

The Damascus Affair

“Ritual Murder,” Politics,
and the Jews in 1840

Jonathan Frankel

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For Edith

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Finally, a word should be said about technical matters. In the body of the book I have tried to avoid unduly complex systems of transliteration; and I have also selected the English version of certain first names (e.g. David not Daud, Harari).

J.F.
Jerusalem
April 1996

The Damascus Affair

Introduction: Crisis as a factor in nineteenth-century Jewish history

In February 1840 an Italian monk and his servant disappeared in Damascus. The charge of ritual murder was brought against a large number of Jews in that city and they were declared guilty. News of the case spread across the Middle East, Europe, and the entire Western world. It grew into a cause célèbre. Adding to the uproar was the fact that a parallel case erupted in the region almost simultaneously, on the island of Rhodes. As diplomats and governments found themselves entangled in the Damascus affair, it became a marginal but complicating factor in the international conflict that during the year produced one war in the Middle East and threatened another in Europe. Jews in many countries groped for ways to cooperate in order to rescue the surviving prisoners in Damascus and to save their own good name.

In the late spring and throughout the following months, the affair produced an explosion of polemics, speculation, fantastic theories, and strange projects. The most respected newspapers in England, France, and Germany assigned it endless space. Did the Jews really practice ritual murder and human sacrifice? Perhaps, indeed, they did. What kind of people was this which had survived almost two thousand years in exile, expelled from one country to another, dispersed across the globe? Was it possessed of a special destiny, providential or sinister, part of some divine pattern or satanic mystery?

Seen within the context of Jewish history during the nineteenth century – or, more exactly, between 1815 and 1914 – the Damascus affair was, of course, no isolated incident. It was one of the many sudden attacks that from time to time broke in upon the otherwise relatively regular life of the Jews in an era free of prolonged and general wars. These crises served as the counterpoint to the basic themes that are often described as dominant in the Jewish history of the period. They provided the moments of sudden discontinuity at a time when long-term patterns of development were steadily transforming traditional ways of life.

In Western and Central Europe, the social trends that can conveniently be subsumed under the term *modernization* – acculturation (sometimes leading

to assimilation, sometimes not); secularization (sometimes producing a religious reform movement, sometimes not); emancipation, the grant of equal civil rights (sometimes sooner, sometimes later); urbanization; occupational diversification; upward social mobility (frequent, but by no means universal) – were clearly gaining momentum as the century wore on. This was the way “out of the ghetto,” to use Jacob Katz’s succinct idiom.¹

While these same trends were evident in Eastern Europe, they were much less advanced by 1914 and were partly overshadowed by other long-term political and sociological developments: the denial of equal rights; a population explosion outpacing economic opportunity; and the consequent mass emigration.² Not surprisingly, it was in Eastern Europe that such observers as Moshe Lebl Lilienblum and Lev Pinsker would eventually (in 1881–2) produce the argument that the periodic crises which interrupted the day-to-day patterns of Jewish life were not aberrations, the final thrashing of a dying past, but on the contrary were symptomatic of the modern era. For them, it was the lightning produced by these periodic storms that illuminated the true situation of the Jewish people in their time.³

Abrupt upheavals, particularly wars and revolutions, have always attracted the close attention of historians, and this is no less true of those studying Jewish history. But for the student of the political history of the Jews in the nineteenth century, the crises that had specifically Jewish issues at their epicenter are of particular interest. Lacking a state, a government, a parliament, and an army of their own, they were long reluctant to form political organizations or to undertake coordinated political action. This was particularly true in the decades prior to 1860, when the traditional forms of Jewish autonomy had largely atrophied or been abolished, while the modern political organizations, movements, and parties so familiar by 1914 still had to be formed.

To ascertain the extent of solidarity among the Jews at the time, the political means that they were able and prepared to use, the degree of their influence, their standing in public opinion, their own (often conflicting) aspirations, and the projects (benevolent or malevolent) proposed to (or for) them by others, there is no choice but to turn to those moments when the Jews found themselves under severe attack. It was then that forces normally dormant exploded into view; each such episode is to the historian what an earthquake is to the seismographer.

¹ I.e.: Katz, *Out of the Ghetto*.

² On the socioeconomic development of East European Jewry and the emigrations, e.g.: Kahan, *Essays*, pp. 1–127; Lestschinsky, “Jewish Migrations.”

³ For the ideas of Lilienblum and Pinsker (1881–2), e.g.: Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, pp. 85–7, 115; Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, pp. 166–98; Vital, *The Origins of Zionism*, pp. 111–32.

Speaking in broad terms, it is possible to divide the periodic crises that broke in upon the Jews into four types. Each case, after all, belonged not only to its own time and place, but also to a distinct tradition with its specific modes of discourse and action.

Most immediately terrifying for the victims, and extremely dangerous in the long run, were the eruptions of mass violence against the Jews. Particularly notorious among such episodes were the attacks in a number of German states in 1819 (known as the "Hep! Hep!" riots); in Romania in 1866; and in the tsarist empire in 1881-2, 1903, and 1905-6.⁴ (These latter outbursts, indeed, were so destructive that they introduced the Russian term *pogrom* into the everyday vocabulary of the Western world.)

Less obviously dramatic, but liable to cause as much or more long-term distress, were government laws and administrative decrees. In the first half of the century, initiatives of this kind taken against the Jews were justified variously in the name of legitimacy and the restoration of the ancien régime, necessities of state, and enlightenment. In the later decades, such steps answered to a (would-be) populist admixture of nationalism and Christianity. The cases that drew the most attention were the decision of 1815 to permit the individual German states to roll back rights granted during the revolutionary and Napoleonic era; the tsarist decree issued in 1843 to expel Jews from a broad swath of land, one hundred versts wide, on the Lithuanian frontier; the repeal of recently made concessions in Romania (once more in 1866); the May Laws of 1882 in Russia; and the expulsion of Jews from Moscow in 1891.⁵

Distinct again were the emergence, the sudden growth, or the resurgence of anti-Jewish agitation, organizations, movements, and parties. In this case, the impact made by Stöcker, von Schönerer, Wilhelm Marr, and their organizations in Germany and Austria during the years 1878-80, and by the so-called Black Hundreds movement (particularly the Union of the Russian People) in the tsarist empire during the years 1905-6, proved to be especially alarming to Jews at the time.⁶

Finally, we come to the judicial arena: the courts, criminal cases, and legal conflicts. Undoubtedly, the most sensational of all such instances in this category was the Dreyfus affair which, of course, divided French society,

⁴ On 1819: Katz, "Pra'ot 'Hep! Hep!"; Sterling, "Anti-Jewish Riots"; on Romania (1866-7): Iancu, *Les Juifs en Roumanie*, pp. 63-85; on the pogroms (1881-1906): Klier and Lambroza, *Pogroms*, pp. 39-289.

⁵ On the Congress of Vienna (1815) and the Jews: Baron, *Die Judenfrage*; on the tsarist decree of expulsion (1843): Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I*, pp. 175-6; Frankel, "The Russian-Jewish Question"; on the May Laws (1882): Berk, *Year of Crisis*, pp. 72-6.

⁶ For the upsurge of anti-Semitic agitation in Germany and Austria (1878-82), e.g.: Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism*, pp. 72-101, 142-7; Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction*, pp. 21-47.

thrusting it into a bitter struggle for a decade or more. But a great stir was also made in its own time by the Mortara case of 1858 (which involved the right of the Catholic Church in the papal states to take possession of any Jewish child once it had been baptized behind its parents' backs and on the initiative of a midwife, nurse, or maid).⁷

Falling into this category, too, were the many criminal investigations and trials in which Jews were accused of ritual murder. Probably the best-known of such events in the period under discussion here was the Beilis trial held in Kiev in 1913. Among contemporaries, especially the Jews in the countries involved, though, the cases of Tisza-Eszlar in 1882 (in Hungary), of Xanten in 1891 (in Prussia), and of Polna in 1899 (in Bohemia) engendered hardly less tension.⁸ The Damascus affair of 1840, as already noted, caused an extraordinary sensation in its own time.

In reality, these four kinds of crisis (however distinct they might be as ideal-types) usually tended to overlap. Laws against the Jews, and still more the repeal or rejection of laws in their favor, were often preceded by noisy agitation or even mob violence. Although governments often hastened to suppress riots, at times they defended the rioters; on occasion, the army actually took an active part in pogroms. Trials involving ritual murder (or treason) were sometimes the consequence of pressure from below and sometimes of initiatives launched from above; but, in either case, they stirred up angry forces calling for revenge.

Beyond such taxonomical issues, it is worth noting, too, that the scale, the danger, of a given eruption bore no necessary relationship to the volume of noise that it produced at the time. And as for its long-term impact on future historical developments, its place in the collective memory, and the weight assigned it by the historians (which are three very different things, of course), they, too, were the product of multiple variables.

Thus, for example, two tragic developments in tsarist Russia – the ritual murder case in Velizh, which began in 1823 and was only settled in 1835; and the Cantonist policy involving the mass recruitment of Jewish children into the armed forces, which began in 1827 – were hardly reported abroad. Both issues had the potential, in the abstract, to become major causes célèbres, but that potential was not realized because of the closed nature of the Russian state at the time, the pervasive fear implanted in the population, and the inexperience of the Jews in the West, who were still not attuned to handling such cases.

Or, to take another instance, the wide-scale violence against the Jews in Central Europe that took place during the years 1848–9 attracted relatively little attention at the time (and has only recently been given due weight by

⁷ There is no full-scale study of the Mortara case, but see: Korn, *The American Reaction*.

⁸ See chap. 16, nn. 1 and 71.

historians),⁹ presumably because its impact was muffled by the revolution and by the hopes of imminent emancipation. A similar syndrome worked to lower the profile of the October massacres in 1905 – again during revolution. To this day, it is the Kishinev pogrom, which involved far less loss of life but took place in 1903 when there were no such distractions, that is popularly remembered.

Similarly, timing was a crucial factor in deciding which crises were to exert a decisive influence on the development of modern Jewish history. The Mortara case, objectively only one in a succession of such instances of legalized child abduction, served as a direct factor in the establishment in 1860 of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the first international organization committed to Jewish self-defense. The pogroms of 1881, which were far less violent than those soon to come, did much to inspire the creation of the first proto-Zionist movement and thus marked a major historical turning point. And the Dreyfus affair is credited with having accelerated Herzl's decision to follow a similar path in the West fifteen years later.

Of course, the ultimate outcome of these three eruptions was, in part, the culmination of political, institutional, and perceptual processes that had long been at work within the Jewish world. They by no means represented examples of *creatio ex nihilo*. Yet the catalytic effect of the crisis was an essential factor in producing that ultimate synthesis that in each case would prove to be so significant.

The crucial element at work here was extreme shock. Thus, the year 1858, when the Mortara case took place, was very close to what is often considered the high-water mark of nineteenth-century liberalism – the prestige of England with its constitutionalist, free-trade, and *laissez-faire* ideas had never been greater – and nonetheless it turned out that a Jewish child in Italy could be forcibly taken from his parents, and nothing could be done to retrieve him. (Edgardo Mortara ended up as a Catholic bishop.) The Russia of 1881 had long passed the heady days of Alexander II as the Tsar-Liberator, but nobody had anticipated the outbreak of pogroms on a massive scale, still less the general tendency in the country to blame them on the victims rather than on those committing the violence. And the same sense of shock, of certainties betrayed and of expectations dashed, marked the Dreyfus affair, which took place, after all, at the end of the nineteenth century, in France, the motherland of revolution and the declaration of human rights.

The tumult produced in 1840 by the Damascus case is also to be explained in large measure by this same shock effect. To the Jews it seemed unbelievable that widespread credence should be given to the charge of ritual mur-

⁹ On the 1848 revolutions and the Jews, e.g.: Baron, "The Impact"; idem, "Aspects of the Jewish Communal Crisis"; Toury, *Die politischen Orientierungen*, pp. 47–109; idem, *Soziale und politische Geschichte*, pp. 277–313.

der. For its part, what can loosely be termed public opinion in Europe (and overseas) responded with astonishment as Jews eventually organized forceful measures in their own defense. This disbelief, the cognitive dissonance, provoked unanticipated reactions on all sides and these in turn produced a maelstrom of excitement, polemic, exercises in millennial speculation, and posturing.

It has to be remembered that for some twenty years before 1840 the Jews in Europe and the world at large had been very much out of the limelight. Their sudden appearance on center stage could therefore easily be interpreted as a phenomenon of exceptional, perhaps metaphysical or supernatural, importance. This was, after all, a period when the religious revival in Europe was still at its postrevolutionary (or restorationist) and pre-Darwinian height.

By far the greatest number of Jews at that moment were to be found as subjects of Nicholas I. The Vienna settlement of 1815 had bestowed most of what had been the Polish state, with its huge Jewish population, on Russia. To say that the Jews there were shut behind an iron curtain would be no great exaggeration. There was communication with the West, but the Jews in the tsarist empire had as yet sought neither to engage outsiders in their own problems nor to involve themselves in affairs beyond the frontiers of the state.¹⁰ A phrase more familiar from our own day was applicable then too. As far as the outside world was concerned, they were still, in great part, "the Jews of silence."

In contrast, the particular combination of circumstances prevailing in Central Europe and Italy could well have brought Jewish issues into great prominence – or so it would appear at first glance. True, the Jewish population in that area was much smaller. While in 1840 there were, perhaps, some 2 million Jews in the Russian empire, the number in the Habsburg realms was closer to eight hundred thousand, in the states of the German Confederation (sans Austria) about three hundred thousand, and in the Italian states (again the Austrian area excepted) some thirty thousand.¹¹ But there, in marked opposition to Russia, the hand of the state did not lie so heavy and public issues could be discussed and debated, albeit not everywhere and only within the confines of an often strict censorship. And the question of emancipation for the Jews was highly controversial.

Moreover, in Central Europe, again in contrast to Russia, the Jewish population had in its ranks men such as Gabriel Riesser, who were well capable of championing the case for equal rights. Since 1837 a number of Jewish weeklies devoted to news, comment, and scholarship had been found-

¹⁰ E.g.: Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I.*

¹¹ These figures are extrapolations from the very approximate estimates for 1825 and 1850 in Lestschinsky, "Die Umsiedlung," p. 132.

ded. Processes of acculturation were far advanced, at least at the elite level; German had replaced Yiddish to a large extent; and many (including an entire generation of rabbis) had graduated from high school and university. Whenever proposals came up here or there to modify laws directed against the Jews, furious public debates, accompanied by vocal popular resistance, became the order of the day – and Jewish spokesmen played their part in the flurry of opinion.¹²

However, there were thirty-nine German (and more than a half dozen Italian) states and each one had its own particular laws and regulations laying down what was and what was not permitted to its Jewish subjects. Even within a given state, different provinces and different cities had their own particular rules.

In the Prussian state, Posen in the east and the Rhine provinces in the west each had its system of laws and both differed from that in the historic heartland of the Hohenzollern kingdom. In some cities (Nuremberg and Lübeck, for example) Jews were simply forbidden to reside; in others (Frankfurt-am-Main, Dresden, Vienna) their numbers were strictly limited; in some, Jews could come and go freely as temporary visitors, while in others they were liable to expulsion before nightfall or after one or two days. The variety of special taxes and special oaths to which the Jews were subject also formed a patchwork quilt of incredible complexity.¹³

This system, which had been largely dismantled during the Napoleonic era, had become reentrenched since 1815 and was regarded by large parts of the population (including intellectuals of almost every stripe, burghers, and clergy) as hallowed by time, a part of the age-old order of things that had been successfully defended against the French invader. Thus, under the existing Vienna settlement – barring revolution or war – there was no reason to expect basic change in any but the most minor states such as Hesse or Baden.

What this meant was that the Jews in Central Europe and in Italy felt themselves increasingly secure (some twenty years had passed since the “Hep! Hep!” riots), but the realization was dawning on them that they would have to await a radical transformation of the political climate in order to gain equal rights. An entrenched status quo had placed Jewish issues in the shadows even in this era marked by highly tangled relationships between the Jews and their neighbors. Under these circumstances, the energies and

¹² On the profound divisions and furious controversy caused by the issue of Jewish emancipation in Germany, e.g.: Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, pp. 51–104, 147–220; Sterling, *Judenhass*, pp. 74–129.

¹³ For the legal position of the Jews in the German states in the late eighteenth century: Mahler, *A History of Modern Jewry*, pp. 129–46; and post-1815: Rürup, “Jewish Emancipation,” pp. 74–82.

talents of young intellectuals involved in Jewish life were naturally channeled into the relatively apolitical areas of scholarship (*Das Wissenschaft des Judentums*) and theology. Those few firebrands who insisted on pursuing oppositional politics often chose to abandon Judaism for a nominal Christianity and anyway tended to end up abroad, as did both Börne and Heine, who settled in Paris.

In Western Europe, the status of the Jews appeared to be totally different from that prevailing in the German, Italian, and Russian states. In France, Jews had enjoyed equal rights since 1791; those rights had been somewhat limited in the 1808–18 period, but since 1830 formal equality had been total. Jewish religious institutions, like those of the Church, were financed in large part by the state. The administrative system set up by Napoleon to run those institutions – the network of central and regional consistories¹⁴ – was designed to insure a large measure of state control and to discourage any form of autonomous political activity.

The Jewish population was small, perhaps sixty thousand in all; and as most of the Jews were concentrated in Alsace-Lorraine, their presence in numerical terms could hardly have been felt elsewhere in France. In Paris, Jews had become prominent in the fields of banking and high finance (the Rothschilds, Foulds, Goudchaux), as well as in the intellectual and artistic life of the city.¹⁵ As yet, however, this development had not become a matter of major controversy. It was not until January 1840 that the first Jewish weekly was founded and its title, *Archives Israélites*, accurately reflected its editor's belief that the political battles of French Jewry were a matter of the past.

In Holland, where some fifty thousand Jews lived, and in Belgium, where there were only a few thousand, equal rights had likewise been an established fact since the revolutionary and Napoleonic period. And the situation was not radically different in England, where the Jewish population at the time was no more than twenty or twenty-five thousand.

It is true that since the emancipation of the Catholics and Nonconformists in 1829, the Jews remained the only religious group in the United Kingdom denied the right to sit in Parliament and to hold important public office. This issue had produced some major debates in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Lobbying on this issue, though, had been left by the Jewish community largely to the private initiative of such prominent individuals as Sir Francis Goldsmid. The self-declared representative body of that community, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, had chosen to deal with

¹⁴ For a description and analysis of the consistorial system: Albert, *The Modernization of French Jewry*, pp. 45–76.

¹⁵ On the Jews of Alsace, e.g.: Hyman, *The Emancipation*; and on the emergent centrality of the Paris community: M. Graetz, *Haperiferiyah hayetah lemerkaz*, pp. 36–74.

the emancipation issue in only desultory ways. It is safe to say that, in general, the duties that it had assigned to itself up until 1840 were of the most perfunctory kind.¹⁶

Finally, in North America and the West Indies, the number of Jews was still infinitesimal. In the United States, there were some fifteen thousand Jews in this period. They had equal rights and hardly stood out in the medley of different denominations and sects, both old and new.¹⁷ It was symptomatic that in none of the Western countries (France apart) was there a Jewish periodical press in 1840.

In sum, the Jewish people was little prepared, whether in psychological, political, or institutional terms, to grapple with the Damascus affair. In the tsarist empire, the Jews were very numerous, but isolated; in Central Europe and Italy, they were scattered over dozens of states, had no centralized institutions, and found themselves in a state of limbo, encouraged to modernize their way of life but facing closed doors at every turn. In the West, for the most part, emancipation was a fact, but their numbers were minuscule and the future of their communities in the face of rapid acculturation in doubt.

Moreover, it was almost one hundred years since the last time a crisis of such dimensions had forced itself on the consciousness of the Jewish people. The expulsion of the Jews from Prague in 1745 (like that from Vienna in 1669–70 and from Ancona in 1555) had provoked an energetic response from Jews more securely situated elsewhere.¹⁸ Lobbying on an international scale eventually generated enough pressure then to bring about modifications in the draconian policy proclaimed by Maria Theresa. That episode, though, was not recalled in 1840.

Europe – or, more specifically, France, Germany, and England – constitutes the focal point of this book. It was there that the Damascus affair evolved into a struggle for public opinion, meaning not only the newspaper readership, but also the broader populace that was likewise influenced, through word of mouth and rumor, by the press. Without the open controversy possible only in constitutional and semiconstitutional states, the affair would have been decided locally, leaving the Damascus case perhaps no better known than that of Velizh. The press and the politics of newspaper publication, therefore, occupy a central place in this study.

Nonetheless, if it was Europe that brought the affair under a powerful

¹⁶ On the Board of Deputies, see chap. 6, n. 47.

¹⁷ For two recent books on the Jews in nineteenth-century America: Diner, *A Time for Gathering*; Marcus, *United States Jewry*.

¹⁸ On the expulsions from (1) Ancona: Roth, *Dona Gracia*, pp. 134–75; (2) Vienna: Wertheimer, *Die Juden in Oesterreich*, vol. 1, pp. 123–32; (3) Prague: Mevorah, “Ma’asei hahishtadlut.”

microscope, magnifying its significance many times over, the cases themselves – the alleged murders, the investigations, the imprisonments – were still played out in the Middle East (in the “Orient” or the “East,” as the region was known at the time). True, even there, both in Damascus and in the parallel case at Rhodes, a major role was played by the consuls and the great powers, but it would certainly be a mistake to treat the affair simply as an extension of European politics. The indigenous forces – the government authorities, popular sentiment (Muslim, and still more Christian), and the Jews themselves – were all independently and actively involved. Some words must, therefore, also be said about the situation of the Jewish people in the Ottoman empire at the time.

Like the Polish-Lithuanian state, the Turkish sultanate had provided the Jews, virtually expelled from most of Europe by the early sixteenth century, with a crucial place of refuge, and a large number of immigrants from the Iberian peninsula had thus been added to the Jewish communities already living in the Islamic world. In 1840, even if one subtracts North Africa (sans Egypt) and the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia (soon to become independent Romania), there still remained perhaps three hundred thousand Jews under at least nominal Ottoman sovereignty, with some half in the Balkans and Constantinople; the rest in the Asiatic part of the empire.¹⁹ Fulfilling many important functions in finance and international trade, the Jewish elites had long exerted considerable political influence, but their relative standing was in decline by the mid-nineteenth century, rendering them potentially more vulnerable to the arbitrary violence then endemic to vast regions of the empire.²⁰

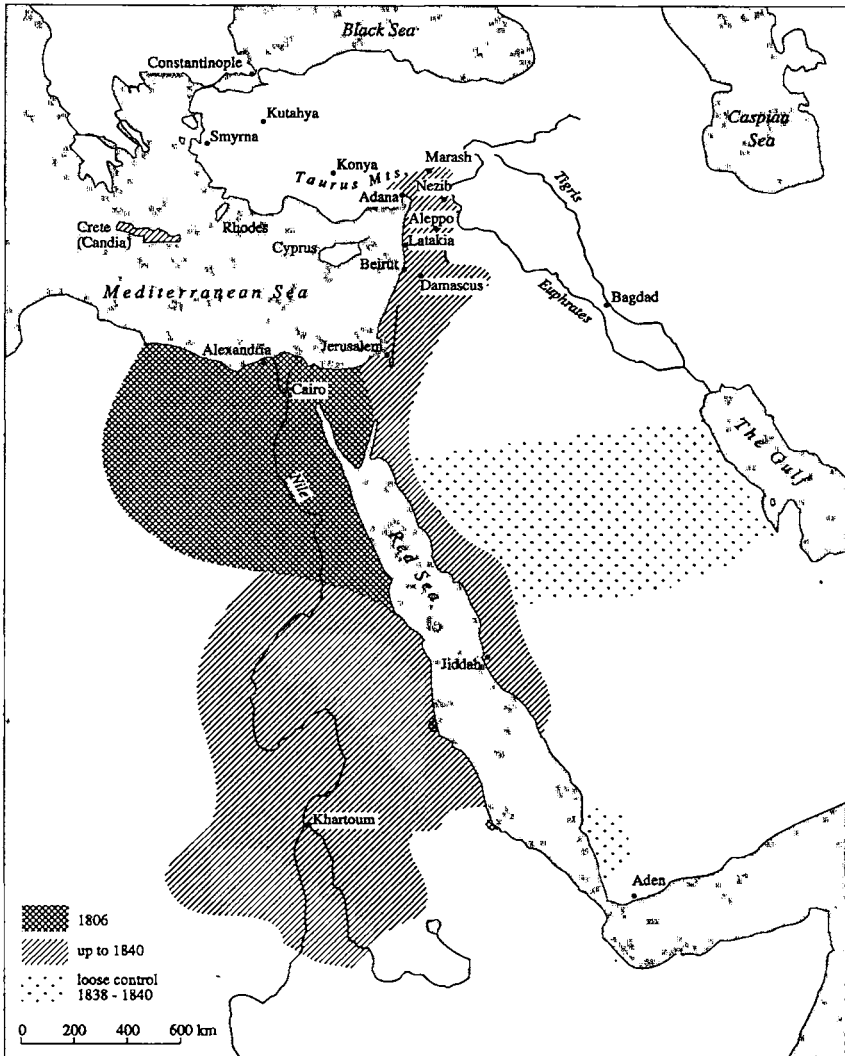
Complicating the situation of the Jews in 1840 still further was the fact that for close to ten years the empire had been divided *de facto*, although not *de jure*, into two halves. The viceroy of Egypt, Muhammed Ali, had conquered greater Syria (including Palestine) in 1831–3, leaving the Sultan in control, often tenuous, only of his European possessions, most but not all of Anatolia, and the Bagdad region.

This meant that when the ritual-murder crisis erupted, Damascus and Rhodes were to be found, although nominally in the same state, actually divided by a hostile frontier. Rendering the situation still more complex was the fact that the European powers took different sides in the dispute between Turkey and Egypt. It became impossible for the Ottoman Jews to pool their resources in a fully effective way. The story of the ritual-murder cases in 1840 was, thus, from the first, not only a tale of two cities (Damascus and

¹⁹ For estimates of the Jewish population in the Ottoman empire: Barnai “Hayehudim baim-peryah ha’otomanit,” pp. 196–209; Lestschinsky, “Die Umsiedlung,” p. 132.

²⁰ Among recent books on Ottoman Jewry, e.g.: Braude and Lewis, *Christians and Jews*; Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*; Weiker, *Ottomans, Turks and the Jewish Polity*.

Territories Controlled by Muhammed Ali (1840)



MAP 1. Territories controlled by Muhammad Ali, 1840

Rhodes), but also of two governments locked in conflict, and of fierce competition between the great powers for influence, or even hegemony, in the Middle East.

The Damascus affair would renew age-old accusations and call forth primordial preconceptions about the Jew. Ancient patterns of thought and

behavior would repeat themselves. However, the strong and the strange reactions that the affair provoked on all sides were the result not only of collective memories stirred up from the deep, but as much, or more, of spontaneity and shock.

It is in order to allow the reader to share, at least in some measure, the constant sense of surprise experienced at the time that this book has been structured as it has. Much of it follows a narrative pattern, opening with a description (Part One) of the actual murder cases as they unfolded in the claustrophobic atmosphere of Damascus and Rhodes. In Part Two, the story follows the transformation of the affair into a worldwide sensation – a long, drawn-out process, involving the piecemeal reception of the news, its transmission by the press, the formulation of policy by the great powers, the response of the Jewish leadership, the struggle for public opinion, and the interchange (always much delayed) between Europe and the “East.”

The narrative is taken up again and brought to its conclusion in Part Four, which deals with the famous quasi-diplomatic mission of Adolphe Crémieux and Sir Moses Montefiore to Egypt as well as with the effects of the Middle East war on the final stages of the Damascus affair. Following the rhythms of the time that only revealed the full meaning of the affair gradually, I have not concentrated all the background material in this introductory chapter, but have, rather, woven much of it into the fabric of the story as it unfolds.

Many of the questions that arose then, and have been asked since by historians, about the meaning and mechanics of the affair come under consideration during the course of the narrative. Was there a conspiratorial force planning and coordinating the ritual-murder cases? If not, how are they to be explained? What role was played by the consuls and the powers; by the Ottoman and Egyptian authorities; and by their complex interrelationships? Along what lines did the press and public opinion divide in Europe, and how far did the reaction in one country differ from that in another? And what was the response of the Jews – how rapid, united, effective?

By the summer of 1840, the affair had brought almost every aspect of the Jewish people, past, present, and future, into the domain of public debate. A number of key issues that then emerged involved wide-ranging discussions of history, politics, and theology; and they hardly lend themselves to chronological treatment. I have therefore chosen at that point to interrupt the flow of the narrative by the inclusion of a long thematic section (Part Three).

What, it is asked there, were the meaning and long-term implications of the affair as understood within the Jewish world? Second, how far were the arguments for and against the ritual-murder charge a mere replay of age-old polemics and how far a reflection of contemporary political pressures? Third, in what ways was the Damascus affair interlinked with the concurrent upsurge of Jewish messianic, and Christian millennialist, expectations –

especially in view of the fact, curious to say the least, that the year 1839-40 (5600 in the Hebrew calendar) had long been anticipated by many Jews as the eagerly awaited time of the messianic coming? Still another issue examined is the extent to which the affair sparked an upsurge of Jewish national consciousness and proto-Zionism. Was this phenomenon anything more than a minor curiosity, or did it have some real political significance?

The final section of the book, Part Five, is likewise thematic in nature. It is there that the way in which 1840 was treated in retrospect, both by historians and by publicists, both as fact and as myth, is analyzed in some detail. Even though the affair has never before been the subject of a book-length history, it has rarely been forgotten either by Jews or by Judeophobes. Finally, in the Conclusion, it is asked how 1840 is to be placed in, and what were its long-term implications for, modern Jewish history.

PART I

The dynamics of ritual murder (the first two months)

Ritual murder: official documents

On 29 February 1840 the French consul in Damascus, Count de Ratti-Menton, sent his first report to Paris on the disappearance of Father Thomas and his servant. The letter, sixteen pages long, was addressed to the president of the council and minister of foreign affairs, Marshal Soult, a hero of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars who became head of government three times during the reign of Louis-Philippe. On the following day, 1 March, Soult, faced by an adverse parliamentary vote, would be replaced by Adolphe Thiers, a much younger man (he was forty-two years old) who had made his name as a lawyer, journalist, parliamentary politician, and historian of the revolutionary era.

Ratti-Menton's letter, though, would not reach Paris for weeks. The new steamships, which were the fastest means of communication, called at Beirut only at infrequent intervals. To send despatches overland to Alexandria by express (or "Tatar") camel service would take about a week and to Constantinople much longer. Under these circumstances one had to assume that it would normally be at least three weeks, and perhaps much more, until news reached the French capital. Communications were so bad that the British consul preferred to hold up his despatches in readiness for the monthly steamer to Falmouth.¹

The handful of diplomatic representatives in Damascus was thus cut off from Europe not by distance but by time. However, it did not follow from this fact that the post of French consul in that city was insignificant. On the contrary, the appointment of Ratti-Menton to his new position clearly represented a major step up in his career. His previous postings, dating back to 1824 (as successively deputy vice-consul, vice-consul, and consul), had all been of a routine nature: Genoa, Palermo, Naples, Tiflis, and Gibraltar. But Damascus was something very different.²

European consuls in the Ottoman empire held extraordinary powers as the result of the various capitulatory agreements concluded over the centuries with the court of the Sultan (or the Porte, as it was usually known). They

All dates refer to 1840 unless otherwise stated.

¹ Werry to Bidwell (22 June) FO 78/410, p. 129.

² MREA:Ratti-Menton, le Comte de/Personnel, Série 1.

were directly responsible for safeguarding the rights of a large and growing body of people (both Ottoman and non-Ottoman subjects) who enjoyed the protection of the respective states. And it was primarily on their shoulders that the burden of this complex system of extraterritorial justice fell. The consuls had their own courts and prison cells, their own police (the kavasses or janisseries) who accompanied them in uniform through the streets, and their own interpreters (dragomen) who enjoyed protected status. They had the right to appear in the Ottoman courts in defense of somebody enjoying protection even if he were involved in a case falling under local jurisdiction. Their special status had come to symbolize the enfeeblement of the Turkish empire and the might of the major European powers.

Even beyond this fact, though, Ratti-Menton's appointment was of far greater, and of immediate political, significance. He was the first French diplomat to be sent to Damascus, where he had arrived only on 1 November 1839. The Soult government had evidently decided that it was essential to have a senior representative in a city that had over the previous decade become increasingly important to French strategic interests.

Syria (or what today would be called greater Syria, meaning not only the present Syrian state but also Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and neighboring areas of Turkey) had been wrenched in the years 1831–3 from direct Ottoman control by Muhammed Ali, the viceroy of Egypt. His avowed allegiance



FIG. 1. Damascus

to the Sultan did not prevent him from waging war against the Turkish armies nor from weighing up the chances of either conquering Constantinople itself or else of declaring the full independence of the vast territories under his *de facto* rule.

A succession of governments in Paris since the period of Napoleon had concluded that the growth in the power of Muhammed Ali and the Egyptian state, albeit under nominal Ottoman suzerainty, represented a major French interest. For a time, following the peace agreement of Kutahya in 1833, it had appeared that the Egyptian conquest of Syria would come to be accepted as a *fait accompli* not only by France, but by the other European powers with a direct interest in the Middle East, notably England, Russia, and Austria.

However, a series of uprisings by the local populations in Palestine, the Hauran, and Mount Lebanon – Druse, Maronite Christians, and Nablus Muslims – had cast doubt on the stability of the new order, encouraging the Turkish Sultan to renew the war in 1839. The Egyptian army, once more commanded by Ibrahim, Muhammed Ali's son, won another decisive victory (this time at Nezib), but the magnitude of the triumph was so overwhelming that it forced the reopening of the entire Syrian question.

In a famous joint note of 27 July 1839, the ambassadors of the great powers, including France, assured the Porte that the dispute between the Sultan and his Egyptian viceroy had become an international issue which could only be settled with their active participation. This dramatic show of unity, the result of momentary panic lest Ibrahim march on Constantinople, could not long disguise the profound rivalries and suspicions dividing England from Russia (as they vied with each other for dominant influence at the Porte) and pitting both of them against France, which took the side of Egypt.³

Thus, the Count de Ratti-Menton had arrived in Damascus, the administrative capital of Egyptian-occupied Syria, at the height of a dispute threatening to engulf not only the region but even Europe in war. It was his task to entrench French influence in the area and to employ that influence to help stabilize Muhammed Ali's control over a restless population. Syria in general, but particularly Mount Lebanon, was recognized by all sides as the weak link in the chain of Egyptian (and hence French) strategy. The Count de Ratti-Menton would need to call on all the experience accumulated over almost twenty years in the diplomatic service in order to handle himself well in so volatile and complex a situation.

Just three months after his arrival he found himself faced with the case of Father Thomas who, together with his trusted servant, Ibrahim Amara,

³ On the battle of Nezib and its diplomatic background, e.g.: Driault, *L'Égypte et l'Europe*, vol. 1, pp. xxxvii–lxxix, 36ff.; Sabry, *L'Empire Égyptien*, pp. 441–85.

disappeared on 5 February. Although Thomas (or Tommaso) came from Sardinia, there was no doubt that as a Capuchin monk and priest he enjoyed the protection of France. In accordance with the Franco-Turkish treaty of 1740, the French diplomatic agents had the right to protect the Roman Catholic clergy in the Ottoman empire; and, furthermore, specific mention had been made of safeguarding the Capuchin churches in agreements between those same two powers dating as far back as 1673 in the reign of Louis XIV.⁴ Ratti-Menton was thus intensively involved in the suspected double murder case from the very first.

He, no doubt, waited over three weeks to send in his report in the hope of being able to announce progress in solving the mystery. In his letter of 29 February he was able to do so. As this document is of key importance in the development of the Damascus affair, it is worth quoting at some length. "An appalling drama," he wrote to Marshal Soult,

has just stained the city of Damascus in blood. The fact that the principal victim had direct ties with the consulate; that he occupied a position which was both public and consecrated; that those who played the primary role in this scene of murder enjoy a [high] social position; and above all, that their actions were inspired by an anti-human idea, all conjoin to justify the length and detail of what I am about to report.

On the afternoon of the 5th of this month, Father Thomas, an apostolic missionary and chaplain of the French Capuchin monastery at Damascus, left in the direction of the Jewish quarter in order to put up a notice on the door of one of the synagogues about an auction for the benefit of a poor European family. He was due on the following day, the 6th, to have dinner with the other members of the religious orders at Dr. Massari's where he failed to appear. His absence was rendered the more unusual both by the fact that he was not at the monastery at the usual time for celebration of the mass and also by the simultaneous disappearance of his only domestic servant [Ibrahim Amara]. However, this could initially be explained by the supposition that Father Thomas had gone to one of the neighbouring villages in order to vaccinate some of the children there.

Informed of what had happened I went to the monastery where the street was full of Christians from all the different sects who were shouting that Father Thomas had been slain [*immolé*] by the Jews.⁵

Ratti-Menton then went on to describe how, finding a way into the monastery, they discovered two places set for supper. Tommaso and Ibrahim had clearly expected to be home on the evening of the 5th, a Wednesday, and had

⁴ Benoit, *Étude sur les Capitulations*, pp. 38–45; Gavillot, *Essai sur les Droits des Européens*, pp. 27–101, 120–2.

⁵ Ratti-Menton to Soult (29 February, no. 16) MREA:TAD, pp. 1–2. (My page numbering; the original documents in this file are not paginated – JF.)



FIG. 2. Father Thomas and his servant. This illustration, published in 1891, was probably reproduced from an original of 1840.

simply disappeared. Nothing was disturbed inside the building and robbery of the monastery could therefore be discounted as a motive.

On Friday, Jean-Baptiste Beaudin, who served as both dragoman and chancellor of the French consulate, went to inform the governor-general of Syria, Sherif Pasha, of the disappearance of the two men

and made him party to the suspicions which had become attached to the Jewish sect. These suspicions, I have to say, were by the minute taking on the unhappy appearance of reality. Reports reached me hour after hour which all agreed remarkably that Father Thomas had entered the Jewish quarter, while no one came forward to give evidence that he had been seen anywhere else after sunset. Here it is important to note that this missionary had lived in Damascus for more than thirty-two years and that, according to the Muslims, he had vaccinated between twelve and fifteen thousand children of their religion; with his being so well known as this, it would have been impossible for him to have gone through other quarters of the town without anybody, Muslim or Christian, noticing him.⁶

What is more, according to their own testimony, two witnesses (Greeks) had seen "seven or eight people with their faces half covered by handkerchiefs walking fast down the main street" of the Jewish quarter. One of them, a young man, was overheard asking Father Thomas's servant, who was only a few steps away, where he was heading and he replied: "I'm going to bring my master back home."

With the scene of the crime more or less known, it was evident that the range to be covered by the investigations had narrowed; and there was reason to hope, as in fact proved to be the case, that with a prompt effort, an appropriate degree of severity, and a constant surveillance of the means employed by the leading Jews to guarantee collusion, it would not take long to apprehend those guilty.⁷

The governor-general authorized Ratti-Menton to conduct house searches and make arrests with the aid of the local police but, even though the floor was dug up in many Jewish homes, the initial inquiries led nowhere. Matters took a turn for the better only when Muhammed el-Telli (a Muslim familiar with life in the Jewish quarter) was released from prison, where he was being held for debt, in exchange for "the promise that he would work hard to put us on the tracks of the criminals within a few days." And, indeed, by Sunday, 9 February, "a barber and three other Jews from the lower class [*classe du peuple*]" had been arrested as the result of el-Telli's efforts.⁸

Suspicion came to concentrate on the barber, Solomon Halek, because the notice put up by Father Thomas on the synagogue door had been moved and was found, on the 8th, high up on the wall next to the barber's shop. He was held for three days of questioning at the French consulate to no avail. "The obstinate silence of the man left me no choice but to return him to the

⁶ Ibid., pp. 3-4. ⁷ Ibid., pp. 4-5. ⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

ordinary jurisdiction"⁹ (meaning to interrogation by Sherif Pasha and his subordinates).

Under the pressure of questioning, he then declared that on the 5th of this month, a half an hour after sunset, Murad, who is a Jew and is the servant of David Harari, the merchant, came at his master's bidding to look for him in his shop; that when he went to Harari's house he found a group of people there made up of the three Harari brothers; their uncle; Joseph Leniado, and two rabbis, Moses Abu el-Afieh and Moses Salonikli; and that when he was brought into one of the rooms, he saw Father Thomas stretched out on the raised part of the floor, his arms tied behind his back and his mouth gagged. He was told that *he had to kill [expédiér] that man*, but he refused to undertake the operation pleading a lack of courage.¹⁰

He was then allowed to leave with a promise of one thousand piastres to keep his mouth shut, as well as with one of Father Thomas's notices to put up.

The next step, of course, was to arrest the men named by the barber, but they insisted that they knew absolutely nothing about the matter. All that Murad el-Fatal, David Harari's servant, would admit was that he had indeed been sent to fetch Solomon from his shop, but he had not gone back with him, and that was the sum total of his knowledge.

Two weeks of stalemate, surveyed somewhat cursorily in Ratti-Menton's report, now set in. He mentioned that Murad el-Fatal, apparently intimidated by the most prominent Jew in Damascus (Raphael Farhi), at one point retracted his story; that he had, therefore, had Farhi placed in preventive detention; and that he had also gone to see the governor-general in order to thank him for "the laudable zeal" with which he was conducting the case. At the same time, though, he complained about the laxity of the chief of police, whom "a public outcry" accused of "letting himself be bought by the Jews."¹¹

Early on the morning of 28 February, the consul and the dragoman received an urgent summons to the palace (the serail), where Sherif Pasha announced that during the night the barber had corrected his testimony, making a full confession. He confirmed what he had said earlier, but now admitted that he had remained at David Harari's house and "assisted in the murder of Father Thomas." He stated that

he had pulled his head up by the beard in order to facilitate the flow of blood into a copper basin; that he had stripped him of all his clothes which were burnt; and that the body, then still in one piece, was carried into a neighboring room. . . . In the meantime, Harari's servant had

⁹ Ibid., p. 6. ¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 6-7. ¹¹ Ibid., p. 10.

returned to the house and was put to work with the barber on cutting Father Thomas up. They then smashed the skull and pounded the bones to pieces on the marble stone of the courtyard. Finally, under the cover of darkness, they went and threw all that remained of the flesh and the bones into one of the conduits in the quarter.¹²

Murad el-Fatal at first denied his alleged role in the events, but was persuaded to admit that it was indeed the truth when the barber said to him, "*Don't be afraid to talk; I have confessed everything.*"¹³ Interrogated separately, their stories agreed. Each in turn was taken to David Harari's house, where blood stains were found, and then on to the conduit, where fragments of a skull and pieces of bone were discovered. "In the many criminal cases which I have encountered," wrote Ratti-Menton (who had studied in the faculty of law in Paris), "I do not recall any that produced so exact a matching in the details provided by the authors of the given crime."¹⁴

With the murder case thus solved, there still remained "the social question": to ascertain

whether it is true that the Jews, as accused by the public [*la voix publique*], employ human blood in the celebration of their religious mysteries. Well, it is with real distress that, bit by bit, I have had to discard my scepticism in the face of the evidence. Questioned by me on the matter, Harari's servant replied that he had heard talk of a custom among his co-religionists which involves taking human blood to mix with the flour for the Passover dough. The initiates distribute it among themselves; but he added that ordinary people are not admitted into the initiation of this terrible mystery.¹⁵

So far, continued Ratti-Menton, this religious aspect of the case had not been confirmed by the others, but three of the suspects (including a rabbi, Moses Abu el-Afieh) had admitted to taking part in the murder. According to one testimony, that of Isaac Harari, the blood once collected had been given into the hands of Abu el-Afieh.

Concluding his report on what he called "one of the most awful calamities ever witnessed by the city of Damascus," the consul wrote that the governor-general was expected to pronounce judgment and to impose "the penalty on these people which I believe should be exemplary" (a reference, of course, to the death sentence). The case, after all, had very serious implications:

Even in the periods of the greatest anarchy, and even amidst the fanaticism of the Muslims, the few foreigners resident in Damascus have been treated with respect. For thirty-two years, Father Thomas moved

¹² Ibid., pp. 10-11. ¹³ Ibid., p. 11. ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 12. ¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 12-13.

about without danger through all the quarters of this city exercising his charitable mission. And now, three months after the arrival here of one of His Majesty's consuls, the Jews have dared to attack people under the direct protection of the consulate. This is a challenge thrown down against the tutelary powers of His Majesty's government and for this reason – as well as because of the outrageous assault on humanity represented by these satanic [*diaboliques*] sacrifices – it is essential to subject these sectarians of the Jewish religion to a salutary terror. It is the prejudice of wild beasts which produced the crime; and it is essential to strike them by striking at those hideous prejudices.¹⁶

Concluding his report, Ratti-Menton wrote that minutes were being made of the cross-examination and a copy would be forwarded to Paris as soon as a translation was ready.

