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Anglo-Judeo Confrontation:

Jewish Antagonism towards the English Medical Mission in Nineteenth-Century Palestine

The renewal and expansion of the Yishuv (the Hebrew term for the Jewish community in Palestine) in the mid-nineteenth century met with opposition from the Ottoman regime and with the antagonism of the local, mainly Moslem population. The Yishuv was also forced to fight the British Mission that had achieved unprecedented success during the nineteenth century throughout the world. The Mission's chances of success among the Jews of Palestine were initially small, since they had immigrated to the country for national and religious reasons and not in order to be converted to Christianity. The Yishuv conducted a bitter struggle against such "instigators" and undoubtedly limited to an even greater extent the success of the Mission that in any case was poor in that region. Part of this struggle took place in connection with the British Mission hospitals, to be discussed in greater depth below.

In 1809, Christian Friedrich Frey (1771–1850), a converted German Jew, founded a modest missionary society that wished to spread the Gospel among the Jews of the East End of London. The "London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews" grew at an extraordinary rate, expanding into the central cities of Europe, maintaining a foothold in Palestine and, for a while, turning its outpost in Jerusalem into the centre of Protestant operations in the Holy Land. The Society lost no time in leveraging its reputation in Jerusalem to further its aims. It soon built the first hospital in Palestine, the first western educational institutes in the country, and completed the building of the first Protestant church in the Ottoman Empire.¹

The meteoric rise of the London Jews Society in its first decades was made possible by a surge of faith that had inundated tens of millions of believers in the Protestant world, and especially in Britain, at that time. Their belief was that the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel and their conversion to Christianity,

¹ On the London Jews Society, see mainly: Yaron PERRY, *British Mission to the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Palestine* (London 2003); William Thomas GIDNEY, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, from 1809 to 1908* (London 1908).

followed by the millennium, would bring the second coming of the Messiah closer than ever. This faith spread like wildfire, and in addition to gaining sweeping popular support, it also found backing among the higher echelons of British society including the heads of the Anglican Church, several members of the aristocracy, and high-ranking state officials. Such people worked consistently and zealously towards the promotion of the London Jews Society, which became an important factor in the process of transforming the Land of Israel from a forsaken desert-land at the beginning of the nineteenth century into a regenerated and repopulated country by 1900.²

The mission's work in Palestine resulted in some 600 Jewish converts in the entire nineteenth century. The initial objective for which the London Jews Society had been founded, namely promoting Christianity among the Jews, was not achieved. But the missionaries assumed from the beginning that operations in Palestine would not be as easy and convenient as in England and Europe and that the number of converts would naturally be lower. One of their first missionaries pointed this out already in the mid-1820s: the Society should not expect any openness towards the Christian faith by a Palestinian Jew unless "he be prepared for actual martyrdom in consequence, or that he can fly the country, or find here a protector [from his brethren]."³ The majority of the Jewish public was perceived as coming to Palestine mainly to be buried on Mount Zion and hence as being firmly religious. Prospects for conversion were thus poor. At the same time, most of the Jewish community at the time was living on charity funds from abroad and hence totally subordinated to an absolute obligation to its leaders and their doctrines. Converts would automatically lose their living allowance.

Aware of this situation, the heads of the London Jews Society augmented their efforts and investments in the Palestinian mission, despite the relative lack of success, and posted about a third of their global missionary force in Palestine. Their basic assumption was the saying "Cast thy bread upon the waters." When missionaries had to justify their meagre achievements in Palestine, they often blamed the alienation that these Jewish converts suffered at the hands of their brethren, which drove them to leave Jerusalem and Palestine altogether and to be baptised at a mission station in another country. This also furnished a

² Yaron PERRY, *Anglo-German Cooperation in Nineteenth-Century Jerusalem. The London Jews' Society and the Protestant Bishopric*, in: *Jewish Culture and History* 4/1 (2001) 65–80; Yaron PERRY, Alexander, Michael Solomon (1799–1845), first bishop of the United Church of England and Ireland and of the Protestant Church of Germany in Jerusalem, in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 1 (Oxford 2004) 681–683.

