englishwoman of a similar class. On a visit to Italy, she toured the famous churches of Florence and Rome and expressed her admiration for the artistic creations of the Renaissance.³ She observed Catholic religious ceremonies and even attended church in Rome during a Mass in which the Pope participated.⁴ Her language in

¹ This was already noted by students and biographers of the Montefiore family and of the Jewish Yishuv in Eretz Israel. Cf. for example L. Wolf, "Lady Montefiore's Honeymoon," in C. Roth, ed., *Essays in Jewish History* (London, 1934), p. 233; G. Yardeni, "John Gawler and his Scheme of 1874 for the Settlement of Palestine," *Zionism* 1 (1970), p. 84 (Hebrew); I. Bartal, "Programs for Settlement during Montefiore's Second Journey to Eretz Israel," *Shalem* 2 (1976) (Hebrew; in press).

² On her diaries see S. L. Lipman, "Judith Montefiore—First Lady of Anglo-Jewry," *The Jewish Historical Society of England, Transactions*, 21 (1962-67), pp. 287-303; I. Bartal, introduction to *Diary and Letters from Voyages to Palestine in the 1830's*, Kuntresim-Sources and Studies, Series 3, Number 2 (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. iii-vii (Hebrew).

³ *Private Journal*, pp. 44-51.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

commenting upon Christian liturgy, monks and priests, is in no way different from the language of similar English Christian accounts.⁵

Conversely, only a few of her visits to Jewish communities receive major attention in her diary. During their hasty stay in Eretz Israel (between the 16th and 23rd of October, 1827 — almost entirely spent in Jerusalem and its environs), they came into closer contact with members of the Jewish community;⁶ and yet, even here, they sojourned on their way from Jaffa to Jerusalem at the Greek monastery in Ramle, and Lady Montefiore visited among other sites the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem to whose description she devotes quite some length.⁷ Furthermore, her descriptions of the Holy Land, especially her impressions of Jerusalem, bear a distinctly European-Christian character. Palpitating with emotion, they are colored throughout by the culture and world-view of contemporary English society, far indeed from the spirit of Jewish accounts of the time. In a ten-page passage she recounts her emotional experience entering Jerusalem and combines it with a brief lecture on the history of the city.⁸ The influence of Christian sources by way of English translations is clearly perceptible in her remarks. Periods of Byzantine rule and Crusader conquests are presented in a positive light, whereas the early Moslem era is portrayed darkly: "Jews and Christians, feeling no diminution in their reverence for the Holy City, continued to traverse its streets and environs, in defiance of the bitter insults heaped upon them by the Turks."⁹ The periods of Mameluke and Ottoman rule are likewise characterized as times of decline. In this description, hardly any space is devoted to the Jews after the destruction of the Second Temple. An additional element prominent throughout the journey and even during their stay in Eretz Israel, is the religious behavior of the couple. On the one hand, it should be noticed that Montefiore and his wife in no way abstained from eating meat and other foods at Christian house-

⁵ Expressions such as "His Holiness" and "His Apostolic Majesty" (*Ibid.*, p. 53); "the good brothers" in the Greek monasteries in Eretz Israel (whose members displayed sharp hostility to the Jews in Palestine), as well as use of sacramental terms for the Christian liturgy and rites.

⁶ On Rome for example (p. 54), only a few lines describe the Ghetto, while several pages are devoted to churches and antiquities. On the other hand, encounters with Jews are noted in those places where they stayed as guests in Jewish houses (Alexandria, Jerusalem, Livorno).

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 193-202.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 201.

holds even at monasteries¹⁰ and drank non-Jewish wine at nearly every station of their journey.¹¹ Lady Montefiore spent Sabbath in Rome visiting churches and ancient sites, and attending a Catholic religious ceremony.¹² Montefiore himself was entertained on a Sabbath with coffee and pipe at the house of the Governor of Jerusalem.¹³ On the other hand, his religious devotion and frequent participation in services are mentioned more than once.¹⁴ It seems, that at least during this phase of his life, Montefiore stressed ritual-ceremonial elements in the spirit of the religious atmosphere of Sephardic communities in Western Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The diary contains little information on the Jewish Yishuv in Jerusalem and the material in general is similar to that found in contemporary Christian accounts.¹⁵ In her treatment of people and ways of life, the author does not stray from the style which characterizes her writing throughout the diary and lingers over details of external appearance, behavior, food and drinks, and so on. Nowhere does the writer make an attempt to analyse people and actions, nor display any substantial understanding of the mentality, spiritual and social conditions of the Jews of Eretz Israel.

Perhaps there is something in the description of the first encounter of the Montefiores with the Jewish Yishuv which may shed light upon the behavior of the philanthropist during his subsequent visits to Eretz Israel and on the extent of his ability to penetrate more than superficially the problems of the Yishuv and to offer competent solutions. In any case, there is no cause for wonder that Eliezer Halevi, Montefiore's secretary and confidant, published only excerpts of the 1827 diary with considerable deletions, since large portions of the book, written with no ulterior designs

¹⁰ For instance, the account of their meal at the Greek monastery near Bethlehem. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹¹ See for example p. 9, where a close acquaintance of French wine prices, acquired as a result of daily consumption in French hotels, is hinted at.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 215. And see the "revised" version edited by Louis Loewe (Eliezer Halevi, *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore* (London, 1890), vol. I, pp. 41-42. The pipes were deleted there and in their place the word "refreshments" appeared.

¹⁴ In Rome, Alexandria, and Jerusalem.

¹⁵ Compare with M. Ish-Shalom, *Christian Journeys to Eretz Israel* (Tel Aviv, 1966), pp. 436-440 (Hebrew), for the account of R. Madden, a friend of the Montefiore family.

did not conform at a later period to the image of the Montefiore family which he sought to project.¹⁶

The edition presented here represents a selection from the 322 page original printed for private circulation in London in 1836, and relates to the Egyptian and Palestinian leg of the journey. This is a rare edition, not to be found even in the National and University Library in Jerusalem. Acknowledgement is gratefully rendered to Mr. Elijahou Hacohen of Tel-Aviv for making available for reproduction a copy of the book from his private collection.

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¹⁶ *Diaries of Sir Moses*, pp. 36-54; subsequent accounts relied upon this passage. Compare for instance P. Goodman, *Moses Montefiore* (Philadelphia, 1925), pp. 48-50.)