The bones found in the conduit in the Jewish quarter were submitted for examination to four European and seven local doctors. They all agreed that they were human and signed statements to that effect. Moreover, there appeared to be evidence linking the remains directly to Father Thomas. Fragments of black material with a red band running through them and some hair on a piece of skin looked clearly, it was decided, as though they came from the monk's cap and tonsure respectively. The Austrian consul, Caspar Merlato, signed a statement on 3 March declaring that he had examined "the pieces of a small black skullcap which clearly looked to me to have come from that always worn by the above-named monk, now deceased."¹⁷

On 2 March a funeral was held to inter the remains. Overseeing the entire proceedings was Father Francis of Ploaghe, who like Thomas was a Capuchin monk from Sardinia and who had been sent from Beirut to replace the missing man. In a letter written three days later, he described the event (here transcribed from the translation in the *Times*). A double coffin was used,

the bones were enclosed therein, then covered over with black velvet, and we carried them from the consul's house to the Church of the Holy Land [*Terra Sancta*], which is most spacious. All the clergy of Damascus accompanied the coffin; the Greek Catholic priests bore it; the English, French, and Austrian consuls assisted at the ceremony. The streets were thronged with people and . . . the janissaries could hardly clear the way. . . . I myself performed the mass. . . . The [French] consul asked for a funeral oration to be pronounced, and Father Joseph, curate of the Maronites, undertook that office. . . . We [then] took in procession

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 14–15. ¹⁷ Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, p. 118.

the shrine of our brother to the church of our order. . . . According to the consul's desire, a suitable tomb will be erected . . . and an epitaph will perpetuate the remembrance of his death.¹⁸

With the primary case thus completed, attention could turn to the disappearance of Ibrahim Amara, and a major breakthrough was made there without any delay. According to the minutes of the cross-examination, Murad el-Fatal presented the key evidence on 29 February. Urged to explain where he had been in the interval between summoning the barber and returning home (calculated as a period of two hours), he finally said: "The truth is that my master [David Harari] sent me to Meir Farhi, Murad Farhi and Aaron Stambuli to ask them to keep a careful watch for Father Thomas's servant. If he were to come looking for Thomas, they were to make sure that he did not go to raise the alarm and have the affair discovered."¹⁹ As he carried this message around, he found two other men, likewise anxiously awaiting the outcome of events, at the homes of the conspirators: Aslan (a son of Raphael Farhi) and Isaac Picciotto.

Orders were given at once, of course, for the arrest of the five men named in this testimony. By now, however, a large number of the Jews in the city had gone into hiding and it proved possible at first only to find Isaac Picciotto. As we shall describe (in chap. 5) Picciotto's interrogation turned out to be a major stumbling block in the progress of the case, but it did not bring it to a halt. Aslan Farhi's hiding place was discovered about ten days later, and on 19 March he provided a full confession.

In the meantime, Murad el-Fatal had again been persuaded to provide more information and he now stated that he himself had taken part in the murder of Ibrahim Amara. Thus, basing himself on the evidence of two eyewitnesses, who were also self-confessed participants, the French consul could send in his second report (still addressed to Sault) on 24 March. In this letter (which, for reasons to be explained later, was more sober in tone than the first) he added some more details about the case of Father Thomas before going on to that of his servant.

Moses Abu el-Afieh, wrote Ratti-Menton, had now admitted that Thomas's blood had been given to him, but he had then passed it on to the chief rabbi of the Damascus community, Jacob Antebi. What is more, it was the chief rabbi who had initiated the entire enterprise. Ten or fifteen days before the murder, Antebi had said to Abu el-Afieh: "*To fulfil what is required by our religious precepts, we need some blood; I have spoken with the Harari brothers, as the operation should take place in their house. They have given me their*

¹⁸ "Father Thomas," *Times* (9 May), p. 6.

¹⁹ "Traduction du Journal Arabe concernant l'Assassinat du R^d Père Thomas" FO 78/410, p. 155 (cf. Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, p. 127; there are minor variations between these two versions of the judicial protocols).

promise to do it. It is essential that you should be there."²⁰ Abu el-Afieh's lengthy testimony describing the death of Father Thomas was committed to writing, signed by him, and witnessed by Raphael Farhi.

As for the second murder, it turned out that, in addition to the five men originally mentioned, Joseph Farhi (a brother of Raphael) and Jacob Abu el-Afieh (Moses' brother) were also present when Amara was killed. Picciotto and Aslan Farhi, wrote the French consul,

each held him by a leg; the rabbi Aaron Stambuli pinned him down with a knee in his stomach; [and] Harari's servant [el-Fatal] had him by the head. While one of the others held the basin, two people seized hold of him by his middle and Murad Farhi, the richest banker in the city, cut the victim's throat.²¹

Following up the early evidence given, a search had been made on 7 March in the water conduit flowing under the latrines in Meir Farhi's home (where the murder allegedly took place) and it led to the discovery of "human bones and a shoe recognized as belonging to the servant by his brother."²²

The Count de Ratti-Menton included some personal comments in his report. He cast doubt on the assertion that Father Thomas's servant had been killed in order to prevent his raising the alarm; rather "it was no doubt part of that religious scheme worked out in accordance with the regulations of the chief rabbi." Moreover,

there is one thing which it is essential to note; in both of the homicides, the number of the principal murderers was *seven*; in both of the homicides, *three* rabbis were present. The blood of both the victims was collected in the same way in bottles for the purposes of conservation.²³

When one turns from Ratti-Menton's reports to the minutes of the interrogation conducted in February and March, it again emerges clearly that the ritual aspects of the alleged murders were the focus of much attention. The basins used to collect the blood were copper; the bottles into which it was later poured were white. Both murders, it was claimed, were conducted shortly after nightfall and in brightly lit rooms. In order to facilitate the free flow of the blood, the victim's head and neck were held over the edge of the low platforms that customarily skirt walls in ceremonial rooms (diwans) in the Middle East.

The protocols of the cross-examination – which was both investigation and trial rolled into one – ran to hundreds of pages, but the following two extracts will serve to illustrate the thrust of much of the questioning. One exchange between Sherif Pasha and Murad el-Fatal reads thus:

²⁰ Ratti-Menton to Sault (24 March, no. 19) MREA:TAD, p. 22. ²¹ Ibid., p. 29.

²² Ibid., p. 26. ²³ Ibid., pp. 25–6.

Question: "What did you do with the blood? And who took it?"

Answer: "As I did not stay till the end, I do not know who took the blood; there was a large white bottle on the edge of the platform . . . which was to be filled with the blood."

Question: "I do not believe that these people, who were busy with the servant's murder, would have prepared a bottle in advance. It would have been enough to keep the blood in the basin until the operation was over. If you saw the bottle, you must have seen who poured the blood; confess the truth."

Answer: "The truth is that Aaron Stambuli poured the blood into the bottle which he held in his hand; he used a new funnel of white metal, the kind used by the oil dealers. It was Joseph Menahem Farhi who lifted the basin and tipped it towards the bottle. When it was full, Aaron Stambuli gave it to Jacob Abu el-Afieh. I left them at that point."²⁴

Or, again, here is an extract from the session on 2 March, when Moses Abu el-Afieh was being interrogated:

Question: "But what purpose does the blood serve? Is it for making the consecrated bread for your holidays and does everybody eat it?"

Answer: "The blood used in the consecrated bread is not divided out to everybody; it is only the Hakhams and wise men who are given it. . . . On the eve of Passover, the other Hakhams send him [the chief rabbi, Antebi] the flour and he makes the bread with his own hands; with nobody watching he mixes the blood with the flour."

Question: "Is the blood sent elsewhere, or is it kept, rather, for the Jews of Damascus?"

Answer: "The Hakham Jacob [Antebi] told me that he has sent it to Baghdad, too."

Question: "Was the plot designed specifically to get hold of a priest or would any other Christian have done as well?"

Answer: "The aim of the plot was to capture a Christian, but as Father Thomas became available, he was killed."²⁵

The many exchanges of this type when taken together suggest that both sides – the authorities and the accused – were groping their way toward creating a fully coherent tale of ritual murder. (And, as we shall describe later, the uneven dialogue between the strong and the weak continued for a long time behind the scenes, too, as attention came to center on the Talmud and the rabbinical texts.) At least initially, the Jews, Christians, and Muslims involved in the interrogations had, it seems, little specific knowledge when it came to the long and detailed history of ritual-murder (or "blood-libel") trials.

²⁴ Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 151–2.

²⁵ FO 70/410, pp. 84–5 (cf. Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, p. 45).

Over hundreds of years, starting with the case of William of Norwich in 1144 and up until the seventeenth century in the German-speaking lands and the eighteenth, or even the nineteenth, century in Eastern Europe, the charges brought against the Jews had become largely standardized. A key characteristic was the fact that the victim was nearly always a prepubescent boy.²⁶ In reality, the murders were presumably most often the result of sadistic crimes or domestic violence, but it was assumed at the time that the Jews required the blood of an innocent and pure Christian child for their devilish practices. Given the centrality in Christian belief of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb, and of the eucharistic ceremony in which bread and wine become the flesh and blood of the Savior, it is easier, perhaps, to understand how the popular imagination could have ascribed such rites to the Jews.²⁷

With the gradual change in standards of evidence normally demanded by the courts in Central – and eventually in Eastern – Europe, the number of trials and investigations declined and the set tradition lost much of its uniformity. The cases (few of which reached the courts after 1772) became less uniform. Increasingly, from the late sixteenth century on, Jews were also accused of killing girls and even adult men and women. In his fascinating study of the ritual-murder myth in Reformation Germany, R. Po-chia Hsia describes how in the rapidly changing climate of opinion in the late sixteenth century it was ever more difficult to maintain the long-familiar patterns of judicial prosecutions. “The ritual murder discourse was beginning to lose its former coherence, its narrative structure, and its power of persuasion.”²⁸

As the investigation in Damascus dragged on for some two months, it took on its own specific character. The case clearly differed from the classic trials not only in that it involved two adult men (one sixty-two years old) but also in the emphasis that was placed on circumstantial and forensic evidence. The witnesses, even though (so the official reports claimed) kept strictly apart, still corroborated each other’s damning testimony. Remains of the bodies had been found as the result of information supplied by the accused and

²⁶ On the origins and development of the ritual-murder accusation, e.g.: Strack, *The Jew and Human Sacrifice*; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, pp. 124–55; Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, pp. 275–305; idem, *History, Religion and Antisemitism*, pp. 195–298; Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, pp. 41–4, 242–64; S. Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, pp. 264–375; Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*.

²⁷ For a major study of the eucharistic ceremony: Rubin, *The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*. Some Jewish historians have suggested that Jewish rituals and ceremonies – or, alternatively, acts of collective suicide – may have contributed to the image of the Jews as committed to human sacrifice, e.g.: the recent controversy in the Israeli historical journal *Zion*: Yuval, “Hanakam vehakalah”; Fleischer, “Yahasei nozrim-yehudim”; Breuer, “Dimyono shel hahistoriyon;” and Yuval, “Nikmat hashem.”

²⁸ Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, p. 204. In the effort to achieve the right balance between continuity and discontinuity, Hsia later appears to qualify this statement, writing that even after the decline of the trials in Germany from the late sixteenth century on, “the discourse of ritual murder retained much of its cohesion and force of persuasion” (ibid., p. 228).

(allegedly) could be identified by articles of clothing. This, after all, was the mid-nineteenth century; the prestige of scientific method stood high; and the minutes of the investigation were prepared for despatch to Paris in the French consulate.

Again, the pattern of self-confessed religious customs had to be worked out largely from scratch. It did not take long, of course, to agree that the blood was needed for use in the unleavened Passover bread (matzot). Of all the innumerable theories used over the centuries to explain why the blood was required, that explanation had long become the most entrenched. Again, the conception that this religious mystery cult was the monopoly of a hidden coterie of rabbis with international connections may well likewise have come down from the past.

But the idea that seven leaders of the community had to be present – servants and other members of the lower classes did not count – was new. And so was the idea that among the seven there had to be three rabbis. Similarly, in the long list of such cases, there was no line of precedent prescribing that the victims had to be suspended in that particular way or that their blood had to be collected in those particular ceremonial vessels.

What we are witnessing here, then, was not the invention of a tradition, but rather its reinvention or reinvigoration. The tradition was alive not in its well-defined classical form, but as a much vaguer memory in the collective psyche of the Christian community in Damascus. During the month of February that tradition was revived, the details were, in large part, invented.

The mechanics and motivations of the case

During the first week following the disappearance of Father Thomas and Ibrahim Amara, the Jews in Damascus sought to save themselves by a judicious combination of countermeasures, but it did not take long until they found themselves overwhelmed. When news of the case eventually reached the Jews in Europe, it only served to reinforce their preconceived idea of the community in Damascus as a remote outpost cut off from civilization, surviving precariously amid Oriental fanaticism and rendered passive by its ignorance of the outside world.

It is certainly true that very few Europeans visited Damascus. Until the conquest of Syria by Muhammed Ali, it had been dangerous to appear in the city, known as a bastion of Islamic conservatism, in European dress. To reach it involved not only many weeks of most uncomfortable travel, and the danger of bandits in the Lebanese mountains, but also a high risk of infection by a variety of deadly diseases that went under the general name of the "plague." The traveler frequently found himself confined for weeks in special quarters (lazarets) set aside for quarantine in which he was not only forced to expend large sums of money but was also particularly liable, because of the crowded and unsanitary conditions, to catch some fatal illness.¹ However few the Europeans, in general, to reach the city, so many fewer were the European Jews. Even Moses Montefiore, the persistent traveler, did not go to Damascus on either of his two early visits to the Middle East, in 1827 and 1839.

In many ways, though, the reality did not match the image. The Jewish community in Damascus had a very long history that had never been broken by those expulsions so characteristic of European states and cities. Composed originally of Arabic-speaking Jews, it had since absorbed a large number of Spanish descent (whose language had been and sometimes still was Ladino) as well as more recent arrivals from elsewhere, particularly Italy. The European (or "Frank") Jews had their own synagogues, but by 1840 the entire community was primarily Arabic-speaking. As subjects of the Turkish empire since the sixteenth century, the Jews here as in other Ottoman cities had been granted a significant degree of communal autonomy within the

¹ Eg.: Bowring, *Observations on the Oriental Plague*.

millet system and this framework remained in place under Muhammed Ali. The fact that the Jews had their own historic quarter in the city, adjacent to those of the Muslims and Christians, thus symbolized a measure of rootedness and permanence which was in marked contrast to the pariah status associated with the European ghettos.

True, Christians and Jews, as dhimmis, were by law and by tradition ranked far below the Muslims; they had to wear distinctive clothing; they could not ride horses or carry swords; they had no standing in the courts when testifying against Muslims; and they were subject to additional taxes. But within this system, the Ottoman authorities had tended to treat the Jews more favorably than the Christians.²

Estimates of the size of the Jewish population in Damascus in 1840 fluctuated wildly between some three thousand and twenty thousand people out of a total population of perhaps eighty thousand or one hundred thousand; the most recent scholarly estimate opts for five thousand.³ However, all observers agreed that although most of the community lived in great poverty and the Jewish quarter gave a general impression of squalor and dirt, there was still a significant group of Jews who played a major role as bankers and merchants in the life of the city. It also must be remembered that in 1840 Damascus was a city of some importance both financially, as the administrative capital of greater Syria, and commercially, as a transit point on the caravan route from Baghdad to Beirut. Given the fact that Anatolia had been cut off since 1833 by the makeshift frontier dividing the areas under Egyptian from those under Ottoman control (and that the Suez Canal was still in the distant future) this route had recently even gained in importance.

When in 1839 John Bowring, an expert on international trade (as well as a leading disciple of Jeremy Bentham), drew up his report on Syria for the British government, he emphasized the role of the Jews. In Damascus, he wrote, there were twenty-four "Hebrew houses occupied in foreign trade"⁴ with an estimated total capital of £160,000–180,000, while the twenty-nine Christian houses had only £45,000–59,000. (Some sixty-six Muslim firms had £200,000–250,000 between them.) In addition, over one hundred Jewish shopkeepers (with an average capital of £150–180) were involved in the sale, among other things, of imported British goods.

As was usual with important visitors from the West, Bowring, too, paid special attention to the exceptional role of the Farhi family, noting that two of its members (Murad and Nisim) had some £15,000 each involved in international trade. The Farhis, after all, had long become the stuff of

² Ma'oz, "Changes in the Position of the Jewish Communities," pp. 142–6; Landau and Ma'oz, "Yehudim velo yehudim."

³ E.g.: Dubnow, *Weltgeschichte*, vol. 9, p. 308; Barnai, "Hayehudim baimperiyah ha'otomanit," vol. 2, pp. 197, 209; Harel, "Temurot beyahadut Suriyah," p. 25.

⁴ Bowring, *Report on the Commercial Statistics of Syria*, p. 94.



FIG. 3. Jewish quarter of Damascus

legend.⁵ From 1790 on, Haim Farhi, in particular, had achieved fame as the financial adviser to three of the pashas of the province (pashalik) of Acre, or St. Jean d'Acre as it was usually known at the time. For all intents and purposes, he had served as prime minister under Ahmed Pasha al-Jazzar (until 1804), under Suleiman Pasha (until 1818), and under Abdallah Pasha

⁵ On the Farhis: Philipp, "The Farhi Family"; Ma'oz, "Harek'a le'alilat Damesek," pp. 29–31.

(until 1820). When Suleiman was appointed governor of Damascus, too, in 1810, Haim Farhi's power and wealth were seen as immense. A contemporary observer commented that "a Jew is ruling over Moslems and Christians, high and low, near and far without any limits."⁶ Among other things, the successful defense of Acre against Napoleon's siege of 1798 was partially attributed to his leadership.

However, given the frequently anarchic conditions of the period and the arbitrary nature of power as exerted by the Turkish pashas, high office carried very high risks. Al-Jazzar had Haim Farhi imprisoned for a time in 1794, ordering him to be blinded in one eye; one of his ears and part of his nose were also, it seems, cut off. In 1820 Abdallah, who had been appointed on Farhi's recommendation, had him drowned. Haim Farhi's fame was such that news of his death even created a stir among the Jews of the tsarist empire. A service was conducted in his memory by the *maskilim* in Vilna and a long poem written for the occasion in Hebrew by Zvi Hirsh Katznellenbogen was published there in 1825.⁷

The family never regained the power and prominence associated with Haim Farhi. Nonetheless, his brother, Raphael, succeeded in winning the post of chief financial adviser (or *saraf*) to the pasha of Damascus in the 1827–32 period. And even when losing that post with the arrival of Muhammed Ali's regime, he still obtained another prestigious position as a member of the commercial tribunal (the *majlis al-shura*).⁸ European visitors to the city counted a courtesy call to his home as almost *de rigueur* and they were astonished at its palatial proportions and Oriental opulence. The main quadrangle was said to be some fifty yards across with a fountain playing at its center and with orange trees up to forty feet high casting a welcome shade over much of the marble pavement. And there was another fountain, this one with water shooting out of eight spigots, in the vast reception hall, which stood twenty-three feet high and overpowered the visitor with the mass of brightly colored carpets and hangings covering the walls.⁹

In sum, there was much that was paradoxical in the view of the Damascus community as perceived by the Jews in Europe. While the West knew little about the Syrian Jews, there was a group among them who knew much about the West, was involved in international trade, and in many cases spoke Italian or Spanish as well as Arabic and Turkish. Whereas the Jews in Europe, the heartland of civilization (as they, too, usually saw it), were still hemmed in, at least east of the Rhine, by a complex array of legal and social barriers, the Jews in Damascus enjoyed a large measure of acceptance, as one among the major ethnoreligious groups that by tradition made up the city. They

⁶ Qu. in *ibid.*, p. 30. ⁷ Katznellenbogen, *Megilat sefer*.

⁸ Hofman, "The Administration of Syria," pp. 330–1. ⁹ *Morning Chronicle* (1 March 1841).

not only ran their own communal affairs but, to a degree unimaginable in contemporary Europe, were involved in public administration and high politics.

Given all that, though, they were living in a society where the fate of the individual and even of the group ultimately depended on the whim of whichever despot was in control at a given moment. The concept of the rule of law, of a *Rechtsstaat*, of the inviolability of property and person, which was gaining ground fast in Europe, applied in Syria only to that tiny privileged group of people who somehow or other had won the status of protégés – the protection of a European state. It is thus not surprising that, in the hope of somehow warding off the dangers of expropriation or pillage, Raphael Farhi, like the other rich Jews in Damascus, hid his home behind an utterly nondescript exterior; to reach it, one had to go through a mean-looking and neglected passageway. Many such homes had well-concealed hiding places built into them.¹⁰

Events moved so fast following the disappearance of Father Tommaso and Ibrahim Amara that it left the Jewish leadership in Damascus very little time to coordinate any effective response. Nonetheless, they tried a number of different ways to head off the impending disaster. Thus, a few days after the first arrests on 9 February, a delegation (made up of the Harari brothers; Aaron Stambuli; Murad, Joseph, and Meir Farhi; and Shahade Lisbona) went to the French consulate in order to offer a reward for information leading to the arrest of those guilty of the crime. The suggestion was accepted and thirty notices were distributed throughout the city announcing that the “Hebrew nation”¹¹ was ready to pay fifty thousand piastres to that end.¹² Promissory notes for the sum were deposited with the governor-general and the delegation asked for one month’s grace while efforts were made to solve the mystery.

More hope was probably invested in lobbying and other attempts to exert influence. A group, including some of the same people, went to see Hanna Bahri Bey, the chief financial official in the government and the right-hand man of Sherif Pasha, with a request for help. But he replied that “it was not a matter concerning him and that we ourselves would have to arrange matters.”¹³ In contrast, it appears that the Jews could count on Ali Agha, the chief of police or, as the British consul, Nathaniel Werry put it in one of his reports, “He is a bon vivant and in his habits was always great friends with

¹⁰ Interrogation of M. Abu el-Afieh (25 June) MREA:TAD, p. 372.

¹¹ Werry’s report (18 August, enclosure no. 10) FO 78/410, p. 239.

¹² Fifty thousand piastres was worth approximately five hundred pounds, a very large sum at the time.

¹³ FO 78/410, p. 97 (cf. Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, p. 62).

the Jews, passed much of his time with them [and in the past] had been favored in his money and mercantile transactions by the then powerful family of the Farhis. . . . It is generally reported that in the [case] of Father Thomas he rendered services to the Jews."¹⁴

Whether or not, as alleged by Ratti-Menton, Ali Agha was paid to do what he could to slow the momentum of the case, there is no question that attempts were made in these early days (as later) to buy off various people whose word might carry weight. By the nature of things, such efforts usually left no trace, but one instance did come to light. During the visit to the French consulate, Shahade Lisbona slipped one of Ratti-Menton's closest advisers in the case, Sibli Ayub, five hundred piastres hidden in a piece of paper. Ayub apparently chose to reveal this fact and Lisbona was later interrogated in the French consulate about the attempted bribe.¹⁵ Meanwhile, particularly well-placed members of the Jewish community, such as Raphael Farhi and Isaac Picciotto, made a point of spending as much time as possible at the governor-general's palace and at the French consulate in the hope of gleaning useful information and also, it seems, in order to encourage the prisoners to stand fast. (It was on these grounds, as already noted, that Raphael Farhi was arrested on 14 February.)

The most dramatic and, ultimately, the most tragic initiative in the early days was undoubtedly that undertaken by Jacob Antebi, the fifty-three-year-old chief rabbi of Damascus. In two accounts that he gave later (a verbal testimony delivered under oath in August and a written statement in Hebrew drawn up, it seems, toward the end of the year or in 1841) he explained what had happened. On 10 February, or possibly the day after, he was called in to see the governor-general, who told him preemptorily that Father Thomas had disappeared in the Jewish quarter and that he expected the chief rabbi personally to see to it that the missing man was produced.

As Antebi described it, even though he was on his knees, he insisted on arguing back as Sherif Pasha stood infuriated and poised to hit him. "Is the Jewish quarter closed off?" he asked. "It is open on every side and thousands of people go in and go out day and night; and so how can the law hold us responsible?" He had no troops at his disposal to back up any investigation, and he bitterly quoted the words of the Bible, "Am I my brother's keeper?"¹⁶ At this point, Sherif Pasha struck a blow at his head, saying:

It's obvious to me that you killed him to take his blood and that that's your custom. Don't you know about the expulsion from Spain and other expulsions, and about the thousands of Jews killed because of this issue?

¹⁴ Werry's report (18 August, enclosure no. 7) FO 78/410, p. 233.

¹⁵ Interrogation of Lisbona (27 March) FO 78/410, pp. 94-7.

¹⁶ Elhalil, "Te'udah mekorit hashuvah," p. 36.

And yet you still stick to this custom of killing a lot of people secretly!
And I have sworn that now I too shall kill you without number until not
even two Jews are left here.¹⁷

Sent away, Antebi called together a large meeting in his synagogue and in a gesture of desperation opened the ark, exposing the scrolls of the Law to view. A true catastrophe (*gezerah kashah*), he said, was hanging over them and he threatened anyone who had relevant information, and did not come forward, with excommunication (*herem*). This somber ceremony had its effect and word came back to him that a young Jew (apparently named Isaac Yavo), who made a living selling tobacco in the Ramele market, a long way from the Jewish quarter, had seen Father Thomas and his servant there walking out of town on the evening of 5 February. He had even spoken to them. Realizing at once that it might prove extremely dangerous for the young man to make such a statement to the authorities, Antebi asked Isaac Picciotto to find out from the French consul whether it would be safe to send him to testify. Even though Ratti-Menton insisted that there was nothing to worry about, Antebi was still not satisfied – the man's mother was afraid for her son – and only after renewed assurances from Picciotto did he finally send him to the consul on 12 or 13 February.¹⁸

He was held for some three days in the consulate, where he gave his evidence; but then, instead of releasing him, Ratti-Menton delivered him to the palace, where he was interrogated by Sherif Pasha. There the young man reiterated his story. How the governor-general reacted, he himself later explained, and his words were summarized as follows in an internal report for the French government:

As the place where this young man stated that he had seen the monk is situated in the west of the town while the Jewish quarter is in the east, he [Sherif Pasha] realized that he was therefore lying; he asked him [the young man] whether he had not been coached by anybody, but he denied it. He was then flogged; he confessed nothing and was taken to the prison where he died.¹⁹

According to one usually accurate contemporary source, Yavo had been given five thousand lashes, and "the Jews had great difficulty in conducting the customary purification of the corpse . . . since the flesh fell entirely off from the bones."²⁰ In a letter to Thiers on 7 May, the Count de Ratti-Menton made the following comment on the episode: "This act of brutality by the soldiers [*kavasses*] was by no means intended by the pasha who under-

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 37. ¹⁸ Interrogation of Antebi (11 August) MREA:TAD, pp. 725–6.

¹⁹ MREA:TAD, pp. 510–11 (note on the "Marchand de Tumbak").

²⁰ Salomons, *An Account of the Recent Persecution*, p. 11.

stood that this individual, who had obviously been giving false evidence, could have revealed the names of the people who had suborned him."²¹

The death of this twenty-two-year-old man was a significant milestone in the development of the case. It was the most brutal of the many signs accumulating in the second week that the powers-that-be would stop at nothing in order to block off other lines of investigation and to bring the affair to a satisfactory conclusion. Among other things, the governor-general now ordered the incarceration of the boys in one of the Jewish schools, some sixty in all, from five to twelve years of age, and threatened to have them killed unless they and their mothers agreed to reveal the truth. They were held in two rooms of the palace for weeks on a diet of bread and water.²² At the same time, there was a wave of arrests involving people not accused of participation in the crime – including all the Jewish butchers and grave-diggers – many of whom were subjected to violent flogging. (Estimates of the numbers involved vary from fifteen to three hundred, with seventy as the most reliable figure.)²³ It was at this juncture that many Jews decided to go into hiding or flee the city altogether.

In his reports of February and March to Marshall Soult, the French consul made no mention of the violent measures being employed, referring only (as we have seen) to the application of "an appropriate degree of severity." Obviously, though, torture was the fuel that alone provided the investigation with its momentum. In this respect, the Damascus affair was essentially no different from hundreds of other such chapters that occur throughout medieval and modern history, involving the ritual-murder cases, of course, but also people accused wholesale of satanism (heretics, witches) or treason (the most notable instances in recent years being the Stalinist show trials). For varying reasons, depending on the time and place, brute force was cloaked in the mantle of justice in order to prove imagined crimes.

In Damascus, again following a familiar pattern, the application of extreme ferocity alternated with moments of calm when the whip was replaced by soft words and tempting promises. It was this dual technique that had produced the first major breaks in the case: the confessions first of Solomon Halek, the barber, and then of Murad al-Fatal, David Harari's servant, both of whom were about twenty years old. Kept initially imprisoned at the French consulate, where he denied everything, the barber was then taken to the governor-general's palace and subjected to extreme physical pressure.

²¹ Ratti-Menton to Thiers (7 May, no. 25) MREA:TAD, p. 38.

²² See e.g.: Werry's report (18 August, enclosure no. 6) FO 78/410, p. 230; Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 213–14; letter from Damascus Jews to Constantinople, [Montefiore] *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 209.

²³ Werry's report (18 August, enclosure no. 6) FO 78/410, p. 230; Alfandari to Lehren (15 March), *AI*, p. 215; *Times* (13 August), p. 3.

On four different occasions he was flogged on the soles of his feet, thighs, and buttocks with hundreds of lashes from the kurbash (a whip usually made of hippopotamus hide).²⁴ He was also tortured, as Werry described, "by the application of a tourniquet or common cord round his head," twisted so hard that the cord broke.²⁵

In between these sessions, Muhammed el-Telli tried to talk him into a confession. It was no doubt obvious to el-Telli that this prisoner – and the same would apply a few days later to Murad el-Fatal – was particularly vulnerable. It was assumed that because of their youth, their bodies would be able to survive an immense degree of violence without their actually dying (although, as the example of the tobacco man showed, it was hard to be sure). Moreover, coming as they did from the lowest levels of a highly hierarchical and status-conscious society,²⁶ they could possibly be induced, in the last resort, to implicate others far above them on the social scale. After all, without the money to bribe the guards and officials (a standard practice) they were particularly isolated and helpless.

From testimony given many months later, it is possible to catch a glimpse of how the accusations of murder were extended to include the upper echelons of the Jewish community. Asked if he had made the charges out of hatred, the barber replied simply: "No, I have no connection to these people who are of a higher class than me and have done me no harm."²⁷ However, el-Telli gave a much more detailed account. The barber had been promised the fifty-thousand-piastre reward and a full pardon in exchange for a confession, and had been told that if he refused, the governor-general "would know what to do." It was at that point, el-Telli recalled, that the barber had said to him: "Go to the important people in the quarter and they will settle everything"; and then, again, later: "Tell the pasha to seize the important people in our nation; those people know." When asked who they were, he replied: "You know them better than I do."²⁸

It is not known how the specific names of the accused in the two murder cases were finally produced, but it is worth noting that of the eight men who came to offer the reward, seven were later implicated; very possibly, by stepping forward at the crucial moment, they drew attention to themselves. From further evidence produced in the summer, it emerged that in the early days of the case, el-Telli had approached David Harari, whom he knew well (he was even described as his "friend"), and said to him: "Make sure that the

²⁴ Interrogation of Halek (24 June) MREA:TAD, p. 349.

²⁵ Werry's report (18 August, enclosure no. 6) FO 78/410, p. 228.

²⁶ On the extreme disparities of wealth and status in Damascus Jewry: Harel, "Temurot beyahadut Suriya," pp. 29–65.

²⁷ Interrogation of Halek (24 June) MREA:TAD, p. 350. 28.

²⁸ Interrogation of el-Telli (2 August) *ibid.*, pp. 713–14.

Jews give me money or I'll do them a bad turn." Harari had promised to pay him once the case had been satisfactorily settled, but would not do so then "for fear that it would be said that he had bought him." From this fact another Harari brother concluded that el-Telli had "coached Solomon the barber in revenge for the refusal of the money."²⁹

Picciotto, likewise, blamed el-Telli for implicating him in order to pay back an old slight. However, it should also be noted that of the fourteen men accused of primary responsibility for the two murders, no less than ten had been involved over the years in legal confrontations with Jean-Baptiste Beaudin, who had been acting on behalf of foreign firms (most of them Jewish) to collect long overdue debts.³⁰ All in all, it is probable that more than one man was responsible for naming the alleged murderers.

In reality, what was remarkable about the prolonged process of the interrogations was not that it often proved effective – nothing else was to be expected – but that, on the contrary, it turned out to be so difficult, and in some cases impossible, to extract the confessions. By finally agreeing to cooperate, Solomon Halek and Murad el-Fatal escaped some of the worst forms of torment, but the more obstinate the other prisoners proved, the more ferocious became the methods applied to break them down. An accurate report drawn up by George Wildon Pieritz, a Protestant missionary, who had arrived in Damascus on 30 March, listed the means of torture succinctly:

1. Flogging.
2. Soaking persons in large tanks of cold water in their clothes.
3. The head machine, by which eyes are pressed out of their sockets.
4. Tying up tender parts of the body and ordering soldiers to twist and horribly to dispose them into such contortions that the poor sufferers grow almost mad from pain.
5. Standing upright for three days, without being allowed any other posture, not even to lean against the walls; and when they would fall down, aroused up by bystanding sentinels with their bayonets.
6. Being dragged about in a large court by the ears until the blood gushed out.
7. Having thorns driven in between their nails and the flesh of fingers and toes.
8. Having fire set to their beards till their faces are singed.
9. Having candles lit under their noses, so that the flame arises up into the nostrils.³¹

²⁹ Interrogation of Aaron Harari (4 July) *ibid.*, pp. 489–90.

³⁰ Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 248–9.

³¹ Salomons, *An Account of the Recent Persecution*, pp. 46–7. (Also in *Times*, 4 July, pp. 6–7.)

For the sake of complete exactitude, it should perhaps be added that no prisoner actually lost the use of his eyes as the result of the tourniquets and that the use of candles and fire was, as the prisoners later testified, only a relatively minor element in their torture. As against this, though, it has to be noted that another three men died as a direct result of the violence inflicted upon them: Joseph Leniado, a man fifty years old (who, according to his widow, had been responsible "for feeding twenty mouths"³² until his death); Joseph Harari, an old man whose age was given variously as anything from sixty-five to eighty and was an uncle or cousin of the three brothers involved; and the watchman of the street in which David Harari's house was situated. Typically, given his lowly place in society, none of the reports provide the watchman's name or age.

One of the people who would later become most familiar with the case (the French diplomat, des Meloizes, who reached Damascus in June) made the perceptive comment that those prisoners "who suffered the most, made no confessions and accused nobody."³³ He was, no doubt, referring particularly to Jacob Antebi and Moses Salonicli. Somehow, they proved exceptions to the rule that eventually everybody can be broken down by torture. Salonicli, who was forty-three years old, was a rabbi by training but a merchant by profession and of modest means. Like the others, he was subjected to various types of violence, but he was made the special victim of one particular cruelty: reeds were inserted deep under his fingernails; many months later the fingers of both hands were still "deformed."³⁴

Even the official and carefully sanitized minutes of the judicial investigation permit us a glimpse into the resolute and stoic behavior of this man. Confronted, for example, with the evidence that Father Tommaso's watch had been consigned to him on the night of the murder, he obstinately insisted that he had seen "nothing and since our Festival of Tabernacles I have not been in David Harari's house, nor do I go around with them [the Hararis]; and I know nothing about this affair."³⁵ He had been at home with his family that night, but even though pressured under cross-examination he did not produce the names of any witnesses to reinforce his alibi. Many months later, it turned out that there had, in fact, been guests in the house, but Salonicli had kept this information to himself in order, as he then put it, "not to expose the witnesses to torture."³⁶ According to the notes that the Count de Ratti-Menton attached to the official minutes, the governor-

³² Esther Leniado to C. Merlato (23 April) MREA:TAD, p. 392.

³³ Interrogation of Antebi (8 July) *ibid.*, p. 522.

³⁴ Werry's report (18 August, enclosure no. 6) FO 78/410, p. 230.

³⁵ Interrogation of Salonicli (31 March) FO 78/410, p. 107; also in Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 76-7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, (4 July) MREA:TAD, p. 500.



FIG. 4. Street in Damascus

general had once said “affectionately” to Salonikli during a pause in the interrogation: “Musa, look, we are compatriots, and as such I have a particular regard for you; tell me the truth and I swear on the Koran that nothing shall be done to you.” Salonikli (who, like Sherif Pasha and Muhammed Ali, originated from the Balkans) had replied simply: “Your Excellency, I want to die in my own religion.”³⁷

For his part, Antebi in his report to Montefiore recounted in some detail the treatment to which he had been subjected. On Sunday, 1 March, he was brought through the streets on a donkey from the prison to the palace and found himself the object of furious curses and threats from the crowds lining the streets. The governor-general ordered the chief rabbi to produce the bottle containing Father Thomas’s blood, and when he could not do so ordered his head to be cut off. Soldiers with drawn swords and then Sherif Pasha’s cook with a butcher’s knife stood poised to decapitate him until word of a reprieve came; he was next thrown into a pool of freezing cold water (Damascus in winter can be very cold) and every time he came up for air, the soldiers hit at him with sticks. When he then tried to commit suicide by staying down at the bottom of the pool, the governor-general came running to have him pulled out at the last minute. Subsequently, he was flogged at

³⁷ Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 214–15.

least twice into a state of unconsciousness. Once when he rejected the offer of a pardon and a life pension to be received in the Holy Land in exchange for a confession, he was subjected to the tourniquet until the rope broke twice and "I dropped like a corpse before the whole crowd."³⁸ He was dragged around by a rope tied to his penis; tormented until he yet again lost consciousness as his genitals were crushed; and repeatedly tossed up into the air tied to two poles and left to come crashing down on the stone floor.

The fortitude shown by these two men, like all such examples of superhuman courage, cannot be explained in terms of rational behavioral patterns. And it is probable that they were inspired by a deep-rooted religious faith; the Jewish tradition preserves a special place in the communal memory for those who willingly accepted martyrdom (*kidush hashem*) rather than betray their beliefs. Certainly, observers such as Solzhenitsyn, who have given much thought to the way people react when subjected to extreme cruelty, have often concluded that men or women who can fall back on some solid rock of religious faith appear better able to come through the experience with their souls intact.³⁹

Although at least seven of the prisoners eventually agreed to testify that they had been involved in the murders, even they did not all prove to be very cooperative. Questioned about what had been done with the bottle of blood, Abu el-Afieh said at first that it was at David Harari's house, then at his own, and then at Antebi's; Aaron Harari replied on one day that it was at Abu el-Afieh's and a few days later concurred that it had been taken to Antebi's. Asked why his brothers were giving contradictory replies, Isaac Harari said it was because "they are afraid of being flogged or killed."⁴⁰ (A number of such inconvenient answers were somehow allowed to slip into the final version of the minutes.)

In his letter to Montefiore, Antebi reported that his refusal to join in the lies had made such an impression on Solomon Halek, that he adamantly refused to play any part in the reconstruction of the second – the Amara – murder case, "and prepared himself to be killed."⁴¹ For his part, Pieritz stated that two of the Harari brothers, when assured by the governor-general on 2 March that all he wanted were the real facts, said: "The truth is that we know of no murder; but if you will torture us again, we shall again return to our former deposition." And, Pieritz noted laconically, they were then "again tortured and again confessed themselves guilty."⁴²

³⁸ Elhalil, "Te'udah mekorit," p. 43.

³⁹ E.g.: Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 2 (New York: 1975), pp. 309–10, 623–4.

⁴⁰ Interrogation of Isaac Harari (29 February) FO 78/410, p. 83; Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, p. 43.

⁴¹ Elhalil, "Te'udah mekorit," p. 43. ⁴² Salomons, *An Account of the Recent Persecution*, p. 33.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that the pursuit of the case was made considerably easier by the fact that, as the pressure increased, preexisting divisions among the prisoners began to surface. Apart from the class gulf that divided the barber and David Harari's servant from the others, there was also a clear division between the two different extended families involved: the Hararis and the Farhis. It was probably not by chance that the first of the two cases involved the less powerful of the two clans. The Harari brothers, in Werry's estimate, were not nearly as wealthy as the Farhis; according to his information, the brothers probably had somewhere between one-quarter and one million piastres each, while Murad Farhi alone, he believed, had between 5 and 12 million.⁴³ All in all, while the Hararis had to bear the brunt of the investigation, the Farhis and those connected to them by marriage (such as Aaron Stambuli) managed either to escape altogether or, at least, to avoid being tortured. The one exception was the chief rabbi, one of whose daughters was married to Aslan Farhi.

The Harari brothers showed great solidarity among themselves, but there was no love lost between them and the rabbis; nor were the rabbis united among themselves. Asked (in June) about his relations with the Hararis, Abu el-Afieh said that he confined his visits to formal occasions, but when it came to the "parties for fun, soirées, business dealings – never." As for David Harari, "there is nothing between us but 'good day!' and 'good evening.' It is not that there is a difference in our social rank. We are of the same rank, but he is rich."⁴⁴ The chief rabbi (also testifying in the summer) was still more outspoken about David Harari whose

mode of conduct . . . has placed me in the position of continuously having to reprimand him. He has local dancing women and bad company brought into his house. I had him threatened with public excommunication. Because of that they [the Hararis] cut down their portion of my salary. He [David] even threatened to complain about me to the government.⁴⁵

And in the minutes of the formal investigation, Salonikli was recorded as saying of the Hararis: "They are liars. . . . They have left their religion."⁴⁶

⁴³ For the conflicting estimates of the personal wealth of the Jews accused of the murders: (i) Werry's report (18 August, enclosure no. 2) FO 78/410, pp. 203–6; (ii) the report, doubtless based on Beaudin's information, in Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, p. 250; (iii) the figures supplied from Damascus to Crémieux: AC, p. 107. Aaron Harari's wealth, for example, was given by Werry as between 62,500 and 250,000 francs (250,000 to 1 million piasters); by Beaudin as 625,000 francs (5,000 purses); and by Crémieux as between 60,000 and 75,000 francs (12,000 to 15,000 talaris). (There were approximately twenty-five French francs and approximately five U.S. dollars in one pound sterling.)

⁴⁴ Interrogation of M. Abu el-Afieh (25 June) MREA:TAD, p. 370.

⁴⁵ Interrogation of Antebi (8 July) *ibid.*, p. 523.

⁴⁶ Interrogation of Salonikli (1 April) FO 78/410, p. 108; Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, p. 78.



FIG. 5. Home of an affluent Damascus family

But there was also animosity between Abu el-Afieh and Antebi, as the latter explained:

His father was the chief rabbi before me. The nation wanted him dismissed and me put in his place, because they did not want a rich rabbi and I was poor. Since then there has been bickering between me and his family.⁴⁷

It, thus, comes as no surprise to find the Hararis insisting that on the fateful evening the bottle of blood had been handed by Salonicli to Moses Abu el-Afieh for safekeeping, nor, in turn, to find Abu el-Afieh eventually declaring that he had then taken it to the chief rabbi who had masterminded the entire

⁴⁷ Interrogation of Antebi (8 July) MREA:TAD, pp. 522–3. For an excellent description of the relations between the chief rabbis and the oligarchs in the Damascus community: Harel, "Temurot beyahadut Suriyah," pp. 64–7.

affair. Utterly exhausted physically and mentally, driven to desperation, they sought to pass as much of the load as possible on to people outside their own circle of family and friends.

Of the two or three prisoners who eventually chose the path of total collaboration with the authorities Moses Abu el-Afieh was the most conspicuous and his resulting behavior would turn out to have the most far-reaching consequences. Abu el-Afieh, about forty years old, was, like Salonicli, a rabbi by training but a merchant by profession. He was one of the accused subjected to the greatest cruelties, being twice deprived of sleep for three days at a time, twice dragged around by his genitals, and twice flogged. (Many months later he was still lame from the beatings applied to the soles of his feet.)

On 1 March he was taken to find the bottle of blood which, according to the confessions up to that moment, including his own, was hidden in his house. Among those accompanying him were the Count de Ratti-Menton, the chief of police, and Francis Salina, who was one of the French consul's closest confidants. What followed was described in a written statement drawn up in June by Ora Abu el-Afieh, the prisoner's wife. She, of course, was astounded to hear her husband constantly asking her for the blood, until he managed to say to her that he had lied in order to be brought home, "so that I would be killed; so that they would take my blood; so that they could say, 'Here is Father Thomas's blood.' . . . I'd prefer death to these tortures."

The consul did not want to believe that my husband had lied and that there was no blood. . . . [He] began hitting me, saying 'Tell me where's the blood.' Salina, on orders of the consul, hit me very hard on the head and body. A cord was tied around my husband's neck; the consul and Salina dragged him across the courtyard . . . causing him terrible pain — his feet, torn to pieces by the blows [in prison] . . . , showed only the bones. . . . This scene went on for about three hours.⁴⁸

She was then taken off, carrying her small baby, to the palace, and the consul sent a request to the governor-general to "have me beaten and tortured." Only an appeal, it seems, by a high official⁴⁹ persuaded Sherif Pasha not to comply with this request, but orders were given to have her husband flogged again "and he was given about another two hundred lashes in my presence."⁵⁰

His sufferings on that day were, in all probability, the straw that broke the

⁴⁸ Petition of Ora Abu el-Afieh (5 May) MREA:TAD, p. 385; also in "The Jews of Damascus," *Globe* (27 July).

⁴⁹ Cited as Abdullah Bey el-Adam in the French ms.; as Abdullah Bey Almak Sadi in the *Globe*; and as Abdullah Bey Admi Zadé in the Austrian archives (HHS: Türkei, Berichte VI, 74, enclosure 4190A, 24 June).

⁵⁰ MREA:TAD, p. 386.

camel's back. On 2 March he declared that he wished to become a Muslim and it was now that he changed his original story, saying that he had delivered the bottle of blood to the chief rabbi. Antebi described how astounded he was when, at this stage, he was brought to the crowded court, or diwan, of the governor-general only to find Moses Abu el-Afieh seated on the floor and wearing the white headdress of the Muslims.⁵¹ Permission for his conversion was granted on 10 March, when he emerged as Muhammed Effendi. Once he opted for this path, Abu el-Afieh was to prove a most articulate and formidable witness for the prosecution. Later in the year, when the worst of the storm was over, he sought to explain away the role he had played in rational terms as the only way he could have chosen to escape the unbearable torment. But he showed himself to be so cooperative that very possibly he had come to identify with those who were tormenting him.⁵² This form of psychological breakdown under conditions of severe stress is a familiar phenomenon in our own age, where it has been observed among the victims of political kidnappings, for example. (It should also be noted, perhaps, that Abu el-Afieh's father, a prominent rabbi in Palestine, writing bitterly to his son, attributed his downfall partially to his weakness for newfangled ideas about religion.)⁵³

Abu el-Afieh now not only had the chief rabbi dragged into the case by his allegations that Antebi had masterminded the murder; he also agreed as a loyal Muslim to pinpoint and translate passages from the Talmud that might explain the criminal behavior of the Jews. The issue of the rabbinical texts had apparently first been brought to the attention of Sherif Pasha by a number of Catholics in Damascus who had begun to search through their libraries for books to prove that human sacrifice was prescribed by Judaism. One eighteenth-century work in Latin – the *Prempta Bibliotheca* by Lucius Ferraris – drew attention to passages in the Talmud which, so the author argued, revealed a murderous hatred for Christians, although they said nothing specifically about ritual murder. Extracts from this book were translated into French and Arabic, and numerous copies were distributed in Damascus and its environs on the order of the Count de Ratti-Menton.⁵⁴ It was surely to this document (among others, perhaps) that Abu el-Afieh was

⁵¹ Elhalil, "Te'udah mekorit," p. 40.