³ *Jewish Expositor and the Friends of Israel, Containing Monthly Communication Respecting the Jews, and the Proceedings of the London Society* 10 (1825) 13–17.

plausible explanation for the heavy rate of desertion among those who had joined the Society and begun the conversion process. Although not all of them were actually baptised, the head of the Jerusalem mission nevertheless asserted that “for every one that I baptise there are probably ten that leave us unbaptised, and yet having had the Gospel proclaimed to them.”⁴

The London Jews Society’s endeavours were soon prey to sharp criticism from all directions. Most of the condemnations came from Greek Orthodox and Catholic representatives in Palestine, who regarded the Society’s Protestant operations as an invasion of their territory and an impediment to their advancement, and, naturally, from the leaders of the Jewish community. The latter saw the (in fact very small) number of converts as a catastrophe and fiercely denounced the missionaries. The antagonism that the London Jews Society provoked in these opponents was obviously the result of its activities, but, even more so, a consequence of its pioneering role. The fact that the Society was the first among various missionary societies in Palestine in establishing health, education, charity, and welfare institutions had forced its opponents to stay alert and initiate similar projects if they wished to keep their flock. The chiefs of the Jewish congregation in Palestine and the Diaspora were obliged quickly to establish hospitals, schools, and other institutions to match the London Jews Society’s initiatives. The Catholic and the Greek Orthodox Churches, and the great powers sponsoring them, above all France and Russia, were quick to follow suit by stationing high-ranking parochial officials of their own in Palestine and establishing many modern institutions there.

*Medical Mission*⁵

A variety of means was employed by the missionaries in their attempts to bring the Jews of Palestine closer to Christianity. First and foremost, they wanted to expose the Jewish community to the Christian scriptures and therefore they set up institutions where the Holy Scriptures, both Jewish and Christian, were available either for sale or distribution. Jews who were book-lovers often gathered around the entrance to these institutions and held discussions

⁴ Arthur Hastings Kelk in: *The Jewish Intelligence, and Monthly Record of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews* (1890) 94.

⁵ On the missionary and medical aspects of the activity of the London Jews Society in Palestine, see Yaron PERRY, Efraim LEV, *Modern Medicine in the Holy Land. Pioneering British Medical Services in Late Ottoman Palestine* (International Library of Colonial History 8, London–New York 2007).

with the missionaries over the relative values of the two religions, and on rare occasions were even persuaded to convert.

Another way to gain the hearts of the Jews was by setting up secular educational institutions with the aim of influencing the children of the community and, through them, their parents. The Mission Society took advantage of the fact that their community gave Jewish youngsters only religious instruction. Jews were thus provided with an attractive alternative in the framework of a free educational system. Moreover, the missionaries also established schools for Jewish girls who did not receive any formal education such as that given to Jewish boys. But the institutions that became the most successful instruments of persuasion for the Jews of Palestine were the hospitals of the London Jews Society.

The sub-standard health situation of the residents of Jerusalem seemed appalling to anyone who visited the city at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Two main problems accounted for this state of affairs. Firstly, the poor sanitary conditions resulted primarily from miserable living quarters in mouldy buildings too crowded for sufficient ventilation, the excessive amounts of refuse, the sewage flowing through the streets without a proper drainage system, the neglect of personal hygiene due to poverty and ignorance, and the use of rainwater collected in untreated wells. The second problem was the lack of adequate medical care. There was no satisfactory system of public health. Disease was considered an inevitable part of life or as part of heavenly design.

Those engaged in curing illnesses were untrained practitioners using a variety of popular panaceas. Most of these were based on ancient medical treatises and medicinal substances that had been used in earlier times, as well as remedies, amulets, incantations, and superstitious beliefs. These curative methods were often applied with the assistance of minor religious clerics who used phrases culled from the Holy Scriptures of all three faiths and who sent their faithful flocks on pilgrimages to the graves of saintly figures buried in the Holy Land.⁶

The leaders of the London Jews Society were aware of this situation from the moment their first missionary set foot in Jerusalem in 1821. But only in January 1842 was Dr. Edward Macgowan (1795–1860)⁷ sent to Jerusalem to establish a hospital for the Jews and to create “a School [...] in which Surgery and Phar-

⁶ Yaron PERRY, Efraim LEV, *Medical Activities of the London Jews Society in 19th Century Palestine*, in: *Medical History* 47/1 (2003) 67–88.