⁵² Interrogation of M. Abu el-Afieh (26[?] June) MREA:TAD, p. 378.

⁵³ I.e.: "I have known for a long time that you are a disciple of those who teach new ways [*haḥamim haḥadashim*]" (Haim Nisim Abu el-Afieh to his son Moses [March or April?], in Gintsburg [ed.], *Devir*, vol. 2, p. 20). Cf. H. N. Abu el-Afieh to Lehren (19 June) in "Persecution of the Jews in the East," *Sun* (6 August), and in Salomons, *An Account of the Recent Persecution*, pp. 110–17; for the most complete version of the letter of 19 June: BofD, pp. 229–43.

⁵⁴ E.g.: Chasseaud to Forsyth (24 March) in Blau and Baron, *The Jews of the United States*, vol. 3, p. 926.

referring when he recalled that one day early in March, the governor-general had arrived with "Christian booklets in his hands and questioned me about their contents."⁵⁵ When it became clear that the Talmud was involved, Abu el-Afieh was put to work translating as many suspect passages as possible.

What ensued next must surely constitute one of the most bizarre chapters in that long line of religious disputations – or "polemics" – which date back to the high Middle Ages and which pitted rabbis against the powers-that-be. Positioning himself as some kind of judge, Sherif Pasha now presided while a Muslim expert, Muhammed Effendi (an observant Jew only a few days before), and a Jewish expert, the chief rabbi of Damascus, argued about the legal meaning of ancient Judaic texts.

On at least one occasion, these hearings were conducted in the formal setting of the governor-general's court, or diwan, but they were usually held in private. Occasionally, Abu el-Afieh was left out and Antebi was cross-examined by the chancellor of the French consulate, Jean-Baptiste Beaudin, by the governor-general's secretary, Mansur el-Tayan, and by others who came prepared with questions based on hastily prepared research. Utterly crippled, the chief rabbi had to be carried to these meetings by two soldiers and, as he recalled it, this went on for "forty-five black nights or more. . . . The governor-general used to make a joke of it until midnight or one in the morning and all the time he was drinking something alcoholic, glass after glass, and would be toying with me."⁵⁶

In one of the more grotesque incidents punctuating these proceedings, Antebi in desperation pleaded with the governor-general to have his head cut off, only to have Abu el-Afieh declare, "Don't do that! Take care, because he would be very happy to die a martyr. It is more worthwhile to torture him." (He then turned to Antebi, saying, "Tell the Pasha where you put the blood I gave you, and so put an end to our being tormented.")⁵⁷

In the official minutes of the investigation no fewer than eighteen pages⁵⁸ were set aside for translations and explanations of the Talmud by Moses Abu el-Afieh. Another eight summarized the public session of 17 March, which was given over to one of the disputations about Jewish Law between the chief rabbi and the ex-rabbi. The translations provided by Abu el-Afieh were reasonably accurate, in so far, that is, as can be judged from a French version based on an Arabic translation of the Aramaic and Hebrew original. However, as will be discussed in chapter 10, it is impossible to build up a picture of rabbinic law as practiced in the modern era by piling up

⁵⁵ Interrogation of M. Abu el-Afieh (26[?] June) MREA:TAD, p. 376.

⁵⁶ Elhalil, "Te'udah mekorit," p. 45.

⁵⁷ Interrogation of Antebi (8 July) MREA:TAD, pp. 533–4.

⁵⁸ FO 78/410, pp. 82–99 (original pagination), pp. 99–106a (new pagination); Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 79–87.

Talmudic quotations in isolation from the work as a whole and from later interpretation. Thus, an aura of total unreality pervaded the confrontation, as it is reported in the minutes, between the two Talmudists.

A major theme that recurs in many of the passages selected by Abu el-Afieh was the suggestion to be found occasionally in the Talmud that the Gentiles are to be regarded not as men but as beasts. Obviously, if this statement were to be taken literally, it might well follow that Gentiles could be slaughtered no less than (other) animals, and hence ritual murder, too, could turn out to be eminently logical. Among the sayings that he chose to translate, for example, was one by the second-century rabbi, Shimon Bar-Yochai (here mistakenly cited as Rabbi Solomon), who is reported to have said that even "the best of Gentiles should be killed."⁵⁹ Similarly, he came up with a passage that pronounces the Sabbath to be a Jewish monopoly and declares any Gentile who adopts it as deserving the death sentence.⁶⁰

The chief rabbi sought to cut off this entire line of attack by resort to the argument that the various violently hostile references to the Gentiles in the Talmud applied "only to those ancient peoples who did not recognize God,"⁶¹ but absolutely not to the monotheistic religions of Christianity and Islam. However, at that point Abu el-Afieh interrupted him, declaring that this was mere special pleading, a smoke screen developed by some rabbis in Europe to disguise the truth. The relevant passages, he insisted, referred to all non-Jews at all times. No less sinister, he added, was the fact that in the published editions of the Talmud certain phrases were omitted altogether, leaving telltale blank spaces; to which Antebi, in turn, replied that such omissions merely indicated those passages that referred to Jesus, and were of no particular significance.

At one point, Sibli Ayub, who was present at the public disputation, complained to Abu el-Afieh that what he had said so far was "not sufficient to make us understand how it is that the use of human blood can be permitted." "That," replied Muhammed Effendi, "is the secret of the chief rabbis (*des grands khakams*); they are the ones who know about this matter and about the way in which to use the blood."⁶² The question (answered in this not entirely satisfactory manner) indicates clearly that in the entourage of the governor-general and the French consul a certain disappointment had crept in because, however industrious, Moses Abu el-Afieh had been no more successful than Lucius Ferraris in producing a direct Talmudic reference to ritual murder or human sacrifice.

But this did not prevent the case against the accused murderers from

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 82. (On these and similar passages from the rabbinic literature, see chap. 10).

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 55-6. ⁶¹ Ibid., p. 54 (cf. Elhalil, "Te'udah mekorit," pp. 44-5).

⁶² Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, p. 58.

proceeding toward its preappointed end. Sherif Pasha declared himself satisfied with all the evidence, including that from the Talmud which, he pronounced, appeared to impose the duty on the Jews to destroy the entire rest of mankind. The death sentence was recommended first for the men accused of murdering Father Tommaso and then for the group accused of slaughtering Ibrahim Amara.⁶³ (Some of the prisoners, of course, had already been killed; and four were promised their lives in exchange for the cooperation that they had demonstrated.)

In its broad outlines, then, the Damascus affair presents no problems of interpretation. A double murder case was formally solved on the basis of a myth and by the employment of ruthless torture. The supposed discovery of the murders was then followed by a systematic attempt to prove that crimes of this type were prescribed by the Talmud and the Jewish religion. However, when the historian moves beyond these basic facts to ask who was primarily responsible for moving the case steadily forward in this direction or to ask what motives were involved, then the answers become less clear-cut.

Ever since the early days of the case, there has been a widespread assumption that it originated in a conspiracy or plot. During the spring of 1840, the idea took hold among the Damascus Jews that Father Thomas and Ibrahim Amara had been smuggled out of the city on 5 February and hidden in one of the many monasteries on Mount Lebanon in order to create a pretext for the subsequent accusations of murder. This hypothesis was taken so seriously for a time that it even became the subject of diplomatic activity at the highest levels in Europe.⁶⁴

Less far-reaching theories produced then and up until our own time have tended to pinpoint particular individuals or coteries as having masterminded the case. One of the earliest reports on the affair, the letter from Pierre Laurella, the Austrian vice-consul in Beirut written on 26 February, directed attention to the governor-general, noting that "many believe that the entire affair has been produced by the regime in order to force money out of the Jews in Damascus."⁶⁵ It did not take long, however, until the spotlight shifted to the Count de Ratti-Menton, and the tendency among Jewish historians has been to see him as the moving force behind the plot, albeit assisted by a small group of advisers. (Graetz also assigned an important auxiliary role to the monks in the city led by the Lazarist priest, Father Tustet.) Recently, it has been argued that a, or the, central part was played

⁶³ On the issue of the death penalty, see chap. 5. ⁶⁴ See chap. 8.

⁶⁵ "France," *JdesD* (20-21 April).

by the chief financial officer in the Syrian government, Hanna Bahri Bey, a Greek Catholic.⁶⁶

However, the more closely one examines the way in which the investigation developed, the less it looks like a single or straightforward conspiracy. Of course, the case was entirely manufactured, but it was built up in a piecemeal and laborious fashion; many hands were involved and the degree of coordination among them was far from complete. In the first few days after Father Tommaso's disappearance, the Egyptian authorities and the staff of the French consulate were clearly groping in the dark. The man who initially charted the route to be followed (el-Telli) volunteered his services from a prison cell and he was very dissatisfied for some time with what he saw as the apathetic attitude of the government. He would later recall having gone on 11 February to complain to Bahri Bey that he was "being stopped in my operations" – to which Bahri responded that he should "keep calm, let them do what they are doing, and we will see how it ends up."⁶⁷

If the government had been left to its own devices, the case against the Jews would probably never have progressed much further; various bribes would have been paid; and other more promising channels of investigation might or might not have been pursued, depending on the whims of the chief of police and the governor-general. But it was at that point that pressure from the French consulate tipped the scales; and henceforward Sherif Pasha and the Count de Ratti-Menton allied themselves in an effort to drive the case forward. The French consul relentlessly demanded results; the governor-general made sure that results were produced.

Even then, however, they apparently reached no agreement to speed up the case by the wholesale manufacture of evidence. The one method consistently employed was that customary and considered legitimate according to the Ottoman and Egyptian system of justice: torture. Nothing would have been easier than to plant a bottle made of white glass filled with (animal) blood in the home of Abu el-Afieh or Antebi; but that was not done. The bones alleged to be those of Ibrahim Amara were, on examination, soon declared to be those of an animal by a qualified Italian doctor.⁶⁸

The second case was not taken up until almost a month had passed, and by then the selected suspects, together with a large part of the male Jewish population, had gone into hiding. "The fact is," wrote the British consul

⁶⁶ E.g.: Ma'oz, "Changes in the Position of the Jewish Communities," pp. 148–50; idem, "Harek'a le'alilat Damesek," pp. 29–32; idem, "Communal Conflicts in Ottoman Syria," pp. 98–101.

⁶⁷ Interrogation of el-Telli (2 August) MREA:TAD, p. 706.

⁶⁸ Interrogation of Dr. Massari (15 July) *ibid.*, pp. 578–80. On 21 April Dr. Lograsso declared them to be animal bones; two other Italian doctors were undecided, and it was recommended that they be sent to a medical academy abroad for examination. Whether this advice was acted upon is not known (cf. report, 21 April, from Damascus in *AZdes* [20 June], p. 357).

(reporting retroactively on the case), "the Jew prosecution not only lasted a long time but absorbed all the attention and time of the government, and scarcely any business could be got through at the palace."⁶⁹ And it emerged from testimony given by el-Telli in January 1841 that, at the height of the inquiry, Bahri Bey had lost patience with the chief of police and burst out:

How long are you going to let the case of Father Thomas drag on? All our affairs are being neglected because of this. . . . Can't you find two or three reliable men . . . who could dig up a corpse and who would then each take some limb, go into a Jewish home – Murad's or Stam-buli's or somebody's – and then create an uproar. . . . [And] say: "Here now, we've found Father Thomas."⁷⁰

Of course, the bones discovered in the water conduit on 28 February might well have been planted. The Damascus Jews were convinced that this is what had happened and that the arrest of the night watchman responsible for the area (who soon died under torture) was directly linked to the operation – either in order to remove him from the scene in advance or else to prevent him from reporting later what he had witnessed.⁷¹

However, the fragments of bone (allegedly those of Father Thomas) discovered in the conduit were so small that it was probably impossible to be sure that they were human and not much reliance should be placed on the testimony of the doctors who (as one insider later admitted) had been "compelled to be of service."⁷² Moreover, even if this was an example of fabricated forensic evidence, it clearly was the exception that proved the rule. The all-absorbing nature of the investigation which went on day and night for weeks and months clearly reinforces the impression that there was, in fact, no single plot and no one guiding hand. The straightforward fabrication of material proof would have involved enormous risks for those involved, whether they were in Egyptian or French service; and given the lack of a shared culture to unite the people involved in prosecuting the case, the chances of discovery would have been great.

The tendency of the historians to concentrate attention on individuals, and most specifically on Ratti-Menton, has led to the relative neglect of a fundamental factor in the development of the case. It turns out that at the initial and crucial phase, in the month of February, albeit not later, the entire Christian community in Damascus supported the ritual-murder charge (or, to be more precise, there is no record of anyone opposing it, even in confidence). This was not just a matter of the indigenous population, the Mar-

⁶⁹ Werry to Hodges (10 June, no. 5) FO 78/405, p. 117.

⁷⁰ Statement of el-Telli (13 January 1841), in Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 260–1.

⁷¹ H. N. Abu el-Afieh, in "Persecution of the Jews in the East," *Sun* (6 August).

⁷² The words of Mustafa ibn el-Saia as reported by el-Telli, in Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, p. 259.

onites, Greeks, and Armenians who lived primarily in the Christian quarter, although it was from their ranks that the crowds which so often threatened the Jews with destruction in the early days were largely drawn. Nor was it simply that a number of Catholic priests – specifically Eugène (or Jean) Tustet, a Lazarist; Francis of Ploaghe, a Capuchin; and Maximus, the Greek Catholic patriarch⁷³ – were all in their different ways involved. Even more important was the fact that the small group of European businessmen and diplomats in the city, Protestants as well as Catholic, English and Italian as well as French, unreservedly endorsed the actions taken by the Count de Ratti-Menton and the governor-general.

Thus, in his initial despatches to Lord Ponsonby, the British ambassador to the Porte, written on 28 February and 30 March respectively, Werry transmitted the official version of the case as proven fact, noting, for example, that in both murders “seven of these influential persons performed the sacrifice, being in each four laymen and three rabbins.” Further, “the extracts from the Talmud, taken from the rabin prisoners have been translated, which warrant these enormities and the secret which has been hitherto traditional and only imparted to the initiated, now has been revealed to the public.”⁷⁴

On his part, the Austrian consul, Caspar (or Giovanni) Merlato, committed his support for the case to writing still earlier. In a letter of 21 February, he assured the governor-general that he had personally warned the Jews under Austrian protection that “the secret guarded by the Jewish nation would serve no purpose and would only prove prejudicial to the innocent.”⁷⁵ Congratulating Sherif Pasha on the “zeal and vigor” with which he was prosecuting the case, he promised that he would do nothing to prevent the authorities from arresting Jews who were Austrian protégés. “These villains . . .,” he wrote to P. Laurella in Beirut on 28 February, “murdered the poor old man and collected his blood.”⁷⁶ And he is reported to have said during a social gathering at his home early in March that some of the Jews guilty of the two murders were in all probability inspired not only by “religious principle,” but also by a “commercial motive”⁷⁷ – reference to the notion that the

⁷³ The patriarch, Maximus (or Massimo), published a leaflet in support of the ritual-murder charge (Laurin to Metternich [16 August] in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*, pp. 46–7). In a letter of 6 April to the Propaganda Fide he wrote that the Jews had been guilty of such murders for thousands of years and that now, finally, Providence and prayers to the Virgin Mary had led to their discovery (reported in O'Connor, “Capuchin Missionaries,” pp. 552–3).

⁷⁴ Werry to Ponsonby (30 March, no. 49) FO 195/170 (cf. Werry to Palmerston [23 March] no. 4), (qu. in Hyamson, “The Damascus Affair,” pp. 50–1).

⁷⁵ Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 286–7.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 289. ⁷⁷ Ratti-Menton to Thiers (7 May, no. 25) MREA:TAD, p. 40.

Jewish communal leaders in such centers as Bagdad and Aleppo would pay large amounts for the blood.

In sum, it was no surprise to find both Werry and Merlato, like Ratti-Menton, only too willing to lend their presence to the highly emotional funeral ceremonies of 2 March, thus expressing their solidarity with the local Christian communities. However, when the news of the case reached the West, there was no understanding of the social dynamics thus at work in Damascus. In Europe it was widely accepted that the ritual-murder charge was not endemic to the Orient and that the Damascus case was the first of its kind to have taken place for centuries. The last such episode, according to Zunz, had occurred in 1530.⁷⁸ And it is, of course, true that the Muslims were usually excluded from the age-old myth which throughout declared it to be specifically Christian blood that was sought by the Jews.

Nonetheless, there were very large Christian communities in the Middle East and, as Jacob Landau and Moshe Ma'oz have recently emphasized,⁷⁹ these were the source from which the accusations of ritual murder had emanated with growing frequency starting from the turn of the century. The charge that the Jews had committed murder or attempted murder in pursuit of their ancient blood rites was laid at their door in Aleppo in 1810; Beirut in 1824; Antioch in 1826; Hama in 1829; Tripoli in 1834; and Jerusalem in 1838.⁸⁰ In none of these cases were the Ottoman authorities prepared to pronounce a verdict of guilty, but public opinion among the Christians was outraged and on at least one occasion riots caused many deaths. Werry's despatches of late March, even if historically inaccurate, no doubt reflected the sentiments prevailing in Damascus at that time:

It has been immemorially the received opinion and belief of the Christian population throughout Turkey and several instances have been brought to light by the local governments in different parts that the Jews scattered throughout the country immolated clandestinely Christians, to obtain their blood to celebrate their feasts therewith . . . [and] this fact has been proved here.⁸¹

The underlying sources of the case are thus to be sought more in the realm of sociology than of individual psychology. This does not mean, though, that the economic and political rivalries pitting Jews against Christians, specifically Greek Catholics, constituted the primary factor. Such competition was no doubt fierce involving, as it did, local trade, international commerce, banking, and public administration; and it must have provoked

⁷⁸ Zunz, "Damaskus, ein Wort zur Abwehr," *LAZ* (Beilage) (31 May), p. 1645.

⁷⁹ E.g.: Landau, "'Alilot dam"; and Landau and Ma'oz, "Yehudim velo yehudim," pp. 5-7.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁸¹ Werry to Ponsonby (30 March, no. 49), (qu. in Hyamson, "The Damascus Affair," p. 50).

each side to think the worst of the other. But, once implanted, traditional beliefs such as the myth of ritual murder can develop a life of their own, constantly reinforced by new evidence – unsolved murders – and reinvigorated by fear of the hidden hand ever ready to pluck out new victims. Only prolonged and profound cultural change can erode the inherent logic of such an enclosed belief-system.

Under these circumstances, it would have taken a very unusual man to take a stand against the public outrage that was already manifest in the crowd gathered outside the Capuchin monastery on the afternoon of Thursday, 6 February. The French consul was certainly not the person to do so. On the one hand, he was gregarious, eagerly sought the approval of his equals, and gloried in public approbation. (His personal file in the French foreign ministry contains adulatory letters, one of 1830 from over twenty French businessmen in Palermo, the other of 1841 from a prominent group of Christian clerics and notables in Damascus.)⁸²

On the other hand, he clearly lacked the critical turn of mind, cool head, and humane instincts that alone might have prompted him to question the consensus uniting all strata of the Christian community in Damascus. Taken together, the crises which punctuated his diplomatic career suggest that sound judgment was not among his qualities. He reputedly went bankrupt twice while in Palermo; had to leave Tiflis at the urging of the Russian government; was recalled hastily to Paris from Canton in 1843 to explain a violent dispute with the French representative in Macao and was kept waiting until 1846 for a new appointment; and in 1862 left the diplomatic corps under something of a cloud following charges that as consul in Havana he had facilitated the illegal departure of a ship carrying slaves. Time and again, his career was saved only by the intervention of well-placed aristocratic relatives, most notably the Countess de Lostanges.⁸³

Characteristics that might have proved positive under other circumstances served him ill in Damascus. He was manifestly a man of great energy and ambition. From the very start of the affair, he came to the conclusion that here at last was his chance to achieve the success and fame that had so far eluded him. He at once worked himself into a storm of activity, combing the

⁸² (i) Palermo, 24 September 1830. (This letter speaks of his “zeal and constant activity,” of his “concern for his compatriots,” and of his “great solicitude for the defense of the national honor.”) (ii) Damascus, 6 August 1841 (signed by representatives of the Greek-Catholic, Maronite, Armenian, and Syrian churches and by Valentino Galvez of the Franciscan, Terra Sancta, monastery). MREA:Ratti-Menton, le Comte de/Personnel, Série-1.

⁸³ For the relevant documents: *ibid.* It should be noted, though, that inquiries by the Rothschilds in 1840 did not produce any particularly damaging information about Ratti-Menton. (Their sources came up with nothing more significant than that his debts in Sicily had resulted partly from a failed campaign to marry a rich heiress.) (Rothschilds Frères, Paris, to K. Rothschild [12 May] NMRA:RFam AD/2, no. 36; and report from Palermo [28 May, no. 53].).

Jewish quarter at the head of a body of troops and police, conducting searches, excavations, arrests. This went on for weeks and months, winning much local admiration but producing no concrete results.

The evidence suggests that he was not personally a sadist, and he kept away from the scenes of torment at the serail and prison.⁸⁴ But he had no compunction in urging the governor-general on to ever greater exertions, knowing full well what methods were being used. Moreover, his fits of temper became notorious. Ora Abu el-Afieh's story was only one of such accounts that later filtered out.

Particularly shocking to local sensibilities (although probably harmless enough in the eyes of a European nobleman dealing with hapless subordinates) was his coarse treatment of the women he confronted in what would normally have been the sacrosanct seclusion of their homes. He was unmarried at the time and would make a point of looking over the women in mock search of a wife. Employing threats against her father, he tried to persuade David Harari's daughter, described as a "young girl of great beauty,"⁸⁵ to leave the house with him. He was presumably responsible, too, for the arrest by the government of Harari's servant, "a poor negro-girl, a Muslim," who (so an English clergyman reported) "the torture could not force to bear false witness against the Jew, her master."⁸⁶

And, according to Joseph Leniado's wife (soon to become his widow), Ratti-Menton had marched into her house, insisted that she raise her veil, had sung some words from an Arabic love-song, demanded to be kissed, and, when she refused, said: "Your husband is old; I would be willing to take you; or else my dragoman would"; and turning to his entourage, remarked: "Without this Father Thomas case, how would we have been able to see the Jewish women?"⁸⁷ (In one letter written in Hebrew by a leading rabbi in the area, these episodes became transformed into biblical images – as described there, Ratti-Menton had called on the women to submit to him like Esther to Ahasuerus in order to save the Jewish people).⁸⁸

There is also no solid proof to suggest that the French consul was imbued with any special hostility to the Jews prior to his involvement in the Damascus affair. True, Heinrich Heine maintained in one of his articles on the affair that Ratti-Menton had mixed in Ultramontane and legitimist circles while in Paris in 1839; and some other observers sought to explain his behavior in terms of his Spanish connection (he was born and brought up in

⁸⁴ Des Meloizes to Thiers (27 July, no. 5) MREA:TAD, pp. 621–2; Werry to Hodges (10 June, no. 5) FO 78/405, p. 123.

⁸⁵ Rev. Schlientz to Montefiore (30 November) MREA:TAD, p. 138.

⁸⁶ [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, pp. 231–2.

⁸⁷ Esther Leniado to Merlato (23 April) MREA:TAD, p. 391.

⁸⁸ H. N. Abu el-Afieh to Lehren (19 June) BofD, p. 242. (This passage was omitted from the version of the letter in the *Sun*.)

Puerto Rico). But there is also evidence to suggest that in casual conversation shortly after his arrival in Damascus, he had expressed himself in favor of Jewish emancipation in Europe.⁸⁹ The nature of his beliefs thus unfortunately remains an open question.

What did emerge clearly from his political despatches, though, was his determination to foster Christian support for France in every possible way. "Since my arrival in Damascus," he wrote in July, for example, "I have daily received proof of the sympathy felt by the Christians for France and of their wish to be able one day to act accordingly."⁹⁰ Here there was a clear hint at the ambitious idea of a future French protectorate over Mount Lebanon, if not over Syria as a whole. And on another occasion, he noted that it was fortunate for France that because of their long-standing beliefs, the Catholics would prefer to remain loyal to France, shunning both "heretic England and schismatic Russia."⁹¹ Thus, whatever his original political principles, he had an enormous incentive in the affair of Father Thomas to put himself at the head of Christian, and specifically Catholic, opinion in Syria.

Of course, any attempt to understand Ratti-Menton's behavior during the Damascus affair must also take into account the fact that as of 5 February he had been in the city for only three months. He was unfamiliar with the Middle East, knew no Arabic or Turkish, and was utterly dependent on the advice of those Europeans who had the experience and knowledge which he lacked. Wherever he went he was accompanied by either Jean-Baptiste Beaudin, Francis Salina, or Eugène Tustet; and in the evenings, he would go to Beaudin's home, the social center of their circle, where he would also meet Werry, Merlato (initially), and their small circle of friends. From them all he heard the same thing, that he had a unique opportunity to reveal the truth about the Jewish rites, hitherto concealed by the Ottoman authorities, to the world. Thus, reliable observers at that time concluded that the merciless ferocity demonstrated by the French consul was to be explained, in part, by the advice he was receiving from the Europeans long-established in the country. More specifically, G. W. Pieritz, for example, inclined to the view that "the French consul would never have gone so far had it not been for Werry and Beaudin."⁹²

Werry's prime contribution to the case against the Jews was his prestige, which stemmed both from his official position and from a lifetime's experi-

⁸⁹ [Heine], "Syrien und Aegypten," *A4Z* (13 May), p. 1071 (*Säkularausgabe*, vol. 10, p. 31); H. N. Abu el-Afieh to Lehren (19 June) BofD, p. 229; Werry to Hodges (10 June, no. 5) FO 78/405, p. 123 (i.e., Ratti-Menton "was a partisan of the Jews, in the liberal sense, and [of] sentiments entertained toward them in France and Europe generally").

⁹⁰ Ratti-Menton to Thiers (17 July, no. 12) MREA:Turquie: Consulats Divers: 11, p. 267 (microfilm no.: Poo787).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, (27 August, no. 15), p. 21. ⁹² Pieritz to Hodges (11 May) FO 78/405, p. 102.

ence in the region. Beaudin, Salina, and Tustet, in contrast, were involved with the proceedings on a day-to-day basis (as was Sibli Ayub in the second, and later, of the two murder investigations).⁹³ Francis Salina was originally from Aleppo, enjoyed British protection, and was described (by a hostile source) as an "interpreter, an agitator [*excitateur*] and spy."⁹⁴ It later emerged that he had been exploiting his position to take large bribes in exchange for the promise to save given individuals from torture or imprisonment. Under totally different circumstances at the end of the year, Deborah Farhi actually sued him for the return of the jewels that she had given him to save her husband from one thousand lashes of the kurbash. (In accordance with custom, the jewels were placed in Salina's sash, not in his hand.)⁹⁵ A list preserved in the archive of the Rothschild bank in London states that he had received a grand total of 24,400 piastres (or £244) on behalf of ten different people.⁹⁶

Whether these sums were shared with other members of the coterie or even with the consul himself is not known. No such suggestion was made by informed observers at the time; and Pieritz was convinced that Ratti-Menton was too implacable to allow himself to be swayed by money. Salina did advise Deborah Farhi to ask for help from Eugène Tustet, too, but his interest was ascribed to religious fanaticism (a desire "to revenge the death of His Master")⁹⁷ rather than to greed, and so perhaps no additional bribe was expected.

Probably the crucial role in the affair was played by Beaudin. A detailed portrait of the man was sketched by the famous poet and politician, Alphonse de Lamartine, who visited Syria in 1833. Beaudin had by then been living in Damascus for some ten years, even working at one time for the legendary Lady Hester Stanhope. Married to an Arab woman ("of European descent"), careful to wear the clothing of the country, and with perfect command of Arabic, he had for a long period been the only representative of a European state in Damascus. Always insecure in such an isolated situation, he had built a second house for himself in the Christian town of Zahle, ready to flee for his life at a moment's notice. In the eyes of Lamartine, he was an embodiment of the romantic hero. "Mr. Beaudin," he wrote,

⁹³ Sibli Ayub (described as a "well-educated man") had arrived from Tyre to volunteer his services and in the second case apparently filled the role played by el-Telli in the first: to wheedle out, and reconcile, the confessions. It was Ratti-Menton's considered opinion that no progress would have been made in the Ibrahim Amara investigation without Sibli Ayub – "despite all my energy; Mr. Beaudin's cool reason; and Sherif Pasha's good will and praiseworthy tenacity" (Ratti-Menton to Bourée [21 March, no. 694] MREA:N, Beyrout, Consulat, File no. 25).

⁹⁴ Merlato to Laurin (23 March) *JdesD* (7 May).

⁹⁵ Cross-examination of Deborah Farhi and Havah Said (6 November) MREA:TAD, pp. 833–7.

⁹⁶ "Lista delle estorsioni fatte da Francesco Salina," NMRA:RFam AD/2, no. 51.

⁹⁷ Merlato to Laurin (23 March) *JdesD* (7 May).

is one of those rare people whom nature has readied for everything: possessed of a clear and rapid intelligence; honest and firm of heart; tirelessly active. Whether it is Europe or Asia, Paris or Damascus, land or sea, he adapts himself to everything, finding contentment and serenity throughout, because his soul like that of the Arab, is resigned to God's will . . . and because he is endowed with that adroit quick-wittedness which is second nature to Europe. . . . He is the complete man, who is much travelled, and has changed his way of thinking and way of life twenty times over.⁹⁸

To have pitted against them somebody so formidably gifted and so well positioned was a true nightmare for the Damascus Jews.

It was Beaudin who recruited el-Telli and helped stir up the hue-and-cry about the advertisement next to the barber's shop. Thereafter, as dragoman and chancellor of the French consulate, he was ubiquitous – attending the investigations; active in the cross-examinations, both public and private; often present at the torture sessions. As suggested above, he may well have had a hand in choosing the accused.

This relentlessness could well have been motivated by economic factors. For all Beaudin's long service to the French government, he had always been paid absurdly little, presumably for lack of the right connections; in the mid-1830s his annual salary was a mere fifteen hundred francs.⁹⁹ In order to supplement his income, he ran a shop in one of the bazaars and continued to do so, despite foreign ministry regulations, even after his appointment as chancellor-dragoman; but, even then, living as a member of the city's elite, he was never able to make ends meet. (When he finally went bankrupt in 1846, his debts stood at no less than 378,000 piastres, of which over one-third was owed to Sherif Pasha.)¹⁰⁰ Under such circumstances, a chance to eliminate an entire class of business rivals could have appeared too good to lose.

At work here, though, there might have been nothing more complicated than sheer hatred for the Jews. In June, Beaudin published a truly venomous article on the case. Jewish bankers take exorbitant interest, he wrote, "in accord with the precepts of the Talmud." The Jewish businessmen under arrest in Damascus are men who "illicitly retain money" belonging to others (a reference to his past legal battles). The investigation had come across the

⁹⁸ Lamartine, *Souvenirs*, vol. 3, pp. 68–9.

⁹⁹ Beaudin to Paris (14 February 1834) MREA:Beaudin/Personnel, Série 1. (Lamartine complained about the "injustice" of Beaudin's salary: *Souvenirs*, vol. 3, p. 61).

¹⁰⁰ Beaudin to Toppel (17 January 1846) MREA:Beaudin/Personnel, Série 1. Appealing to the French government to provide Beaudin with a pension or a new posting (he had had to leave the Damascus consulate), Lamartine attributed much of the blame for the bankruptcy to "the hatred of the Jews compromised by the [murder] affair – Jews all-powerful in the commerce of Damascus" (undated letter [1846], *ibid.*). As early as 1834, though, Beaudin had accumulated debts of some ten thousand francs.

religious motives for the murder only because the "culprits declared it so themselves." And the authorities had determined to prove guilt "in order to allow people henceforward to be on their guard."¹⁰¹ In sum, here the on-looker catches a glimpse into the very heart of darkness.

Of course, if Beaudin and Ratti-Menton initiated and guided the case, it was the governor-general alone who kept it moving constantly forward. Without his steady application of torture, no progress would have been made. That this method of investigation was employed does not require explanation. Floggings, beatings, the kurbash, and the bastinado were part and parcel of the administrative system. It was not the least unusual to hear of people being beaten to death in an effort, for example, to extract taxes or to discover runaway recruits.

However, why Sherif Pasha decided to ally himself so closely with the Count de Ratti-Menton is by no means self-explanatory. After all, senior Muslim officials had consistently refused to cooperate in the prosecution of such cases. And Sherif Pasha was a prominent figure with many years of experience behind him. Both adopted son and son-in-law of Muhammed Ali, he had held high office in Egypt before becoming the governor-general of greater Syria in 1832. There he was subordinate only to Ibrahim Pasha, whose army command left him little time for civil affairs.¹⁰² Sherif Pasha was widely respected and was praised, for example, by Colonel Campbell (a longtime British consul-general in Alexandria and writing before the case of Father Thomas) for his "conciliatory and dignified manner, mixed with a natural but reasonable severity . . . rendering him a very fit person to contend with the fanatic population of Damascus."¹⁰³

Unfortunately, no light is thrown on Sherif Pasha's motives by the various letters that he sent to Ibrahim Pasha and Muhammed Ali describing the Damascus affair.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, in some cases they paralleled Ratti-Menton's despatches so closely that their composition must have been coordinated. Moreover, little credence can be given to the idea bandied about at the time that in pursuing the case so ferociously he was simply seeking to increase state revenues or his own private fortune. He did not initiate the case or show much interest in it for some days; and the property of the prisoners was not confiscated, even when they had been declared guilty of murder. He may have hoped that ultimately the destruction of the Jewish community in Damascus would provide some desperately needed fiscal relief for the state

¹⁰¹ *Journal de Smyrne* (2 June) in Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 293, 295, 300, 294.

¹⁰² On Sherif Pasha and his place in the governing hierarchy: Hoffman, "Po'olo shel Muhamed Ali," pp. 43-50; idem, "The Administration of Syria," pp. 315-22.

¹⁰³ Bowring, *Report on the Commercial Statistics of Syria*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁴ Sherif Pasha to Muhammed Ali (28 February and 24 March) in "Persecution of the Jews of Damascus," *Times* (17 August), p. 3; cf. his letters of 1 and 13 March to Ibrahim as summarized in Rustum, *Al-Mahfuzât*, vol. 4, pp. 300-2.



FIG. 6. Sherif Pasha

treasuries, but so far-reaching a measure was not within his realm of competence.

It is far more probable that Sherif Pasha believed that his actions in the Damascus case served to strengthen the basic policies being pursued at the time by Muhammed Ali. In his unwritten alliance with France lay Muhammed Ali's only hope of victory in the prolonged conflict with the Ottoman regime. If French support were to be withdrawn, he would find himself alone facing a united and hostile front of four European powers. And, conversely, there was always the chance that public opinion in France,

fired by the Napoleonic tradition, might induce the government to lend Egypt military as well as diplomatic support.¹⁰⁵

Integrally related to this aspect of Muhammed Ali's policy was his determination, demonstrated over the years, to enhance the standing of the Christian communities in the areas under his control. Eager to establish closer ties with Europe, to introduce modern technologies into industrial production and the armed forces, and to divert agricultural production to export crops, he saw the Christian population as a link between East and West. The French connection insured special favor for the Catholics. And the fact that the Ottoman regime had begun to follow a similar path – as symbolized by the famous declaration of equal rights for all in the hattı-sherif of Gulhané in November 1839 – reinforced the policy still further by adding the element of competition.¹⁰⁶

More specifically, Sherif Pasha had to take into account that parallel to the rise in the status of the Christian communities had come a relative decline in that of the Jews. There was no uniform pattern discernible – the Jews in Jerusalem were relatively satisfied with Egyptian rule; Moses Montefiore had been warmly welcomed by Muhammed Ali in 1839 – but the trend was nonetheless perceptible. In his contribution to John Bowring's report completed in 1839, Colonel Campbell had noted the diverging status of the two religious minorities, writing that

The condition of the Jews forms, perhaps, an exception and cannot be said to have improved comparatively with that of other sects: this is owing to a personal feeling both of Muhammed Ali and Ibrahim Pasha, as also of the Christians and other sects in Syria, against them.¹⁰⁷

In February 1840 the Egyptian regime was threatened by rebellion and war in Syria, and, in fact, both these dangers were to become reality within a few months. The Jews, as a small urban group, were not a significant factor in the dangerous game that was being played out. In contrast, the Christians carried much weight if only because of their respective ties to the great powers and because of the large Maronite population situated on Mount Lebanon. Aware of all these facts, Sherif Pasha would have needed little urging to do all he could to fall in with the vociferous demands voiced by the French consul in unison with Christian public opinion.

Seen in this context, it would seem that the role played by Hanna Bahri

¹⁰⁵ For a more detailed discussion of Muhammed Ali's relations with the powers see chap. 13.

¹⁰⁶ On the hattı-sherif, e.g.: Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 2, pp. 58–61.

¹⁰⁷ Bowring, *Report on the Commercial Statistics of Syria*, p. 137. (The famous court doctor, Antoine Clot, probably reflected prevalent opinion in Alexandria when he wrote that the Jews possess "a mass of traits which really do merit that terrible contempt to which they are subject" [Clot-Bey, *Aperçu Général*, vol. 2, p. 141]).

Bey in the Damascus affair was more symbolic than real. His presence as the official in charge of state finance demonstrated dramatically the prestige enjoyed by the Catholics under Egyptian rule in Syria and the discomfiture suffered by the Jews. Rivalry between the Farhi and the Bahri clans went back decades, and Hanna Bahri had been rewarded by Muhammed Ali with the position held under the Ottoman regime by Raphael Farhi. Bahri, no doubt, took pleasure in witnessing the humiliation of his old rival in February 1840; Raphael Farhi, although not charged with murder, was kept incarcerated for ninety days.

However, Hanna Bahri had simply no need to intervene actively in the case when he could leave it to the unrelenting efforts of Beaudin, Ratti-Menton, and Sherif Pasha. He was often present at the diwan during the public sessions and followed the proceedings closely; some of the Damascus Jews believed that he was the evil genius behind the scenes.¹⁰⁸ But this theory was vigorously denied by des Meloizes¹⁰⁹ at a later period when, for his own reasons, he preferred to tell the truth if he could do so without harm to himself.

An analysis of the Damascus affair in the months of February and March has to raise the question of what the officials involved knew and what they believed. There can be no doubt, for example, that anyone seeing for himself how the confessions were gradually constructed must have been aware of how totally unreliable they were. The prisoners and the officials fed ideas to each other in a macabre dance played out against the background of the torture chambers.

Sherif Pasha, Mansur el-Tayan, Jean-Baptiste Beaudin, Sibli Ayub – not to mention Muhammed el-Telli – knew exactly what was happening. On one occasion in the summer, Moses Abu el-Afieh stated the obvious, declaring that “if the pasha had wanted to know the truth [about our innocence] he would have discovered it in a minute.”¹¹⁰ On the other hand, though, it is possible, that the Count de Ratti-Menton as a newcomer and total outsider might not have understood that the confessions were the result of coaching and collusion. He may have preferred to be duped.

However, even those who knew that the details had been invented could still have believed in the general charge. Once an idea is firmly implanted in the group mind, the impulse to interpret the facts to fit the preconception can be overwhelming. Sherif Pasha frequently told the prisoners that the Europeans could not have misjudged so many dozens of cases over so many centuries. If the Jews persisted in their denials, was not this simply proof of

¹⁰⁸ Picciotto to his brother in Constantinople (21 March), *Morning Post* (28 May).

¹⁰⁹ E.g.: Des Meloizes to Thiers (27 July, no. 5) MREA:TAD, p. 637.

¹¹⁰ Interrogation of Abu el-Afieh (30 June) *ibid.*, p. 428.

their fanatic solidarity and obstinacy? If the accused were innocent, the community could still be guilty.

Even in the most law-abiding countries, police pressure, misinterpreted facts, and slanted evidence – inspired by the prior assumption that the prisoners are guilty, if not directly then by association – result not infrequently in extraordinary miscarriages of justice.

From the moment that the bones alleged to be those of Father Thomas were found on 28 February, the situation of the Jews in Damascus, already desperate, took a dramatic turn for the worse. The danger of an attack on the Jewish quarter, its destruction, and the massacre of its inhabitants now became immediate. However, the governor-general, whatever his animus against the Jews, was not prepared to preside over mob violence and he hastily brought in a reinforcement of soldiers eight hundred strong. He thus averted the scenes of carnage that would overwhelm Damascus twenty years later, when Muslims sacked the Christian quarter, leaving some five thousand dead.

At the same time, there was a constant clamor for the execution of the Jewish prisoners, which throughout March was considered imminent. A public hanging was eagerly expected, but Sherif Pasha chose to weather the increasingly vociferous public indignation and to await final instructions from his superiors: Ibrahim Pasha at Marash to the north and Muhammed Ali in Alexandria.

Beyond Damascus: early reactions to the affair

Diffusion or Spontaneous Combustion?

Writing in 1924, historian Ben Zion Dinaburg (Dinur) focused attention on the fact that violent agitation against the Jews in the late winter and spring of 1840 was not confined to Damascus but, on the contrary, flared up in a large number of cities in the Middle East. These developments were so widespread and took place so fast that, he argued, only one explanation made sense: "This was a phenomenon organized and directed in advance. . . . What we see here was an organized 'conspiracy' against the Jews."¹

However, if (as already suggested above) the belief in the ritual-murder charge had become deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of the Christian communities throughout the entire region, an alternative hypothesis becomes far more persuasive. The extreme suspicion and fear in face of the Jews were endemic, but were normally kept in check by the Muslim authorities. Now, though, recent political trends – the much enhanced status of the Christian populations in both the Turkish and the Egyptian territories (symbolized most dramatically by the hatti sherif of Gulhané); the simultaneous decline in Jewish influence; the simmering unrest associated with the constant wars and uprisings – had gone far to erode this protective barrier. Any unexplained murder or disappearance, or even news of such an event elsewhere, would expose the Jews to sudden danger.

A letter sent from Alexandria on 22 March for publication in France summed up the situation as understood by the indigenous Christian (and, to an increasing extent, Muslim) populations:

The fury in Damascus and all the cities of Syria is at its height, and it needed all the firmness [of the authorities] . . . to prevent the extermination of the entire Jewish race at Damascus. . . . Father Thomas's murder has drawn public attention to the fact that several Christians both in Damascus and in other Syrian cities where Jews live, have vanished on earlier occasions. Their disappearance has always remained a mystery and the idea that they fell victim to the same crime has increased the thirst of the people for vengeance.²

¹ Dinur, "Haofi hamedini shel 'alilat Damesek," p. 519.

² "Nouveaux Détails sur la Disparition du Père Thomas," *GdeF* (7 April).

The way in which the news emanating from Damascus stoked the flames of hostility elsewhere in the region can perhaps best be observed in the case of Beirut, the closest city of any significance. The process proved to be rapid, although not always instantaneous. Thus, some of the earliest letters reporting on the affair suggest that initially the charges against the Damascus Jews were met there with skepticism by at least some of the European consuls and businessmen.

This was certainly true, for example, of E. Kilbee and P. Laurella, who (although not Jews themselves) were both sometimes involved in transmitting the regular donations collected in Europe for the Jewish communities in Palestine. Thus, in a letter of 20 February to Hirsch Lehren, the director of the Jewish Holy-Land fund in Amsterdam, Kilbee, an English businessman and banker, emphasized the terrible torture and threats unleashed against the Damascus Jews, concluding: "I only hope and pray that Father Thomas will be found."³ And Laurella, the Austrian, Tuscan, and Dutch vice-consul, writing a few days later, noted the belief (not so unusual at first) that it was the government itself that had engineered "the disappearance of Father Thomas in order to extort money from the Jews."⁴

Once reports came in from Damascus, though, that the case had been solved, both men changed their tune entirely. Thus, on 7 March, Laurella, sending on a copy of Merlato's initial report to the Austrian consular agent in Latakiah, could add:

I imagine that when you read this account it will probably produce that detestation of the Jews which everybody feels here. I could hardly protect the Austrian Jews who arrived recently, and had to send my janisseries with them for the first three hours out of town: Christians, Muslims, everybody were ready to fall on them. . . .

What a terrible thing! The Hararis, rich merchants, have become murderers! . . . *There must be some fanatical belief involved.* May the good Lord confound these enormities, for *they are not the first to be persecuted.*⁵

And Kilbee now obviously wrote to Amsterdam in a similar vein, because in his reply Lehren reproached him for views so "very different from your first letter of 20 February: we are astonished that a man like you, born and educated in a civilized country, could lend the slightest credence to confessions extorted by the most barbaric torture."⁶

In a lengthy despatch to the secretary of state on 24 March, the American vice-consul in Beirut, Jasper Chasseaud, reported *inter alia*, that

³ "France," *JdesD* (20-21 April). ⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 290-1. ⁶ Lehren to Kilbee (5 May, no. 378) PVA.

a most barbarous secret for a long time suspected in the Jewish nation . . . at last came to light in the city of Damascus, that of serving themselves of Christian blood in their unleavened bread at Easter, a secret which in these 1840 years must have made many unfortunate victims. . . . The French consul is seizing their religious books with the hope of clearing that abominable secret. He found a book . . . in Latin by "Lucio Ferraro" in which passages are found from the Talmud, which I have the honor to . . . [send] in French. . . . In the place where the servant's remains were found, a quantity of human bones . . . have been discovered which proves that they were accustomed in that house to such like human sacrifices.⁷

In the light of this and similar commentaries, it comes as no surprise to find a prominent member of the tiny Jewish community in Beirut (perhaps two hundred in all) complaining to Lehren in Hebrew on 15 March that "we can hardly leave our homes. Everybody, great and small alike, attacks us and forces their way into our houses. We are utterly abased. May God take pity on us. Amen."⁸

That the fury against the Jews could erupt at any moment into mass violence was a theme reported with varying degrees of urgency from many other east Mediterranean ports as well as from some of the inland towns. Alexandria, Aleppo, Smyrna (Izmir), Constantinople, Jerusalem, and the island of Cyprus all witnessed mounting tension, while the Jewish community in Rhodes found itself subject to an onslaught on a scale comparable to that reached in Damascus.

In Jerusalem, the head of the English Protestant mission, John Nicolayson, described with alarm the great "ill-will towards the Jews . . . even here among both Christians and Muslims."⁹ A less sympathetic observer reported that "the Jews of Alexandria, who used to be so haughty, are now the most humiliated; they hardly dare go out."¹⁰ In Constantinople, a correspondent noted on 25 March that the case of Father Thomas was "causing a great stir and is increasing the hatred which exists here for the Jews."¹¹ And on the same day, the Prussian ambassador to the Porte, the Count (Graf) von Königsmark, in a despatch could describe the Damascus affair as "a tragic event which has produced a real uproar throughout the entire Levant – in

⁷ Chasseaud to Forsyth (24 March, no. 12) SDA:microfilm 367 (also in Blau and Baron, *The Jews of the United States*, vol. 13, pp. 924, 926). On Chasseaud: Tibawi, *American Interests in Syria*, pp. 75–6.

⁸ Alfandari to Lehren (15 March), "Persécution Exercée contre les Juifs en Orient," *AI*, p. 215.

⁹ Nicolayson to London Society (reports 16–24 March), *Jl* (June), p. 167.

¹⁰ "Assassinat du R. P. Thomas à Damas," *GdL* (9 May).

¹¹ "Türkei: Konstantinopel," *AZ* (14 April), p. 839.

order to obtain the Christian blood which they customarily mix into the bread distributed at their Passover, the Jews have murdered a Capuchin and his servant in a barbaric fashion." A similar case, he added, had taken place in Rhodes "at the same period and for the same purpose."¹²

Yet another charge of ritual murder was in the making at one moment in Smyrna, a city with a large Jewish population (of perhaps fifteen thousand).¹³ A report from that city on 24 March described how a boy of ten or twelve employed by a druggist had for "a few days suddenly disappeared. Already a great apprehension for his fate began to prevail, and the words 'Jew' and 'sacrifice' to circulate among some persons."¹⁴ At that moment, though, the missing lad, who had run away from his master, was discovered on the road out of town and the immediate threat was reduced.

No such good fortune fell to the Jewish community in Rhodes. And, in fact, it has generally been assumed that the alleged murder there was linked directly to the Damascus affair. Thus, Graetz, while not advancing a full-fledged conspiracy theory (as would Dinur), did assume that the events in Rhodes represented an attempt to lend weight to the charges being brought in Syria.¹⁵

But an examination of the relevant dates suggests that initially the two events erupted independently of each other. The crime in Rhodes (that of the alleged kidnap if not necessarily of the putative murder) supposedly took place on 17 February;¹⁶ given the distances and the infrequent, slow shipping, the news from Damascus could hardly have arrived so fast. It was only at a later stage that the well-publicized revelations emanating from Syria exerted a dramatic impact on developments in Rhodes.

To repeat, those troubled and fast-changing times were ripe for such cases. Indeed, only a few days before the Damascus affair, a bizarre instance had occurred in the Ottoman capital which, according to the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, "had placed the sixty thousand Jews in Constantinople in the greatest danger." As told by the correspondent for the journal, a Muslim child, left for safekeeping with a Jewish shopkeeper, managed to wander off unobserved and was not in the shop when his father returned. Laughing the matter off as nothing to worry about, the shopkeeper apparently joked: "I murdered him for Passover!" The father attacked him in fury; the Jew was arrested, and "the Greeks as well as the Orthodox Catholic Armenians, the sworn enemies of the Jews," set up a hue-and-cry, demand-

¹² Königsmark to Berlin (25 March), in Meisl, "Beiträge zur Damaskus Affäre," p. 228.

¹³ Barnai, "Hayehudim baimperiyah ha'otomanit," p. 197.

¹⁴ "Persecution of the Jews at Damascus," *JJ* (July), p. 171.

¹⁵ Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 11, p. 472.

¹⁶ Wilkinson to Palmerston (4 July) FO 78/413, p. 174.

ing that the shopkeeper be lynched.¹⁷ Luckily (as later in Smyrna), the child was found safe and sound and the Jew survived, although subjected to two hundred blows of the bastinado on the orders of the Hacham Bashi, the chief rabbi.

In contrast, the child who disappeared in Rhodes – a Greek Orthodox boy, perhaps eleven years old – was not discovered at the time.¹⁸ This frightening mystery, the fact that somebody could suddenly vanish into thin air, produced results in Rhodes that closely paralleled developments in Damascus. As both cases were the result of largely identical sociological factors, it is hardly surprising that they followed so similar a path.

The surviving documentary evidence from Rhodes is much more fragmentary than that from Damascus, but the basic pattern of events emerges clearly enough. On Monday, 17 February, a young boy living in Trianda was sent on an errand and failed to return home. The next day his mother appealed for help to the Ottoman authorities (the island was ruled from Constantinople, not Alexandria), and the governor, Yusuf Pasha, ordered a search to be launched. When, after a day or two, no sign of the missing boy was found, the European consuls pressed upon the local government the urgent need to solve the case – even though the lad (unlike Father Thomas) did not enjoy foreign protection, he was a Christian living under Muslim rule.

"It was firmly believed," so we read in one eyewitness account written at the time, "that the child in question was doomed to be sacrificed [by the Jews]. The whole island was agitated from one end to the other."¹⁹ The rabbi, Jacob Israel, and the four elders of the small Jewish community (perhaps numbering one thousand in all) were now called in by the governor and ordered to initiate a search of homes in the Jewish quarter. Finally, at the end of the week, a breakthrough was made when two Greek women reported that they had seen the boy heading toward the city of Rhodes in

¹⁷ Qu. from *AZdesj* in "Les Juifs de l'Orient," *AI* (1841), p. 217. (Barnai suggests forty thousand as the Jewish population of Constantinople.)

¹⁸ Galante claimed that the lad was found much later on the island of Syra (*Histoire des Juifs de Turquie*, vol. 7, p. 150), but he provided no source and this statement requires further corroboration.

¹⁹ "Administration of Justice towards the Jews in the East," *Times* (18 April), p. 3. The fact that 17 February was the eve of Purim should presumably be seen as pure coincidence. The consular reports make no mention of that Jewish festival and contemporary accusations against the Jews linked the murder charges to the Passover matzot. That the Damascus affair was associated with Purim was an idea raised in anti-Semitic publications only much later (see chap. 16). However, historians have speculated that the wilder forms of Purim festivity (with their overt celebration of revenge against Gentile enemies) might have sparked off or reinforced the blood accusation: e.g.: Roth, "The Feast of Purim"; Horowitz, "Venahafokh hu'."

the company (as the consular report to London put it) of "four Jews of the lowest class."²⁰

One of them, Eliakim Stamboli, who had (allegedly) been recognized, was arrested, questioned, and subjected to five hundred blows of the bastinado. On Sunday, 23 February, his interrogation was renewed in the presence of a large assembly of dignitaries, including the governor, the *cadi* (or chief judge), the Greek archbishop, and the European consular representatives. According to a report from Jewish sources on the island, Stamboli was now "loaded with chains, many stripes were inflicted on 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 that he was reduced to the point of death."²¹

It appears that a number of the vice-consuls, most particularly the Swedish, E. Masse, and the English, J. G. Wilkinson, played a (or even the) key role in the interrogation and, unlike Ratti-Menton, were present during much of the torture. Jews from Rhodes would accuse them of having conspired to exploit the case in order to eliminate the local representative of a major business rival – the wealthy London Jew, Joel Davis, who was then in the process of rapidly building up his share in the lucrative export of sponges from the island. However, as Stamboli's statement incriminated not Davis's agent (Elias Kalimati) but another prominent Jew, David Mizrachi, it would seem that there was no carefully laid plot.²² Rather, as in Damascus, a snowballing process was lent momentum by the firm belief of so many Christians in the ritual-murder charge (Rhodes was predominantly populated by Greek Orthodox) and by the ruthless application of torture.

Once Stamboli had been forced to incriminate others, a whole series of arrests ensued and the circle of violence rapidly widened. Some half dozen Jews were accused of involvement in the crime and tortured. The chief rabbi and the elders were brought in and subjected to intensive questioning about the Jewish practice of ritual murder. And the Jewish quarter was sealed off from the outside world leaving its inhabitants unable to buy food or to obtain fresh water. "The consuls," so Jewish sources claimed, "stated openly . . . their purpose of exterminating the Jews in Rhodes or to compel them to change their religion."²³

As in the Damascus case, so here, too, the Muslim authorities were by no means united in their determination to pursue the case against the Jews. The

²⁰ Wilkinson to Palmerston (4 July) FO 78/413, p. 175.

²¹ "Translation of a Hebrew Letter from the Congregation of Rhodes . . .," *Times* (25 June), p. 8.

²² E.g.: Isaac Pincherli and Co., Smyrna, to J. Davis (29 May) BofD, pp. 225–6; cf. "The Jews in Rhodes," *Times* (26 August), p. 6 (originally in *LAZ* [30 July], p. 2305).

²³ "Translation of a Hebrew Letter from . . . Rhodes," *Times* (25 June), p. 8.

officer in charge of the blockade was discovered smuggling bread in to the starving inhabitants and, on the urging of Wilkinson, was "bastinadoed and dismissed [from] the service."²⁴ The *cadi*, who was in clear sympathy with the Jews, initiated further hearings on the case toward the end of February, and the evidence was declared insufficient to convict the prisoners. For his part, the governor, although adamantly refusing to lift the siege, did send to Constantinople in early March with a request for instructions on how to proceed. And a high treasury official (*muhasil*), arriving by chance from the capital on a tour of inspection, finally frightened the governor (an official clearly lacking Sherif Pasha's vast power and self-confidence) into lifting the blockade, which by then had lasted twelve days. At that moment, according to an eyewitness report, "everyone believed the affair ended, and the Jews returned thanks to the Almighty for their deliverance."²⁵

In reality, though, such hopes proved to be unfounded. What almost certainly now, in the latter half of March, turned the tables against the Jewish community was the arrival and assimilation of the news about the case in Damascus. Did not that information bring conclusive proof that the boy from Trianda had, indeed, fallen victim to ritual murder? At this stage, Wilkinson reported, "the Greeks cried aloud that justice had not been rendered to them and that the rabbi and chiefs ought to have been imprisoned. . . . In order therefore to endeavour to keep the populace quiet . . . it was decided that these should be arrested."²⁶ (As with Ratti-Menton, so Wilkinson's claim to have helped forestall a massacre should not be dismissed lightly, even though it is no less true that both men contributed crucially to inflaming the crises in the first place.)

Thus, some two weeks after the end of the siege, a new round of arrests was launched. This time, Yusuf Pasha demonstrated a still greater ruthlessness, insisting that, once and for all, the rabbi and the elders had to disclose what had become of the missing child.

When Rabbi Israel now recalled the fact that the Muslim judicial authorities had found no evidence against them, Wilkinson reportedly showed himself full of assurance: "What signifies the Mollah's judgment to us after what happened at Damascus and it is proved that, according to the Talmud, Christian blood must be used in making your Passover bread?" The rabbi and David Mizrachi were now put to the torture, suspended swinging in rough and ready harness from hooks in the ceiling. Mizrachi, an elderly man, lost consciousness after six hours, but the rabbi was kept there for some two days until blood "gushed from his extremities." When the European consular officials came to observe the scene, the rabbi, as an Austrian subject,

²⁴ "The Jews in Rhodes," *ibid.* (26 August), p. 6. ²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Wilkinson to Palmerston (4 July) FO 78/413, pp. 175-6.

appealed to his vice-consul, Anton Giuliani, who apparently replied: "What rabbi!? What do you complain about? So you are not dead yet."²⁷

The rabbi and Mizrachi (like Antebi and Salonicli in Damascus) adamantly and astonishingly refused to confess guilt; they were released after a few days. However, six Jews were still in prison in early April. And no word whatsoever had as yet arrived from the government in Constantinople.

The European Press: Receiving and Transmitting the News

In defense of the idea that the Damascus affair was the result of a planned conspiracy, Ben Zion Dinur emphasized the "large number of reports from Syria which appeared in the European press – all following the same line."²⁸ And it is correct that the publication policies pursued by the newspapers did play a crucial role in the magnification of the affair in Europe. Nonetheless, in this instance, too, the reality (as Graetz had already indicated)²⁹ was much less tidy.

The press in the 1840s, after all, functioned in ways often quite unfamiliar to the twentieth-century reader; it was far less streamlined and, by present-day standards, extraordinarily amateurish. What might look to the modern eye to be the work of some hidden hand was in fact the result of slapdash methods of news-gathering.

First of all, there were no professional journalists employed by the European press in the Middle East, and it was not customary to send reporters on special assignments in case of a crisis. A correspondent from the *Times* did travel out from London in 1840 to report on the political situation in the Middle East, but he arrived six months after the start of the Damascus affair. Even that was exceptional.

In the case of Syria, the papers depended on the few Europeans who for one reason or another were on the spot: businessmen, diplomats, missionaries, and travelers. Some reported regularly and could expect to be paid per article; others simply supplied the news as a public service, or for reasons of vanity, or in the hope of shaping political opinion. Under these circumstances, it was natural enough that the correspondents should have regarded their articles as personal communications, more in the nature of impressionistic letter-writing than of professional journalism bound to certain standards of factual accuracy, open-mindedness, and objectivity.

Furthermore, very few newspapers could even rely directly on the idio-

²⁷ "The Jews in Rhodes," *Times* (26 August), p. 6.

²⁸ Dinur, "Haofi hamedini shel 'alilat Damesek," p. 519.

²⁹ Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 11, pp. 474–5, 477, 487.

syncratic services of such amateur contributors. In a period that predated Reuter and the news agencies, it was acceptable simply to republish items that had already appeared elsewhere. Thus, the papers with the readiest access to the Middle East news – the *Journal de Smyrne*, the *Echo de l'Orient* (likewise published in Smyrna), the *Malta Times*, the *Sémaphore de Marseille*, and the *Sud* (another Marseilles paper) – supplied a huge percentage of the articles, sometimes acknowledged, sometimes not, in many of the European countries.

Given this system, nothing was easier for well-connected people in the Middle East than to infiltrate news into the European press. The mere delivery of information, real or imagined, if written in a major European language, would open many doors. And if the supply of news was not enough, money was a good supplement. In the Middle East, as in France, for that matter, it was common practice for papers to take subsidies from sources considered to be politically acceptable. Muhammed Ali, who went to extraordinary lengths to cultivate his image as a champion of European civilization, employed one of the many Frenchmen in his service to supply the *Sémaphore de Marseille* with a steady stream of adulatory articles. And rumor had it that he also directly subsidized the *Sémaphore*.³⁰

Under these circumstances, it could be imagined that the editorial staff of the major European journals would have carefully sifted, compared, and selected the material to be published. But such an approach was rare. More often than not, the only selection made (considerations of space apart) was that between the publication or the nonpublication of a given news item. And that choice, in turn, was influenced variously by the need to survive in a highly competitive market (when it came to sensationalism, the nineteenth century was no different from the twentieth); by the politics of the paper; and, of course, in many countries by the censorship and government direction. East of the Rhine and south of the Alps, the press was subject everywhere in Europe to various degrees of control, ranging from the draconian in the Russia of Nicholas I to the capricious in such semiconstitutional German states as Bavaria or Saxony.

In the first two months of the Damascus affair, up until early April, the dynamics of this system tended to work to the greatest disadvantage of the Jews. The reports from the Middle East arrived in short bursts, corresponding for the most part to the disembarkation of mail-carrying ships in southern France, but their cumulative effect became ever more devastating as the

³⁰ "Aegypten," *AZ* (Beilage) (26 May), p. 1142. Muhammed Ali may also have subsidized the *Morning Post* (Bourne, Palmerston, p. 488). On the French press, e.g.: Collins, *The Government and the Newspaper Press*; Hatin, *Bibliographie Historique*; on the German: Koszyk, *Deutsche Presse*.

weeks went by. These news items were sent from (and presumably written, or copied, in) various cities – Damascus itself, Beirut, Alexandria, and Constantinople; some came directly to Europe; others were taken from the Smyrna papers. But everything suggests that, with one or two minor exceptions, their ultimate source was information supplied by members of the minuscule European community in Damascus. As there was nobody there for many weeks to challenge the official line of inquiry, the assumption, implicit or explicit, was that Jews had committed the murders.

Initially, of course, the news came trailing an air of unsolved mystery, a fact that reflected the actual state of the interrogations in the Damascus prisons until mid-February or even until the end of that month.

The earliest report to reach the European press was published in the *Sémaphore de Marseille* on 13 March. A short note from Beirut, dated 21 February, described Father Thomas's disappearance and stated that "a number of Jewish families are suspected." There was no mention of ritual murder and no attempt to conceal the methods of interrogation: "The Jews are subjected non-stop to torture in order to force them to name the authors of a crime which revolts everybody."³¹ This report, with only minute variations, soon appeared without comment in many newspapers in Western and Central Europe, including the highly influential *Journal des Débats* in Paris, the *Times* in London, and the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* in Saxony.

But this was merely the lull before the storm. The confession of Solomon Halek, the barber, quickly provided fertile soil for wild speculation. An article, for example, published in the *Gazette de Languedoc* on 16 March and in the *Presse* of Paris four days later, expressed confidence that it would soon be possible to lift "the bloody veil hiding the mystery." And the ritual-murder charge was now out in the open: "Rightly or wrongly, the Jews in this city [Damascus] have the terrifying and inconceivable reputation of sacrificing a Christian on their Passover and of distributing the blood to their co-religionists in the region."³²

On 22 March the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* carried the report, arriving via Constantinople, that Father Tommaso had been "locked up in the cellar of a rich Jew, Daoud [David] Harari, and there ceremonially slaughtered by a Jewish butcher; his blood was secretly divided up among the fanatical Jews." As in many other articles, special praise was reserved for the zeal of "the French consul and the authorities"³³ in their pursuit of the murderers.

There were no doubts expressed and no mention of torture in such news items as these, which presumably originated in the circle of Jean-Baptiste Beaudin and Ratti-Menton. But one or two accounts from this intermediate

³¹ "Syrie: Beyrouth (21 Février)," *SdeM* (13 March). ³² E.g.: *Presse* (20 March).

³³ "Türkei," *LAZ* (22 March), p. 850.

period did reflect some of that disquiet that Laurella and Kilbee had transmitted to Hirsch Lehren in late February. Thus, a long piece, originating in Damascus on 16 February and appearing in the *Sémaphore de Marseille* on 25 March, shows the author, whose identity unfortunately is not known, as torn in two different directions. His almost schizophrenic attitude provides us with a glimpse into doubts well hidden in the diplomatic documents emanating from Damascus at the time.

On the one hand, according to the barber, it seemed that Father Tommaso had indeed fallen victim to "atrocious fanaticism," to that "bloody form of sacrifice ascribed to the Jews by medieval writers," and that "in the East the Jews have preserved this custom of murdering a Christian during their festivals in order to satisfy a hatred transmitted from fathers to sons since the sublime drama of the Calvary." And he added that "our hearts were all filled with indignation."

But, on the other hand, he described the forms of torture being applied in harrowing detail and with unconcealed repugnance: "They are flogged, their foreheads are skinned by the tourniquet, they are despoiled; and what is more, the governor has courteously accepted the services of magicians who have promised to use their art in order to find the culprits." (The role of astrologers in the case was, incidentally, often mentioned in such nonofficial reports.) "This is another Babylonian captivity. . . . All this is happening in 1840." Somehow the author reconciled these highly conflicting emotions by the suggestion that many innocent people were being forced "to suffer with the guilty." (He had particularly good words for the Hararis, who "were highly respected.")³⁴

In contrast, a short note from Beirut written on 29 February and published in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* of Augsburg was downright skeptical. The Jews, we read there, were probably right in suspecting that the motive of the government led by Ibrahim Pasha and Sherif Pasha was simply to expropriate their wealth.

As nobody here sympathizes with the Jews, the people, who are both unsophisticated and fanatical, say that this is a very clever and popular move by Ibrahim. That is the way things are in Syria; hatred here is not between the national groups, but between the religions, and one sect will happily give up half its possessions if that ensures that the other sect loses everything. All the Turkish pashas who used to rule in Syria knew how to exploit this hatred to the utmost and, as we can now see, Ibrahim does so no less.³⁵

However, articles expressing such reservations were very rare, not widely reproduced, and proved to be merely a lull in the gathering storm. On 29

³⁴ "Nouveaux Détails sur la Disparition du R. P. Thomas," *SdeM* (25 March).

³⁵ "Beyrut (29 Februar)," *AZ* (31 March), p. 727.

March, for example, the *Constitutionnel* published a report describing not only the affair in Damascus, but also that in Rhodes. In the latter case, it stated, a very long inquiry – with the participation of the consular corps and the highest ecclesiastics – had come to the conclusion, “albeit not with absolute certainty, that the Jews were implicated in the abduction of the boy.” It was a belief of the people that among the “mysteries” of the Jewish religion there was one which, “in its horror and barbarity, recalls the Druidic sacrifices. For their Passover and their communion . . . they capture a child whom they purify during a period of forty days in order then to slaughter him with refined cruelty.”³⁶

And only a few days later, the *Sémaphore de Marseille* and the *Sud* carried the articles that set in motion a dramatic escalation in the way the case was being reported in France and in some neighboring countries. The headline in the *Sémaphore* clearly indicated what was to follow: “New Details on the Disappearance of Father Thomas: the Discovery of the Murderers.” Sent from Alexandria on 22 March, it announced simply but dramatically: “To-day the truth is known: of the nine accused . . . seven are united in admitting everything.” There followed a description of Father Tommaso’s murder which, while following the lines of Ratti-Menton’s report to Marshall Soult on 29 February, went into still more detail. David Harari’s servant (Murad el-Fatal), it stated, had

sat firmly on the victim’s stomach; the barber had held him by his beard; the two hakhams pinned him to the ground, the one by the arms, the other by the legs. David Harari, armed with a large knife, cut deep into his throat; and then his brother Aaron Harari, Mussa [Moses] Abu el-Afieh and Mussa Salonicli finished him off. Around these leaders responsible for the sacrifice [*grands sacrificateurs*] three others ranged themselves in order to fulfil their own functions. The body was suspended head down; one held a tub to collect the blood while the other two applied pressure to facilitate the flow. Then, once the source of blood had dried up, all of them, maddened, threw themselves on the corpse, cutting it to bits.

Much more followed in a similar vein. The remains of Tommaso’s servant had been discovered; attention was turning to earlier unsolved crimes of this type; and now the news from Rhodes – “the same crime committed in the same week” – clearly suggested that “the acts of human sacrifice were committed at predetermined times.”³⁷ (The article in the *Sud* was somewhat shorter, but likewise stated confidently that “the murderers of the revered Father Thomas have been discovered,”³⁸ and described the alleged facts of the crime.)

³⁶ *Constitutionnel* (29 March). ³⁷ “Égypte: Alexandrie (22 Mars),” *SdeM* (2 April).

³⁸ “Beyrouth (12 Mars),” as reproduced, e.g., in *Presse* (6 April).

The news from Marseilles was quickly picked up by papers elsewhere, among them many of the most important in continental Europe, and often with a similar headline, announcing "The Discovery of Father Thomas's Murderers." The gruesome article from the *Sémaphore* reappeared, for instance, in the first three weeks of April in the *Constitutionnel*, *Gazette de France*, *Gazette de Languedoc*, the Belgian *Courrier de Meuse*, the Turin *Gazzetta Piemontese*, the Bavarian *Allgemeine Zeitung* of Augsburg and *Bayerische Landboten*, and in the Hungarian *Sürgöny*. The piece in the *Sud* found its way, inter alia, into the *Siècle*, *Temps*, *Presse*, *Univers*, *Gazette des Tribunaux*, *Quotidienne*, *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Bayerische Landbote*, *Münchner Politische Zeitung*, and, again, in the *Gazzetta Piemontese* (which published both articles). The *Journal des Débats* chose to combine the two stories in one long account. And, for its part, the leading Viennese paper, *Oesterreichischer Beobachter*, published yet a third report (drawn from the Smyrna papers) of the murder triumphantly solved.

Of course, an analysis of editorial policies has also to give due weight to the fact that many papers did not publish this material, however great its sales value. Among the journals that chose not to pick up the story of human sacrifice and murder rites were a number on the French Left (the *National*, for example); many in the German states (among them, the *Frankfurter Journal*), and such liberal papers in Belgium as the *Journal de Flandres*, published in Ghent.

There is probably nothing noteworthy in the fact that, by early April, the revelations from Damascus had apparently not been mentioned in Russia, given the huge distances that the news had to travel and the prevailing suspicion in St. Petersburg of any unusual information. But, clearly, a definite choice lay behind the total silence regarding the case imposed by (or, rather, on) the press in Rome, then capital of the papal states.³⁹ And no less conspicuous was the decision of the papers in England and Holland,⁴⁰ some of which had already begun reporting on the Damascus affair, to ignore the latest and most newsworthy episode in the unfolding drama.

Nowhere, it should be added, did anybody subject the extraordinary information emerging from the Middle East to any form of critical scrutiny. True, the *Sémaphore de Marseille* did accompany its lurid account of the murder with an editorial note pointing out that "an entire nation should not be made the object of the blame which is due only to a few miserable fanatics."⁴¹ And

³⁹ On the press and the papal government: [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 286; James to Karl Rothschild (3 June) NMRA:RFam AD/2, no. 33, where the fear was expressed lest the censors permit the *Diario di Roma* to publish material in support of the ritual-murder charge.

⁴⁰ On the Dutch press: Steenwijk, "De Damascus-Affaire," pp. 59–63. (A sampling of the press in Sweden suggests that the affair aroused little interest there.)

⁴¹ *SdeM* (2 April).

the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, a paper directed to the legal profession, did wonder whether "the confessions are an expression of the truth or were made . . . to escape the sufferings of the torture."⁴² But these themes were not followed up elsewhere.

The mosaic pattern formed by the decisions to publish or not to publish demonstrates clearly enough that the dissemination of the murder story was not an exclusively French phenomenon. It was, after all, reproduced in the most influential German and Austrian papers, in Belgium and in Italy.

And although it is also true that these grotesque reports were most widely disseminated in France, it by no means follows that the government of Thiers (better known as "the government of 1 March") was responsible. Papers associated with both the conservative and legitimist wings of the opposition proved at least as eager to publish as the pro-government, or "ministerial," press. Such editorial decisions can be explained by the fact that for weeks on end, Beaudin and Ratti-Menton were able to exercise something very close to a monopoly on the flow of news from Damascus; that the story came with scarcely disguised consular approval; and that the Egyptian government was deeply involved – hero worship in contemporary France had no more popular object than Muhammed Ali, who over many decades had gradually acquired the aura of some minor but authentic Napoleon.

Even more improbable is the idea that a clerical plot was involved. Certainly, the ultra-Catholic Right, as represented by legitimist (the *Gazette de France*, *Quotidienne*, *Gazette de Languedoc*), accommodationist (*Univers*), and by various Belgian and Piedmontese papers, took up the reports with transparent eagerness. By the same token, the wariness displayed on the French Left was probably to be attributed to its extreme anticlericalism and its aversion to the talk (already noticeable in early April) of Tommaso as a martyred saint. But the Ultramontane and legitimist press had not initiated the spread of the news; and the silence displayed by the papacy itself as well as by many Catholic papers elsewhere – in Ireland, for example – demonstrated that there was no unified policy in the Catholic world.

By early April, then, editorial policies with regard to the Damascus affair had still not hardened into any final form. Yet the shape of things to come was already beginning to emerge. The pointed silence of papers in the pluralistic, mercantile, and predominantly Protestant states – the United Kingdom (including Ireland) and the Netherlands – stood in extraordinary contrast to the opposite policy adopted by the militantly Catholic (or "clerical") press in the West and by the great majority of papers in France.

⁴² "Poursuites contre les Juifs de Damas," *GdesT* (6–7 April).

Groping for a Response: The Jews in East and West

To say that the Jewish people at first found themselves totally outmaneuvered by the European Christian community in Damascus, led by Beaudin and Ratti-Menton, would be an understatement. The truth is that the Jews both in the Middle East and in the West were caught completely off guard, defenseless. In the region, they were handicapped by the general perception that the political influence which they had once enjoyed was now in rapid decline. And in the West, there were no existing institutions designed to respond to such crises. Moreover, for an entire generation, nothing had prepared the Jews for the kind of massive onslaught unleashed in much of the European press from mid-March. Their response had to be worked out almost from scratch; it was ill-coordinated and slow.

However, it is also true that certain steps taken in the first two months of the affair did prepare the ground for the more effective measures to be adopted later. And even at that early stage, there were signs that the Jewish community in Rhodes, however desperate, was still better placed than that in Damascus to escape from its entrapment.

A letter in Hebrew reporting on the affair was sent from Damascus to two prominent members of the Jewish community in Constantinople on 21 February. This document is missing, but its gist is known. Whoever wrote it (his identity was not disclosed) expressed the hope that the case would soon be settled satisfactorily on the spot.⁴³

It was, thus, not until well into March, about one month after the start of the case, that actual appeals for help left Damascus and Beirut addressed to both the Ottoman capital and Europe. They described in some detail the chain of events up until that moment, but a summary of their contents would add little to what has already been related here (apart from the fact that a number of Jews, even though not imprisoned themselves, opted like Moses Abu el-Afieh to convert to Islam – among them, a prominent banker close to Sherif Pasha, Negri Behor).⁴⁴

The Hebrew text of these letters carries a resonance missing from the later abridged translations into European languages. Replete with age-old terms, they spoke, for example, of martyrdom (*kidush hashem*); added standard curses (*yimah shemo*, “may his name be obliterated”) when referring to Beaudin; and,

⁴³ The reference is in the letter from Damascus to Conorte and Cohen in Constantinople (March): [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 208.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 210. Cf. Isaac Roumani in Damascus to Haim Roumani, Beirut (3 March), *AI*, pp. 211–12; and R. Alfandari, Beirut, to Lehren (15 March), *ibid.*, pp. 212–16.

in one instance stated, along traditional lines, that the young tobacco salesman, Isaac Yavo, who had voluntarily come forward as a witness had – while being flogged to death – constantly repeated the most holy statement of the faith, the *shema* (“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One”).⁴⁵

In its closing words, the letter to Constantinople asked the recipients to read its contents to the leaders of the community there in order (as the English translation put it) “that they may cooperate for the safety of our unfortunate brethren, with such persons as they may deem most fitting.”⁴⁶

While it had thus taken the Damascus Jews about four weeks to issue a call for help, somebody (again, understandably enough, unnamed), speaking for the community in Rhodes, managed to smuggle a letter out of the besieged Jewish quarter in the first days of the crisis there.⁴⁷ In this case, too, following ancient practice, the appeal was sent to the Jewish leadership in the capital. As the island was under direct Ottoman rule, it clearly made sense to appeal to the Jews in Constantinople, who at least in the past had often been able to intercede with the government on such occasions. In contrast, of course, Damascus was *de facto*, albeit not *de jure*, in the enemy territory of Muhammed Ali.

It was not until 27 March, a full seven weeks after the start of the Damascus affair, that the leaders of the Constantinople community (I. Camondo, Salamon Fua, and Samuel de N. Trèves) finally forwarded the letters received from Syria and Rhodes to Europe. They chose to send the material, with their own statement written in Italian, to the heads of the Rothschild banks in Vienna, Naples, and London (and possibly to those in Paris and Frankfurt, too). They appealed to the Rothschilds in the name of “the tie which so strongly binds together the whole Jewish community.”⁴⁸

They put forward the case for Rhodes as well as for Damascus, thus suggesting grave doubts about their own ability to influence the regime of the Sultan. But they presented the Damascus problem as particularly intractable, because the Jewish leadership in Constantinople was “deeply grieved to find itself incapacitated from affording any relief in consequence of being subject to a government not on friendly terms with the pasha of Egypt.”⁴⁹ This appeal was apparently the first concrete step taken by the Jews in Constantinople, although others would follow.

That the tempo governing these moves, the letter from Rhodes apart, was regarded even by contemporaries as inordinately slow, can be seen from the response sent by Hirsch Lehren of Amsterdam to Moses de Picciotto, a prominent member of the Aleppo community and Dutch consul in that city,

⁴⁵ Ibid. (See, too, *AZdesJ* [16 May], p. 280, which reproduced much of Alfandari's letter in the original Hebrew.)

⁴⁶ [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 210. (Cf. *Times*, 25 June, p. 8.) ⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 211.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 206. ⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 207.

who had sent a letter about Damascus on 24 March, some days before the one from Constantinople. "I am truly astonished," declared Lehren, "that you loitered such a long time in giving us information."⁵⁰

Lehren, as he did not hesitate to tell de Picciotto with some contempt, had received news of the crisis in Damascus much earlier directly from Beirut. He was the first prominent Jewish figure in Europe to be warned of what was happening, a fact that well illustrates the importance of institutions (and the lack of them) in such circumstances. The charitable organization that he headed, best known by its Hebrew title of "Hapekidim Vechaamarkelim" and founded in 1809, was in constant touch with the Middle East. Lehren, strictly observant and Orthodox, had long made himself responsible not only for the complex transfer of money, but also for the varied diplomatic contacts required to provide the Jews in the Holy Land with a measure of security and protection.⁵¹

Naturally enough, then, it was to him that Raphael I. Alfandari, one of his key Jewish contacts in Beirut, chose to despatch the various eyewitness accounts from Damascus, all written in Hebrew, on 15 March. Alfandari concluded his own appeal, likewise in Hebrew, with the request that Lehren write to the Rothschilds in London, Paris, and Vienna: "Let them sanctify themselves by sanctifying the name of God; let them speak to the kings and to their ministers in order to persuade them to write to [Muhammed] Ali Pasha to have the proceedings heard by him and by the consul-general."⁵² (The reference is almost certainly to the Austrian consul-general, Anton Laurin, whose role will be discussed in the following chapter.)

While such messages were slowly wending their way to Europe, a number of other steps were taken in the region that would eventually also have significant repercussions. Thus, a most extraordinary development began to unfold in Jerusalem starting from 16 March.

It was on that day that the mission of the English Protestant organization, the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews (usually known simply as the London Society), was first drawn into the Damascus affair. The diary of John Nicolayson, the head of the mission, records the fact that he then made it a point to inquire into the highly disquieting rumors arriving from Damascus, only to have them confirmed by the governor of the city, by the mufti, and by the Roman Catholic ("Latin") monks.

⁵⁰ (13 May, no. 399) PvA.

⁵¹ On Lehren and the Amsterdam organization, e.g. Rivlin, *Igrot hapekidim*, particularly Bartal's introduction, vol. 3, pp. xiv-xvi; Lieber, *Mystics and Missionaries*, pp. 144-56, 190-201, 218-19, 246-74; Morgenstern, *Meshihiut veyishuv eretz yisrael*, pp. 149-56 and passim; idem, "Igrot hapekidim vechaamarkelim."

⁵² *AI*, 1840, p. 216.

The attitude of the demonstratively Orthodox Jewish community in Jerusalem (which numbered a few thousand) to the Protestant mission was highly complex: most hostile for much of the time; occasionally cooperative; sometimes even warm. On the one hand, the rabbis, Sephardi and Ashkenazi alike, were ready to fight tooth-and-nail against the strongly conversionist policies of the mission.

On the other hand, they were well aware of the fact that key leaders of the London Society held the idea of the Jewish people, if not the actual, present-day Jews, in awe as the rightful heirs to the Children of Israel and as the future beneficiaries of biblical Prophecy – hence, indeed, the immense importance of winning the Jews over to true (Protestant Evangelical) Christianity. By the same token, the belief in a special Jewish destiny often translated itself into a tangible effort to help the Jews in Palestine in very concrete, philanthropic, and political terms – during the frequent plagues, for example, or after the devastating earthquake of 1837 in Safed. In 1839 the Society decided to set up a hospital in Jerusalem and two medical officers were sent out. They were both ex-Jews converted to Anglican Protestantism. Nicolayson's small team was, as a deliberate policy, entirely manned by such men, among them George W. Pieritz.⁵³

It was to Pieritz, so Nicolayson's diary tells us, that the Jews of Jerusalem now "sent a delegation . . . to beg he would do what he could to rid them of this calumny, and in fact requested that he would go with them to Damascus for this purpose."⁵⁴ The missionaries pronounced the ritual-murder accusation to be absurd ("a renewal in the nineteenth century of that old calumny") and advised the rabbis "to keep perfectly quiet lest they should draw the . . . calumny upon themselves."⁵⁵

With remarkable speed the decision was taken to send Pieritz to Damascus alone; he left on 18 March via Jaffa and from there by sea to Beirut, arriving in Damascus at the end of the month. "May it be given to us," wrote Nicolayson, "to discover the real perpetrators of that horrible deed."⁵⁶ On the day of Pieritz's departure,

several rabbis had assembled at his house and wished to accompany him out of town, but we thought it best not to attract attention. . . . It is deeply interesting to think with what fervour the rabbis and the whole Jewish community here will be pouring out prayers for the *success* of his object: the first time that they have done so for a converted Jew and

⁵³ On the London Society, in general: Gidney, *The History of the London Society*; and on its work in Jerusalem: Lieber, *Mystics and Missionaries*, pp. 292–317; Tibawi, *British Interests in Palestine*, pp. 5–17, 29–57; and the frequent reports in *Jl*. Cf. Farah, "Protestantism and Politics."

⁵⁴ The General Journal of the Mission of the London Society (16 March) (Jerusalem Municipality: Historical Archive).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 17 March. ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

missionary! Indeed, the opportunity . . . to serve the Jews, at much expense and some risk, is a most precious one.⁵⁷

Nicolayson noted with satisfaction that, for the time being, there would be no more efforts to impose a boycott, or *herem*, on the mission; and of the Sephardi rabbi, Raphael Navon (an erstwhile advocate of the boycott, but now most friendly) he wrote, that "if he had any moral sense left, he must have felt coals heaped upon his head."⁵⁸

While it was thus decided that Damascus itself should be avoided, the Jewish community did, nonetheless, send its own emissaries elsewhere to solicit support in the affair. The rabbis, Haim Nisim Abu el-Afieh (the father of Moses Abu el-Afieh or Muhammed Effendi), and Isaac Farhi set out for Constantinople, sent, as they put it, "by the leaders of the Holy Land to seek help and protection"⁵⁹ for the Damascus Jews. Rabbi Isaac Fakh (the "Engraver") went to Alexandria in hope of winning over the European consuls-general there.

Nicolayson provided him with a solemn statement declaring the ritual-murder charge an "utter absurdity," but the rabbi was unsure until the last minute whether to go, "seeing that he felt almost discouraged at the small prospect . . . of success and the measly manner in which he would be furnished with the necessary expenses by the Jews here." The head of the Protestant mission, however, persuaded the rabbi not to give up, appealing to his "feelings as a Jew."⁶⁰

Given the extreme poverty, insecurity, and ultraconservatism of the Jewish community in the Holy Land, this rather surprising degree of activism requires some explanation. It has to be remembered, first, that the despatch of emissaries (*shliḥim* or *meshulaḥim*) to Europe, or even farther afield, albeit primarily in search of funds, was an old Jerusalem tradition; and, second, that the community, for all its innumerable problems, also enjoyed a special prestige thanks to the holiness of the city and the land. That status, it may be surmised, carried with it a certain sense of noblesse oblige.

Meanwhile, a measure of a different kind was initiated in Smyrna. The chief rabbi of the city, Pinhas de Segura, issued an official statement in his own name and in that of the community rejecting the ritual-murder charge. It later emerged that he had only agreed to take this step "after multifarious and pressing exhortations"⁶¹ – a fact in no way surprising given that the Smyrna community was notorious for its fierce internal divisions and controversies, largely involving rabbinical rule (or tyranny, as the opposition would have it).⁶²

⁵⁷ Ibid., 18 March (cf. *Jl*, pp. 166–7). ⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ H. N. Abu el-Afieh and Isaac Farhi to James de Rothschild (15 April), *AI*, p. 260.

⁶⁰ The General Journal of the Mission, 18 March (cf. *Jl*, p. 167).

⁶¹ "Zur nähern Würdigung Orientalischer Zustände," *LA* (11 June 1841), p. 186.

⁶² E.g.: "Türkei," *LÄZ* (12 May), p. 142; "Smyrna – Letter from Mr. J. Cohen," *Jl* (August 1841), pp. 278–9; cf. Galante, *Histoire des Juifs de Turquie*, vol. 3, pp. 14–21.

In his declaration, de Segura deplored "the disorders and harassment" to which the Jews of Smyrna were being subjected because of the news from Damascus and Rhodes; insisted that the biblical commandments forbade the murder of any human being, not only of Jews; and declared that as the Jews were strictly forbidden to consume the blood of animals, they would hardly defile themselves with that of a man.⁶³ This statement was short, but as it found its way into the *Echo de l'Orient* it was assured a resonance far beyond the region.

Of the various letters sent in the latter half of February to alert the Jews in Europe, the first to arrive was that from the English businessman, E. Kilbee, to Hirsch Lehren in Amsterdam. He received it on 18 March and decided at once, even on the basis of very scanty information, that he had to respond in some way. In a period when Jewish reactions were often hesitant or delayed, Lehren acted with remarkable urgency.

On that same day, he wrote appealing for intervention, at the very least to the Dutch foreign minister, Baron V. Van Soelen,⁶⁴ and Baron James de Rothschild in Paris. His letter to Rothschild (in French), describing the plight of the Damascus Jews, declared inter alia that

the Jews will never be free of persecution until our Messiah comes – a time which we steadfastly await; but the good Lord . . . has always given us men of eminence with sufficient influence to ameliorate their misfortunes. And in our times, He has given us the renowned Rothschild family which has the power to save their brethren suffering persecution. . . . Here is a chance to prove yourself the guardian angel of the oppressed and for you to open the doors of Paradise. Every moment is possibly vital.⁶⁵

A week later, he followed this up with a still more pressing appeal, transmitting new letters from the Middle East and stating that "the life of many thousands of our co-religionists is at stake."⁶⁶ He pressed James de Rothschild for an immediate reply.

It so happened, though, that Rothschild was in London at that time attending the wedding of his nephew, Anthony, to Louisa, the niece of Moses Montefiore. Thus, apparently, no action was taken in Paris until the end of March. At that point, Albert Cohn, who was tutor in Jewish subjects to the Rothschild children and the family's adviser on Jewish public affairs, found himself involved in the case.

As he recalled later,⁶⁷ he now undertook to help the famous court lawyer,

⁶³ "Türkei," *Oesterreichischer Beobachter* (15 April), pp. 535–6.

⁶⁴ Steenwijk, "De Damascus-Affaire," p. 70. ⁶⁵ PvA no. 314. ⁶⁶ Ibid. (25 March), no. 329.

⁶⁷ [Cohn], "Rückblick," pp. 200–1.

Adolphe Crémieux, prepare a written response to the flood of articles in the press accusing the Jews in the Middle East of ritual murder and human sacrifice. Even though Crémieux was the vice-president of the Central Consistory, the body responsible for the supervision of Jewish religious institutions in France, his knowledge of traditional Judaism was sketchy. It thus fell to Albert Cohn to instruct Crémieux in the long history of the ritual murder charge and to translate the Hebrew letters from the Middle East as they began to trickle in during the month of April. Here, at least, a counteroffensive was being systematically prepared.

When searching the horizon, then, for somebody capable, perhaps, of saving the Jews in Damascus and Rhodes, eyes in the Middle East had not turned to the Central Consistory in Paris or the Board of Deputies in London, even though those bodies enjoyed a representative status. It was to the Rothschild family that the community leaders in Constantinople and Raphael Alfandari in Beirut looked for rescue.

The Rothschilds had no official status as Jewish leaders, and their exceptional wealth was hardly more than one generation old in 1840.⁶⁸ But it was no doubt well-known in the Middle East that they were actively involved in Jewish affairs of all kinds; that they shared concern for the welfare of the Jews in Palestine (cooperating with Hirsch Lehren); and that they had ready access as bankers and even as unofficial advisers to many statesmen and politicians in Europe.

Indeed, by 1840, the Rothschilds were already acquiring a mythic status in the Jewish world – and beyond it. However, the myth was grounded on a rock of facts. The appeals to them from Constantinople, Beirut, and Amsterdam were logical enough. And it can be surmised with some confidence that Lehren's impassioned pleas to Jacob (James) Rothschild led directly to the recruitment of Albert Cohn and Adolphe Crémieux to the cause.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ On the Rothschilds in the first half of the nineteenth century: Corti, *The Rise*; idem, *The Reign*; Davis, *The English Rothschilds*; Muhlstein, *Baron James*.

⁶⁹ The supposition that James Rothschild took the initiative is based, *inter alia*, on the fact that the Hebrew correspondence from the East reached him before anybody else in Paris.

The consuls divide

During its second month, the ritual-murder case in Damascus began to lose some momentum. As the proceedings stretched on week after week, they ran into difficulties that had certainly not been anticipated earlier. And the failure to round matters out during March can be seen in retrospect to have been of decisive importance in the history of the affair, a crucial turning point.

Moving forward one step at a time, without any master plan, the men responsible for the creation of the case allowed themselves both unlimited time and ever greater ambitions. They overestimated their ability to control events. The final result was that the European consular corps in Damascus, which had been solidly united in support of the ritual-murder charge, split apart. At the same time, profound disagreements opened up among the consuls-general in the capital, Alexandria.

Of course, news of these developments did not reach the papers in Europe until May; and throughout April they continued to carry sensational reports from Damascus. Much was made, for example, of the efforts under way there to unearth the mysteries of the Jewish religion. "On the orders of the pasha," reads a typical item in the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* on 12 May,

the Talmud is now being translated. Three rabbis have been recruited to that end and are kept in separate rooms. They are threatened with the death sentence if, on comparison, they are found responsible for the slightest fabrication. One part of the translation . . . is already complete, but the summary has not yet been made public and the general opinion is that the pasha is afraid to increase still more the fury of the Christians and Muslims against the Jews.¹

That the condemned men were about to be publicly hanged was another story often picked up by the press. A news item in the *Quotidienne* on 29 April actually announced that "David Harari with eight Jews of Damascus have been put to death for the murder of Father Thomas and his servant."² This report, however, was erroneous. The population in Damascus certainly

¹ "Türkei: Beyrut 7 April," *LAZ* (12 May), p. 1421.