⁷ On Macgowan, see Efraim LEV, Yaron PERRY, *Dr Edward Macgowan, a long term pioneer's physician in Mid Nineteenth Century Jerusalem: the founder and director of the first modern hospital in the Levant*, in: *Journal of Medical Biography* 16 (February 2008) 52–56.

macology is to be taught.”⁸ In December 1844, the “Jews’ Hospital” in Jerusalem was opened and was filled within days to capacity. The new institution swelled the hearts of the missionaries with pride, which found expression in the frequent reports to London. The Society journal published many of Macgowan’s letters, one of which described a typical day at the hospital: “It has frequently been my wish during the last month, that our friends in England could get a peep at the hospital on one of my days for the admission of patients. The scene that would meet their eyes would be one of uncommon gratification and interest. They would see the waiting room full of patients, besides a crowd of others thronging the doors of the hospital, who had been too late for admission, but who are patiently waiting, in the hope of being attended to when the first applicants shall be dismissed. Every three or four minutes the door of the consultation-room opens, and out comes a patient with his prescription in his hand, which he takes to the dispensary, which is situated on the other side of the street. This lasts for about two hours, during which the crowd of patients in the street are waiting – some standing, others seated, or lying on the ground or on the steps of the door. Some of them, naturally enough, lose patience, and, on the opening of the door, endeavour to force their way into the consulting-room, and are with difficulty prevented from doing so. Their turn, however, comes at last, when it becomes necessary to discriminate between those who really require advice, and those who are suffering from want. To the most necessitous of the latter a ticket is given for the matron of the hospital, who is in attendance in an adjoining room, and who, on receiving the ticket, gives out of her stores which have been provided by the kind friends in England, some articles of clothing, flour, or relief in a little money, according to the wants of the applicant.”⁹

Even before the dedication-ceremony of the hospital, the missionaries in Jerusalem had, in spite of the three years’ experience in operating the dispensary that had come to serve a broad public, anticipated opposition from the heads of the Jewish community to the hospitalisation of Jewish patients in a Christian establishment. The missionaries tried to facilitate things for the patients and those accompanying them as far as possible, even going as far as setting up a kosher kitchen. In spite of the expected difficulties, the missionaries never expected the resulting violent reaction from the Jews.

Because of its segregated character, the Jewish community in Palestine used a variety of methods to draw back into its folds anyone who even appeared to be

⁸ Archive of the Israeli Trust of the Anglican Church Jerusalem (hereinafter: ITAC), London Committee Resolutions, nos. M 1329, M 1330, M 1337 (26 March 1841).

⁹ Jewish Intelligence (1847) 21.

on the verge of converting to Christianity. Heavy social pressure was brought to bear on the candidate for conversion, including threats of forced divorce, the removal of children from the parent-convert's care, and finally a total ban or excommunication that involved the denial of the right of burial in a Jewish cemetery and thus no hope of eternal bliss. Above all, the community took advantage of its economic resources – the charitable donations and their distribution – to force the convert into submission.

Six weeks after the opening of the medical establishment, one of the patients died there. As a condition of his Jewish burial, the two chief rabbis in Jerusalem required all patients in the hospital, and the Jewish attendants, to leave it immediately. No Jew was to be allowed to enter its gates in the future. Several letters went back and forth over the course of a week between the rabbis and the director of the hospital, and between the latter and the British consul in Jerusalem and the foreign minister in London. All of this correspondence turned out to be futile and the missionaries were forced to bury the deceased patient in the British cemetery.¹⁰

The seriousness of this event induced the Jerusalem rabbis to invoke their most powerful weapon immediately. They issued a ban that stated: “All agreed [...] as follows [...] we give notice that no man shall dare to enter the hospital above mentioned, whether a patient for his recovery, or a healthy person to serve there. Let both man & woman take warning by this our edict. We also inform all our brethren of the house of Israel that whosoever shall enter the said hospital; their meat & drink shall become, through a heavy excommunication, as unlawful food – their bread and wine shall become as the bread & wine of idolaters, all their children will not be circumcised (amongst the holy assembly, neither will he be called up to the reading of the law) nor shall he have any part in the God of Israel, he will also not be purified, after his decease, by Jews, nor buried in their burial ground. We caution also the Shokhatim [ritual slaughterers] of all the congregations, not to kill a fowl for those, of the house of Israel, who shall enter the hospital. Likewise we charge our vendors of meat, by the same powers, not to sell meat to any man or woman, who shall enter the hospital; should they, however by any device, get meat from our vendors, then the dishes will be unlawful, the man or servant, through whom they got it, in-

¹⁰ Public Record Office, Foreign Office Record Group, London (hereinafter: FO), 78/625, Consul William Tanner Young in Jerusalem to Lord Aberdeen in London, 31 January 1845; *ibid.*, The Chief Rabbis to Macgowan, 21 January 1845; *ibid.*, Macgowan to Young, 21 January 1845; *ibid.*, Macgowan to Young 22 January 1845, in: Albert M. HYAMSON (ed.), *The British Consulate in Jerusalem in Relation to the Jews of Palestine 1838–1914*, vol. 1 (London 1939), no. 43 and appendices, 67–70.

curs the above mentioned curse.”¹¹ The implication of such a ban in those days meant the expulsion of the excommunicated person from the Jewish community or death by utter deprivation. The publication of this ban resulted in the complete desertion of the hospital by everyone within twenty-four hours.

During the weeks that followed, the Jews of Jerusalem slowly trickled back to receive hospital-services. However, the community leaders remained adamant and, every time a Jewish patient died in the medical establishment, they raised difficulties about burial. For example, at the end of the summer of 1845, when a Jewish mother and her baby died, the father of the family pleaded for mercy from the rabbis with absolutely no success. The latter claimed that the very hospitalisation in the Mission Hospital stripped a person of the right to Jewish burial. After lengthy discussions in which the missionaries of the London Jews Society and the British consul in Jerusalem were involved, the rabbis agreed to permit the burial at ten times the normal cost.¹²

The distress of the patients' families, which became a common phenomenon, created the need for a special burial place for those Jews who died at the hospital. At that time, there was a plot of land for sale near the Jewish cemetery, which the Society wished to allocate for the immediate burial of the Jewish mother and child. When the rabbis heard of the expected sale, they hurriedly agreed to bury the bodies in Jewish graves. The purchase was nevertheless made and the plot of land was bought for £12. In January 1846, another Jewess died in the hospital and, after the rabbis of Jerusalem again refused to allow her Jewish burial, the body was interred in the cemetery bought by the Mission for this purpose. The burial, the first since the plot had been purchased half-a-year earlier, aroused great anger among the Jewish population. Jewish leaders enlisted the support of the governor of Jerusalem, who threw the Arab owner and the Jewish dealer into prison and ordered the sale cancelled. Attempts to change this ruling through the British embassy in Constantinople were fruitless and the London Jews Society lost the cemetery plot.¹³

The missionaries, of course, laid the blame on the community leaders and not on the Jewish population, which generally appreciated the medical services. A careful distinction was made between the rabbis of the European Jews

¹¹ ITAC, Collection of unclassified documents: Original letter of excommunication in Rashi script with an accompanying handwritten English translation.

¹² ITAC, Medical Reports, see several reports by Dr. Macgowan throughout 1845.

¹³ FO, 195/210, Henry Newbolt to Stratford Canning in Constantinople, 17 February 1846, in: HYAMSON (ed.), *The British Consulate 1*, no. 48 and appendices, 82–86; ITAC, *Jerusalem Local Committee Minutes Book*, vol. 1, no. 333 (27 January 1846); *ibid.*, *Jerusalem Local Committee*, no. 335 (24 February 1846).

(Ashkenazi) community and those of the Oriental Jews (Sephardi). The latter, which represented the larger community in Jerusalem and were less dependent upon the charity allocations coming from abroad, showed greater tolerance towards the Mission. The Society missionaries assumed that the Sephardi rabbis would not have taken such a drastic measure as preventing a Jewish burial. They attributed it rather to an internal Ashkenazi split between the Hasidim and the Perushim that fostered the maintenance of distinctions between the sects. The missionaries realised that the eagerness of the Jews of Jerusalem to receive medical and welfare services provided by the London Jews Society, and the consequent influence acquired by the Christian church, undermined the authority and position of the Ashkenazi rabbis. In the Society's view, the Ashkenazi group was mainly concerned with "the preservation of its own narrow and exclusive dominion over the minds and bodies of its victims" and therefore did all it could to oppose the Mission.¹⁴