² "Nouvelles d'Orient," *Quotidienne* (29 April).

awaited the executions eagerly from day to day; and Ratti-Menton in his despatch of 29 February to Paris had taken it for granted that the murderers would be promptly executed ("a salutary terror," as he had euphemistically put it).

But as the affair unfolded and the executions still did not take place, a variety of competing theories emerged to explain the delay; even now it is difficult to decide what exactly took place. One story frequently told, in different forms, described how the prisoners, or some of them (and David Harari's name was the most frequently mentioned) were lined up in a public square to be hanged and were only saved when Ratti-Menton intervened at the last moment – they were needed alive to provide further evidence.

This account, constantly trotted out in defense of the French consul's good name,³ was vigorously denied in a despatch sent to Metternich in June by Anton Laurin, who stated that Ratti-Menton had, throughout, "enthusiastically insisted on the death penalty being carried through."⁴ And in October, Adolphe Crémieux (likewise relying ultimately on Merlato) recorded the view that "Mr. Ratti-Menton . . . had demanded the execution of the accused except for two who, he said, could throw light on the murder of the servant."⁵

However contradictory these accounts, they can be reconciled. As far as Sherif Pasha was concerned, the first case had been solved and the prisoners would doubtless soon be hanged; and, in turn, the French consul urged that no time be wasted in executing at least four of the condemned men. Moreover, various mock executions formed an integral part of the treatment to which the prisoners were subjected during the interrogations and one such incident probably lay behind the story of the last-minute reprieve.

It has to be remembered, though, that Sherif Pasha was under standing orders never to carry out the death penalty in Syria without authorization from above. He reportedly received such permission from his immediate superior, Ibrahim Pasha, who was stationed at the time with his army at Marash, near the northern border. But he (or they) nonetheless considered it necessary to await a final decision from Muhammed Ali. In his first letter to Alexandria on 29 February, Sherif Pasha stated specifically that the assassins would "be dealt with agreeably to the orders of Your Highness."⁶ If, as one report had it, the death sentence was not finally pronounced until

³ E.g.: *Sun* (18 April), where it is stated that Ratti-Menton "nobly" saved thirty Jews from execution.

⁴ Laurin to Metternich (16 June, no. 933) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*, p. 37. Laurin doubtless based himself on Merlato's despatch (21 May, no. 134), (HHS: Türkei, Berichte VI/79 Varia: "Judenverfolgung in Damaskus").

⁵ AC, p. 120 (Cochelet there repeated that the death sentence had been pronounced, whereas Crémieux insisted that Sherif Pasha had referred the issue to Muhammed Ali).

⁶ "Persecution of the Jews at Damascus," *Times* (17 August), p. 3.

12 March,⁷ no reply could have been expected from Egypt until near the end of the month; but none came even then.

The constant postponement of the executions was certainly an irritant, but could still be treated as no more than a technical hitch. Far more serious was the fact that the slow progress of the investigations had provided many of the prominent Jews still at liberty with the time to go into hiding. Thus when the moment came at the beginning of March to arrest the seven suspects in the murder of Tommaso's servant, Ibrahim Amara, it was discovered that six of them had disappeared.

Ratti-Menton now spent much of his boundless energy in search of the fugitives. At the head of a body of troops supplied on demand by Sherif Pasha, he combed house after house (whether belonging to Jews or others). The first of the suspects to be discovered in this way, after about one week, was Aslan, the son of Raphael Farhi, the most distinguished member of the Jewish community. After being held for eight days in the French consulate to no effect, he was handed over to Sherif Pasha, who persuaded him, by dint of vivid and wholly credible threats, to describe at the diwan, on 18 March, how Tommaso's servant had met his end.⁸ (Aslan was about twenty, already married – to the daughter of the chief rabbi, Jacob Antebi – and clearly did not see himself as made in the same unflinching mold as his father-in-law.)⁹

The search brought nobody else to light until 23 March, when Meir Farhi was captured. In his case, the hiding place (in the home of a Muslim washer-woman) was finally revealed by his wife, who broke down after three hundred lashes of the whip had been administered to their young son.¹⁰ Meir Farhi, a merchant of about fifty years old, was not brought to testify publicly until 27 March.

The one suspect who decided not to hide was Isaac Picciotto (or, in full, Isaac d'Ezdra de Picciotto), who was destined to play a major role in the case. A young man some twenty-five years old, he was engaged in the import trade and, like so many others among the accused, had been subpoenaed in the past by Jean-Baptiste Beaudin for the nonpayment of debt to his European suppliers. Letters from Genoese creditors urging Beaudin to bring

⁷ "Assassinat du Père Thomas à Damas," *GdL* (9 May).

⁸ The interrogation of Aslan Farhi (18 March), Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 153–6.

⁹ On Aslan Farhi: (i) Werry's report (18 August, enclosure no. 3) FO 78/410, pp. 205–6; (ii) Salomons, *An Account of the Recent Persecution*, pp. 41–3; and pp. 12–13, where Pieritz wrote of Aslan's "notorious childish timidity, which he carries so far as actually to refuse being alone with his wife, and some of the household are required to sleep in the same room." Sherif Pasha put it differently: "As he, [Aslan] is yet young . . . [he] has not imbibed the Jewish tricks" (letter to Muhammed Ali, 24 March, in *Times* [17 August], p. 3).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

the full weight of the law against Picciotto continued to arrive even as the ritual-murder case was proceeding.¹¹

In the period before Father Tommaso's disappearance, Picciotto had also run afoul of that key figure in Beaudin's entourage, Muhammed el-Telli. During one interrogation, Picciotto sought to explain their enmity: "I have had no dealings with him. But he sometimes frequents the homes of other Jews; knowing his lewd behavior, I would not let him into my house. Since that moment, he has sworn unbroken hatred against me."¹²

Under these circumstances, it came as no surprise to find that Picciotto's name cropped up as highly suspect very early in the affair. A letter sent from Damascus on 16 February and published in the *Sémaphore de Marseille* stated that Picciotto had tried to buy over the barber (allegedly offering him five francs for every blow of the bastinado suffered in silence).

Picciotto thus had every incentive to disappear, and if he chose not to do so, it could only have been because, as an Austrian citizen, he enjoyed foreign protection and because he was on friendly terms with the Austrian (acting) consul, Caspar Merlato. Moreover, while not himself a rich man, he probably thought that his family connections would reinforce his immunity. The Picciottos formed a wealthy merchant clan established in both the Middle East and such European ports as Leghorn (Livorno) and Marseilles. In Aleppo, members of the family had served as the consular representatives of the Austrian government since 1784. Isaac's father had been the consul-general there from 1817 to 1822, when he was killed in an earthquake; and that position had then passed to one of his uncles, Elias, who still held it in 1840. At the time of the Damascus affair, Holland, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Prussia, Russia, and Sweden were likewise represented by various family members.¹³

However, Picciotto would hardly have retained confidence in his safety if he had been familiar with all the actions and reactions of Merlato during the first month after Tommaso's disappearance. Merlato had insisted throughout that he would do everything possible to further the case against the Jewish suspects. The capitulatory treaties between the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires provided the consuls with far-reaching powers to protect their citizens and protégés, but they hardly obliged Merlato to shield somebody accused of murdering a native inhabitant (Ibrahim Amara) from local (meaning Egyptian) jurisdiction.

In his letter to Sherif Pasha of 21 February, (described in chap. 3) he had promised that "mere suspicion" would suffice to justify the surrender of any

¹¹ E.g.: letters from Altaras and Co., of Genoa and Beirut; and from d'Alberti (Genoa), in Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 245-7.

¹² Interrogation of Picciotto (9 March) MREA:TAD, p. 123.

¹³ Sauer, "Zur Reform," pp. 218-20 (cf. Eliav, *Behasut mamleket Ostriya*, pp. 4-9).

Austrian Jew for imprisonment by the authorities. All that he requested in return was that he be kept informed of the charges and that the gravity of the alleged crimes and "the social position"¹⁴ of the accused be taken into account in the choice of prisons. And in his despatch of 1 March to the consul-general in Alexandria, he took credit for the fact that consular employees had played an important part in cross-examining the barber (Solomon Halek) and thus in breaking open the extraordinary secret involved in the crime. The governor-general, he added, had "employed a gentle approach"¹⁵ to exact confessions from most of the prisoners.

Fortunately, he added, there were no Austrian subjects among the prisoners, but

the populace is accusing Isaac de Picciotto of having knowledge of the crime. Some . . . even dare to say that a portion of the blood was sent to the Chevalier E. de Picciotto, the imperial consul-general at Aleppo. It should be noted that one of the accused, Abu el-Afieh, is the uncle of Isaac de Picciotto's wife. If one wanted to suggest a certain imprudence on the part of this individual one could deduce that he had some knowledge of the deed. I consider it necessary to have him put under secret surveillance.¹⁶

While here Merlato chose the path of prudence, merely reporting, as it were, popularly held views, in private he had no hesitation in stating that some Jews, Picciotto among them, had probably hoped to make money from the sale of the blood to other communities in the region – "that is why I asked Sherif Pasha to have Picciotto watched and if necessary to have his house searched."¹⁷

On Friday, 6 March, Ratti-Menton followed up a visit to Merlato with a formal letter stating that new revelations made by Murad el-Fatal (David Harari's servant) were "of a nature to gravely compromise the man named Isaac Picciotto," and that he therefore asked permission "to have him arrested."¹⁸ And without delay, Picciotto was imprisoned at the serail, where he was interrogated by Sherif Pasha. On the following day, Ratti-Menton went further, pronouncing in a new letter that, as el-Fatal's testimony had just led to the discovery of Ibrahim Amara's remains, it was highly probable that he had also "told the truth regarding the complicity of Isaac Picciotto."¹⁹ Shortly thereafter, he was transferred to the prison of the French consulate.

¹⁴ Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 287–8.

¹⁵ Merlato to Laurin (1 March, no. 97) MREA:TAD, p. 131. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁷ Ratti-Menton to Thiers (7 May, no. 25) *ibid.*, p. 40 (cf. Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, p. 207).

¹⁸ Ratti-Menton to Merlato (6 March, no. 13) *ibid.*, p. 299.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* (7 March, no. 14), p. 300.

Up to this moment, then, the case against Picciotto had been built up along familiar lines and its eventual outcome, a forced confession to culminate in a death sentence, looked inevitable. Thus, if all had gone smoothly, the second murder trial would have dealt a devastating blow to the two most powerful Jewish families in the region: the Farhis and Picciottos. That Elias de Picciotto as a consul-general had often clashed head-on with the Egyptian authorities, and specifically with Ibrahim Pasha, because of his tendency to grant Austrian protection to ever more local subjects,²⁰ no doubt made the family appear unusually vulnerable.

However, starting on Sunday, 8 March, events began to take a radically new turn. In his report of that day to the French consul, Merlato (although he did not state it specifically) moved to have Picciotto's case brought under Austrian jurisdiction. The ponderous, but key, sentence in his note to Ratti-Menton reads: "It seems to me that what is now required is for you, if you would be so kind, to communicate to me officially the chief articles involved in the charges against Mr. de Picciotto in order [for me] to proceed without significant delay to the preparation of the judicial protocols."²¹

The full impact of this request started to become apparent on the next day, when Picciotto was formally cross-examined by Merlato and his staff at the Austrian consulate. A glance at the minutes of this interrogation reveals that Picciotto had found refuge, at least for the moment, from the Orwellian world of double-speak outside. He denied all the charges against him in the most rigorous manner as "absolutely false" – "I shudder at the audacity of the servant who is inventing such lies against me."²² And he then did what nobody had been allowed to do at the serail. He spelled out an alibi for the evening of Wednesday, 5 February, which looked completely watertight.

From the early evening on that day, he said, he and his wife had been in the Christian quarter at a party in the home of Georgios Mahsud. At the gathering, which was also attended by Francis Salina and his wife, were both Christians and Muslims (an easy mingling between the religions and the sexes which, as so often, hardly fits the reputation of the city as totally "fanatical"). When questioned at the British consulate, Mahsud, who was an employee of the East India Company, confirmed the fact that the Picciottos and "another Jewish lady"²³ had arrived at his home at about half an hour after nightfall. (Despite this crucial testimony, Mahsud remained, as Pieritz discovered a few weeks later, totally unshaken in his belief in the general truth of the ritual-murder charge.)

²⁰ Sauer, "Zur Reform," p. 220.

²¹ Merlato to Ratti-Menton (8 March, no. 16) *ibid.*, p. 303.

²² Interrogation of Picciotto (9 March) *ibid.*, p. 118.

²³ Interrogation of Mahsud (6 March) *ibid.*, p. 114.



FIG. 7. Near the East Gate dividing the Christian and Jewish quarters

Isaac Picciotto was not returned to the French prison, but henceforward remained incarcerated at the Austrian consulate. From there he was taken to the serail, where he appeared before Sherif Pasha and the diwan at least four times between 17 and 27 March, but always accompanied by an Austrian official.

There now ensued a series of confrontations between Picciotto and the prosecuting team led by Sherif Pasha which, even as filtered through the carefully edited protocols, have retained much of their dramatic force. Picciotto was clearly not out of danger, given the lynch-like atmosphere in the city, the arbitrary power of the governor-general, and the unpredictable behavior of Merlato. But, from the first, he opted for a show of open defiance. Ratti-Menton saw in "his impudent attitude, his highly insolent tone,"²⁴ a conscious policy, and was surely right.

Picciotto had decided that attack was the best form of defense. His underlying nervousness occasionally showed itself, but his youth, his high rank in an extremely hierarchical and status-conscious society, and his Austrian citizenship enabled him to put on a fierce display of haughty confidence. (Buoying his spirits, too, no doubt was the optimism of his exceptionally beautiful fifteen-year-old wife, Rebecca, who spoke with assurance of giving a ball to celebrate the eventual release of her husband – even offering the first dance to a German traveler, the Count Karl von Hailbrunner, who had expressed some sympathy for the family.)²⁵

The tactic adopted by Picciotto at the hearing was a very simple one: to tell the truth in a setting where there had been nothing but lies. Of his primary accuser, Murad el Fatal, he said: "After being imprisoned for fifteen days, and being well flogged, he began to slander me. . . . All this is false. . . . The statements of such an individual . . . after the bastinado and torture should not be admissible."²⁶

He spoke openly of the witnesses being coached before their public appearances: "Certainly, Your Excellency cannot but know that the slanderer is always prepared [in advance] ready for the confrontation."²⁷ And he brushed aside the most recent confession: "Aslan Farhi can be forgiven, especially as he received a promise . . . that his life would be spared. . . . And it is probable that if I were [in his position] I too would have resorted to lies in order to save myself. May God preserve me for the sake of my honor and conscience from doing anything of that kind."²⁸ And he did not beat around the bush in seeking to explain the nature of those investigating the affair: "It

²⁴ Note 16 appended to the judicial protocols: Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, p. 219.

²⁵ Hailbrunner, *Morgenland und Abendland*, p. 364. (On reading Hailbrunner's account, Hirsch Lehren in Amsterdam reacted bitterly, writing to Moses de Picciotto in Aleppo that "the last thing we would have expected at such a calamitous time was the promise of a ball" [PvA: 21 Elul/19, September 1841, no. 443].)

²⁶ Interrogation of Picciotto (22 March, in Laurent *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, p. 176).

²⁷ Ibid. (20 March), p. 159. ²⁸ Ibid., p. 161.

is the intention of certain people to bring about the total destruction of the Jewish nation."²⁹

He likewise insisted that unless correct procedures were followed during the interrogations he would have no part in them. The result was frequent uproar. When on one occasion, Sherif Pasha left it to Bahri Bey to translate his remarks from Turkish into Arabic for inscription in the protocols, Picciotto protested, asking Bahri bluntly: "Who is it that is doing the interrogation, you or the pasha?"³⁰ Bahri backed down. And when Ratti-Menton once applied the epithet, "murderer," to him, Picciotto "got up in a rage, claiming in a fit of fury that he had been insulted by the words of the French consul . . . [and] would make no replies nor hear any questions."³¹ In the end, Ratti-Menton left in disgust. In this instance, as in many others, Picciotto declared that his case could only be judged by the highest Austrian authorities.

This astonishing turn of events clearly caught the governor-general off guard. A number of witnesses had to be called in to undermine Picciotto's alibi; and the unhappy Georgios Mahsud was induced to admit that, as he had not been wearing a watch, he could not after all be sure exactly when the Picciottos had arrived at his party. Sherif Pasha could thus conclude that in reality Picciotto had not appeared there until two hours after dark and that until then he had been "in the company of murderers."³² As for the upper echelons of the Austrian government – "they are not here . . . to search out and find the truth; in actuality, the examination of all the facts is in my hands."³³ Nonetheless, Picciotto was returned in this instance, too, to imprisonment in the Austrian consulate. (In a letter written on 21 March and smuggled out of the city, he understandably described the consulate not as a prison, but as a "refuge.")³⁴

At this point, of course, it has to be asked what it was that made Caspar Merlato realign himself so radically on 8 March. This question has almost never been raised by Jewish historians, who from 1840 until today have nearly always treated him simply as a major hero of the Damascus affair.³⁵ (An exception to the rule was Abraham J. Brawer, who in his truly outstanding article of 1937 did hint at the problem.)³⁶ As against this, though, the question naturally enough was raised immediately by Ratti-Menton and his infuriated entourage, and they recorded their own explanation as did Merlato himself, albeit in a most oblique fashion.

In a despatch of 17 April to Alexandria, Merlato stated that "my viewpoint

²⁹ Ibid. (22 March), p. 174. ³⁰ Sherif Pasha to Merlato, *ibid.* (22 March), p. 179.

³¹ Ibid. (20 March), p. 167. ³² Ibid. (23 March), p. 187. ³³ Ibid. (26 March), p. 192.

³⁴ Isaac Picciotto to his brother in Constantinople (21 March): "Turkey (Constantinople, 7 May)," *Morning Post* (28 May).

³⁵ E.g.: Hyamson, "The Damascus Affair," p. 49; Henriques, "Who Killed Father Thomas?" p. 63; Eliav, *Behasut mamlakhet Ostriyah*, p. 28.

³⁶ Brawer, "Homer hadash," p. 2.

was formed as the result of moral considerations deduced from the standing and the position of the accused; and very soon also from the savage treatment to which they were subjected."³⁷ And, of course, it is not inconceivable that Isaac de Picciotto, by dint of hard work, did finally persuade Merlato that his alibi was sound and that he was about to fall victim to a massive case of injustice. However, the sheer suddenness of the conversion cannot but make his conduct suspect.

Two different theories were put forward by Ratti-Menton and his younger colleague, des Meloizes. In their opinion he had been most heavily bribed. Merlato, a forty-two-year-old insurance agent from Trieste, had been appointed acting consul to Damascus in 1836, but on a nonsalaried basis. According to des Meloizes, he had lived in straitened circumstances until the spring of 1840, when "he hastened to close his business in order to occupy himself entirely with the defense of his new interests . . . and he now fast replaced his modest dwelling by an elegant and spacious house; the costs involved in the display were inexplicable in the light of his known resources."³⁸

The other hypothesis, again given in its most persuasive form by des Meloizes, was that Merlato had been brought up short by a despatch from the Austrian consul-general in Aleppo, Elias de Picciotto. He was so shocked, according to Ratti-Menton, that "he sent an express messenger to Beirut to hold up a report against the Jews which he was sending to Alexandria, but it was already on its way by the time the courier arrived."³⁹

Unfortunately, if the despatch from Aleppo ever existed, it has not come to light and it is, anyway, unlikely to have reached Damascus by the beginning of March when Merlato sent his report to Alexandria endorsing the ritual-murder charges. Besides, his volte-face did not come for another week. And what could Elias de Picciotto have written to him that he would not have anticipated from the start? When all is said and done, this remains a question that cannot be resolved conclusively on the basis of the existing evidence.

Whatever his motives, Merlato now quickly proved himself a formidable obstacle in the path of the hitherto unstoppable juggernaut. His relationship with Ratti-Menton and Sherif Pasha deteriorated from day to day, as recorded in an increasingly angry exchange of notes.

³⁷ Merlato to Laurin (17 April, no. 110), in *ibid.*, p. 281. (A copy was enclosed by Laurin to Stürmer 13 May, no. 737/65 [HHS: Türkei VI/74]); (cf. *JdesD* [31 May].)

³⁸ Des Meloizes to Guizot (20 May, 1841, no. 9) MREA:TAD, p. 186.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 184. While des Meloizes thus explained Merlato's volte-face by a despatch from Aleppo, Ratti-Menton attributed it to one from Alexandria (Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, p. 222). Elias de Picciotto did appeal to Ibrahim Pasha on behalf of his nephew, but probably not until April (Ratti-Menton to Cochelet, 24 April in Talas, *Faṭīr Shihyawn*, pp. 187, 189; Ibrahim Pasha to Alexandria, 16 May, in Rustum, *Al-Mahfūzāt*, vol. 4, p. 331).

Thus, in a letter of 10 March to the Austrian consul, Ratti-Menton announced an astonishing procedural move clearly designed to nullify Merlato's attempt to take Isaac Picciotto under his protection. One sudden reversal had inspired another. According to article 69 of "our capitulations," he wrote, the prosecution of even the primary murder case was, after all, the responsibility of the Egyptian government, the reason being that Tommaso was a protégé, but not a citizen of France. He had, therefore, "remitted the entire procedure relative to the murder of Father Thomas into the hands of H. E. Sherif Pasha who undoubtedly can employ more numerous and firmer methods of investigation than any foreign agent."⁴⁰ (And, obviously, what was true of Tommaso's case applied still more to that of his servant, a rayah.)

Under these new circumstances, concluded Ratti Menton, he could not accept Merlato's right to conduct the investigation against Picciotto:

This is a complex case, and it seems to me that cognizance should attain to the above-mentioned official [Sherif Pasha]. It is for this reason . . . that I have the honor of warning you that I shall from this moment have to protest against any separate procedure which you might pursue in the question of the murder of Father Thomas and in that of his servant.⁴¹

The French consul had thrown down the gauntlet, and the Austrian took it up with no time lost. He gave as good as he got. His reply stated, *inter alia*: "I have the honor to warn you that the [judicial] procedure taking place at the Austrian consulate will not deviate from the existing treaties between the Austrian court and the Ottoman Porte nor from the legal rights pertaining to Austrian subjects."⁴²

And in a later letter, Merlato transmitted a protest to Ratti-Menton, asking why he continued to play so active a role in the case if it had been officially handed over to the governor-general. He referred particularly to two episodes that he described as scandalous. On 17 March, he stated, "you – at the head of various armed kavasses – suddenly entered the residence of Mr. Joseph Ayrout, an Austrian subject, and not only went into the rooms, opened the drawers and cupboards, took the mattresses off the beds but also forced . . . Ayrout's servant to undergo interrogation . . . and all this . . . utter commotion took place in the presence of Mrs. Ayrout who is pregnant."⁴³ (In a parallel complaint to Sherif Pasha, Merlato wrote that, given the show of force employed in searching Ayrout's home, "one could have imagined it a fortress taken by enemy assault.")⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ratti-Menton to Merlato (10 March, no. 15) MREA:TAD, p. 301. ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 301–2.

⁴² Merlato to Ratti-Menton (11 March, no. 17) *ibid.*, pp. 305–6.

⁴³ *Ibid.* (20 March), p. 289. ⁴⁴ Merlato to Sherif Pasha (18 March) *ibid.*, p. 274.

No less incomprehensible, in view of the fact that the case was now exclusively in the hands of Sherif Pasha, was Ratti-Menton's presence at the judicial proceedings at the serail, especially when he had called Picciotto, innocent until proved guilty, "a murderer."⁴⁵ Picciotto was looking into ways to lodge a formal complaint.

The French consul, of course, responded in kind. He was acting on firm legal grounds. ("The action of the magistrate against the accused has never excluded the rights of the civil party and it was that right which [I have been] exercising.") Ayroul's house was suspected of housing Jewish fugitives and, besides, "Mrs. Ayroul and the three or four other women [there] did not make the impression of being very frightened by my presence." As for Picciotto, the term "murderer" was, indeed, formally incorrect, but considering the facts, "it could perhaps be permitted me to employ an expression somewhat harsh in response to the arrogant tone and ridiculous threats of this individual."⁴⁶

In the meantime, Merlato had begun sending a series of lengthy despatches to his immediate superior, Anton Laurin, in Alexandria. That they totally contradicted his first report was an embarrassment which he chose to ignore. He now went into great detail about the appalling nature of the torture employed; the fact that some of the prisoners had been beaten to death; the lack of any convincing evidence; the suspect role played by such key figures as Beaudin and el-Telli; and the relentless demands of Ratti-Menton to redouble the cruel pressure on the suspects.

As for Isaac Picciotto, "I could not allow an unfortunate Austrian, with a reputation hitherto of being an honest man, to be delivered like some booty, to his enemies." He was convinced that the case had to be transferred "to your imperial consulate-general in Egypt . . . in order that such measures be taken as you consider necessary to prevent not only a subject of our empire, but any European whosoever, from being handed over . . . to the horrors of this infamous judicial inquisition."⁴⁷

At the very best, though, no support of any kind could be expected from Alexandria for weeks, and in the meanwhile Merlato and his closest associates (Joseph Ayroul and Hanna Frej) found themselves subjected to great moral pressure. Consular officials were insulted at the serail; their homes were systematically spied on; guards surrounded the consulate. Ayroul not only had his home ransacked, but also found much of his family turning against him. Word was spread that Merlato was a Jew (he

⁴⁵ Merlato to Ratti-Menton (20 March) *ibid.*, p. 290.

⁴⁶ Ratti-Menton to Merlato (20 March) *ibid.*, p. 292.

⁴⁷ Merlato to Laurin (23 March), "Affaire des Juifs de Damas," *JdesD* (7 May).

was a Catholic), and that he was no doubt an accomplice to the murders.⁴⁸

The German traveler, von Hailbronner, who arrived in Damascus at this time, was immensely impressed by his refusal to be intimidated: "His life was in constant danger and it required all the steadfastness and courage of an old military man – Merlato had served as an officer in the marines – in order to stand up to the unrestrained attacks of his colleagues and the rage of the population."⁴⁹ For his part, the Austrian consul responded wherever possible with irony, writing, for example, to Sherif Pasha about the spies and soldiers around his house as "an astonishing thing, for if these guards are there on government orders to prevent the enemy from attacking the consulate, I am most grateful to Your Excellency; but their presence is not required." And he added: "It is clear that the government is choosing to regard the consulate as suspect. At a later stage, it is this fact which will become the object of an inquiry by our superiors, thus restoring its honor to the consulate."⁵⁰

When Ratti-Menton formally delivered prosecution of the case into the hands of the governor-general, he hoped that Picciotto would be arrested and imprisoned at the serail. As the murder victim (Ibrahim Amara) was an Egyptian subject, Sherif Pasha might have been in his rights to do so. Werry, who had many years of experience in such matters, professed that he was baffled by the legal confusions involved in Picciotto's case.⁵¹ But Sherif Pasha knew that he would have to employ torture to extract a confession, and that to do so in defiance of a European consul would put him at serious risk. It was one thing to work in unison with the entire consular corps against the hapless Jewish community; it was quite another to brush aside the representative of a great power in order to subject a European citizen to the bludgeon, the lash, and the tourniquet. The fact that Muhammed Ali was so slow to confirm the execution was no doubt an added reason for caution. Sherif Pasha was willing enough to bombard Merlato with official complaints about Picciotto's insolent outbursts, but he still returned him each time to the consulate.

⁴⁸ For these rumors, see the notes appended to Merlato's letter to his father-in-law in Trieste: "Aegypten," *AAZ* (31 May), p. 1216; and Hailbronner, *Morgenland und Abendland*, p. 381.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 385. ⁵⁰ Merlato to Sherif Pasha (18 March) MREA:TAD, p. 277.

⁵¹ As Werry explained it: (i) in the case of Father Thomas, the French consul "appeared as prosecutor," while "jurisdiction belonged solely to H. E. Sherif Pasha"; (ii) in the case of the servant, Ibrahim Amara, a rayah, the French consul was "indirectly a party and observed the prosecutions"; but (iii) Picciotto could argue that as "an Austrian accused subject" his own personal case was "only amenable to the Austrian authority and tribunal." In a piece of understatement, Werry wrote that all this had "given a complex appearance to the proceedings" (Werry's report [18 August, enclosure no. 3] FO 78/410, p. 207).

Significantly, the governor-general now began slowing the pace of the judicial proceedings. Meir Farhi, after being brought before the diwan twice, was not recalled for an entire month, and he was not tortured (it turns out that his wife was able to pass bribes of two thousand piastres to Francis Salina and five thousand to Sibli Ayub).⁵² And it can hardly have been by chance that, even though the interrogations went on through April, the official protocols stop abruptly with the session of 30 March.

In his letter of 24 March to Marshall Soult, Ratti-Menton admitted his frustration at being unable to overcome Merlato's resistance in the Picciotto case: "In the interests of justice I have had to protest against such a situation and have referred it to [our] consul-general in Alexandria."⁵³ His tone was understandably less excited here than in his first despatch. He was already looking beyond the local confines of the affair, and concluded on a speculative note that can be read either as a sign of incipient caution or else as an implicit menace:

In the midst of this horrible nightmare of almost two months, one thing provides my spirits with some consolation: hitherto, nothing has shown that the Jews of civilized Europe had any knowledge of these acts of revolting fanaticism. Personally, I admit that, given my principles in favor of this section of humanity, I would be sadly disillusioned if I had to conclude that there was connivance . . . between the Jews of Europe and those of Asia.⁵⁴

It was becoming increasingly obvious that final decisions would not be taken in Syria, and all eyes were looking to Alexandria or beyond. And, as it turned out, the senior diplomats were not necessarily ready to accept the opinions of their subordinates. The consuls-general in Egypt and the ambassadors at the Porte tended to exercise their own independent judgment in the affair, no doubt weighing possible political implications, but, to a large extent, treating it at face value as a matter of criminal law, of guilt or innocence, as a charge against Jews or even against Judaism, which was either fact or fiction. Thus, diplomats serving the same government often reached conflicting conclusions.

However, two key figures, the French and Austrian consuls-general, did end up in a head-on conflict which paralleled that developing in Damascus. The French representative at Alexandria, Adrien-Louis Cochelet, was a man of enormous experience who, as a very young man, had been assigned

⁵² "Lista delle estorsioni fatte da Francesco Salina" NMRA:RFam AD/2, no. 51.

⁵³ Ratti-Menton to Soult (24 March, no. 19) MREA:TAD, p. 27.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30. Tudor Parfitt suggests that this statement should probably be taken at face value; it would seem more likely, though, that Ratti-Menton was obliquely seeking – albeit with uncharacteristic caution – to raise suspicion against the Jews in Europe (see T. Parfitt, "The Year of the Pride of Israel," p. 138).

important diplomatic and administrative missions by Napoleon. Since 1825 he had been a member of the French diplomatic corps, serving in Brazil, Mexico, Portugal, Wallachia, and Moldavia; and his appointment to Alexandria in 1837 by Molé (Soult's predecessor) had doubtless been intended to underline the sentimental commitment of France to Muhammed Ali – one of Napoleon's men as the go-between with Napoleon's old ally.⁵⁵

Given his knowledge of the world, maturity (he was fifty-two), and long record of service, he could well have been expected to put a swift end to the potentially embarrassing Damascus affair. A word from him would have stopped Ratti-Menton in his tracks. Some short-term political damage to French interests might have resulted but, as described (in chap. 7), the fact did not deter the ambassador of France to the Porte from adopting a stance critical of Ratti-Menton.

As early as 5 March, Cochelet sent a report to Paris about the case, based on nothing more than the initial confession of the barber, Solomon Halek; and yet he showed every sign of having made up his mind. As the barber, he wrote, admitted that he had been called in "to cut the throat of the father, it is assumed that he was the victim of the fanaticism of the Jews." The French consul and the governor-general in Syria were in complete accord in their pursuit of the truth. And there was an implicit reference to imminent executions: "At my urging, Muhammed is to give the strictest orders to ensure that the punishment of those guilty be carried out."⁵⁶ (This despatch significantly also contained the remarkable, but wildly improbable, statement – sent by the French consul in Beirut – that the Jews in Lebanon had joined with the Druse and the Christians to prepare a rebellion against Egyptian rule.)⁵⁷

A month later, on 2 April, when Cochelet was far better informed of the events in Damascus, he sent a second report to Paris. He once again stressed the excellent cooperation between Ratti-Menton and Sherif Pasha, going on to point out that the affair "will echo far and wide if, as asserted, although it is hard to believe, it was caused by a religious motive." He enclosed a statement made

by a rabbi [Abu el-Afieh], who has become a Muslim, which would appear to mean that human blood is required by the Jews for their Passover and that there was a shortage of it at Damascus. This unexpected discovery gives grounds for the supposition that various people who, over a long period, have disappeared . . . – among them Greek slaves bought by the Jews at the time of the war in the Morea – fell victim to the latter.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ On Cochelet: *Dictionnaire de Biographie Française*, vol. 9, p. 66.

⁵⁶ Cochelet to Soult (5 March) in Driault, *L'Égypte et l'Europe*, vol. 2, p. 169.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 168. ⁵⁸ Cochelet to Thiers (2 April) *ibid.*, p. 225.

Muhammed Ali was about to order Ibrahim Pasha to do everything necessary, albeit "with prudence and discernment," to unearth the secret of the affair, "which is of interest to the entire world and which will arouse renewed and great animosity against the Jews." The chief rabbi of Smyrna had publicly denied the allegations, but "the inquiries directed at the chief rabbi, Jacob Antebi, accused . . . of having received the blood, will no doubt reveal the truth."⁵⁹

While thus giving Ratti-Menton full support in his despatches to Paris, Cochelet did send him warning that the use of torture in the case could have negative repercussions. But this piece of advice went astray, arriving too late to have any practical effect.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, the Austrian consul-general, Anton Joseph Laurin, had come to his own conclusions about the affair. Of much the same age as Cochelet (he was fifty-one), Laurin had likewise spent a lifetime in government employ. A graduate of a Jesuit gymnasium in Slovenia and of the law faculty at the University of Vienna, he had entered the Austrian civil service in 1816. From 1823 until 1834 he had served in various consular posts in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and, since then, he had held his senior position in Alexandria.⁶¹

On 27 March he forwarded Merlato's first report to his immediate superior, Baron von Stürmer, the Austrian ambassador, or internuntius, to the Porte, and strongly dissented from the opinion stated there that "the Jewish religion" had produced the murders. "The accused," he wrote, "are the richest and most prominent Jews" in Damascus, and every confession had been extracted by the application of some five thousand blows of the bastinado. "Our consul, who probably does not know how often the Jews have been accused of human sacrifice and found innocent, believes positively in this crime; and he has Picciotto and some other Austrian Jews under strict surveillance."⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Des Meloizes to Thiers (17 August, no. 7), p. 688. Cochelet's warning regarding torture, despatched on 10 March, did not reach Damascus until 4 April (no. 181 in correspondence register) MREA:N, Damascus, Consulat, File no. 45.

⁶¹ On Laurin: Hamernik, "Anton Ritter von Laurin," pp. 1-14; Crémieux considered the Austrian consul-general a man "of the best character, worthy of praise by every friend of humanity" (AC, p. 25). Laurin was clearly somebody ready to act on spontaneous impulse - a fact illustrated by the story of his marriage (as told to Crémieux). A teenage girl in Palermo, about to be forced into marriage, fled the wedding, disappeared, and finally took refuge in the Austrian consulate, asking to have her father notified. Once he arrived, she turned to Laurin, saying: "They want me to marry a man I don't want; I love you; you should marry me yourself!" After very little hesitation, the consul accepted. "A priest was called; the marriage was concluded; and Mr. Laurin is very pleased with the match, he has a son now entering his second year" (ibid., p. 24).

⁶² Laurin to Stürmer (27 March) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*, p. 13.

At the same time, Laurin addressed similar sentiments to Merlato, warning him not to accept at face value accusations with so long and so unsubstantiated a history behind them. (Whether he had sent similar advice to Damascus some weeks earlier, as Ratti-Menton always maintained, is uncertain.)

When further despatches arrived from Merlato revealing his *volte-face*, Laurin eagerly sent them on to von Stürmer. The consul in Damascus, he wrote, "after full enquiries has found [the] accusations to be groundless." From his letter of 31 March, it first emerged that Laurin had no intention of standing by as a merely passive observer of the affair. Von Stürmer, he urged, should persuade the French ambassador in Constantinople to bring pressure on the Count de Ratti Menton in order that

he respect the rights of the imperial consul [Merlato] and those in his charge; that he stop urging on the Muslim authorities – who, as it is, are accustomed to committing brutalities – to inhuman abuse of the accused; and that he cease to incite the population of Damascus against these inhabitants who are so mishandled.

I have the honor to report that early today I held a long discussion with Muhammed Ali about the case and learned from him himself that two of the defendants had given up the ghost under torture. When a Jew allows himself to be tortured even to death he must surely have a sense of his own innocence.

I therefore maintain that the horrendous procedures are far too extreme.⁶³

On the same day, Laurin sent a long letter to the Baron James de Rothschild. Even though Rothschild was the Austrian consul-general in Paris, Laurin was certainly under no obligation to keep him informed. Rothschild's position was unpaid and he was subordinate to the Austrian ambassador, the Count Apponyi. A strictly personal gesture was involved. Like so many others in the Middle East, Laurin, too, turned instinctively to the Rothschilds for help in the Damascus murder case.

Laurin enclosed Merlato's most recent despatches and informed Rothschild that he had urged Muhammed Ali to put a stop to the use of torture in the affair. What Rothschild should do was to convince the French government to issue "a strong order" commanding Ratti-Menton to desist. Laurin explained that he had asked von Stürmer to work through the Count de Pontois (the French ambassador to the Porte), because Cochelet now maintained that he had no direct authority over Ratti-Menton. But, he added, too pessimistically as it would turn out, Pontois would doubtless give "a similarly evasive answer."

Under these circumstances it is imperative that Your Excellency, working either directly or via our embassy in Paris, hold the government

⁶³ Ibid. (31 March), p. 14.



FIG. 8. The Rothschild brothers. *Clockwise, starting from the top:* Amschel, Salomon, Karl, James, Nathan.

there responsible; and this is all the more urgent . . . [lest] the animosity of the non-Jewish population develop into a real outburst against the Jews [*Judenverfolgung*] which could easily spread to the holy places in Palestine.

I would be much in your debt if Your Excellency would be so good as to inform me immediately of the success of your efforts.⁶⁴

A second letter followed soon after, to tell Rothschild that Laurin was now demanding of Muhammed Ali not only that "humane methods" be em-

⁶⁴ Laurin to J. Rothschild (31 March) *ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

ployed in the interrogations, but, far more, that the case be given an entirely new direction. It should be reopened and heard before "unprejudiced, independent and enlightened judges." As for Merlato, "he deserves every praise and support for his sincere and energetic efforts to save innocent men; I miss no opportunity, within the limits of what is appropriate, to buoy him up."

Extreme urgency was of the essence "in the interests of humanity" and because Austrian subjects were in imminent danger of death. Irrepressible and forever seeking out the right key, Laurin now hinted that massive publicity in Europe could be the answer. (He could not have known that, at the very moment of his writing, reports which declared the Damascus Jews guilty were appearing in innumerable European papers.)

I am convinced that the press will raise a cry of horror at the indescribable crimes to which the unfortunate victims have been subjected in order to extract confessions lacking all foundation in reality – and this in a country where Muhammed Ali is spreading civilization and where the hattı sherif of Gulhané is being publicized. The alibi of Picciotto, once judicially proved, will serve to . . . demonstrate the injustice of the entire case.⁶⁵

The letter was dated 5 April; a postscript on the next day announced a radical new turn of events: "I have spoken to the pasha [Muhammed Ali] and the methods now to be employed in the case will be of the kind which I advised him to be the best. Much has been achieved."⁶⁶

In the context of Christian opinion as it had crystallized in the Middle East, the stance adopted by Laurin was astonishing. True, he was not completely alone. The Prussian vice-consul in Beirut, Mr. Sasun, was another Christian diplomat who rejected the ritual-murder charge from the first, winning high praise from Raphael Alfandari,⁶⁷ but his attitude may well have derived from a Jewish family background, or so his name suggests. Laurin's origins, on the other hand, were Catholic. His dissenting judgment and his decision to champion the cause of the Damascus Jews by every means at his disposal doubtless resulted not from any single cause, but from a whole range of factors.

The Damascus affair constituted a direct threat to the family of an Austrian consul-general, the Picciottos, and, beyond that, represented a challenge to the entire Habsburg, or at least Josephinian, tradition of appointing Jews to consular positions. But this fact was not enough to compel either

⁶⁵ Ibid. (5 April), pp. 16–17. ⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶⁷ Alfandari to Lehren (15 March) in "Persécution Exercée contre les Juifs en Orient," *AI*, p. 216 (for the original Hebrew: *AZdeš* [16 May], p. 280). Sasun's exact status remains unclear and no trace of him was found in the Berlin archives (a letter to me from the Gemeines Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, 9 August 1994).

Merlato (initially) or von Stürmer (later) to identify with the victims of the ritual-murder charge.

Then, again, Laurin had enjoyed a good education, which included two years of theology (he even picked up some Hebrew along the way) and a law degree. But Ratti-Menton had likewise graduated from a faculty of law (in Paris), and he chose to use his legal knowledge on the other side. Beyond that, Laurin had decades of experience in public life behind him, but so had Cochelet.

As consul-general in Alexandria, he had been active for some years in defense of the Jewish community in Palestine. He worked in close cooperation with Hirsch Lehren's organization in Amsterdam and had more than once sent his dragoman to Palestine to press claims for protection and compensation from the Egyptian government there.⁶⁸ Yet their close links to Lehren – and hence to the Rothschild bank in Paris – had in no way prevented Laurella and Kilbee from pronouncing the Damascus Jews guilty.

During his many years in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Laurin had become friends with one of the five Rothschild brothers, Karl, who headed the Naples branch of the family's banking enterprise. They shared an interest in old coins, jewelry, and other artifacts. While in Egypt, Laurin gained a reputation as something of an archeologist and he used his expertise to hunt out possible purchases for Karl; he, in turn, received presents of wine, macaroni, and other such welcome supplies from Naples.⁶⁹ But, once more, despite their friendship, Merlato had been ready enough at first to hand Picciotto over to the tender mercies of the serail.

Ultimately, Laurin's behavior has to be explained in very simple but crucial terms. He was, by all accounts, a man of stalwart character: wise, independent-minded, honest, and courageous. The only historian to have given him his due was Abraham J. Brawer, who summed up his own opinion: "Here is a man who has earned a page in Jewish history as an outstanding example of a 'righteous Gentile' [*bashurah harishonah shel hasidei umot ha'olam*]." ⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Laurin's efforts on behalf of the Amsterdam organization can be traced in its minute books (e.g., Lehren to Laurin [1 June, no. 429] PVA).

⁶⁹ For the friendship between Laurin and Karl von Rothschild and their correspondence in 1840: Frankel, "An Historical Oversight," pp. 296–314.

⁷⁰ Brawer, "Homer hadash," p. 277.

PART II

In search of support (April–August)

The press, the politicians, and the Jews

The headline news from Damascus — “The Discovery of the Murderers” — published in so many European papers in early April represented a challenge that was hard to ignore. And, increasingly, some of the Jews in positions of leadership (official or unofficial) came to the conclusion that they had no choice but to respond. At first, the initiative was taken by a few individuals on a piecemeal basis, but very soon communal institutions were drawn in to what came to be seen more and more as a collective effort to deal with a dangerous threat to Jewish interests and even to Jewish security.

Even though nobody had so intended it at first, the measures adopted in response to the ritual-murder charges, when added together, gradually took on the character of a full-scale political campaign. Long-familiar patterns of political behavior shaped many of the initiatives, but even more striking was the degree to which the Jews in certain countries — most notably France and England — were prepared to innovate. Direct appeals to public opinion, employing the language of contemporary civil discourse, and the methods appropriate to the time and place, came to be seen as of key importance. The traditional and the modern intermingled in the Jewish politics of the Damascus affair.

Adolphe Crémieux and the French Press

It was during the first two weeks of April that, here and there, Jews in Europe began to break their silence. The virtual monopoly of the news enjoyed by the French consulate in Damascus since mid-March now came under challenge. But the methods used to approach the press varied greatly.

In Amsterdam, Hirsch Lehren, a primary recipient of news from the Middle East, opted for extreme caution. Naturally enough, given his militantly Orthodox traditionalism, he did not argue the case himself but, rather, had the letters received from the non-Jews, Kilbee and Laurella, transmitted to the leading Amsterdam paper, the *Algemeen Handelsblad*.¹ From there, they found their way into the French and German press. (Of course, there

¹ See Steenwijk, “De Damascus-Affaire,” p. 60.

was much unconscious irony in this development because, unbeknownst to Lehren, both his correspondents in Beirut had meanwhile concluded that the Damascus Jews were certainly guilty of ritual murder.)

On 4 April, the day following its announcement that the murder case had been triumphantly solved, the *Sémaphore de Marseille* published a letter from the local chief rabbi, M. D. Cohen. He sounded a note of indignation: "I have been surprised, I admit, that the French newspapers accepted and reproduced so serious an accusation without any guarantee [of its accuracy]." Confessions extracted under torture were clearly of no value

and so I restrict myself to rejecting this hideous accusation with all my might; now once again, the attempt is being made to bring the weight of this overwhelming prejudice to bear down on my people [*nation*]. No, it is in no way true that we celebrate mysteries requiring human victims.²

Like the rabbi of Smyrna (whose own letter would soon find its way into the European press), Cohen also referred to the traditional abhorrence felt by the Jews for the consumption of animal blood, quoting Leviticus in support: "You shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh; for the life of all flesh is the blood."³ (Similarly, the leaders of the Jewish community in Leipzig now, too, decided that they had no choice but to respond with a protest to the press.)