The person who led the campaign of criticism against the leaders of the Jewish community was naturally the director of the Hospital, Edward Macgowan. His choice of words went beyond merely deflecting the antagonism towards the institute that he headed. His criticism was broad and sweeping: "In fact Rabinism is a system far more refined, complicated, and exacting than Popery itself. It embraces not only the religious observances, but rules with despotic control of every act of civil life. Claiming the exclusive superintendence of meats and drinks, and determining the lawfulness or unlawfulness of the same, it separates by a broad demarcation the Jewish community from all the rest of mankind."¹⁵

During the second half of the 1840s, the medical wing underwent an impressive development, and the hospital in Jerusalem became the flagship of the entire missionary enterprise. The hospital expanded until it contained thirty beds. The Turkish authorities in Jerusalem, who seem at first to have hindered the hospital's development because of the rabbis' protests, gradually dropped their objections and changed their attitude completely after some of the governor's relatives needed medical attention and received it. The reputation of the hospital spread throughout the region, and Jewish patients often arrived even from remote cities, mainly Damascus, Aleppo, and Beirut. The thriving institution and early intimations of its changing image for some of the Jewish population broke down the wall of prejudice and brought into the hospital's waiting-rooms even wealthy and well-respected members of the Jewish community. In 1850,

¹⁴ Jewish Intelligence (1845) 110, Macgowan from Jerusalem, 4 February 1845.

¹⁵ Ibid. (1846) 158, Macgowan's report of the month of February.

the chief rabbi of Jerusalem chose to be hospitalised there, and at the same time allowed its doctors to operate on his daughter's infected eyes. The hospital director felt so exuberant because of the change in attitude that he declared: "Nothing could more forcibly prove to me how entirely the opposition to the hospital had died away amongst the Jews."¹⁶ Yet, it appears that this statement was inaccurate, since in general the Jewish community in Jerusalem maintained its opposition to the activities of the hospital. The frequent application of the ban to those entering its gates did not stop some visitors to the hospital from preferring medical assistance to economic welfare. The dilemma faced by the Jews of Jerusalem – especially those without means – caused the Society members in certain cases to offer the essential necessities of life to former patients following their release.

The opposition of the rabbis of Jerusalem to the hospital and to the entire medical enterprise of the London Jews Society had a positive outcome in that it generated independent Jewish initiatives. In particular, the British philanthropist, Moses Montefiore (1784–1885), was active in that regard more than once during the nineteenth century: "When Montefiore heard in the year 5603 [1843] that the British Mission Society had set down its stake in Jerusalem as well, and had installed a special doctor to cure the body and even more so, the 'soul,' he hastened to send here Dr. Simon Fränkel [1806–1880] together with medicines to heal those who were poor and sick free of charge in order to cut off the arm of the Mission [...]."¹⁷

Fränkel arrived in Jerusalem in mid-1843. The further the renovations of the Mission hospital advanced, the more he realised how vital it was to set up a rival Jewish hospital. Around the time of the inauguration of the Mission hospital in December 1844, the Jewish hospital was opened in one of the finest buildings of the Jewish quarter. During the Egyptian occupation, several years earlier, the building had been used as a military medical institute. The spacious two-story building was well-equipped and its capacity was the same as that of the Mission hospital. The doctor of the London Jews Society welcomed Fränkel gladly. The missionaries were pleased at the establishment of a Jewish hospital, knowing that their activities had induced the philanthropic patrons of the

¹⁶ Ibid. (1848) 13, Macgowan from Jerusalem, 4 October 1847; *ibid.* 134; *ibid.* (1850) 374f.

¹⁷ Letter from Montefiore to the rabbis of the Jewish Community [Hebrew], in: Pinchas B. Z. GRAJEWSKI, *In Memory of the First Zionists* (Jerusalem 1928), chapter 11 (no page numbers). On the activities of Montefiore and Fränkel, see Mordechai ELIAV in collaboration with Barbara HAIDER (eds.), *Österreich und das Heilige Land. Ausgewählte Konsulatsdokumente aus Jerusalem 1849–1917* (Fontes rerum Austriacarum, part 2, vol. 91, Wien 2000) *passim*.

Jewish community to act. Dr. Macgowan, director of the Mission Hospital, wrote that “every friend of Israel would rejoice that Christian benevolence had provoked such a charitable jealousy among them.”¹⁸

The New Hospital in Jerusalem

In the mid-1870s, rumours began to spread in Jerusalem and London concerning the need for a new hospital because of the dilapidation of the old building and the ever increasing numbers of patients. The initial practical step to set up this new institution was taken only in September 1889, when the first decisions were made regarding the site for the proposed building. The London Jews Society Committee in Jerusalem warmly recommended a hospital built outside the city-wall on a stretch of land acquired in 1863 on which the Society’s recreation site called the “Sanatorium” was built. The new hospital, the flagship of the London Jews Society in Palestine and the institution that received most of the funds and attention, was dedicated on 13 April 1897. Some of its leaders in England, foreign consuls, heads of churches in Jerusalem, representatives of the Turkish government, all the London Jews Society emissaries in Palestine, and Thomas Chaplin (1830–1904), who was director of the hospital for twenty-five years, took part in the festive ceremony.¹⁹ Not a single Jew, however, was present.

The fact that not a single member of the Jewish community in Jerusalem took part in the events held for the dedication of the hospital was not a matter of chance. Its opening aroused fierce opposition led mainly by an association called “Bnei-Israel” (Sons of Israel) founded in 1897 in reaction to the erection of this medical institution. The association, which during the period of its activity provided dispensaries and free medication to the Jews in Jerusalem, acted in consensus with nearly all the Jewish communities. It was given significant assistance by the Alliance Israélite Universelle and by the widow of the Jewish philanthropist, Baron Moritz Hirsch (1831–1896). Its avowed objective was to “work for the unity of the congregations and for the improvement of the general situation.”²⁰ However, it mainly engaged in vehement attempts to prevent the hospitalization of Jews in the new London Jews Society hospital.

¹⁸ Jewish Intelligence (1845) 110, Macgowan from Jerusalem, 4 February 1845. For a similar formulation, see Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums, 13 May 1843.

¹⁹ On Chaplin, see Efraim LEV and Yaron PERRY, Dr Thomas Chaplin, Scientist and Scholar in nineteenth-century Palestine, in: Palestine Exploration Quarterly 136/2 (2004) 151–162.

²⁰ Pinchas B. Z. GRAJEWSKI, The Struggle of the Jews Against the Mission from 1824 till our Times (Jerusalem 1935), the chapter: The War of the Bnei-Israel Association against the Activities of the Mission [Hebrew] (no page numbers).

It was not long before the Jewish sentinels positioned at the gates of the hospital took violent action that caused the authorities and the guards (Kawass) of the British consulate to react. In the wake of the resulting riots, both Her Majesty's ambassador in Constantinople and the foreign office in London took up the matter.²¹ It seems that the appeal in the Hebrew journal "Ha-Zevi" made by Arthur Hastings Kelk (1835–1908), the head of the Jerusalem Mission to the Jewish community, contributed to calming tempers.²² He published a summary of the conversations, meant to clarify the situation, held between him and the rabbis of the community. Kelk said that he had no complaints against the rabbis who, in dissuading the public from using the medical services of the Society, were merely fulfilling their duty according to their faith. He did reject, however, the use of force to achieve that aim.²³

The activities of Bnei-Israel can be understood from a petition submitted to the British consul in Jerusalem by certain Jews who opposed it: "We come in the name of thousands of sick and unfortunate people [...] to the English Consul. [...] They [Bnei-Israel] have forbidden the Jews to enter the English Hospital or to employ the English doctor. The reason they give us is that it is against religion [...] but we Jews know how far that is from the truth – religion is not their object – but only to beg money from Europe [...]. We showed him [the Pasha] how necessary the English Hospital is in the town. First, because the doctor is a good one, and we have no such good doctor as he – the doctors in the Jewish Hospital have no experience. And secondly, they have not such a Dispensary [...]. Many young women and children are dying now [...]. But what can we do? The Bnei-Israel are so strong and behave in such a savage way, that they say if any one allows himself to be treated by the English doctor they will beat him, and do him all kinds of harm, for they will pay money to the Government, so that no complaint against them will be listened to."²⁴

²¹ On the stormy demonstrations and the bans against the hospital, see FO, 195/1984, A series of exchanges between John Dickson (1847–1906), British consul in Jerusalem, and Philip Henry Wodehouse Currie (1834–1906), the ambassador in Constantinople, and other documents in: HYAMSON (ed.), *The British Consulate*, vol. 2 (London 1941), nos. 385–390, pp. 505–514. On the watchers stationed by the Jewish community leaders at the gates of the hospital to prevent Jewish patients from entering the institution, see FO, 195/2028, Percy d'Erf Wheeler, director of the hospital, to Dickson, 14 July 1898, *ibid.*, Addendum to no. 393, pp. 516–518. On Wheeler, see Yaron PERRY, Efraim LEV, Dr Percy Charles Edward d'Erf Wheeler – A Notable Medical Missionary of the Holy Land, in: *Journal of Medical Biography* 16 (May 2008) 105–108.