However, it was the long letter of Adolphe Crémieux published on 8 April in two Paris newspapers, the *Gazette des Tribunaux* and the *Journal des Débats*, which, causing nothing less than a sensation, produced a radical transformation in the treatment of the ritual-murder issue by the French press. If the aim was to achieve the widest possible publicity and to demonstrate that there were Jews ready to take up the fight blow for blow, then there could have been no better choice than Crémieux.

Forty-four years old at the time, he was already one of the most famous courtroom lawyers in France.⁴ He readily took on highly charged political cases and revelled in his ability to provide the most controversial prisoners with an effective defense. Among his clients had been a minister of King Charles X threatened with execution for deaths caused by the troops during the revolution of July 1830 and, at the other extreme, republicans involved in the abortive uprising of June 1832. While his own leanings were to the left of center (he was a friend of Odilon Barrot), he nonetheless took on the defense of the legitimist *Gazette de France* when its right to publish was threatened by the government.

Like many brilliant young lawyers, self-made and given their first openings during the Napoleonic era – Thiers being the most prominent example – Crémieux had also tried his hand at journalism. At one time, he was

² "Marseille," *SdeM* (4 April). ³ Leviticus 17:14 (erroneously cited in *SdeM* as 13:14).

⁴ On Crémieux, the most useful study remains: Posener, *Adolphe Crémieux 1796–1880*.



FIG. 9. Adolphe Crémieux (1796–1880). Lithograph by Louis-Eugène Coedès (1810–1906).

on the staff of the *Courrier Français*, which hovered on the verge of republicanism.

Within the Jewish world, Crémieux, who was far removed from religious practice or traditional learning, had first caught the public eye in 1827 when he had taken on two separate cases in order to challenge the validity of the Jewish oath or *more judaico*. According to the principles of modern jurisprudence, he there argued, it was absurd to hold Jews so untrustworthy that, before testifying in court, they had first to undergo an elaborate hocus-pocus

that involved rabbis, the Torah scrolls, prayer shawls, and attendance in synagogue. He won both cases at the time and still another one, in Saverne in 1839 (albeit all of them on an ad hoc, local basis). His impassioned speeches delivered in court were published, and he was awarded a special medal by the Paris consistory to commemorate his role in the trials.⁵

He had first been elected to the Central Consistory in 1830 and became its vice-president in 1834. His standing was enhanced still more by membership on the committee established by the Consistory in 1837 to draw up plans to restructure the established Jewish institutions in France. Despite his mildly radical leanings, he was very much at home in the upper echelons of Jewish society in Paris and was on a first-name basis with the Rothschilds. Although his letter to the French press was not authorized by any institution, it was presumably backed by James de Rothschild, and Crémieux chose to note under his name that he was "vice-president of the Central Consistory of the French Jews."

As was only to be expected from a highly skilled, professional advocate, Crémieux struck a fine balance between arguments grounded on hard fact and impassioned appeals to public sentiment. He opened with a direct attack on the French press and with oblique criticism of those circles on the French Right who sought their political ideal in the Christian Middle Ages:

Is it really true that in France, in Paris, those newspapers which are the most devoted to the ideas of progress and liberalism (no less than those whose political and religious ideas lag farthest behind our times) have accepted the absurd and monstrous stories emanating from Alexandria and Beirut about the murder of Father Thomas and his servant? And that they have done so without challenge and in deplorable haste? Is it possible? Can it be that in 1840 this despicable calumny born in the infamous prejudices of medieval Christianity is not rejected in disgust but is being repeated? Can it be that *true-believing* Jews are described as feeding, during their Passover, upon the blood of Christians whom, as a sacred duty, they kill with their own hands?

Was it not an act of incredible irresponsibility to disseminate such inflammatory myths in France "amidst our own population, amidst the masses who are still so little educated? How is it that the thought of the anguish which would be caused so many French Jews did not deter such a painful publication?" For his part, in now rebutting the accusations, Crémieux spoke "in the name of your Jewish fellow-citizens whom your report has shocked; in the name of all the Jews throughout the world who will protest en masse; and in the name of the Damascus Jews over whom at this very moment the sword of death may be poised."

⁵ "Nouvelles: Sur le Serment 'More Judaico,'" *AI*, p. 78.

He then proceeded point by point to argue that the case against the prisoners in Syria was built on sand. The targeting of the wealthiest Jews was suspicious and suggested that the authorities were in it for the plunder. If the murder were the work of some hidden elite of the rich and the rabbis, they would hardly have let a barber and a domestic servant into the secret, disposed of the corpse within their own Jewish quarter, or collected the blood for Passover two months too early. Even though the confessions had been extracted by torture, two of the prisoners had, tellingly, remained adamant in their denials. And a religion that forbade its adherents to eat even an egg marked by a blood spot could not logically sanction cannibalism.

There was, of course, a long history to the ritual-murder charge, and Crémieux (doubtless assisted here by Albert Cohn) called in the testimony of the most authoritative Jewish spokesmen from ages past. He quoted at length from Menasseh Ben Israel, noting that what had been written at the time of Cromwell applied just as well to Damascus in 1840. And he reproduced the words of Moses Mendelssohn on the same subject. Both men, unsure that rational argument alone would ever carry the day, had taken the most solemn oaths (republished in Crémieux's letter) denying the blood charge. "If the Jewish religion commands murder, . . ." added Crémieux in his own name, "let us – enlightened Jews, Christians, Muslims – rise up as one man and abolish . . . this barbarous and sacrilegious cult!"

He concluded, as he had begun, on a vehement note. For well over one thousand years, Islam had ruled the Orient and this "stupid accusation" had never been raised there. But now the "Christians are beginning to reassert their influence in those countries; and, behold, the prejudices of the West are coming to life in the countries of the East."

And, yet, nobody should give way to despair. "French Christians" read his final words,

we are your brothers and fellow-citizens. You have given the world the finest example of . . . real tolerance. . . . Let the press, with that zeal which is its glory, take up the sacred cause of civilization and truth! That is the role which befits and nobly becomes it!⁶

In his impressive biography of Crémieux, first published in 1933–4, S. S. Posener makes the observation that the article of 8 April was not well received by the French newspapers.⁷ And, sure enough, if there had been hopes that one meticulously argued and sharply accusatory appeal to the press would call forth a flood of apologies, then the results were definitely disappointing. Judged by more sober standards, though, Crémieux's intervention proved to be a remarkable success. It became apparent immediately

⁶ "Affaire des Juifs de Damas," *GdesT* (8 April) (cf. *JdesD* of same date).

⁷ Posener, *Adolphe Crémieux 1796–1880*, vol. 1, p. 210.

that the ritual murder stories would no longer be treated as simple news items to be republished without a second thought. However great their sensationalist value, they now became the subject of doubts not easy to ignore; and the editors had to take a stand of one kind or another, even if that often meant simply opting for silence. It took a few weeks for the newspapers to sort themselves out into clearly delineated camps, but even the immediate reactions to Crémieux's article revealed a considerable degree of embarrassment and confusion. A number of the leading newspapers which had earlier printed the grotesque reports from Damascus uncritically now declared that they had not believed them to be necessarily correct. "We had not intended," declared the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, "to be understood as guaranteeing the truth of this accusation."⁸ "We, no less than Mr. Crémieux," stated the *Journal des Débats*, "want to find [the report] to be nothing but an absurd fable."⁹ Ignoring its recent article, which declared the murder case fully solved, the *Siècle* now recalled its statement back in March casting doubt on the validity of confessions extracted by torture.¹⁰

Anybody with the slightest knowledge of the Old Testament, wrote the *Presse*, would see it as "absurd to think that the Damascus Jews collected Father Thomas' blood for use in their Passover bread."¹¹ Even the *Quotidienne* admitted that in introducing the news reports from Damascus it should not have used the word *true* when all it had really meant was *authenticated*: "We voluntarily withdraw the word which was bound to have shocked Mr. Crémieux."¹²

At the same time, though, nearly all these journals (and they were by no means alone) also felt it incumbent upon themselves to criticize Crémieux. He had gone too far. Typical was the statement of the *Siècle*: "We regret that he [Crémieux] has permitted himself to make accusations, not justified by any supposition against Muhammed Ali and the Christians in the East."¹³ And the *Quotidienne* went much further. The Jews, it wrote,

while defending their co-religionists, should be on their guard against casting suspicion upon other nations and religions, thus simply displacing these monstrous accusations [on to others]. . . . If one wants the Jews to be innocent of the refined slaughter of Father Thomas, one would have to accuse the Muslims or the Christians. That is an unhappy alternative. Mr. Crémieux will permit us to say that the Christians did not butcher Father Thomas.¹⁴

⁸ "Affaire des Juifs de Damas" (editorial note) *GdesT* (8 April).

⁹ *JdesD* (editorial note) (8 April). (The *Journal des Débats* was owned by the Bertin family, and controlled by Armand Bertin; on the paper, see Nettement, *Histoire Politique*).

¹⁰ "Affaire des Juifs de Damas," *Siècle* (9 April).

¹¹ "Nouvelles et Faits Divers," *Presse* (12 April). (The *Presse* was run by Émile de Girardin.)

¹² "Nouvelles Diverses," *Quotidienne* (9 April).

¹³ "Affaire des Juifs de Damas," *Siècle* (9 April).

¹⁴ "Nouvelles Diverses," *Quotidienne* (9 April).

The differences in emphasis apparent in these immediate reactions to Crémieux's article soon became far more pronounced. Most significant, within the given political context, perhaps, was the stance adopted by the "ministerial" press. Journals such as the *Constitutionnel*, the *Siècle*, the *Courrier Français*, or the *Temps*, which were in varying degrees identified with the Thiers government, now chose to downplay the ritual-murder issue, mentioning it only rarely and, even then, with extreme brevity. This sudden silence presumably followed directions from Thiers, who went to exceptional lengths to put his personal imprint on as many papers as possible;¹⁵ whenever the government itself referred to the Damascus case, that fact was duly reported by these journals.

On the rare occasions when one or other of the papers in this group did recall the ritual-murder issue independently, they tended to evince sympathy for the Jews. Indeed, as more accurate information reached Europe about the situation in Damascus, both the *Courrier Français* and the *Temps* even suggested that if the rumors about Ratti-Menton were true, if his behavior were (as alleged) "so far out of line with our morals and our laws,"¹⁶ then the government would have to take action against him. "Is it civilization which is duty-bound to wipe out barbarism," asked the *Courrier Français* on 8 May, "or is barbarism to conquer civilization?"¹⁷ And Eugène Briffault, a prominent feuilletonist writing for the *Temps*, took it upon himself to heap praise on the "banking princes of Europe" (meaning, doubtless, primarily the Rothschilds) for their strong intervention on behalf of the Damascus Jews, while declaring at the same time that "fortunately our consul in Damascus is not a Frenchman"¹⁸ (Ratti-Menton, it will be recalled, was born in Puerto Rico). Such forthright statements as these, though, remained very much the exception in the ministerial and semiministerial press.

It fell to the weightiest of the French papers and the one most respected abroad, the *Journal des Débats*, to take up the cause of the Jews in Damascus and Rhodes in consistent and outspoken terms. This newspaper saw itself as the mouthpiece of the conservative opposition to Thiers, and was widely believed to speak for King Louis-Philippe, whose distaste for the government of 1 March was barely concealed. It would be erroneous, though, to see the position adopted by the *Journal des Débats* as fully representative of parliamentary and court conservatism; the *Presse*, which was in the same political camp, wavered on the Damascus issue.

¹⁵ On the extent of government influence (particularly marked under Thiers) on much of the Paris press: Collins, *The Government and the Newspaper Press*, pp. 82-99; Rémusat, *Mémoires*, vol. 3, pp. 355-60.

¹⁶ "Affaires des Juifs de Damas," *Temps* (Supplement) (9 May).

¹⁷ "Intérieur: Paris," *Courrier Français* (8 May). (The *Courrier Français* was the paper of Léon Faucher.)

¹⁸ *Temps* (16 May).

That the alleged murderers in Damascus and Rhodes were certainly innocent victims was a position first adopted by the *Journal des Débats* on 20 April. It based itself on "numerous and incontestable accounts,"¹⁹ republishing inter alia the letters of (the hapless) Kilbee and Laurella. If the Jews had for so long been accused of human sacrifice, this only proved that deeply rooted prejudice, however absurd, could survive for centuries against all logic. Henceforward, the paper proved unwavering in support of this viewpoint.

At the other extreme, positions were also rapidly hardening. The *Univers* now began to champion the view that, although some doubts remained, there were excellent grounds for assuming the Damascus Jews to be guilty. This belief was shared by the *Quotidienne*, but the two journals were unable to join forces on the issue. The *Univers* saw itself as the militant spokesman for that part of the Catholic Church in France which, reconciled to the Orleanist regime, was determined to further its interests within the existing political system. The *Quotidienne* was legitimist and awaiting the return of the Bourbons. The papers were at daggers drawn, and once the *Univers* took the lead on the Jewish issue, its rival lost some of its enthusiasm (as did the *Gazette de France*²⁰ still more).

During the month of May, the public debate over the case of Father Tommaso increasingly took on the appearance of a personal duel between Adolphe Crémieux and the *Univers*. And their principal weapon was the publication of documents emanating from Damascus and Alexandria. Of course, neither side was acting alone. The materials published by Crémieux had accumulated in the hands of the Rothschild family, and it was Baron James de Rothschild who presumably paid to have them translated into French from their original Italian, German, and Hebrew. The documents reaching the *Univers* emanated from the coterie grouped about the French consulate in Damascus and arrived in some cases via institutions of the Catholic Church.

Thus, on 3 May the *Univers*²¹ published the letter of Father Francis of Sardinia (or of Ploaghe) that had already appeared in Rome in the journal of the Opera Pia della Propagazione della Fede, a (French-based) support organization of the Catholic missionaries.²² The ban forbidding mention of the Damascus case in the papal city did not apply to the missionary publications, which were under the control of Cardinal Frasoni. Another report from Da-

¹⁹ "France," *JdesD* (20–21 April).

²⁰ The *Gazette de France* (directed by Antoine de Genoude) was known for its paradoxical support of both legitimism and universal suffrage; see the brilliant thumbnail sketch by Zeldin in his *Politics and Anger*, pp. 29–32.

²¹ "Feuilleton de l'*Univers*: Assassinat du Père Thomas. Documents Officiels."

²² For the French edition published in Lyons: "Nouvelles Diverses," *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi: Réueil Périodique* no. 70 (May), pp. 297–301.

masculus, dated 4 March, came out in the *Univers* a week later; its author remained anonymous (very possibly because it came directly from the pen of either Beaudin or Ratti-Menton or both).²³ This document, in turn, was followed later in the month by the account of the Lazarist priest, Eugene Tustet (which had first appeared in the *Ami de Religion*).²⁴

For his part, Crémieux wasted no time in countering the version of Francis of Sardinia;²⁵ he produced the despatches of Merlato with their head-on attacks against the French consul as well as an extract from one of Laurin's letters to James de Rothschild. In his next rebuttal, which took the form of an open letter to the *Univers* that the paper accepted, he confined himself to his own arguments;²⁶ but he published yet another large batch of documents from the Middle East on 31 May.²⁷

In making its case, the *Univers* developed a number of themes. It implied clearly enough that, whatever the facts today, the Jews in the Middle Ages had indeed practiced ritual murder:

The affair . . . is of incontestable importance. It has recalled the accusations so often repeated by our forefathers against the Jewish population dispersed among them, avid for their money; trafficking in their liberty; and at times stained with their blood. This is what explains those persecutions which some try to turn into a historical scandal, but which, in fact, only constituted legitimate self defense.²⁸

This eagerness to defend the medieval past was similarly a central motif for the *Quotidienne*, which had been edited until 1839 by the well-known historian of the Crusades, Michaud. "Over the last one hundred years," we read in that journal, "the historical school in France has lavished insults on the greatest of our kings for having at various periods banned the Jews on the pretext of atrocities [committed by them]. This philosophy is facile; it represents neither truth nor nationality. Can it be that the Jews alone are free of superstition and barbarism?"²⁹

At the more concrete level, the *Univers* had no problem in ferreting out what it saw as the weak spots in Merlato's despatches. If the Austrian consul was so convinced that the case against the Jews had been fabricated, why did he attend the funeral of Father Tommaso on 2 March? What credence could be given to Merlato's impartiality once it was realized (a fact not mentioned in his published reports) that one of the accused was a nephew of the Austrian consul-general, a Jew, in Aleppo? This man spoke of Ratti-Menton

²³ "Nouveaux Renseignements sur l'Assassinat du Père Thomas," *Univers* (10 May).

²⁴ "Affaire de Damas: . . . Lettre de M. Tustet, Lazariste," *ibid.* (31 May).

²⁵ "Affaire des Juifs de Damas," *JdesD* (7 May).

²⁶ "À M. le Rédacteur," *Univers* (16 May); *JdesD* (15 May).

²⁷ "Affaire de Damas," *JdesD* (31 May). ²⁸ "Feuilleton de l'*Univers* . . ." (3 May).

²⁹ "Nouvelles Diverses," *Quotidienne* (9 April). 30.

as an "agent provocateur, a savage inquisitor, a hangman," and yet "is it not curious that in Damascus everybody, including the leading Europeans, is at one with our consul and . . . approves his conduct?"³⁰

Finally, the *Univers* expressed great anger at the fact that Crémieux was buying space for his communications in so many of the French journals. The amount of publicity the case was receiving not only at home but also abroad clearly demonstrated that "a sense of unity binds the Jews together, making them act as one man in all parts of the world; . . . that by means of their money they can, when it suits them, control almost the entire press in Europe."³¹ The French newspapers should never have agreed to publish Crémieux's material without subjecting it to critical analysis. The way in which the journals were making themselves accomplices of an Austrian agent and of the vice-president of the Jewish Consistory was simply incomprehensible.

In response to all this Crémieux was ready, to a large extent, to let the despatches and letters from the Middle East speak for themselves, and the massive amount of detailed evidence brought to bear by Merlato must certainly have impressed anybody whose mind was not already made up. But he did point out that the Austrian consul was subordinate to Laurin, a Catholic, in Alexandria, and not to Picciotto in Aleppo. The basic issue, though, was quite different. Did not the *Univers* understand that without a system of impartial justice, the truth could not be found? "Luckily in Western courts . . . there is no torture; . . . otherwise the Jews in the West would be facing the charge of regularly murdering Christians."³²

And as for the subsidies, he himself had included the letter of Francis of Sardinia among the documents that he published in several newspapers, in order to allow the readers to judge both sides of the question. The Jewish bankers involved had every reason to be proud of "the noble use"³³ to which they were putting their money in this affair. (Heinrich Heine, in one of his reports from Paris to the *Allgemeine Zeitung* in Augsburg, referred to the issue of the subsidies, asserting on the basis of "reliable sources" that they were required for special supplements, but that if one were "prepared to wait for a few days"³⁴ one could have newsworthy documents published in the press at no cost.)

Crémieux made it clear that he, too, would continue to play his part: "Rest assured," he wrote on 13 May, "if I were to think that my presence would be of use in London or Alexandria or Damascus I would drop everything

³⁰ "Assassinat de Damas," *Univers* (8 May). ³¹ Ibid.

³² "À M. le Redacteur," *Univers* (16 May). ³³ Ibid.

³⁴ [Heine], "Die Juden und die Presse in Paris," *AAZ* (2 June), p. 1229; (idem, *Säkularausgabe*, vol. 10, p. 38).

in order to save so many unfortunate people.”³⁵ Of the Count de Ratti-Menton, he wrote: “the gauntlet has been thrown down; and he, no doubt, will pick it up.”³⁶

Lobbying the European Statesmen

It was assumed initially by the Jews involving themselves in the cause that they would be able to count on the support of their own governments. This belief eventually turned out to be too optimistic. Just as the diplomats had failed to reach a consensus first in Damascus and then in Alexandria, so now the politicians in Europe reacted in very different ways to the ritual-murder charge. But during the months of April and May, a variety of attempts were made to win support at the highest levels.

The statesman who reacted with by far the greatest alacrity was Prince Metternich, who sent out his instructions regarding both Damascus and Rhodes as early as 10 April. This meant that he laid down his own policy before he had heard from either Laurin or von Stürmer on the issue.

On the other hand, it is very possible that he had already discussed the two murder cases with Salomon Mayer von Rothschild, who headed the family bank in Vienna. Rothschild, fifty-two years old in 1840, had developed an extremely close relationship with the Austrian chancellor over a period of decades. He (in association with his brothers) played a key role in both the internal and external affairs of the Habsburg empire; the Rothschilds raised huge loans for the Austrian government and were often called upon by Metternich to lend financial support to foreign regimes in accord with Vienna's perceived interests. And they were deeply involved in the construction of the first railways in the empire. Moreover, Salomon Rothschild was also the private banker of many of the great aristocratic families, among whom were Metternich's nearest relatives by marriage, the Zichys and the Esterhazys. Melanie Zichy-Farrari, who had married Metternich in 1831 (his third wife), maintained warm relations with the Rothschilds; and Salomon's sisters-in-law – Betty in Paris and Adelheid (née Hertz) in Naples – kept her supplied with fashionable dresses (for which, it should be said, she paid). It was the Habsburg empire that had made the Rothschild brothers hereditary barons in 1822 and that appointed them as honorary Austrian consuls-general in the countries where they lived.³⁷

³⁵ “À M. le Rédacteur,” *Univers* (16 May). ³⁶ “Affaire de Damas,” *JdesD* (31 May).

³⁷ On Salomon Rothschild and the Habsburg regime: Balla, *The Romance of the Rothschilds*, pp. 270–80; Corti, *The Reign*, pp. 9–49 and *passim*.

Of the five brothers (four of whom were still alive in 1840), Salomon was the least removed from the role of the eighteenth-century court Jew. In its self-conscious commitment to the defense of the ancien régime, the Austrian government was determined to maintain the existing restrictions on the Jews, which included the ban preventing their settlement in Vienna. Salomon was one of the very few permitted to live in the capital, but even he could not acquire property and, as a result, resided in a hotel.³⁸

Thus, during the ritual-murder crisis of 1840, he to a great extent served as something of a self-appointed *shtadlan*, using his connections to intercede behind the scenes with the royal power on behalf of his defenseless fellow-Jews. Both Rothschild and Metternich can be seen as playing traditional roles in the affair, the one requesting and the other bestowing personal favors – all with discretion, due deference, and at no cost to the status quo at home. But that was only part of the picture. Through his ties to a complex international banking enterprise, with major centers in Paris and London, Salomon Rothschild was by no means wholly dependent on the Austrian government. Conversely, the government was very careful to play off the Rothschilds against other banking houses, most notably those of Sina and Eskeles. During the 1830s the two sides had often clashed angrily over foreign policy, particularly with regard to the acute Belgian and Spanish problems.

For his part, Metternich, although rigidly conservative in his political policies, remained very much of an eighteenth-century rationalist in his personal beliefs. His Catholicism was tempered rather than romantic, Josephinian rather than Ultramontane.³⁹ He discussed the ritual-murder issue with Baron Rothschild and would go to considerable lengths to do as the banker requested. His despatches of 10 April may thus have been prompted by one such meeting: he there mentions news received directly from Syria – a reference, possibly, to the various letters sent to Lehren from Beirut early in the affair. But there is no proof that such a meeting took place and, given his beliefs, he could certainly have been acting on his own initiative.

Writing to Laurin, he stressed at the outset that there were a number of Jews in Syria enjoying Austrian protection, among them the consul-general in Aleppo. Immediate steps had to be taken to prevent the affair from overwhelming them and taking on an uncontrollable momentum of its own. Unable to know that Laurin had long anticipated his instructions, he told him to urge Muhammed Ali to issue orders “which, without interfering in the course of justice, would put a check on the cruel and stupid steps being taken by the subordinate officials.”

³⁸ I.e.: in the hotel, “Zum Römischen Kaiser,” *ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁹ On the nature of Metternich's views on religion and reason: von Srbik, *Metternich*, vol. 1, pp. 256–73; Woodward, *Three Studies*, pp. 38–43; Chadwick, *The Popes and European Revolution*, pp. 536–7.



FIG. 10. Prince Clemens von Metternich (1773–1859). Mezzotint by V. G. Kinninger after a painting by Johann Ender (1793–1853).

The accusation that Christians are deliberately murdered for some blood-thirsty Passover festival is by its nature absurd, and the ways in which the governor of Damascus has chosen to prove this unnatural crime are utterly inappropriate; it is thus no wonder that those really guilty have not been discovered. . . . The Egyptian authorities are duty-bound to ensure strict and swift justice. The misuse of power, persecu-

tions and the mistreatment of innocent people, would, however, become known throughout all of Europe and would undoubtedly be in open contradiction to the viceroy's views.⁴⁰

Thus, like Laurin, Metternich, too, had decided that the most effective tactic would be to threaten Muhammed Ali with the loss of his carefully cultivated reputation as a champion of civilization in the barbaric East.

In a parallel despatch to von Stürmer in Constantinople, Metternich referred to the case in Rhodes and noted that "prejudices, like disease, return time and again and suddenly break out in one place or another." It was not impossible that some Jews were guilty of murder, but

it does not make a good impression when authorities, intoxicated by such prejudices, let themselves be drawn beyond the boundaries of justice to the point of persecuting entire families and communities. I would like you to tip the wink to the Turkish regime, so that they instruct the 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.⁴¹

In his reply (sent on 5 May), Laurin made no attempt to disguise the delight and relief caused him by the fact that he had reached the same conclusions and had acted accordingly, over one month before the receipt of Metternich's instructions.⁴² However, it soon became evident that there were limits to how far Metternich considered it wise for Austria to go in this affair.

It will be recalled that, when forwarding copies of Merlato's despatches to Baron James de Rothschild, Laurin had also spoken of the press as a force which would come to the rescue of the Damascus Jews. Rothschild had chosen to interpret this statement (rightly or wrongly) as allowing him to publish those documents – a task that Crémieux took upon himself starting from 7 May. At the same time, James wrote to Vienna urging his brother to ask Metternich for help in building up the press campaign. He wanted Austrian authorization to publish the letters Laurin had sent him. (Although he did not say so, he was in fact about to publish extracts from them without such permission.) He was turning to Salomon

in the conviction that you will willingly do everything you possibly can in defense of the just cause. . . . The gracious and humane goodwill which the Prince has shown in this sad affair gives grounds for the confident hope that this request will not go ungranted. The goal is simply that

⁴⁰ Metternich to Laurin (10 April) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*, pp. 17–18. (For a recent article on the Rothschilds and Austrian diplomacy: Erb, "The 'Damascus Affair.'")

⁴¹ Metternich to Stürmer (10 April) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*, pp. 18–19.

⁴² In Brawer, "Homer hadash," pp. 287–9.

through the vehicle of the eminently reliable Mr. von Laurin the truth be heard as loudly and uninterruptedly as possible.⁴³

Unfortunately for Laurin, the effect of this initiative was the exact opposite of what had been sought. Metternich had chosen to ignore the publication of Merlato's despatches in early May, but, apparently, the formal request from the Rothschilds acted upon him like a red rag to a bull. In his second despatch to Laurin, sent on 27 May, he was generous in his praise of Laurin's vigorous action in pursuit of justice on the spot, but went on:

I am sorry that . . . [you] have permitted yourself to enter into direct correspondence with the House of Rothschild in Paris. The dispute between the Austrian and French consuls in Damascus are matters for the imperial cabinet and not for the consulate in Paris. By sharing with the latter Mr. Merlato's reports . . . you made [them] known to the public newspapers which are not the authorities who have to deal with this case. . . . The affair may appear straightforward to you, perhaps, but, because of the circumstances, it has become much inflated and highly inflammatory.⁴⁴

Metternich was clearly motivated by a variety of factors: fear of the international crisis in the Middle East threatening war between France and the German states; his standing conviction that a free press endangered political stability in Europe; and his irritation at yet one more display of independence by the Rothschilds.

Laurin was obviously aghast on receipt of this rebuke, but did not cower. Urgency, he responded, had been of the essence. Isaac Picciotto had been threatened with imminent execution in March and April; Cochelet had refused help; and "I therefore felt obliged in order to forestall still greater misfortunes to pursue the matter with somebody who would be personally interested as a co-religionist." He had naturally assumed that the documents which he had sent would be used with discretion: "To state to any Austrian consul-general or official that the communications were confidential would have been truly insulting."⁴⁵

In Vienna, then, the rules of the game were well understood; in Paris and London, they were being worked out almost from scratch. Thus, it was not until 21 April (over one month after Hirsch Lehren's receipt of the news from Damascus and almost two weeks after the publication of Crémieux's article and the despatch of Metternich's instructions) that the Board of Deputies of the British Jews first met to discuss the ritual-murder case. This was in no way surprising.

⁴³ James to Salomon Rothschild (7 May) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*, p. 26.

⁴⁴ Metternich to Laurin (27 May) *ibid.*, pp. 27–8.

⁴⁵ Laurin to Metternich (16 June) *ibid.*, p. 37.

For all its high-sounding name, the Board of Deputies, with its members drawn from only five synagogues in London, was not a truly representative body, and it was by no means clear to what extent it had political functions. In the period from its foundation in 1760 until 1828, it had done little else except send loyal congratulations or condolences to the royal family on appropriate occasions – the most notable exceptions being an appeal of 1766 to the government to reverse a decision forbidding the Jews of Minorca to open a prayer room, and an action for libel brought against the printer of an anti-Jewish publication in 1804.⁴⁶ Since the Catholic Emancipation Bill of 1828, the Board had involved itself in the abortive attempts to assume the passage through Parliament of a similar act granting the Jews, too, the right to hold public office, but these efforts had been desultory and cautious. The campaign for Jewish emancipation had been led not by the Board but by a number of prominent individuals who had close connections with the Whig leadership (Isaac Lyon Goldsmid and his son, Francis; David Salomons, and Barnard van Oven).⁴⁷

The meeting of 21 April thus proved to be without precedent, and from the minutes it is possible to gain some sense of the excitement prevailing there. Individuals who were not members of the Board had also been invited and almost the entire elite of the Anglo-Jewish community was in attendance, among them, the Baron Lionel de Rothschild, Sir Moses Montefiore, both Isaac Lyon and Francis Goldsmid, David Salomons, and Louis Cohen. Still more remarkable was the presence of Adolphe Crémieux, who had come especially from Paris. The meeting opened with the reading of a letter from the aged chief rabbi, Salomon Herschel, to the president of the Board, Joseph G. Henriques. (It had been written on 2 April, a fact which suggests that it had taken at least three weeks to agree on, and organize, the event of the 21st.)

Herschel took a solemn oath that the charges were “false and malicious” and called on the Deputies to appeal to the government – “that the British power and influence may interpose to prevent such wanton and unjust proceedings.” “Let us unite in the prayer that the Almighty in whose hands is the heart of princes may guide them to judge our brethren with truth and kindness.”⁴⁸ Likewise read out loud were the moving accounts sent to the Rothschilds from the Jews in Damascus, Rhodes, and Constantinople.

Among the speakers was Crémieux, who addressed the group in French

⁴⁶ As recorded in the minute books, BofD.

⁴⁷ On the early history of the Board: Finstein, “The Uneasy Victorian: Montefiore as Communal Leader,” in *idem*, *Jewish Society*, pp. 227–52; Picciotto, “The History of the Deputies of the British Jews,” in *idem*, *Sketches*, pp. 113–21; Salbstein, *The Emancipation of the Jews*, pp. 57–77, 87–96.

⁴⁸ Special meeting (21 April) BofD, p. 104.

and promised that "the French Consistory would cooperate with the meeting in seeking to stay the cruel persecution directed against our Eastern brethren";⁴⁹ a resolution was carried, expressing thanks to Crémieux for his letter written in "the cause of truth and humanity"⁵⁰ to the *Gazette des Tribunaux*.

Other resolutions were adopted with sight to publication. The ritual-murder charge was there described as a strictly medieval phenomenon that "has long disappeared from this part of the world, with the fierce and furious prejudices that gave [it] birth." That "these abominable calumnies" had now given rise to the persecution in Damascus and Rhodes could only cause sentiments of horror. And it was resolved to request the governments of England, France, and Austria to intercede in Constantinople and Alexandria in the hope of putting a stop to the "atrocities."⁵¹ A delegation was nominated to request an interview with the foreign secretary, Lord Palmerston, and a committee was set up to publicize the decisions of the meeting. This committee, of which Francis Goldsmid was a member, subsequently had the resolution published as a paid advertisement in no less than thirty-one British journals, including weeklies and many provincial papers; in the most important newspapers, it appeared twice.

However long it had taken the Board of Deputies to respond to the crisis, it took the Central Consistory longer still; it met to discuss the issues on 30 April. In contrast to the London meeting, the one in Paris was attended by members alone and there were therefore only six people present. The fact that the Consistory, although elected by a select group of voters, was in essence a quasi-governmental administrative body⁵² undoubtedly inhibited it from seeking the kind of publicity organized by the Board in England. Again, in contrast to London, the crisis in Rhodes was not discussed in Paris; for the French Jews, the extraordinary complications involved in the Damascus case were doubtless as much as they felt they could handle.

Crémieux delivered a report to the meeting on the developments in Syria that was generally accurate enough, but nonetheless contained some errors of fact (demonstrating once again how very remote the Middle East was). Thus, he could state erroneously that in Damascus "several consuls, notably those of England and Austria, had spontaneously intervened in favor" of the Jews. On the other hand, he was well enough informed about the Count de Ratti-Menton who, he declared, had "shown himself to be unworthy of the nation which he represents, for far from pleading the cause of humanity and making efforts to save the victims from torture . . . he seems to have proved implacable and to have provoked the persecution." Following the decision in

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 123. ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 121.

⁵¹ *Persecution of the Jews in the East* (a printed summary of the meeting of 21 April; there is a copy in BofD, pp. 104ff.).

⁵² On the consistorial system: Albert, *The Modernization of French Jewry*, pp. 45-66.

London, the Consistory now concluded that the most urgent step it could take was to seek a meeting with the head of government, Adolphe Thiers, in order to inform him "of the true state of affairs and to ask him to intervene by sending prompt instructions to the French consul."⁵³

On the same day (30 April) that this meeting was taking place in Paris, Lord Palmerston received the deputation from the Board of Deputies in London. Henriques had already supplied him with the relevant documents – the letters from the Middle East and the resolutions of the Board – and the foreign secretary was able to demonstrate familiarity with the subject to his visitors, among whom were David Salomons, I. L. Goldsmid, Moses Montefiore, and Lionel Rothschild.⁵⁴

Palmerston was then in the midst of his prolonged diplomatic campaign to build an international coalition to force Muhammed Ali out of greater Syria and to return the area to direct Ottoman rule – by persuasion if possible, by armed force if necessary. The logic of the situation might thus have prompted him to demonstrate his legendary energy far more vigorously on behalf of the Jews in Damascus (subject to a hostile regime) than on behalf of those in Rhodes (subject to a wavering, internally divided, and weak ally who needed constant reassurance).

In reality, though, he reacted in much the same way as Metternich three weeks before, treating the ritual-murder charge as an issue in its own right and not as a facet of, or pawn in, the conflict between the Sultan in Constantinople and the viceroy in Alexandria. The British foreign secretary, like the Austrian chancellor, undoubtedly felt genuine revulsion in face of the irrationality, the prejudice, and the violence overwhelming the Jews in the Middle East.

Beyond that, however, for some years he had been toying with the idea of granting the Eastern Jews, however informally, a modicum of British protection. The presence of the large Roman Catholic communities provided the French – and, to a lesser extent, the Austrians – with a natural source of influence in the area; the huge Greek Orthodox population in the Ottoman empire gave the Russians an ever-present pretext to make their weight felt, while England was left with no such constituency. The Protestant missionaries and the Jews could, perhaps, provide at least a partial substitute. Moreover, the Jews in the Middle East still retained some significance in international trade and finance – a definite consideration for Palmerston, who saw Britain's greatness in the world as built on the interlocking foundations of economics (manufacture and commerce) and naval power. Accordingly, in

⁵³ CCPV (30 April). ⁵⁴ *Globe* (1 May).

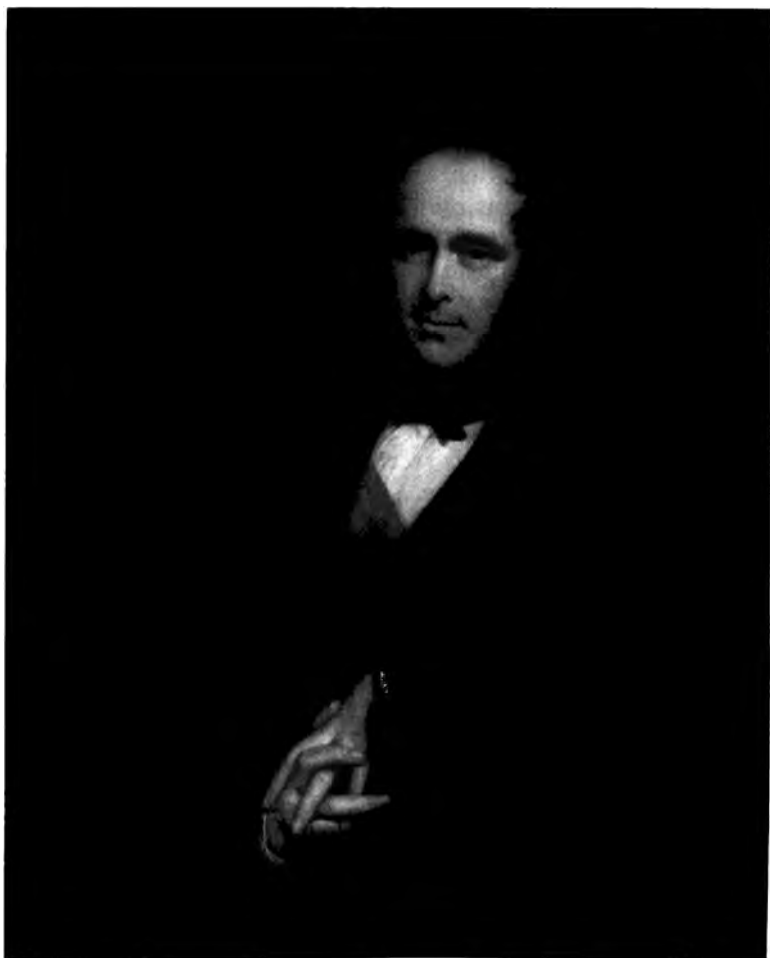


FIG. 11. Lord Palmerston (1784–1865). Painting by John Partridge (1790–1872).

January 1839 Palmerston had specifically informed W. T. Young, the first British vice-consul to be sent to serve in Jerusalem, that it “will be a part of your duty . . . to afford protection to the Jews [in Palestine] generally.”⁵⁵

Palmerston thus had no difficulty in reassuring the delegation from the Board of Deputies that appropriate despatches would go out not only to

⁵⁵ Bidwell to Young (31 January 1839) in Hyamson, *The British Consulate in Jerusalem*, vol. 1, p. 1.

Colonel Hodges in Alexandria, but also to Lord Ponsonby at the Porte. He expressed his "surprise that the calumny which had been invented . . . should have received the highest credence," and promised "that the influence of the British government should be exerted to put a stop to [the] atrocities"⁵⁶ in both Damascus and Rhodes. It was typical of the contrasting political system at work in London and in Vienna that while Salomon Rothschild's consultations with Metternich were treated as strictly private, the meeting with Palmerston was promptly and widely publicized in England and on the Continent.

In his despatches sent out to the Middle East on 5 May, the foreign secretary based himself on the materials (which he enclosed) supplied by the "deputation of the Jews residing in this country"; declared "the interests of the Jewish community in the Levant" to be in danger; and called on both Ponsonby and Hodges to do what they could to stop "the most grievous persecutions" in the states to which they were respectively accredited. Although the two senior diplomats received largely parallel despatches there was, nonetheless, a distinct difference in tone. Ponsonby was told 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 into these transactions and especially into the allegation that these atrocities were committed at the instigation of the Christian and the European consuls, an aspersion which Her Majesty's Government cannot possibly believe to be true . . . and they cannot but imagine to have been an invention of the Turkish subordinate authorities in order to excuse themselves.⁵⁷

Nonetheless, he added, to be on the safe side, the European diplomats at the Porte should likewise be informed of the allegations in order to launch their own "rigid inquiry" into the behavior of their consular agents at Rhodes. And the British vice-consul on the island should be ordered to submit his own prompt report.

Hodges, in contrast, was told to give Muhammed Ali a thorough dressing-down, making crystal clear

the extreme disgrace which the barbarous enormities perpetrated at [Damascus] reflect upon his administration . . . and . . . the astonishment which Europe will feel at finding that under the rule of a chief who has prided himself upon promoting civilization. . . . atrocities such as these have been committed . . . not [as] the acts of an ignorant rabble . . . but [as] the deliberate exercise of power by the pasha to whom the . . . city of Damascus has been entrusted.

⁵⁶ Meeting (12 May) BofD, p. 135.

⁵⁷ Palmerston to Ponsonby (21 April, no. 62) FO 78/389, pp. 116-17.

Her Majesty's Government can entertain no doubt that Muhammed Ali will . . . not only make immediately the most ample reparation in his power to the unfortunate Jews . . . but [will] also dismiss and punish those officers who have so greatly abused [their] powers.⁵⁸

Palmerston's involvement in the ritual-murder affair had come late in the day, but, once committed, he was not a person who would evade further action if need should arise. In 1840 he was at the height of his powers, imbued with a self-confidence bordering on arrogance; in complete command of a highly activist foreign policy; and determined to dictate the outcome of the Middle East crisis even at the risk of war and even if it meant dragging his cabinet colleagues and political allies (Prussia, Austria, Russia, Turkey) reluctantly behind him. He expected his instructions to be followed, and further despatches dealing with Rhodes and Damascus soon followed those of May.

Various factors combined to insure continuing interest in the issue. By now, the British press was devoting much space to reports and comments on the murder cases in Damascus and Rhodes, and on 15 May the subject was raised for the first time in Parliament. This initiative (presumably prompted by one or more of the Jews seeking publicity for the case) produced an embarrassing, albeit comical incident. Asked in the House of Lords by the Marquis of Westmeath whether Colonel Hodges had been instructed to counteract the anti-Jewish atrocities ("I am convinced that a single word on the part of the British government . . . would put an end to them") the prime minister, Lord Melbourne, had replied with a simple, "No."⁵⁹

Melbourne, although only sixty-one years old, was generally regarded as an old man, somewhat indolent, and a mumbler.⁶⁰ A few days later he lamely corrected himself. ("My negative answer was that I did not know whether instructions had actually been sent out") and assured the Lords that the consuls in the East had, indeed, long since been ordered "to interfere."⁶¹ But in the meantime, the Board of Deputies had met in hasty session to consider the prime minister's one-syllable statement, and on 18 May Henriques sent a new and sharply worded letter to Palmerston asking whether it was really possible that he had not acted as promised to the delegation on 30 April, adding:

Your Lordship must be aware that the interposition of the British government will have great weight with those of Turkey and Egypt; and I can assure your Lordship that the subject of these unhappy persecutions

⁵⁸ Palmerston to Hodges (5 May, no. 9) FO 78/403 (in Hyamson, "The Damascus Affair," p. 53).

⁵⁹ "Parliamentary Intelligence: Persecution of the Jews," *Times* (16 May), p. 3.

⁶⁰ On Melbourne, e.g.: Cecil, *Lord M.*; Ziegler, *Melbourne: A Biography*.

⁶¹ "Parliamentary Intelligence: Persecution of the Jews," *Times* (20 May), p. 2.

has created intense anxiety in the minds of the British Jews but which will be greatly alleviated by the knowledge of this government's interposition.⁶²

(This letter, together with the subsequent reassuring reply from the foreign office, was published as an advertisement in the *Times* of 28 May.)

To aggravate matters still further, the first of N. W. Werry's despatches from Damascus now landed on Palmerston's desk. Writing on 23 March, the British consul expressed total confidence in the guilt of the Jews; spelled out the ritualistic and Talmudic motivations involved; and added that "too much praise cannot be given to the French consul here . . . for his energy and perseverance . . . conjointly with H. E. Sherif Pasha."⁶³ If the foreign secretary had really meant it when saying that no British consul could be involved in the affair, he now clearly would have to change his mind. On 21 May he sent Werry a large batch of documents related to the case and adopted his most peremptory tone:

I have to state to you that I have read with much surprise . . . your despatch which relates to the atrocities . . . committed on the Damascus Jews, and I have to observe that . . . [it] either proves you to be wholly uninformed of what passes in the city in which you are stationed or else evinces on your part an entire want of those principles and sentiments which ought to distinguish a British agent.⁶⁴

He repeated his belief that Muhammed Ali would have to pay the Jews compensation and dismiss the officials responsible for mishandling the case.

Two days later Palmerston addressed a similar despatch (again with materials enclosed) to John Wilkinson, the British vice-consul in Rhodes. By now he was talking of his confidence that, at British urging, the Ottoman government, too, would institute the "punishment of the Turkish officers who have so greatly abused [their] powers and authority." And he concluded:

H.M.'s Government cannot possibly believe it to be true that . . . a British vice-consul should be a party to an act so directly in opposition to the principles and sentiments which ought to distinguish a British agent. But I have to desire that you will . . . send me a full and detailed report of everything which took place and . . . explain the part which you took in this affair.⁶⁵

(To add to the weight of the rebuke, separate instructions were sent out stating that "the British vice-consulate at Rhodes is to be considered as

⁶² Special meeting (18 May) BofD, p. 147; Henriques to Palmerston (18 May) FO 78/420, p. 137.

⁶³ Werry to Palmerston (23 March, no. 4) FO 78/410, pp. 42-3; (also in Hyamson, "The Damascus Affair," p. 51).

⁶⁴ Palmerston to Werry (21 May, no. 77) FO 78/162 in Hyamson, "The Damascus Affair," p. 53.