²² On Kelk, see PERRY, *British Mission to the Jews*, 102 and *passim*.

²³ Ha-Zevi, 24 June 1897 [Hebrew].

²⁴ *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, the Monthly Record of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews (1898) 40f.

Apart from the violence employed against those visiting the medical institution and its employees, the members of Bnei-Israel used other means to eliminate the “plague” they called the Mission Hospital. The fact that the institution was built outside the walls of the Old City and that it was not possible to maintain a close supervision over those entering its gates merely gave them added incentive to act. For example, Bnei-Israel induced the Great Bet-Din (Supreme Religious Law Court) of the Jewish community to publish a sharp warning – one of many – that no Jew should use the services of the new hospital. The official declaration read as follows: “We heads and leaders of the holy congregation [...] have unanimously decided to order a decree according to our rite, that it is unlawful for any ‘Shochet’ [slaughter] to kill either beast or fowl for the use of the aforesaid Hospital, likewise it is unlawful for any Israelite to sell, provide, or permit to be sold any Kosher meat to the aforesaid Hospital. This prohibition applies to the sellers who sell directly or indirectly, and whoever transgresses these our commands, if he be a Shochet, whatever he killed will be considered ‘Nebela’ (beast that dieth of itself), and if he be a butcher, he will not be trusted to sell Kosher meat, and supply them (the hospital), he will be dealt with according to our laws.”²⁵ Even this decree, like the former ones, did not prevent members of the Jewish community from selling kosher products at high prices to the hospital’s kitchen. Thus, it was filled to capacity.

The Hospital in Safed

Safed, one of the four sacred cities of the Jewish people in the Holy Land, had a large Jewish population and was an obvious attraction for the London Jews Society from the very first. Attempts to settle in the city were already made during the exploratory expeditions of the British missionaries in the 1820s and 1840s, but it was only in the 1880s that the Society was able to secure a foothold there. Because of its isolated location in Upper Galilee and its being nearly inaccessible in the nineteenth century, Safed safeguarded the Jews from outside influences. This isolation created a community that obeyed to the letter whatever the rabbis said and that was far less open to the overtures of Protestant missionaries. The vehement antagonism met by the latter found expression in the threat that if one of them converted a Jew, “he must dig a grave for him,” since it would be impossible to protect his life in that city.²⁶

²⁵ Missionary Intelligence (1897) 115, the decree translated into English, signed by the chief rabbi.

²⁶ William Thomas GIDNEY, Sites and Scenes. A Description of the Oriental Missions of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews (London 1899) 1, 55.

The difficulties that accompanied the attempts to convert the Jews of Safed led the London Jews Society to send, during the entire period of its activities there, missionaries qualified as medical doctors. However, it was only at the beginning of the 1890s that the Society reached the decision to lease a building and set up a small hospital in the Galilean city. It very quickly became too crowded to accommodate the large number of patients and the need for a larger hospital arose. Land was purchased on the outskirts of Safed and the long process of planning and construction began. The institution was inaugurated only in May 1904.²⁷

The four-storied building was equipped with the best medical facilities available and contained, apart from wards for forty men and women, a modern operating theater and a kosher kitchen. This modern institution fired the imagination of the editor of the Society's journal in London. He published an article written by the hospital director, Dr. Walter Henry Anderson (1869–1937),²⁸ who described in detail every aspect of the institution, taking the readers on a complete tour of the interior: "Upon entering we are at once struck by its brightness and English-like appearance. The floors are composed of white cement tiles, with a border of black. The walls are tinted a soft, pink colour. The modern English fireplace, with turquoise blue tiles and white enameled mantelpiece, at once arrests the attention of the English traveller, who has probably not seen the like since leaving the homeland."²⁹

At the dedication ceremony in Safed, for the very first time at an event of this kind, many Jews participated since the hospital was the only medical institution in the city that also served the Jews in the Galilee settlements. The elderly vice-consul of Austria-Hungary and of Britain in Safed, Joseph Miklasiewicz (1823–1907), expressed fulsome praise in his speech: "I express the sincerest wishes for the prosperity of the 'London Jews' Society' asking it to maintain and increase their benevolent works, for the glory of God and the good of the people in this land."³⁰

The Safed hospital soon gained a place of honor in the city and was crowded with Jewish patients. During the summer of 1905, the number of patients applying for medical care reached a new high of 302 in one day. The value and im-

²⁷ Yaron PERRY, *The British Hospital in Safed*, in: *Cathedra* 103 (2002) 69–84 [Hebrew].

²⁸ On Anderson, see Yaron PERRY, Efraim LEV, *Dr. Walter Henry Anderson (1869–1937) the Holy Man of Safed*, in: *Vesalius. Acta Internationalia Historiae Medicinae* 13/1 (June 2007) 4–9.

²⁹ *Missionary Intelligence* (1905) 84.

³⁰ *Ibid.* (1904) 136–140. On Miklasiewicz, see ELIAV, HAIDER (eds.), *Österreich und das Heilige Land*, passim.

portance of the institution in Jewish communal life can be gauged from a notice affixed to the gate of the synagogue in Safed expressing opposition to the Mission hospital. However, the language here was different from that typically used in the proclamation of bans against missionary institutions in Jerusalem: “The Mission Hospital is now filled with Jewish patients, and the majority of the outside patients also are Jews [...]. Thus last year [...] a *cherem* [ban] was proclaimed against those who should consult the Christian doctor, but were not the Rabbis themselves compelled to loose that which they had bound? Could our brethren obey the *cherem*? Would they not have died in their diseases? Therefore, dear brethren, if you are truly desirous to rescue the souls of our people from the missionary net, you ought to establish [...] a Jewish hospital. Where there is a will there is a way! [...] [T]hen only will we see no more of the face of the missionary who lies in wait for our souls.”³¹

The proclamation suggests the relative success of the hospital as part of the missionary activities in Safed. No longer was a ban imposed upon the hospital, which served so many Jews. Instead, there was an independent Jewish initiative to emulate the British institution. During the summer of 1907, Dr. Walter Anderson was on leave in London and spoke at the annual session of the London Committee. At the end of his speech on the situation at his Mission station, he gave a clear analysis of the attitude of the Jewish community towards the missionaries in the city, epitomised in one sentence: “A few years ago the difficulty with us was how to get at these fanatical people in Safed; now the difficulty is not how to get at them, but how to get away from them.”³²

Conclusion

The 80 years of activity of the London Jews Society among the Jewish communities in Palestine encountered deep-rooted animosity and antagonism that sometimes bordered upon violence. The Christian missionaries to the Jews of Palestine, whatever their intentions, were faced with a fortified wall of entrenched Jewish zealotry. The Society representatives in Jerusalem and Safed had very limited success in making converts, each year baptising no more than a handful of Jews. This fact did not escape the notice of the Society’s supporters in Britain who had invested enormous sums in constructing monumental buildings that still stand in Jerusalem and Safed. It was neither temporary blindness

³¹ *Missionary Intelligence* (1905) 163.

³² *Ibid.* (1907) 93.

nor naiveté that induced the Society to devote so many resources to Palestine and reap such meagre gains. They knew very well that they would not succeed in bringing all the Jews residing in the country to renounce their faith and were satisfied with the attempt to attract a few lone individuals to the Gospel.

The hospitals of the London Jews Society in Jerusalem and Safed were usually regarded with icy hostility during most of the years of their activity. Yet in spite of the fierce opposition, these medical institutions faithfully served thousands of Jews for several decades. Nevertheless, the dominant view among the Jews of the nineteenth century was well expressed by Albert Cohn, a representative of the Rothschild family, at the dedication ceremony of the Jewish hospital in Jerusalem that was founded in 1854: “In cases where medical skill cannot avail, and God, who alone is the physician, has appointed him to die, let the Israelite at least have the consolation in his dying hour, of hearing the words, ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.’”³³

³³ Ibid. (1854) 284–286. On Cohn, see ELIAV, HAIDER (eds.), *Österreich und das Heilige Land*, passim.