⁶⁵ Palmerston to Wilkinson (23 May) FO 78/413, p. 163.

placed under the immediate superintendence of H.M. Consul at Smyrna.”)⁶⁶

On 28 May Lord Palmerston was to have received a second deputation, come to plead the cause of the Jewish communities in the Middle East, a delegation representing the Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews. A distinguished group, drawn from the Society’s leadership, among them Lord Ashley, the Bishop of Ripon, Sir Thomas Baring, and Sir George Rose, arrived at the foreign office, bringing with them a petition (or “memorial,” in the contemporary terminology) endorsed by the annual meeting of the Society. The growing public interest in the Jewish people, stimulated, in part at least, by the affairs of Damascus and Rhodes, had produced an unprecedented attendance at the conference of some three thousand people, a fact that Baring was careful to emphasize in his letter asking Palmerston to receive the delegation.⁶⁷ That the Society in London, in such marked contrast to its Jerusalem branch, entered the field so late, is to be explained by the fact that there was no precedent in the organization’s history for high-level political action on behalf of what it called the “temporal,” as against the “spiritual,” relief (meaning the conversion) of the Jews.

Palmerston, who was notoriously unpunctual, was not there to receive the delegates; they left after a wait of some fifteen minutes, sending in their petition instead. It expressed, *inter alia*, “deep sympathy with the Jewish nation,” calling on the British government “to exercise its merciful interposition and powerful influence” in order to help the victims and to prevent “the recurrence of atrocities”⁶⁸ in the future.

Reacting immediately, the foreign secretary sent off yet another batch of instructions to Constantinople and Alexandria. Referring to the appeal of the London Society, he stated once more that both the Ottoman and the Egyptian governments should “make compensation” and punish the officials responsible for the assaults on their Jewish communities. The difference of nuance in his treatment of the two regimes had disappeared; both were to be informed that “a deep and general feeling of indignation has been excited throughout this country by the barbarity of treatment which the unfortunate Jews have experienced.”⁶⁹

Lord Palmerston must have been as aware as other informed observers that while British pressure on behalf of the Jews might go far at the Porte, it could

⁶⁶ Bidwell to Brant (11 June, no. 5) *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶⁷ Baring to Palmerston (23 May) FO 78/420, p. 157. On the thirty-second annual conference of the London Society: *JJ* (June), pp. 129–48.

⁶⁸ “Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Anniversary,” *ibid.*, p. 142 (also: FO 78/420, p. 174).

⁶⁹ Palmerston to Ponsonby (30 May, no. 80) FO 78/389, p. 148; Palmerston to Hodges (30 May, no. 11) FO 78/403, p. 27 (cf. Hyamson, “The Damascus Affair,” pp. 53–4).

have only a marginal, if not a downright negative effect in Egypt. Colonel Hodges had been appointed consul-general in 1839 specifically in the hope that he would be able to intimidate Muhammed Ali by employing a far harsher tone than had his predecessor, by addressing him as an upstart rebel against the Sultan, and by explicitly threatening the use of British military might. This policy had failed. It had made Hodges something of a pariah in the eyes of the Egyptian viceroy, who looked now more than ever to Cochelet and France for support. As Laurin had realized from the first, only the French government could bring the Damascus affair to a speedy conclusion.

On the face of it, of all the leading politicians in Europe Adolphe Thiers should have proved the most responsive to Jewish lobbying efforts. He was, after all, the prime minister of a country that had emancipated its Jews some fifty years before and since the July revolution of 1830 had reinforced the principle of Jewish equality. Furthermore, he personally would appear to have been particularly well placed to grasp at once the absurdity of the ritual-murder charge and the necessity of finding some speedy way of publicly repudiating the conduct of the French consul in Damascus.

He was universally recognized as being a man of the greatest political abilities. Heine was sometimes accused of excessive admiration for Thiers, but he was expressing a widely held opinion when he wrote, shortly after the appointment of the new prime minister on 1 March, that "while others are only orators or administrators or scholars or diplomats or honest men, Thiers is all of these things, even the latter. . . . [He] is a statesman; one of those souls whose talent for rule is inborn."⁷⁰ His liberalism was of a moderate order, committing him to constitutional monarchy and a limited franchise on the English model. Trained as a lawyer, he had made a name for himself first as a journalist and then as an immensely popular historian of the French revolution and Napoleonic eras.⁷¹

What is more, he was on close terms with James de Rothschild, and from his first days in office engaged in negotiations with the Rothschild bank about the financing of the planned railways to Le Havre and Brussels. Writing on 3 March to his cousins in London about a meeting with the new prime minister, Anselm Rothschild (Salomon's son) could report that Thiers "was very friendly and presents his compliments to Baron Anthony*. . . . The fact is that he is a very clever man and knows the country and the people."⁷² As for the diplomatic crisis in the Middle East, the Rothschilds

⁷⁰ [Heine], "Paris (9 April)," *AAZ* (17 April). p. 861 (*Säkularausgabe*, vol. 10, p. 21). (It remains an open question whether Heine, in stating such opinions, was influenced by his receipt – starting in April 1840 – of a subvention or "pension" from the French government's "secret" funds: see, e.g., Praver, Heine's *Jewish Comedy*, p. 658; Pawel, *The Poet Dying*, pp. 36–40.)

⁷¹ For a portrait in miniature of Thiers: Zeldin, *Politics and Anger*, pp. 242–6.

⁷² Anselm Rothschild to London (3 March) NMRA: XI/104/0.

* presumably on his forthcoming marriage.



FIG. 12. Adolphe Thiers (1797–1877). Engraving by Adolphe P. Riffaut (1821–59).

were far more sympathetic to Thiers, who was trying to maintain the territorial status quo, than to Palmerston, who sought every means to change it and was seen by them as inclined to irresponsible adventurism, as a war-monger.

However, when the Central Consistory submitted its request at the end of April to see Thiers about the Damascus case he refused, explaining that he

needed more time to examine the reports arriving from the Middle East.⁷³ In reality, judging by the minutes of the organization, no such meeting ever took place; Thiers offered no further explanations for the constant postponements. A similar policy of silence had been adopted, as already noted, by the progovernment press (which, against all normal protocol, even ignored the formal appeal on behalf of the Damascus Jews made in person by Crémieux to Louis-Philippe at the latter's birthday reception on 1 May).⁷⁴

In order to gain some insight into the thinking of the prime minister (who was also the minister of foreign affairs) it is necessary to look behind the scenes. It was on 17 April that Thiers despatched his response to the first report from the Count de Ratti-Menton in Damascus. As this document appears to be the only communication ever sent by the prime minister to the consul on the subject, it is worth quoting at some length:

Your account was written under the impression of influences too vivid and too recent to enable me to form an adequate opinion about an affair which is so serious and still clouded in such obscurity. Your subsequent reports will perhaps dissipate that obscurity and I await them with all the more impatience because the news reports post-dating your despatch state that you demanded a stay in the execution of the accused. This move, dictated as much by wisdom as by humanity, has, sir, earned all my praise.

Be that as it may, you beyond doubt will feel as I do that now every effort must be made to prevent this unfortunate affair from becoming the cause of, or the pretext for, an assault on the Jews. Fanaticism should not be allowed to pin on an entire nation the blame for a crime which – whether it was commanded by some other fanaticism or was committed in a spirit of vengeance – was evidently an isolated incident.

I suggest therefore that you employ all the influence inherent in your position . . . to calm the passions and to frustrate the schemes tending to produce a deplorable result.⁷⁵

This truncated and even cryptic response was clearly designed to pour cold water on the ebullient excitement conveyed by Ratti-Menton in his despatch of 29 February. Yet, by the same token, it differed totally in both tone and content from the stand adopted first by Metternich and later by Palmerston. It proved to be indicative of the policy that Thiers would develop with respect to the Damascus affair. He wanted to contain the case, to control the damage, as far as possible, and to do so without in any way repudiating or explicitly reprimanding Ratti-Menton. As for the ritual-murder charge, he

⁷³ Ministère des Affaires Étrangères to the Consistoire Central (2 May) CCAE.

⁷⁴ E.g.: "Frankreich," *LAZ* (3 July), p. 2006. (It was there stated that the French Jews had refrained from protesting against this insult, preferring not to draw public attention to it.)

⁷⁵ Thiers to Ratti-Menton (17 April, no. 9) MREA:TAD, p. 31. (The letter is in rough draft form.)

hinted at agnosticism: the fanatical religious beliefs of a handful of Jews might well have caused the murders, but then again perhaps the motive was merely some personal grudge. Above all, he did not want to be pinned down by an affair that he saw as a highly unwelcome intrusion into the tangled web of the Middle Eastern crisis.

That this was to be his strategy first began to become apparent to the outside world on 7 May, when the official state newspaper, the *Moniteur Universel*, published the following brief announcement: "The government is to send a vice-consul to Damascus with the assignment of collecting information about the assassination of Father Thomas and about everything relating to this unfortunate event."⁷⁶ And it soon became known that the man selected for this mission was the vice-consul serving under Cochelet at Alexandria, the Count des Meloizes.

The logic of this move was, of course, transparently obvious. Here, on the one hand, was an ideal excuse for indefinitely delaying any further action in the case (everything would have to await the report of the special envoy sent to ferret out the truth on the spot); on the other hand, the despatch of so junior an official, only twenty-six years old and Cochelet's subordinate, maximized the chances that the final report would exclude all overt criticism of Ratti-Menton. Or, as Thiers put it in a despatch to Alexandria, des Meloizes would doubtless know how to "elucidate the facts with the circumspection appropriate to somebody in his position vis-à-vis His Majesty's consul."⁷⁷ A number of semiministerial journals – the *Temps* and the *Courrier Français*,⁷⁸ for example – welcomed this step by the government, although they chose to interpret it as a genuine inquiry into the conduct of the French consul in Damascus whose future, they stated, would be hanging in the balance until the results were in.

Some light on what was taking place out of the public eye at this juncture is provided by the letters that James was sending to his brother, Salomon Rothschild, in Vienna. "Unfortunately," he wrote on 7 May,

the steps I have taken so far have not had the desired results in that the regime is very sluggish in this matter. The fact is that with the praiseworthy behavior of the Austrian consul serving as a contrast, this side's consul [Ratti-Menton] will not be recalled right away; the affair is too distant and therefore has not attracted sufficient attention. All that I

⁷⁶ "Intérieur," *Moniteur Universel* (7 May).

⁷⁷ Thiers to Cochelet (9 May, no. 64) MREA:CCC, p. 454 (mistranscribed in Talas, *Faṭīr Ṣīḥyawn*, p. 175). (In his first despatch regarding des Meloizes, sent on 28 April, Thiers had sounded as though the vice-consul was to have a free hand; his policy was then, perhaps, still not fully formed: *ibid.* [28 April, no. 63] MREA:CCC, p. 438 [also in Talas, *Faṭīr Ṣīḥyawn*, p. 173].)

⁷⁸ "Affaire des Juifs de Damas," *Temps* (supplement) (9 May); "Intérieur," *Courrier Français* (8 May).

have been able to achieve so far is reported in today's *Moniteur* in a few words; the vice-consul in Alexandria is to examine the behavior of the consul in Damascus. This, however, is only an evasive measure insofar as the vice-consul is subordinate to the consul; and so it is hardly to be expected that the latter will be brought to account for his behavior. Under these circumstances there only remains for us to turn for help to a factor which here is omnipotent namely, the press.⁷⁹

A detailed analysis of the case, based on Merlato's reports, he noted, was to appear in the *Journal des Débats* on that very day.

In a subsequent letter sent the following week, James de Rothschild struck a still more pessimistic note. Even though so many official despatches had now arrived from the Middle East, the only action which Thiers had taken in response was "casually to allow the *Messenger*, which is now a ministerial evening paper, to include what he had already told me personally – namely, that the case is based on the truth; and that we had better let the matter rest; that the Jews in the Middle Ages were fanatical enough to have required nothing if not Christian blood for their Passover; that the Jews in the East still maintain such superstitions, etc."⁸⁰ Whether or not, in Rothschild's opinion, Thiers sincerely believed in what he was saying was something that he unfortunately chose not to report to Vienna; and this question would eventually become the cause of considerable public speculation.

A mere glance, though, at a despatch from Thiers to Cochelet, sent at this same time (9 May), is enough to reveal that he was being less than open with Rothschild. He was, he there wrote, anything but satisfied with the infrequency of Ratti-Menton's reports; he had so far received only one, and the lack of reliable information from Damascus was appalling. As for Abu el-Afieh's "sudden conversion" to Islam and his confession, they, were in all likelihood "inspired by the fear of torture and of the consequences pertaining to a capital charge." The Egyptian regime had erred in seeing itself thereby justified in stirring up still more fury against the Syrian Jews. Muhammed Ali, he concluded, should use his "vaunted sagacity" to insure that in the necessary pursuit of justice "an innocent population" should not be made to suffer – "whoever the authors of the crimes."⁸¹ (He no longer stated explicitly, although it was perhaps implicit, that the murderers were Jews.)

None of these doubts and reservations were allowed out into the open. The French prime minister had decided that rather than take a clear-cut stand on the ritual-murder charge, he should let the case drag on. He must

⁷⁹ James to Salomon Rothschild (7 May) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*, p. 25.

⁸⁰ Ibid. (12 May), pp. 26–7. ⁸¹ Thiers to Cochelet (9 May, no. 64) MREA:CCC, p. 454.

have hoped that the public, including the Jews, would eventually lose interest.

Press Reactions Beyond France

As the ritual-murder issue took on growing significance in Europe, so its treatment by the press came to be shaped ever more markedly by politics. This fact, which was first apparent in France, as already described, became the general rule from mid-April in much of Europe and beyond. Involved now was no longer a simple decision to accept or ignore a particularly piquant item of news arriving ready-made from the Middle East. The diplomacy and prestige of the great powers had somehow become entangled in the murder cases; and what is more, the way in which the entire affair was handled, no less than its final outcome, could not but affect the standing and status of Jews in the various European states. And that question, of course, was integrally related to much broader problems. Underlying the long, drawn-out duel between the *Univers* and Crémieux was their profoundly contradictory view of the modern state: Was it to be defined in religious – Christian, Catholic – or secular terms?

The political influences impinging on the press originated at different levels. In the constitutional states, most newspapers had their own ideological standpoint, which usually involved some measure, however loose, of party allegiance. But, as the French case demonstrates, even in those countries the government could often exercise a degree of persuasion far transcending that enjoyed by opposition groups. Where absolutist principles reigned, matters were much simpler. The state could, if it so chose, lay down its own guidelines. However, editorial and government offices did not work in a vacuum; they, in turn, after all, were subject to the social climate and the political culture – formed over many centuries – in which they found themselves. The net result produced by the interaction of these factors was an extraordinarily varied mosaic, marking off (as in France) one paper from another and, even more, one country from the next.

Undoubtedly, the most dramatic, and probably the most important, development in the coverage of the Damascus case by the press outside France occurred in Austria between the 11th and 12th of April. On the former date, the country's leading newspaper, the *Oesterreichischer Beobachter*, devoted its entire front page and more to a typically lurid account of the murder of Father Thomas by the rabbis and the elders of the Jewish community.⁸² On

⁸² "Türkei," *Oesterreichischer Beobachter* (11 April).

the next day another front-page item, this time very terse, stated on the basis of "official reports from Beirut" that, with regard to the murder, "there is no proof that the deed took place; the culprits have not been ascertained; . . . and the bones found in the sewers of the Jewish quarter have been declared by the doctors and surgeons selected to be old – and what is more, those of animals." If it were true, as some accounts had it, that the Damascus Jews were under attack because of the

oft-refuted delusion that the Jews consume Christian blood at the time of their Passover, then this merely proves how, over centuries, opinions can survive which revolt human nature; are opposed to the letter of Jewish law; and in this particular case lack all verisimilitude because . . . the Passover comes, of course, in April, many weeks later than [the alleged murder].⁸³

It is surely a safe guess to attribute this latter document to Metternich's intervention. He had written the despatches to his subordinates in the Middle East on 10 April, and it must have come as an unpleasant surprise to find the ritual-murder story, which he had just dismissed as utter nonsense, blazoned across the front page of the *Beobachter* on the very next day. The ignominious volte-face made by the editors became the object of ironic comment in at least one important German paper,⁸⁴ but the abrupt reversal no doubt served the purpose of the Austrian chancellor exactly. It indicated to the world at large that the government in Vienna, unlike that in Paris, which had opted for silence, was absolutely opposed to the anti-Jewish charges; at the same time, the extreme brevity of the report on the 12th suggested that a second, hardly less important, goal was to have the case downplayed as fast as possible. Henceforward, the paper published some carefully selected short articles on the subject spaced out (after the first few days) at long intervals. All the pieces were favorable to the Jewish cause and reported, for example, on the statements of the Marseilles and Smyrna rabbis; the delegation of British Jews to Palmerston; and the French decision to send an official to inquire into the Damascus case.⁸⁵

The writ of the Hapsburg regime extended far, and wherever it reached, there the press followed the lead taken by the *Beobachter* (or so the sampling used here would suggest). The *Grazer Zeitung*, for example, simply reproduced the key article from the Vienna paper and, thereafter, published its own sprinkling of reports similarly inclined. In the Hungarian part of the empire, it took some ten days for the entire press to fall in line, but thence-

⁸³ Ibid. (12 April). In its article of 20 April, the *Journal des Débats* reproduced, without acknowledgment, key passages from the Austrian paper.

⁸⁴ "Deutschland," *LAZ* (6 May), p. 1348.

⁸⁵ *Oesterreichischer Beobachter*, 15 April; 17 April; 12 May; 14 May.

forward there were almost no deviations.⁸⁶ And the same pattern could be observed in northern Italy, not only in Venice, but also in Florence, the capital of Tuscany, a state nominally sovereign although in reality very much part of the Austrian sphere of influence. Even Piedmont (or, more exactly, the Kingdom of Sardinia), with its jealously guarded independence from Vienna and close links to the legitimist camp in France, now witnessed a radical change in the press coverage of the ritual-murder charge. The *Gazzetta Piemontese*, which had initially devoted an enormous amount of space to describing the murder of Father Thomas (who was a Sardinian citizen), now rarely mentioned it, although what it did publish indicated clearly enough a continued belief in the guilt of the Jews.⁸⁷

In a remarkable turn of events, the northern Italian ports now came to serve as the natural conduits for rumors and theories helpful to the Jewish cause – Metternich's alternative, as it were, to Marseilles. A widely distributed report declaring that the actual murderer of Father Thomas was a Druse had its origins in the Trieste and Lucca papers.⁸⁸ An alternative hypothesis that was to prove far more long-lasting – that Father Thomas had fallen victim to an act of revenge by some Muslim muleteers with whom he had had a random quarrel a few days before his disappearance – also it seems first appeared in the Italian press.⁸⁹

The Rome of Pope Gregory XVI, in contrast, was careful in its politics to keep a safe distance from both Paris and Vienna, playing the one off against the other when expedient. Thus, with the exception of the missionary journals, the press there continued simply to ignore the two ritual-murder affairs.

That ceased to be the case, however, in the empire of Tsar Nicholas I. Extremely sporadic mention of the events in Damascus and Rhodes began to appear in the Russian newspapers from May, and continued to crop up here

⁸⁶ The solitary exception unearthed was an article in *Sürgöny* on 26 June; it reproduced a report from Alexandria – filtered through the French ultra-Catholic press – in support of Cochelet, Ratti-Menton, and Beaudin. (On the Hungarian press: Kokay, *A Magyar Sajtó Története*.)

⁸⁷ E.g.: "Cose d'Oriente," *Gazzetta Piemontese* (28 April) (where it was stated that the Damascus case had now been fully solved thanks to "the spontaneous statement of [Aslan] Farhi, the son [sic – JF] of [Meir] Farhi, in whose house the servant of the unfortunate Father Tommaso was slaughtered").

⁸⁸ The *Gazzetta di Lucca*, quoted in the *Manchester Guardian* (29 April).

⁸⁹ E.g.: *Gazzetta di Firenze* (5 May). This version of the affair was also reported by Pieritz: "A day or two before the disappearance of Padre Tommaso and his servant, a violent dispute had taken place between them and a certain sheikh, El Mukan, leader of the muleteers . . . in the Khan Astad Bastad [sic; Assad Pasha – JF] when, while the robust servant seized the man by the throat, and held him till the blood came, his master, . . . Tommaso, cursed him in his faith (he being a Mohammedan). . . . The muleteer swore that Father Tommaso should not die but by his hands" (in Salomons, *An Account of the Recent Persecution*, pp. 7–8). For a recent discussion of the possible identity of the actual murderers: Henriques: "Who Killed Father Thomas?"

and there throughout the summer. The random and truncated information would hardly have enabled the reader to understand what was happening, but the items selected tended to favor the Jews.⁹⁰ It is known that Nicholas I tended to give credit to the argument that there could be no smoke without fire, that the frequency of the ritual-murder charges provided evidence, at least *prima facie*, of their truth. But in 1835 the Velizh case had ended after twelve years in the acquittal of the accused and in the exile to Siberia of the non-Jews who had done the accusing; and two years later, the government had permitted the leading *maskil*, Isaac Ber Levinsohn to publish his lengthy Hebrew treatise, *Efes damim*, in refutation of the blood-myth.⁹¹ The pro-Jewish slant to the news coverage in 1840, therefore, probably resulted from a combination of both internal and external factors – the desire to leave a domestic hornets' nest undisturbed, on the one hand, and to follow the same path abroad as England, Austria, and Prussia (Russia's current allies in the Middle East crisis), on the other.

There was no such uniformity in the (non-Habsburg) German states. True, the soundings made for this study suggest that most newspapers in the German confederation likewise tended to follow the same policy as the *Oesterreichischer Beobachter*. In many instances, especially in the south German states, the Habsburg influence was doubtless again at work – as, for example, in the four Munich journals examined here. In other cases, editors had arrived earlier at the general line adopted in Vienna on 12 April, but chose to publish even less about the events in Rhodes and Damascus, leaving their readers in the dark (such continued to be the policy of both the *Frankfurter Journal* and the *Staats und Gelehrten Zeitung* in Hamburg). And particularly influential in the north was the fact that the *Allgemeine Preussische Staatszeitung*, the semiofficial paper published in the Prussian capital of Berlin, consistently discounted the ritual-murder charges.⁹²

However, the two most respected and quoted journals in Germany that both prided themselves on their relatively large measure of independence – the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, published in the Bavarian town of Augsburg, and the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung*, which came out in Saxony⁹³ – adopted a very different approach. Both papers, following so much of the French press, had

⁹⁰ E.g.: "Iz Londona," *Moskovskie vedomosti* (3 July); and Melbourne's second statement in the Lords: *Journal de Saint Petersburg* (23 May/4 June).

⁹¹ On the Velizh case and Nicholas I: Dubnow, *The History of the Jews in Russia*, vol. 2, pp. 72–84.

⁹² E.g.: the reports headed "Syrien" or "Türkei," *Allgemeine Preussische Staats-Zeitung* (15, 18, 21 and 27 April). The *Magdeburgische Zeitung* also provided German Jewish observers with some encouragement, especially by its republication on 16 April of Crémieux's letter of the 7th; it declared it the duty of the press to lead its readers "further on the way to enlightenment."

⁹³ On the Augsburg paper: Heyck, *Die Allgemeine Zeitung*; the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* had been founded in 1837 by Friedrich A. Brockhaus.

(as noted) published in full the murder stories emanating from Damascus, but in marked contrast to the ministerial press in France, they now continued to devote an enormous amount of space to the issues involved. Indeed, during the month of May the Leipzig journal included articles, many of them very long, on one aspect or another of the ritual-murder problem on an average of every second day. As for their own attitude, both the papers professed, in the name of a liberal open-mindedness and a devotion to strict objectivity, to be neutral in the dispute.

Thus, the reader of the Leipzig daily could find there persistent attempts to demonstrate that the Talmud sanctioned or even prescribed human sacrifice – arguments buttressed variously by quotations from Eisenmenger, for example, and by materials supplied from Damascus; but there were also rebuttals from such well-known Jewish scholars as Leopold Zunz, Abraham Geiger, and Zacharias Frankel. Articles by Crémieux and Jacob Salvador, first published in France, were reproduced or summarized; and it was there that the Leipzig Jewish community published its vehement protest of 12 April against the policy of the press. (“When will the noble German language, when will the humane German papers cease to besmirch themselves by the dissemination of so obvious and so dangerous a falsehood?”)⁹⁴

Side by side, though, there continued to appear reports from the Middle East announcing the discovery of ever greater and more devastating evidence against the Jews. On 31 May, for example, almost two months after such reports had ceased to appear in the French liberal press, it was possible to read in the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* that “there can no longer be any doubt that the Jews are guilty. . . . What remains obscure is [their] motivation. Was it private revenge or an injunction prescribed by religious fanaticism?”⁹⁵ (Here, surely, was an echo, thrown back from the Middle East, of Thiers’ despatch sent out in mid-April.) The paper conscientiously reproduced the statements – remarkably few and far between, it must be admitted – of prominent German Christians denouncing the ritual-murder charges as slanderous nonsense; but it also carried irritable attacks on Crémieux for his impassioned defense of people in the benighted East whose guilt was very possible. (“One cannot but wonder at the extent to which some Jews – Mr. Crémieux for example – defend their co-religionists in Damascus.”)⁹⁶

In essence, the Augsburg paper presented very much the same picture as did that in Leipzig, but there were differences in emphasis, caused partly by geographic and partly by more random factors. The abstruse forays into

⁹⁴ “Erklärung” (from “Die Judenschaft zu Leipzig”), *LAZ* (13 April), p. 1096; (cf. “Magdeburg” *AZdesJ* [2 May], p. 251). For the editorial rebuttal of the Jewish protest and other comment: *LAZ*, *ibid.* and (14 April), p. 1098.

⁹⁵ “Syrien,” *LAZ* (31 May), p. 1641.

⁹⁶ “Die Juden in Damascus,” *ibid.* (Beilage: 20 May), p. 1519.

Talmudic scholarship belonged to the traditions of Protestant Germany, and were absent from the Bavarian journal. Again, observers considered that the south German paper was the most hostile to the Jewish cause,⁹⁷ and on balance this analysis was correct. Paradoxically, though, it was also there that Heinrich Heine had for some ten years been publishing his perceptive and marvelously witty commentaries on French life – which included, as we have seen, his initially hyperbolic praise for Thiers. That the paper reputedly had close ties to the government in Paris probably goes far to explain such otherwise bewildering contradictions.⁹⁸

In May, Heine sent no fewer than three articles on the Damascus case to the journal. They were unsigned, but their authorship was clearly recognizable. Employing all his polemical and analytical gifts, he sought to make a mockery of the ritual-murder charge and to destroy the credibility of the Count de Ratti-Menton. Referring, for example, to the way in which the French consul in Syria was distributing exposés of the Talmud dating back to the eighteenth century, he noted that

the noble count is taking good care not to revive that other medieval tale . . . , namely that the Jews to the same end also desecrate the Host with nails to keep the blood flowing. In the Middle Ages this crime was discovered not only by the testimony of witnesses, but also because a halo of light spread out from the Jewish house in which the Host was being crucified. No, the unbelievers, the Muslims, never believed in this . . . and the Count Menton must resort to less miraculous tales.

Unfortunately, he wrote, however absurd the myths now being revived, they were nonetheless dangerous for that – just the contrary. With his characteristic and almost uncanny prescience, he predicted that the violent popular frenzy in Damascus now directed at the Jews would at some later date be turned against the Christians. The dangers, though, went beyond the Middle East:

For the friends of humanity such things are always the cause of pain. Events of this kind are a misfortune the results of which cannot be estimated. Fanaticism is a contagious evil which spreads under the most varied forms and in the end rages against us all.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ E.g.: "Zeitungsnachrichten," *AZdesJ* (3 October), p. 568.

⁹⁸ Thiers had been a regular, albeit anonymous, contributor to the Augsburg paper in the 1820s (see Marquant, *Thiers et le Baron Cotta*).

⁹⁹ [Heine], "Syrien und Aegypten," *AZ* (13 May), p. 1071 (*Säkularausgabe*, vol. 10, pp. 30–1). During the course of 1840 Heine returned to work on the historical volume that he had begun writing in the 1820s, *The Rabbi of Bacherach* – a fictional account of a ritual-murder accusation in fifteenth-century Germany. Praver attributes Heine's decision to extend and publish the work, which remained a fragment, to the impact of the Damascus affair (*Heine's Jewish Comedy*, pp. 383–4). (On Heine, German romanticism, and the blood myth: Och, "Alte Märchen.")

None of this, however, in any way deterred the Augsburg paper from publishing, throughout this period, frequent reports from the Middle East on the terrifying rituals practiced by the Jews. A typical article at the end of May stated that although

Christian children have suddenly disappeared every year without trace, even though the Jews have always been suspected, nobody could lay an accusation at their door . . . because their influence with the corrupt Turkish authorities – attained by their money – was so great.¹⁰⁰

True, in this instance, the editors decided to add their own note. Lest anyone should accuse the author of this report of irresponsibility, they wrote, it was important to recall that he had originally

expressed in the most decided terms his lack of belief in the truth of the accusations. The obligation to remain non-partisan obliges us to reject neither the accusations nor the defense; and no circumspect observer should find in our so acting any hostility to the Jews. It would be by no means surprising if the notorious fanaticism of the Muslims in Damascus were matched by similarly fanatical tendencies among the Christians or the Jews. On the other hand, no rational man would consider it justifiable to draw conclusions from Damascus with regard to the Jews in general.¹⁰¹

To leave continental Europe and examine the stance adopted by the English press in 1840 is to enter not simply another country but a new world. The contrast was extreme. It was not that the English newspapers all reacted as the Jewish community would have wished; some did not do so during the months of April and May (and there would be cause for greater disquiet in the summer). But the press there was not regimented by government or party (although party allegiances certainly existed); and the sensationalist revelations, the sudden reversals, the enforced silences, the parsimonious rationing of news, the implausible avowals of a strict neutrality were, if not totally absent, at least most exceptional. Beyond their often strongly partisan antagonisms, the editors shared, for the most part, faith in the solidity of empirical fact, the rational appraisal of evidence, and the value of a skeptical common sense. Intuitively, perhaps, it was understood that the tolerant society, which had evolved in England over the previous 150 years, depended on some such belief in the ability to distinguish truth from fable – as well as on the right to publish that truth without fear or favor.

Typical enough of the comment on the murder cases in Damascus and Rhodes, which now began to issue in a steady stream, was that of the Tory *Morning Post*. Departing from the norm, the paper did publish on 11 April an

¹⁰⁰ "Aegypten (Alexandria 6 Mai)," *AAZ* (31 May), p. 1211. ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* (editorial note).

account of the assassination of Father Thomas (as transmitted by the *Sémaphore de Marseille*) but it had no doubt that the confessions had been forced from the Jews by "atrocious cruelties."

In the mind of a Christian, and especially an English reader, there can be but one opinion on reading the above account, all the circumstances of which bear such evident characters of exaggeration and inconsistency. It is a lamentable thing that the old story so often repeated during the Middle Ages should have been revived to satisfy the rapacity of barbarian authorities.¹⁰²

Variations on these same themes soon appeared in the *Times*, the *Sun*, the *Courier*, the *Morning Herald*, and the *Manchester Guardian*. Thus, on 18 April the *Times* reproduced from the *Quotidienne* the story of the way in which the Jewish barber, Solomon Halek, had supposedly used his own adhesive material (or "wafers") in place of the monk's, when moving the notice left by Father Thomas near his shop: "Whether the barber took offence at the number or at the colour of the wafers," commented the paper,

is not explained. It is not said that they were disposed in a cruciform order. Be that as it may, the wicked Jew is said to have replaced the bill by two wafers only, a blue and a red one at the top, the other at the bottom. This was proof enough. Nothing could be clearer to all Damascus than that there was a conspiracy among the Jews.¹⁰³

For its part, the *Sun* turned to the question of medieval precedent. Unfortunately, the paper noted, it could not be said, as some would have it, that "it was never the popular superstition of Englishmen that the Jews mingled Christian blood with any of their religious sacrifices." Had not Matthew Paris described in detail how Hugh of Lincoln had been murdered for just such a purpose in 1255? This "monkish legend is certainly the origin of the miserable farce got up in Syria."¹⁰⁴

The *Sun* saw itself as a voice of radical, Nonconformist opinion and it now began to belabor the Jews for what it described as excessive passivity in the face of the crisis. In an article appearing on 18 April, three days before the first meeting of the Board of Deputies on the issue, the paper expressed confidence that

surely the British government will not suffer such atrocities to be perpetrated without taking some steps to prevent them. [But] what are the Hebrew communities in England and France about that they do not publicly bestir themselves in favour of their persecuted brethren in the East? Why do they not call public meetings, and . . . protest, at least,

¹⁰² "The Damascus Murders," *Morning Post* (11 April).

¹⁰³ "Administration of Justice towards Jews in the East," *Times* (18 April), p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ [Leading article], *Sun* (28 April).

against the infamous behaviour of the Egyptian government? They are sufficiently numerous and influential to make themselves heard; and a fair hearing is all that is wanted to enlist the sympathies of every enlightened and honest person.¹⁰⁵

(Lest it be thought that such indignation was all concentrated against Muhammed Ali, mention should be made of the fact that a long report on Rhodes, sympathetic to the Jews of the island, was published by the *Times* on 18 April. Stamboli, it stated, "was brought to a sort of confession by the same means as old women in England were once induced to accuse themselves of witchcraft.")¹⁰⁶

Given this initial display of outspoken support for their cause, the English Jews must have been thoroughly shocked to open the *Times* on 9 May only to discover the long report of Father Francis of Sardinia (or Ploaghe) sent from Damascus on 5 March. A summary of that document had already appeared in the *Morning Post* a few days earlier, but there it had been balanced by news of a contrary nature reproduced from the *Oesterreichischer Beobachter*. In the *Times*, it appeared alone and without comment. Replete with a mass of (seemingly) watertight circumstantial evidence – corroborated, as Father Francis reported, by all the European consuls – the letter could not but make a powerful (and, from the Jewish point of view, devastating) impression. To take just one example, after describing the discovery of Father Tommaso's bones and subsequent solemn funeral, the report noted that "in searching the fatal conduit several more bones were found, the remains of more ancient victims, and who had been immolated like the first by the barbarity of the Jews."¹⁰⁷

It did not take long for a rebuttal to appear. On 14 May, a letter one-and-a-half columns long and signed simply, "A Jew," denounced Father Francis as one of the "abettors or approvers of the late atrocious persecution," and as a man ready to state, "as if they were undoubted truths, alleged facts of which . . . the only evidence consists of pretended confessions forced from the victims by the most cruel tortures."¹⁰⁸ Included in the letter to the editor were long extracts from the despatches of Merlato and Laurin (first published on 7 May by Crémieux).

A note of reproach was clearly discernible when the anonymous Jewish letter writer recorded the fact that the *Times* had (hitherto) been unable to find room to reproduce the reports of the Austrian diplomats even though it had noted their appearance in Paris. And the truth is that the decision to

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. (18 April).

¹⁰⁶ "Administration of Justice towards Jews in the East," *Times* (18 April), p. 3. On the *Times* (which was edited by Thomas Barnes) in 1840: *History of the "Times,"* vol. 1, pp. 378–83.

¹⁰⁷ "Father Thomas," *ibid.* (9 May), p. 6 (reproduced from *GdesT* [5 May]).

¹⁰⁸ "Prosecution of the Jews at Damascus," *Times* (14 May), p. 3.

publish Francis of Sardinia and not to publish Merlato could hardly have been a merely random choice. The *Times* was tentatively beginning its move toward a more balanced policy – one that could provide space to both sides in the battle. As the paper had previously spoken out so strongly in defense of the Jews, so now it gave priority to Francis of Sardinia.

This shift in the direction of even-handedness (even if the Jewish cause was still all in all better represented) meant that the paper was coming around to the view that the ritual-murder charge could no longer be dismissed as simple nonsense. Such signs of doubt did not become characteristic of the British press as a whole, but the *Times*, of course, as the bastion of Tory opinion, was fiercely opposed to the Whig government of Lord Melbourne and, above all, to the activist (or adventurist) foreign secretary, Lord Palmerston. Now, though, Palmerston had assured the Jewish leadership that they could count on full British support in the affairs of Damascus and Rhodes even though this meant ignoring the opinion of the British consuls on the spot and of the French government (for which the *Times* had much sympathy in the mounting Middle East crisis). Furthermore, it was obvious that the ritual-murder charge was bound to impinge on the long-standing dispute about Jewish emancipation in England – a dispute in which the Whigs tended to support, and the Tories to oppose, the principle of complete equality for non-Christians.

The *Times* thus had every incentive, perhaps consciously perceived but very possibly not, to delay final judgment on the issue until all the evidence was in. Other Tory papers – the *Morning Post* and the *Standard*, for example (although not the *Morning Herald*) – likewise made it clear that not enough was yet known to declare the basic question of guilt or innocence settled. “Since the British and Austrian governments are going to inquire into this matter,” pronounced the *Morning Post* on 6 May, “it is to be hoped that the truth will ultimately be brought out.”¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

In sum, after some two months of concerted effort, the attempts made by Adolphe Crémieux, the Rothschild family, and the institutionalized leadership of English and French Jewry to stem the tide of hostile opinion had been only partially successful. The Jewish case was now being heard in Europe; the initial indiscriminate flood of ritual-murder stories had been halted; and the support of the Austrian and British governments was as-

¹⁰⁹ “The Jews of Damascus,” *Morning Post* (6 May). (This statement was made apropos the publication, in summarized form, of Francis of Ploaghe’s report.)

sured. The press in England had at first unanimously dismissed the anti-Jewish accusations as medieval nonsense, but by mid-May the *Times* was seeking ways to withhold judgment. In France, the government maintained an ominous silence (apart from sending a junior official to conduct an inquiry at Damascus) and the ministerial press largely followed suit. An objective observer in Paris reported it as his opinion in late May that "the Jews in France have still not succeeded in winning over public opinion to the realization that the accusations are intrinsically impossible." And he noted: "Let us hope that in Germany that result will be easier to achieve."¹¹⁰ But there the two most influential papers, published in Augsburg and Leipzig respectively, had opted for a policy best described as malevolent neutrality.

¹¹⁰ "Paris (22 Mai)," *LAZ* (28 May), p. 1603.

Restoring the balance: the Middle East

In his letter of early April to James de Rothschild, Anton von Laurin had anticipated that news of the Damascus affair, with its "indescribable crimes" of torture, would be met with "a cry of horror" in Europe. In reality, the response in the West had been anything but uniform or unified, and the initial "cry of horror" had been directed at the crimes committed not against, but (supposedly) by the Jews.

Nonetheless, it is also true that as time went on, the voices in Europe speaking for the Jewish cause did begin to rise over the general cacophony; and this fact gradually exerted its own influence on the course of events in the Middle East. Above all, the unequivocal despatches first of Metternich and later of Palmerston, even though countered by the equivocal words and actions of Thiers, came to exert a powerful cumulative effect. If Canning had once said that the new world should be called in to restore the balance of the old, so now the combined weight of the Habsburg empire and of England served, however slowly, to restore some semblance of balance between the Christian and Jewish populations in the Muslim states of the Middle East. That said, it is also true that the impact of the conflicting messages emanating from the great powers proved to be very different in Damascus and Rhodes.

Damascus (April-May)

Not until the month of April, apparently, did it begin to dawn on the Count de Ratti-Menton, Jean-Baptiste Beaudin, and their circle that the ritual-murder case could end up as the path not to fame but to infamy. That the outside world might simply reject their basic assumptions was a possibility first brought home to them by the Anglican missionary, George Wildon Pieritz, who arrived in Damascus on 30 March.

Pieritz had an introduction from W. T. Young, the British vice-consul in Jerusalem, and he was well received by the consul in Damascus. But he made no attempt to conceal his conviction that the case against the Jews was both absurd and criminal, and his entire mode of conduct served as an affront to the powers-that-be in the city. He rejected Werry's offer to intro-

duce him to Ratti-Menton and Sherif Pasha. And, as it was put in a French diplomatic report of later date,

He lodged with a renegade, one of that small number of Europeans in Damascus who sought to make a profit out of this deplorable affair; far from making impartial inquiries . . . he, rather, only examined the case among the relatives and friends of the accused. . . . It was thus that he was able to gather the materials which seem to have had as their object less a presentation of the facts than an attempt to distort all the circumstances.¹

In his own account of his stay in Damascus, Pieritz described how he found himself drawn into vehement argument about Jewish practices. Among the allegations that he challenged was the one

that Jews dip a handkerchief in Christian blood, dry it, and burn it to ashes; and the day after a Jewess is married, these ashes are strewn on a hard-boiled egg, which is eaten by the young couple. This invention, I am grieved to say, gave rise to new tortures, and new investigations concerning the murder of the monk, which for the last month had been considered as settled.²

It did not take Pieritz long to see that he would achieve nothing in Damascus even though his viewpoint was by then shared fully by the Austrian consul and his staff. After a mere eight days, he left for Beirut on his way to Alexandria where, as he now understood, the case would ultimately be decided. In a despatch of 24 April addressed to the foreign office, the British consul summed up his impressions of the man:

We have had a Mr. Pieritz here, a missionary from Jerusalem, a converted Jew who . . . has taken quite a different view of the assassination committed here by the Jews than the French consul and local government did, and strange to say looks upon the perpetrators as innocent victims. The violent measures resorted to by the pasha here to extract evidence . . . give Mr. Pieritz ample room to make something like a case out for the Jews. He intends . . . to publish and is extremely violent against the French consul and Sherif Pasha – in which he very comically lets me in for a share of his displeasure pretending that I was the counsellor of the French consul. It is quite sufficient to be acquainted with the French consul, his . . . dragoman [Beaudin] and Sherif Pasha to be at once convinced that they are not men to . . . receive counsel of anybody. . . . Mr. Pieritz is wrath against me, because he could not persuade me to be a convert to his opinions, when he was wholly ignorant of the evidence obtained . . . and relied solely on information . . . from the Jew brethren here.

¹ Des Meloizes to Guizot (20 May 1841, no. 9) MREA:TAD, p. 188.

² In Salomons, *An Account of the Recent Persecution*, pp. 34–5.

. . . He, who I verily believe is still a Jew in conscience and heart, rejected all other information and determined to whitewash the Jews at the expense of the Christians and all the Mussulman population in the country. We shall see what he will publish [but] . . . I believe the case is substantially correct.³

At the time that Pieritz left Damascus for Beirut on 6 April, the prisoners were still under interrogation. The particular concern at the time was the search for the watch, the cross, and the keys that Father Thomas had habitually carried. At least one of the Hararis was then being tortured as part of that particular line of inquiry; for his part, the chief rabbi, Jacob Antebi, was as before subjected to torture in the vain hope that he would finally confirm that Judaism prescribes human sacrifice. And, meanwhile, as Merlato reported in a despatch of 17 April, Sibli Ayub had quarantined himself in the French consulate – a plague was then raging in the city – and was busy drawing up, in final form, the protocols of the judicial proceedings. (“I would not be surprised,” wrote Merlato ironically and perspicaciously, “if this conscientious report were to omit all mention of the despicable tortures to which the accused were subjected.”)⁴

It was only a few days later, though, that the shape of affairs in Damascus took on a very different appearance. Two documents from Muhammed Ali ordering that an end be put to the use of torture arrived one after the other in the space of a few days (on the 20th and 25th of April). As Laurin explained to Metternich, he had concluded that the first instruction drawn up at the end of March was too mild in tone, and had therefore induced the viceroy to produce a much stronger version. Once in possession of this second order, Laurin had sent it to Damascus on 10 April by camel service, the fastest means available at that moment. Laurin had, perhaps, been overanxious in this instance, because as early as the 22nd, Merlato was able to report that Muhammed Ali’s order was being obeyed and that the torture had stopped.⁵ Jewish sources dated the deliverance to the seventh day of Passover, the 24th.⁶ (For all his compliance, Sherif Pasha made no attempt to conceal his anger, declaring in a despatch of the 30th that the guilt of the Jews remained “as clear as the sun.”)⁷

No sooner did news of these developments become public than they produced an outburst of indignation in the city. Instead of the long-expected

³ Werry to Bidwell (24 April) FO 78/410 in Hyamson, “The Damascus Affair,” p. 58.

⁴ Merlato to Laurin (17 April, no. 737/65), HHS: Türkei, Berichte VI/74; also in *JdesD* (31 May).

⁵ Merlato to Laurin (22 April) in “Affaire de Damas,” *JdesD*, *ibid*.

⁶ “Persecution of the Jews in the East,” *Times* (30 July), p. 5. (Ratti-Menton, though, could report to Cochelet on 24 April that no change of policy had yet been ordered from Alexandria: [no. 1] MREA:CCC, p. 446; also in Talas, *Faṭīr Shihyawn*, p. 197.)

⁷ Sherif Pasha to Husayn Pasha (30 April) in Rustum, *Al-Mahfūzāt*, vol. 4, p. 321.

confirmation of the death penalty, there had come this concession to the Jews. As a result, while the position of the prisoners was radically transformed, the rest of the Jewish population found itself subject to a renewed and dangerous wave of harassment. Over the following days and weeks, there were frequent reports of attacks on both people and property. Once again, as in early March, hundreds of troops had to be brought into the city to forestall a massacre.

Synagogues, including the beautiful medieval building just outside the city, at Djobar, were sacked, and, according to one report (translated from Hebrew and published in the *Sun*), the vandals "took from our synagogues the Taleth and Tephilim, and put them on dogs."⁸ Cemeteries were also targeted, graves broken open, corpses and bones cast about. And Jews, simply snatched off the streets, were subjected to forced labor in building a church. The most serious incident, however, occurred on Mount Lebanon, where the long-threatened revolt of the Maronites and Druse finally erupted in May. A group of travelers was stopped by some of the rebels, and the eight Jews among them separated out. The latter, reported Hodges to Palmerston, "were all murdered in consequence of the late events in Damascus, but the Mussulmans and Christians were liberated."⁹

Now in receipt of frequent reports from Syria, Laurin wasted no time in turning yet again directly to Muhammed Ali in the hope that he would intervene to protect the Jewish community in Damascus. And, on 3 May, the viceroy issued a further order, or *bulgrundi*, which Laurin despatched post-haste overland to Syria. The message was succinct and clearly indicated that Muhammed Ali expected genuine compliance from Sherif Pasha:

To my son, the governor of Damascus,

The honorable consul-general of Austria, Mr. von Laurin, informs me that certain uneducated people have been insulting the Jews in Damascus who, when they appeal to the government, have not received justice. Since the said insults, tolerated by you, are in contradiction to my will, you must ensure that this situation does not degenerate. This letter is intended to that end.¹⁰

None of these various instructions in favor of the Jews, which had thus begun arriving from 20 April, could have come as a complete surprise to Ratti-Menton. He had clearly been forewarned of impending trouble by the

⁸ "Persecution of the Jews in the East," (a translation from the Hebrew letter of H. N. Abu el-Afieh in Constantinople to Lehren [18 June], *Sun* [6 August]).

⁹ Hodges to Palmerston (18 June, no. 54) FO 78/405, p. 34. (According to another report, the rebels "threatened to murder all Jews in Damascus if they took the city" [*Times* (22 July), p. 5].)

¹⁰ Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*, pp. 23–4. (In the original Turkish, enclosed with Laurin to Stürmer [3 May, no. 759/67], HHS:Türkei, Berichte VI/74.)

French consul-general in Alexandria. That Cochelet had made immediate contact with Damascus as soon as he realized how far Laurin intended to go in defense of the Jewish prisoners was implicit in his despatch of 6 April to Thiers. After noting that Caspar Merlato was shielding men guilty of murder (*coupables*) out of motives generally assumed to be "sordid," he added:

It has come to my attention that the Austrian consul-general at Alexandria must have written to his government in terms less than moderate about the behavior of Mr. de Ratti-Menton. It is probable that the cabinet at Vienna will make representations to you in this matter. I would like to request, sir, that you delay your response until His Majesty's consul at Damascus has provided you with all the clarifications needed to enable you to form your own judgment. I believe that I can assure you in advance that they will be such as to satisfy you.¹¹

That the Count de Ratti-Menton felt himself suddenly thrown on the defensive emerges with startling clarity from a letter which he wrote on 16 April to the chancellor of the British consulate. He appealed to the chancellor (Said Ali) as somebody whose knowledge of Arabic, marriage to a Muslim, and "social position" enabled him to follow local events very closely. What Ratti-Menton sought was a statement that would declare that during the ritual-murder affair he had neither used violence against the Jews himself nor "requested the authorities to employ any violent measures against them"; describe "especially the prevailing attitudes of the Muslim and Christian populations toward the Jews"; and confirm that he had initially remained skeptical regarding the use of blood. He was not asking for "a justification of my conduct,"¹² but simply for a statement of the facts. (In his response, the chancellor chose his language cautiously, but did write that "it would appear, from what is said, that the Jews use human blood . . . at their Passover and that this is a custom conserved by tradition." The affair would "perhaps still not have been elucidated if anybody but you had been responsible for its prosecution.")¹³

Henceforward, the French consul made it a point to seek such testimonials to his conduct from various people in-the-know – the Lazarist priest, Father Tustet, for example, and the priest-vicar of the Greek-Catholic patriarchate, Mikhail Ata – thus preparing a dossier ready for his defense. This same anxious concern for proper procedures manifested itself in the decision to have the supposed remains of Ibrahim Amara officially reexamined at the French consulate on 21 April, producing split opinions among the Italian doctors present.

¹¹ Cochelet to Thiers (6 April) in Driault, *L'Égypte et l'Europe*, vol. 2, p. 232.

¹² Ratti-Menton to Said Ali (16 April) in Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 314–15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

Ratti-Menton's mounting nervousness became ever more apparent in his despatches to Paris and Alexandria. Thus, in his letter of 7 May to Thiers, he once more found himself explaining how it had come about that he had forced his way into the apartment of an Austrian citizen (Joseph Ayrout); that he had called another Austrian subject (Isaac Picciotto) a "murderer" while he was still on trial; and that he had not protested against the use of torture by the government (such, after all, were the "customary modes of justice" in the region). He claimed credit for having saved many of the prisoners from execution and for the release of the Jewish boys (numbered by him at forty) from their incarceration at the serail. And Merlato – however accusatory now – had enthusiastically supported the prosecution of the case for an entire month and only then, suddenly, did the measures "adopted by me become odious, intolerable, marked by a barbarity worthy of the Middle Ages."

From the first, he had taken measures to frustrate the inevitable campaign of bribery, foreseeing as he had

that the Jews, clumsily turning the event into an issue of religious groups, would neglect no means of corruption to prevent the truth from seeing the light of day. . . . The movement set in motion by the Jews both in Europe and in Asia is certainly providing confirmation of all my predictions.

It was in this context that the letter made reference to the intervention of Pieritz, "a German Jew and would-be convert."

Concluding his despatch, Ratti-Menton put forward two requests. First, he urged Thiers to use the protocols of the judicial investigation, which he would soon be forwarding in French translation, in order to rebuff the attacks on the Damascus consulate. And, second, to insure that justice be done, he asked for the appointment of "a commission of enquiry to examine my conduct."¹⁴ Probably by sheer coincidence, it was on the same day, 7 May, that Thiers in Paris publicly announced that the vice-consul in Alexandria, Maxime des Meloizes, was to undertake just such an inquiry.

Over the next two months, the judicial protocols were sent off in installments, as completed, to France. Ratti-Menton added his own explanatory notes which (as he wrote to Thiers on 20 May) marshalled "incontestable facts" – a telling response to those "who believe that in order to establish, willy-nilly, the supposed innocence of a few fanatics, it is necessary to accuse me of fanaticism and barbarity."¹⁵

The extent of the disquiet pervading the French consulate, as the month

¹⁴ Ratti-Menton to Thiers (7 May, no. 25) MREA:TAD, pp. 33–42. (Cf. idem to Cochelet, [24 April], in Talas, *Faṭır Şihyamn*, p. 195.)

¹⁵ Ratti-Menton to Thiers (20 May, no. 26) MREA:TAD, p. 46.

of May wore on, can be gauged by an extraordinary news item sent from Damascus and reproduced, *inter alia*, in the *Quotidienne*. "The fanaticism of the Jews against our consul," we read there, "has become so inflamed that his life is menaced. The Count de Ratti-Menton is obliged to take the most exacting precautions and not to go out unarmed."¹⁶

And no less indicative of the changing mood were the despatches that Werry sent to London on 22 May (together with another set of the judicial protocols). He had in the meantime been warned by Colonel Hodges, in a letter sent from Alexandria on 7 April and received on the 28th, to keep a safe distance from the ritual-murder affair; and to Palmerston he therefore adopted a detached tone. "Orders relating to the case," he wrote, "were being awaited from Ibrahim Pasha." As for the Jews,

neither the detained accused nor the nation are now persecuted; the latter are generally in good spirits . . . ; the Christians are somewhat depressed at the protection the Jews generally and apparently receive on this affair. . . . The Mussulman population takes a decided bias in favour of the Christian cause against the Jews.¹⁷

However, to John Bidwell, the senior official responsible for the consular department, whom he regarded as a personal friend, he allowed himself to speak much more frankly:

The Jews are moving heaven and earth, both in Turkey, Egypt and Europe, to gain over the governments, public authority and public opinion to their side, to establish their innocence, if not of the crime, the object for which it was committed. Ingenuity of argument, every species of intrigue . . . is resorted to, to arrive at that end. The pasha here and the local authorities . . . , particularly the French consul, might, to have quashed this investigation, have made immense sums of money. . . . Tolerant as I am and moving in accord with the liberal and philosophic principles of the age . . . , I must confess that I conceive the conduct of the French consul was honourable and virtuous. What is now attempted to be established? – to prove black white! – the innocence of the Jews and thereby blacken the reputation of an honourable public functionary and destroy his career! . . . thereby completely reversing the relative positions the defendant and prosecuting functionaries stood in when the investigation commenced. But all these intrigues . . . , whether for private pecuniary, or for Hebrew national and political ends, cannot succeed in the face of established facts: . . . any impartial and conscientious person will decide on reading the investigation that the Jews are guilty. . . .

The same arguments, . . . means and measures are employed by the

¹⁶ "Affaire des Juifs de Damas," *Quotidienne* (12 June).

¹⁷ Werry to Palmerston (22 May, no. 6) FO 78/410, p. 55.

Jews to get whitewashed as were produced by them centuries back when they were expelled from different countries in Europe, from Great Britain, France, Italy, Spain and for the very same alleged crimes; and unfortunately they neither want themselves talent or riches nor friends and abettors blindly concurring in their measures.¹⁸

In inverse proportion to the anxiety now palpable in the despatches of the French and English consuls was the growing confidence of Caspar Merlato. Laurin's repeated success in inducing Muhammed Ali to discipline the governor-general in Damascus meant that the state of siege to which Merlato had been subjected was now gradually eased. Thus, in a letter of 25 April to his father-in-law in Trieste, he still complained of being constantly insulted – "the general Christian mob overwhelms me with curses" – but he looked forward to "a deserved triumph." Not only were the Jews praying for him, but the most prominent Muslims of Damascus had given him words of encouragement, saying "that my love for justice has tempered the religious hatreds." He looked forward to the publication of Pieritz's report and hoped that the visiting Bavarian army officer, von Hailbronner, would see to it that his version of events found its way into the *Allgemeine Zeitung* of Augsburg. "With God's help," he wrote, "I have saved the lives of many unfortunate people and defended numerous families from persecution." As a result of "this strange and extraordinary affair my humble name will become known through the newspapers and historical memoirs, and my conduct judged and described variously in accord with the different attitudes of the authors."¹⁹

By the end of May, many of the Jews, including Raphael Farhi, held on peripheral charges, had been released. But nine of the sixteen men accused of murdering Father Thomas and Ibrahim Amara were still in prison; four more had to stay in hiding; and one, Isaac Picciotto, remained shut up in the Austrian consulate. (The other two, of course, had been killed early in the case.) In addition, the chief rabbi, Jacob Antebi, was also behind bars. No longer subject to torture, they were still at the mercy of Sherif Pasha's uncertain whims. In retaliation against the inquiries undertaken by Pieritz and against the appeals of two other outsiders – Mr. Sasun, in the Prussian consular service at Beirut, and Mr. Briggs, the leading English merchant on a visit from Alexandria – the prisoners were now ordered into strict solitary confinement.²⁰ They were not allowed to change their clothes and were reported to be infested by insects. The death penalty had been neither

¹⁸ Werry to Bidwell (22 May) *ibid.*, pp. 113–14; (partially also in Hyamson, "The Damascus Affair," pp. 51–2).

¹⁹ "Syrien," *LAZ* (3 June), p. 1680.

²⁰ "Persecution of the Jews in the East," *Times* (30 July), p. 5. (On Samuel Briggs: Rodkey, "The Attempts of Briggs and Company." Briggs had been in Egypt since 1803.)

confirmed nor rescinded, and, as before, their ultimate fate rested with the viceroy of Egypt, who gave no sign of being in any hurry to decide the issue.

Rhodes

In their origins, shape, and initial development, the ritual-murder cases in Rhodes and Damascus were essentially alike; but (as already noted) even in the earliest days, it was possible to discern certain distinguishing features, and these would eventually prove significant. The governor of Rhodes, Yusuf Pasha, was newly appointed and, lacking the authority of his counterpart in Damascus, proved unable or unwilling to force the investigation through to any formal conclusion. And the Jews on the island, in contrast to those in Damascus, had appealed from the start for outside help – turning to the communal leadership in Constantinople.

It was, presumably, some combination of these two factors that produced the direct intervention of the Ottoman government in the case. According to the detailed report that the British vice-consul on the island, John Wilkinson, drew up in the summer, the governor had written to Constantinople in early March “to apprise the Porte of what had taken place and to wait orders as to the manner in which he should proceed.”²¹

However, in the view of another observer, a crucial role in activating the central government was played by the chief rabbi (or Hacham Bashi), M. H. Fresco.²² He reportedly grounded his plea on the principles of the *hatti sherif* of Gulhané, which in November 1839 had promised protection to every religion in the Ottoman empire. By the month of April, moreover, other communal leaders in Constantinople had also begun actively to seek support for the beleaguered Jews in both Rhodes and Damascus. And they were, doubtless, spurred on by the arrival of the two emissaries, Haim Nisim Abu el-Afieh and Haim Farhi, from Palestine. More important, they could count on the unflagging support of a young English Jew then resident in the capital – George Samuel, a nephew of Moses Montefiore, who was there to represent the banking interests of the Rothschild family at the Porte.

Whatever the exact sequence of events, instructions from the government finally reached Rhodes at the end of April. The Greek and Jewish communities were both to despatch deputations to present evidence to an official

²¹ Wilkinson to Palmerston (4 July) FO 78/413, p. 175.

²² “Die Juden zu Rhodes,” *LAZ* (30 July), p. 2317. (Galante gives credit to R. A. Amato of Mylassos in Anatolia – a son-in-law of Rabbi Israel of Rhodes – who supposedly handed the Sultan a petition as he was riding through the streets of the capital: *Histoire des Juifs de Turquie*, vol. 7, p. 150.)

investigatory commission that would be set up in the capital.²³ They reached Constantinople, each group numbering five, on 10 May.²⁴

Just as had occurred in Damascus, the immediate result of intervention by the central government was simply to unleash a new wave of fury among the Christians against the local Jewish population. What caused particular outrage was the arrival in mid-May of orders to release Stamboli and the five other Jews held in prison, on the charge of murder, since February. Called ceremoniously before the Muslim court (or *shura*) on 21 May, the prisoners were, as the elders of the Jewish community reported, "consigned to our hands under our guarantee to the government."²⁵

A flurry of reports left the island over the next few days. That a key role in the final outcome of the affair might well be played by public opinion in Europe was by now well understood; and in their letter of 24 May the Jewish spokesmen urged the community leaders in Constantinople to insure that their version of events receive the widest possible publicity in the European press.²⁶ They referred specifically to the fact that on the previous day, six consuls and vice-consuls – among them, the English and the Swedish – had sent off for publication a detailed rebuttal denouncing their own report from February, which had subsequently found its way into both the *Times* and the *Journal des Débats*. (In their long letter, the consuls argued that responsibility for the interrogations lay not with them, but solely with the Ottoman governor; and that, anyway, only the bastinado, not torture, had been applied.)²⁷ As for the incidents taking place immediately after the release of the Jewish prisoners, an account, no doubt representative of prevailing Christian opinion on the island, was sent off to the *Journal de Smyrne* on 25 May.²⁸

The only fact on which the opposing reports agreed was that intercommunal relations on the island had entered an explosive phase in late May and that violence was in the air. In their somewhat rambling appeal, the product perhaps of extreme agitation, the Jews described a number of cases in which members of their community had been the victims of unprovoked assault and beaten to within an inch of their lives. When they complained to the governor, he rejected their appeals out of hand and had the complainants subjected to the bastinado (four to five hundred blows each). Following a by now familiar pattern, the *cadi* disassociated himself vigorously from the actions of the governor who, in turn, declared that he had simply acted in accord with the demands of the consuls. (One of Wilkinson's sons, as well

²³ Wilkinson to Palmerston (4 July) FO 78/413, p. 176.

²⁴ Pisani to Ponsonby (27 May) FO 78/393, p. 106.

²⁵ Abraham Amato, Baruch Ben Atar, and Isaac Caboloto to Abraham Camondo, Solomon Fua, and Samuel de N. Trèves (24 May) BofD, p. 216.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224. ²⁷ For this letter (23 May) FO 78/413, pp. 179–84.

²⁸ Reproduced in "Rhodus," *AZdesj* (11 July), p. 400.

apparently as E. Scaramanga, the Greek consul, were among those who had beaten up a number of Jews.)

"Many people," concluded this letter, written in Italian,

have decided to run away from the city and have already begun to sell their homes and shops. Under this governor, no Jew will remain; he has already nearly destroyed us; and [his deputy], Chiaga Bey, is still worse, having caused us so many . . . losses, over one hundred thousand piastres. . . . Three months have elapsed without our having been able to attend to our affairs; you must try to obtain the dismissal of this governor, for if he is not defeated we shall find ourselves badly placed vis-à-vis the Europeans here. Consul Wilkinson continues to encourage his people to beat and exterminate us. God grant that no one be killed.

True, the six original prisoners had been released, but five others had now been arrested – "so that we have only had a gain of one."²⁹

A totally different picture emerges from the account appearing in the Symrna paper. Here, it was the Christian communities, indigenous (Greek) and foreign alike, that were described as the victims. Groundless rumors (for which Muhammed Ali's agents were blamed) about an imminent revolt against Ottoman rule had resulted in the arrest of Greeks guilty of nothing at all. As for the Jews, "lent courage by their supporters, they are [now] the aggressors. It has been noted how, en masse, they set upon people going through their bazaars."³⁰ The dragoman of the Russian vice-consul, stated the correspondent, had been severely beaten by a crowd of some fifty Jews and only extricated at the last moment. Given the danger of massive three-way violence involving the Muslims, the Christians, and the Jews, the English vice-consul and the Ottoman *muhasil* had agreed to cooperate in an effort to restore calm.

At the time, in late April, when the deputation of Greek Christians was about to leave for the capital, great efforts had been made by the consuls – and there was no sign of dissension among them on the issue – to insure that the ritual-murder charge would be vindicated. The Austrian consul, for example, managed to have the mother of the missing boy join the delegation, "despite the opposition of the local authorities"³¹ (a reference, presumably, to the *cadi*). And the witnesses, who were ready to provide personal testimony against Stamboli and his fellow-accused, carried testimonials to their trustworthiness from the consular representatives of Sweden, England, Denmark, Austria, and Naples (the Neapolitan vice-consul, C. Biliotti, was also accredited by Tuscany). In explanation of the united front presented by

²⁹ BofD, pp. 217–22 (letter from Rhodes [24 May]; for the original Italian: FO 78/421, pp. 14–15).

³⁰ *AZdesf* (11 July), p. 400. ³¹ Letter from the consuls (23 May) FO 78/413, p. 184.

the consular corps, it has to be remembered that, as a general rule, the men chosen to be consuls or vice-consuls there were businessmen who received no salary from their respective governments. Their livelihood was dependent on the local economy and community, even though consular fees and perks provided a useful supplement.³² (In a letter to Lord Palmerston, John Wilkinson complained bitterly about his "thirteen years of unremunerated public services, with a numerous family to maintain.")³³

However, by the time the delegations reached Constantinople, the tide there had begun to turn in favor of the Jewish side in the crisis. The high-ranking diplomats in the capital were moving toward a consensus diametrically opposed to that prevailing among their subordinates on the island; among them, agreement was forming that the ritual-murder cases, above all in Damascus but (if only by extension) also in Rhodes, had gone too far and should no longer receive European support.

This does not mean that there were not serious and significant differences in the thinking of the ambassadors: the contrary was the case. The Austrian, von Stürmer, for example, made it clear that he personally was withholding judgment with regard to the actual guilt of the Jewish prisoners in Damascus. ("While Laurin," he wrote to Metternich on 13 May, sees "the persecution of the Jews . . . as absolutely unjust, . . . here people are asserting just the opposite. . . . But even supposing that Father Thomas was indeed assassinated by the Jews, nothing proves that the murder was motivated by religious fanaticism.")³⁴ As for Rhodes, he replied to Metternich's vigorous and unequivocal despatch of 10 April with the astonishing statement that "there have been no persecutions against the Jewish population there, at least not by the authorities."³⁵ Whether he had been misled by, or was shielding, the vice-consul, Anton Guiliani, is not clear.

For his part, the Prussian ambassador, von Königsmark, reporting to Berlin on 20 May, no longer assumed, as he had originally, that the guilt of

³² The fact that European vice-consuls and consular agents (and even, often, consuls and consuls-general) were almost always nonsalaried encouraged them to extend protection to rayahs in exchange for payment or other favors. This made it worthwhile financially to pay for such posts – Bowring was told that the going rate for a vice-consulship in Syria was £1,000 (*Report on the Commercial Statistics*, p. 100). The system was resented and resisted by the Egyptian and Turkish governments. See, e.g., Sauer, "Zur Reform," pp. 219–20; Dodwell, *The Founder of Modern Egypt*, pp. 164–5; Bourne, *Palmerston*, pp. 449–50; Gliddon to Forsyth (15 April 1837, enclosure no. 2) SDA: Vice-Consulate, Alexandria (microfilm T:45). In Damascus, Ratti-Menton was fully salaried; Werry, partially; and Merlato, not at all.

³³ Wilkinson to Palmerston (29 September) FO 78/413, p. 185.

³⁴ Stürmer to Metternich (13 May, no. 403) HHS:Türkei, Berichte VI/74.

³⁵ Ibid. (29 April) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffäre*, p. 20.

the Jews was an established fact, but he could still declare that "only the future can reveal the truth in this matter."³⁶

Such private opinions apart, though, the ambassadors to the Porte were moved by various factors to dissociate themselves from the prosecution of the murder cases. Thus, von Königsmark now argued that the ritual-murder issue provided the great-power coalition forming against Egypt with an ideal opportunity to expose the political system of Muhammed Ali as "barbaric and rapacious," and his regime in Syria as just the opposite of that "civilization"³⁷ which he so loudly claimed to represent.

Von Stürmer, even before hearing from Metternich, had allowed himself to be persuaded by Merlato and Laurin that he had no choice but to intervene in defense of Isaac Picciotto. In a letter of 24 April to the French ambassador, the Count de Pontois, he complained angrily that Ratti-Menton had displayed "immoderate zeal" in the case, and, still worse, was irresponsibly seeking to establish the dangerous principle that Europeans should be coerced into standing trial before the indigenous courts. "The fanaticism of a number of Christians," he wrote, "has marked the investigations with a spirit of cruelty and persecution which cannot but profoundly sadden every friend of humanity."³⁸

Similar appeals were also reaching the French ambassador at that time from the Jewish community in Constantinople. A news item, issued by Crémieux and widely circulated in the European press, reported that the Jewish leaders in the Ottoman capital had approached Pontois through the good offices of a well-known lawyer with ties to the embassy.³⁹ And a letter of protest against the role of French officials in the ritual-murder scandal was addressed on 21 April to the ambassador by (as he put it in a subsequent report to Thiers) "a number of prominent local Jews."⁴⁰

Falling in line with his fellow-diplomats at the Porte – and in obvious contradiction to both Thiers and Cochelet (although he was probably as yet unaware of the fact) – Pontois on 25 April addressed a clear, albeit implicit and outwardly polite, rebuke to Ratti-Menton. The French consul, he wrote, had doubtless behaved in accord with that "fair and philanthropic spirit which cannot but mark the actions of every French agent." However, he had as yet had no direct account from Ratti-Menton; and, from the other sources, "it unfortunately appears certain that, in order to arrive at a discovery of the truth, means were employed which are odious, are condemned by humanity and, indeed, have been abolished by Turkish

³⁶ Königsmark to Berlin (20 May) in Meisl, "Beiträge zur Damaskus-Affäre," p. 229.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Stürmer to Pontois (24 April) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffäre*, pp. 20–1.

³⁹ "Affaire de Damas," *Presse* (1 June).

⁴⁰ Pontois to Thiers (27 May, no. 27) MREA (Turquie, vol. 279–80/microfilm 662).

legislation." The French consul was to report "promptly" on what had taken place.⁴¹

Given this far-reaching measure of agreement among the Austrian, Prussian, and French representatives, the way was open for Lord Ponsonby, if he so wished, to intervene unopposed with the Ottoman government on behalf of the Jews in Rhodes. Of course, to do so he would have to repudiate the British vice-consul on the island. But, on the other hand, he was on very friendly terms with George Samuel and was favorably inclined toward the idea, then very much in the air, of a major loan by the Rothschilds to the hopelessly underfinanced Turkish regime.⁴² Again, as somebody even more fiercely hostile than Palmerston to Muhammed Ali, he had ample reason to oppose the ritual-murder charge, if only because of its primary association with the Egyptian regime – and French influence – in Syria.

However, it is not until 27 May that we find the first reference to the Rhodes case in Ponsonby's despatches to London (possibly in direct response to Palmerston's instructions sent out three weeks earlier). Thenceforward, the British ambassador made it a point to keep the foreign secretary regularly informed of the judicial proceedings going forward in the capital. Unlike Palmerston, he did not dismiss the ritual-murder charges as intrinsically absurd; rather, he took it upon himself, as by far the most influential foreign diplomat in the city, to insure as fair an inquiry into the facts as possible. In his letter of 27 May, he mentioned that he had sent the embassy dragoman, Frederick Pisani, to the investigatory tribunal in order that he "watch with care that justice be done without fear or favour. I have also desired that no *sentence* be given before I have been made acquainted with it."⁴³

From Pisani's account of the open session held on 26 May, it turns out that the tribunal was chaired by one of the most influential figures in the regime, Rifaat Bey, and that apart from the two opposing delegations, a number of prominent figures had arrived from the island ready to give evidence: the *cadi*, the French consul (A. Rottier), and the Austrian vice-consul (A. G. Giuliani). Not surprisingly, the *cadi* maintained that "the entire affair is the product of hatred; [and] . . . was instigated by the English

⁴¹ Pontois to Ratti-Menton (25 April) (enclosed with no. 27 to Thiers) *ibid*.

⁴² The Rothschilds had been in contact with the Porte about a possible loan since 1830 – a project strongly supported by Metternich, Ponsonby, and Reshid Pasha; but the problem of adequate guarantees remained insuperable. Rumor had it that the Porte was offering Crete (although then still in Muhammed Ali's possession) in exchange for British guarantees. On a Rothschild loan: S. Rothschild to Metternich (n.d., 1840) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffäre*, pp. 40–1; Stürmer to Metternich (10 June, no. 407/A) HHS:Türkei, Berichte VI/74; Cochelet to Thiers (23 April) in Driault, *L'Égypte et l'Europe*, vol. 2, p. 262; "Turchia," *Diario di Roma* (17 March); [Montefiore] *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 269; and Rodkey, "Lord Palmerston and the Rejuvenation of Turkey," pp. 219–21.

⁴³ Ponsonby to Palmerston (27 May) FO 78/394, pp. 103–4.

and Austrian consuls alone.”⁴⁴ The two consular officials present, backed up by the written testimony of their colleagues on the island, argued the contrary case, insisting on the guilt of the Jews. Ponsonby reported that, on his advice, George Samuel had immediately obtained an interview with Pontois, who promised that henceforward the French dragoman would be instructed to make every endeavor to insure that the case be handled “with care and impartiality.”⁴⁵

In a subsequent despatch, written on 16 June, Ponsonby summed up the basic issue as he saw it: Had Stamboli “made the avowal of his own free will,” as the Greeks maintained, or not?

I have called upon His Excellency, the minister of foreign affairs [Reshid Pasha] to exert the authority of the Porte to obtain from Rhodes decisive evidence upon this point. . . . If the Jew made his confession voluntarily . . . it will be hard to imagine that he speaks falsely unless it can be shown that he was bribed. If he was tortured . . . there cannot be any weight given to such confession.

I suppose that the Ottoman authorities at Rhodes will endeavour to prove that torture was not used. It will also be the interest of the British vice-consul to do the same. It will therefore be difficult to be certain of the truth . . . from those quarters, and I have taken the best means I have to find other sources of information and I shall call upon the Porte not to permit a final judgment to be given before the affairs have been fully sifted.⁴⁶

By July, a somewhat paradoxical situation had begun to emerge. Reports in the press increasingly assumed that the Jews accused of the murder (whether guilty or not) would be acquitted. Given the views, by now well known, of Palmerston and Metternich, and the ever-closer ties of Turkey with Austria and Britain, such an expectation was certainly logical. And even in Rhodes, Wilkinson, brought up sharp by Palmerston’s harsh language, had been reduced to formulating a highly circumspect report on the entire affair (which he hoped would prove that “the attack made upon European representatives here is not only exaggerated but entirely false”).⁴⁷ Nonetheless, Lord Ponsonby was in no hurry to see the case, now in the hands of a ministerial court of justice, finally settled. “The affair of Rhodes . . .,” he wrote to Palmerston on 15 July,

has been examined here with fairness. . . . I have, however, thought it right to delay further proceedings by the Ottoman ministers because I am certain that proper evidence has not yet been produced, and it is

⁴⁴ Pisani to Ponsonby (27 May) *ibid.*, p. 106. ⁴⁵ Ponsonby to Palmerston, *ibid.*, p. 104.

⁴⁶ Ponsonby to Palmerston (16 June, no. 135) FO 78/394, p. 171.

⁴⁷ Wilkinson to Palmerston (4 July) FO 78/413, p. 174.

necessary to take great pains to lay open facts which the governor of Rhodes is strongly interested to conceal and which the vice-consuls would also endeavour to keep secret if there be truth in the charges made against them. . . . I have engaged the Ottoman ministers to call for a strict examination into the fact, was Stamboli tortured or was he not? I believe that he was tortured and most cruelly tortured. There is some impatience here amongst those who are obliged to wait; but I think it will not be fairly judged without the full elucidation of the fact[s].

(In concluding this letter, he had some words of praise for the chaplain of the embassy, a Doctor Bennet; the affairs of Damascus and Rhodes, wrote the ambassador, had "caused the display of much bigotry amongst those who ought to be wiser," but Bennet, at least, had insisted on "the uncharitableness" of making such charges "without clear and irresistible proof," and had "declared his disbelief in the existence amongst the Israelites of those monstrous doctrines which have been so freely attributed.")⁴⁸

Whether in accord with the exact wishes of Lord Ponsonby or not, it was less than a week later, on 21 July, that he could report that the case had been concluded and that he was enclosing the verdict – "a signal proof of the justice and humanity with which the Sublime Porte acts." Fittingly, the results of the case had been transmitted to him by Reshid Pasha, the foreign minister and most forceful advocate of liberal reform in the Ottoman elite. The decision, as Reshid communicated it, consisted of two parts. First, in the case between "the Greek population of Rhodes, the plaintiff, and the Jewish population, defendant," the verdict was acquittal. Second, the governor of the island, Yusuf Pasha, was dismissed from his post, 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 hatti sherif of 3 November."⁴⁹ (Reshid Pasha had been the principal architect of the hatti sherif of Gulhané.)

Alexandria

A very specific combination of forces, then, had led to the acquittal of the Rhodes Jews on 20 July. Even though their standing and influence in the empire were in decline, the Ottoman Jews could still call on the traditional sympathies of the regime. Ritual-murder cases were not infrequent and had usually been given short shrift by Turkish officialdom. Reshid Pasha, who consistently advocated the principle of judicial impartiality, was then at the

⁴⁸ Ponsonby to Palmerston (15 July, no. 145) FO 78/395, pp. 85–6.

⁴⁹ Ibid. (21 July, no. 149), pp. 103–4. For the full text of this judgment: Galante, *Histoire des Juifs de Turquie*, vol. 7, pp. 151–2.

height of his influence; as foreign minister, he was also fully informed about the views of England and Austria regarding the assault on the Jews. Throughout July, he was anxiously awaiting the news that the treaty between Turkey and those two powers (together with Russia and Prussia, but against Egypt) had been signed, and he was eager to do everything possible to consolidate the coalition. To cap it all, the European ambassadors to the Porte (among them, the Frenchman, Pontois) were agreed that their national interests would in no way be jeopardized if they repudiated their consular subordinates on the island.

In Alexandria, the situation was markedly different. The Egyptian regime was the creation of its founder, Muhammed Ali, something of a would-be Bonaparte by temperament, who worked out the rules as he went along. Under these circumstances, the Jewish population in the territories under his control was no match for the Catholics, who constituted a major force in an area of key strategic importance and great international contention – Mount Lebanon. Nothing but the application of persistent outside influence could lead to the overturn of the verdict against the sixteen Damascus Jews, assumed guilty of murdering Father Thomas and Ibrahim Amara. If the diplomatic representatives of the European powers in Alexandria had been united on the issue, as they were in Constantinople, Muhammed Ali would, no doubt, have acquiesced in such a reversal; but from early April it had become apparent that they were not. The Damascus case would thus have to be played out as a struggle between the leading diplomats in Alexandria – above all between Anton Laurin and Adrien-Louis Cochelet – not for the heart of Muhammed Ali (for whom there were no sentiments involved, other, perhaps, than pride or dignity), but for his mind.

On the face of it, this was an utterly uneven contest. Given Muhammed Ali's hope that, in the last resort, France might come to his defense, even militarily if necessary, against Turkey and its European allies, he had every reason to follow Cochelet's lead with regard to the case of the double murder in Damascus. Laurin undoubtedly understood the harsh logic of the situation, but refused to let it deter him. He made the calculation that at a time of a highly complex international crisis, which might or might not lead to war, the Egyptian viceroy would hardly want his image as an enlightened ruler to be tarnished in European eyes by the essentially peripheral affair of the Damascus Jews. And acting from the first on that calculation, Laurin had been able to extract the succession of decrees ordering Sherif Pasha to call a halt both to the use of torture in the case and to the anti-Jewish incitement in the city.

His underlying goal throughout, however, was to have the entire case overthrown as devoid of all genuine proof, as so much slanderous nonsense. Early on, for example, he sought ways to cooperate to that end with the

leaders of the Jewish community in Alexandria. It is probable that he had a part in the decision of Israel Madfis (the official representative or *vekiel* of the European Jews in the city) to write to Baron James de Rothschild, in Hebrew, on 5 April, calling on him in impassioned terms to come to the aid of the Jews in Syria ("a province where we have nobody really to protect us").⁵⁰

And there can be no doubt that he was involved in one way or another with the most unusual petition which the Jews of Alexandria addressed to Muhammed Ali similarly in early April. This appeal (which emphasized the fact that Jews are forbidden to consume even animal blood) specifically mentioned documents received by the Austrian consul-general from Christian sources in Damascus – a reference obviously to Caspar Merlato. It called on Muhammed Ali to have the case retried in Alexandria:

Your Highness, the people of Israel has neither its own king nor its own state; its glory is shrouded in the annals of antiquity. . . . The Jews of Damascus are your children, because God confided them to your government. . . . The name of Muhammed Ali is celebrated throughout the world, because . . . he [upholds both] glory, and . . . justice. . . . The Jewish people has been unfortunate, it is true, but it has withstood adversity with its character intact. . . . Your Highness, we do not demand pity for our coreligionists, we demand justice. . . . Order them brought before you; let them be heard and, if guilty, punished; but if they are innocent, let their innocence be proclaimed. The issue involves an ancient religion which people are seeking to destroy. God, it seems, is offering you a new path to glory – that of liberating an oppressed people.⁵¹

(This document, like so many others in the affair, was soon widely disseminated in the European press.)

At the time of the petition, and on a number of other occasions, delegations from the Jewish community of Alexandria were able to gain audiences with the viceroy. But no concrete results were achieved. Muhammed Ali tended to express himself in cryptic or offhand remarks which, in turn, produced contradictory reports about his true intentions and opinions. Thus, at one meeting, he was alleged to have told the Jewish spokesmen (among whom were Isaac Loria and Moses Valensino) that "his son had written to him saying that to pardon the guilty would lead to a revolt in Syria; he [Muhammed Ali] would not embarrass himself for Jewish murderers."⁵² But, on another occasion, he was quoted as stating that "never throughout his entire reign had he ever found any kind of grounds to warrant laying such

⁵⁰ Israel Madfis to James Rothschild (5–6 April) MREA:TAD, pp. 98–9.

⁵¹ *JdesD* (15 May); "Damas," *AI*, pp. 303–4.

⁵² "Assassinat du R. P. Thomas," *Gdel* (9 May).

charges at the door of the Jews; and he personally would investigate the matter."⁵³ None of this meant anything except that, for the meanwhile, the viceroy preferred to wait and see.

Among the supplicants who came to plead the cause of the Damascus Jews – and received no doubt, as was customary, by the viceroy seated on cushions and offering coffee – was the Anglican missionary, George Wildon Pieritz, who had sailed from Beirut for Alexandria on 27 April. As Colonel Hodges put it in a despatch to Palmerston, "this gentleman . . . had come to this place with no other object than to present to the pasha a petition and various representations in favour of his former brethren."⁵⁴ Pieritz was no more successful than others in persuading Muhammed Ali to take further action on the case, although he presumably used the opportunity to reinforce the idea that the Damascus affair, if further mishandled, could seriously damage the Egyptian regime in European eyes.

Pieritz, by this time, was becoming something of a hero to the Jewish communities directly involved. A letter from a rabbi in Beirut sent on 28 April to a leading Sephardi scholar in Jerusalem (Eliakim Morcado Gagi) reported in excited terms on Pieritz's plans to publish a full account exposing the investigatory methods to which the Jews had been subjected – "all that can be said in their vindication and to their acquittal in such a manner that . . . the Lord's name will be sanctified through him." (Nicolayson, who immediately copied the English translation of this letter into his diary, noted with satisfaction that "to see Mr. P. designated as a 'Protestant' in a Jewish letter and his name followed by – 'may the Lord prolong his days' instead of the usual, 'may his name be blotted out,' . . . is surely a token for good.")⁵⁵

As soon as his report on what he had found in Damascus was ready, Pieritz gave a copy to the leaders of the Jewish community in Alexandria together with an explanatory letter dated 13 May: "I . . . request you hereby to forward copies of the accompanying statement . . . to so many parts of Europe as you think fit, calling on the wealthy and influential members of your community to exert themselves in the case." Urgency was of the essence. "You have too much at stake, and falsehood and fraud, bigotry and prejudice are in array against you – much depends on the view the French government will take of the matter."⁵⁶

Pieritz's description and analysis of the Damascus affair, based as they were on a stay of hardly more than one week in the city, constitute a remarkable document. When published in book form later in the year, it ran to over forty pages in length. Substantiating the facts already exposed by Merlato,

⁵³ "Syrien," *AZdesJ* (6 June), p. 325.

⁵⁴ Hodges to Palmerston (18 June, no. 54) FO 78/405, p. 30.

⁵⁵ The General Journal of the Mission of the London Society (2 May).

⁵⁶ "Extract of Letters from Mr. Pieritz," *Times* (6 July) p. 9; also in Salomons, *An Account of the Recent Persecution*, pp. 102, 106.

and coming from a Jew (a one-time rabbinical student) converted to Christianity, it would prove a most effective weapon in the battle of words raging in Europe over the ritual-murder issue. It effectively combined a sober, even dry, assessment of the events with flashes of bitter anger and contempt. Its accuracy can be confirmed today by comparison with the diplomatic reports to which Pieritz did not have access. No other contemporary account of what took place can match it.

When he went to see Muhammed Ali, Pieritz was accompanied by Colonel Hodges, who received generous thanks from the missionary in his report and accompanying letter. The British consul-general had come out early in defense of the Jews in Damascus, but there are no grounds for the view, advanced by Albert Hyamson, for example, that he took the lead in that direction. He did not report the case to London until 18 June, and only then in reply to Lord Palmerston's forceful instructions. His one letter to Werry in Damascus during April did not go out until the 7th, about ten days later than Laurin's first flurry of despatches on the issue. He also spoke to Muhammed Ali in favor of the Jews, but, again, that was after the Austrian consul-general had obtained orders putting a stop to the employment of torture in the interrogations.

Once Pieritz showed him the draft of his report in mid-May, Hodges' most urgent concern was to give Werry a fair chance to defend his good name. He was able to have the publication of the passages denouncing the British consul postponed; and, in private, he did his best to cast doubt on the missionary's reliability. (Pieritz responded that "we cannot punish a man for his sentiments," but he still felt that Werry should be removed from his post, because "it cannot be safe to confide power to . . . a man who holds principles which dispose him . . . to cruelty and injustice.")⁵⁷ The eventual result of the postponement was that the British consul in Damascus was mentioned only *en passant* in the version of Pieritz's report which reached the public.⁵⁸

The truth is that Hodges was well content to let Laurin forge ahead, backing him up when necessary, but no more. While there was an Austrian, there was no British subject among the accused (thanks, paradoxically, to Werry who, in contrast to Merlato, had acted swiftly in mid-February to extricate suspect Jews under the protection of his consulate).⁵⁹ Laurin had involved himself so early and so deeply for reasons of general principle,

⁵⁷ Pieritz to Hodges (11 May) FO 78/405, p. 102.

⁵⁸ Salomons, *An Account of the Recent Persecution*, p. 46.

⁵⁹ Rabbi Memnon (Haim Maimon) Tobi, a British subject originally from Gibraltar, as well as a man in Tobi's employ, a rayah, were both interrogated at length in mid-February as suspects – the former in the British consulate, the latter at the serail. The consular dragon-man was sent to the pasha and "immediately withdrew [Tobi's employee] from the local authority" (Werry to Hodges [10 June, no. 5] FO 78/405, p. 117). Tobi succeeded Antebi as chief rabbi of Damascus in 1842, thanks in part to his status as a British subject (Brawer, "Yehudei Damesek," pp. 88–9; Wilson, *The Lands of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 330).

but also in accord with what he saw as the specific duties of his office. However, once the most pressing danger was past, he deliberately chose to leave Isaac Picciotto incarcerated in the Damascus consulate, in order to justify the constant Austrian pressure. ("I have refrained," he wrote to James Rothschild on 16 April, "from having our Mr. Picciotto excluded from the case in order that our consul Merlato should have more right to intervene.")⁶⁰

There were a few brief days when Laurin, in a jubilant burst of optimism, did come to believe that he had achieved the breakthrough for which he was aiming. It was on 4 May that Prince Metternich's despatch of 10 April reached Alexandria; buttressed by the chancellor's support, Laurin went on the very next day to press home his advantage with Muhammed Ali.

What he now proposed formally to the viceroy was to have the case reopened; to send a commission of inquiry, with powers of subpoena, to Damascus; and, finally, to bring the commission's findings before a "competent tribunal" for judgment. Among the members of the commission there should be "two or three nonpartisan people familiar with criminal procedures" and "at least one criminal lawyer from a European country."⁶¹ These legal experts should be present to follow the proceedings of the tribunal; and, for obvious reasons, it was highly desirable that the judges should hold court in Alexandria, not in Damascus. (In a despatch to Metternich, Laurin explained that before finalizing these proposals he had consulted with "a number of local Jews here and with the English consul-general.")⁶²

At their meeting on 5 May, Muhammed Ali declared himself to be in agreement with this radical proposal, setting only two conditions – that (as Laurin reported it) "he be given a memorandum which would set forth the reasonings [involved]; and that some of my colleagues and I not only oversee the conduct of the inquiry but actually manage it."⁶³

Whether this ready assent by the viceroy was sincerely meant or not, Laurin eagerly accepted it at face value. He immediately composed a series of jubilant letters announcing this new turn of events: despatches to von Stürmer and Metternich, and a batch which (as he put it to his friend in Naples) would permit him "to state that on one and the same day I wrote to all the brothers Rothschild – about the Jewish case in Damascus, of course." "The affair," he explained to Karl Rothschild, "is going to be investigated on the spot by people, expert in criminal proceedings, who will be sent hither to us from Europe; and the judgment will be pronounced here."⁶⁴ To Salomon

⁶⁰ Laurin to James Rothschild (16 April) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*, p. 19.

⁶¹ Laurin to Metternich (5 May) in Brawer, "Homer hadash," pp. 287–9. ⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Laurin to Stürmer (6 May) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*, p. 24.

⁶⁴ Laurin to Karl Rothschild (6 May; archival no. 5) NMRA:RFam AD/2; (also in Frankel, "An Historiographical Oversight," p. 301).

Rothschild in Vienna he wrote suggesting that he discuss the latest developments with Metternich; now that an end to the torture and incitement had been commanded, one

thing still remains – and this is of the greatest importance – namely to clear the Jews of the crimes falsely imputed to them, and that of course by means of the discovery of the real murderers. . . . Only then will the Jews living in the holy places of Hebron, Safed, Tiberias and Jerusalem live safe from persecution. . . . I have worked out a plan . . . and shall be busy tonight drafting a collective note to that end to be communicated to my friends [the consuls] and submitted to His Highness [Muhammed Ali] for its final wording. Thus, I shall no longer stand alone in this affair and have to fight in isolation against the wild shouting of fanatics. . . .

If you could get hold of someone experienced in the law who could advance this inquiry, seize hold of him and send him hither; and we shall see to accrediting him properly both with our consul in Damascus and with the governor-general of the country [Syria].⁶⁵

A draft of the collective note, drawn up by Laurin, was ready on the next day to be circulated among the European diplomats in Alexandria. It emphasized that no challenge whatsoever was intended to the Egyptian judicial system, which had the sole right to prosecute the case, and that the advice of the consular corps had been requested (“in the interests of humanity”) by Muhammed Ali himself – who was “animated beyond doubt by the enlightened views which for centuries have led to the disappearance, or vigorous rejection, in Europe of the charge that the Jewish nation is guilty of human sacrifice.”⁶⁶ If the Jews were allowed to choose their own counsels, who would be empowered to collect all necessary evidence, the case could be concluded impartially.

The note was signed by the consular representatives of nine states (Austria, England, Prussia, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Spain, and the United States). Of these countries, the first four were closely linked politically in mid-1840; and it is apparent from their despatches that the Russian and Prussian consuls-general, Count Medem and von Wagner, were ready enough to associate with Laurin. (Medem, indeed, gave what is almost certainly an exaggerated account of his own active role throughout.)⁶⁷ As for the other signatories, it would seem that they were simply giving expression

⁶⁵ Laurin to Salomon Rothschild (5 May, no. 4) *ibid.*; (Frankel, pp. 300–2).

⁶⁶ Meisl, “Beitrage zur Damaskus-Affare,” pp. 235–6.

⁶⁷ Medem to Butenev (Boutenieff) (14/26 May, no. 59) Glavnyi Arkhiv, Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del: Gen. k-vo v Egipte no. 820 (also in Cattai Bey, *La Règne de Mohamed Aly*, vol. 3, pp. 372–3). (Cf. the tsarist policy of providing protection for the Russian Jews in greater Syria, especially Palestine: “Projet d’Instruction pour la Gestion du Consulat à Jaffa [1839],” *ibid.*, VA2/181/510, no. 2648.)

to their personal viewpoints. In fact, according to a newspaper report, the American and Danish consuls, who had been out of town at the time, were displeased that their subordinates had signed in their place and would certainly have refused to append their own names.⁶⁸

As it was, the collective note failed to gain the support of the consular officials representing at least six states (France, Belgium, Greece, Holland, Sardinia, and Naples; both sides claimed the support of the Tuscan consul). According to one of Medem's despatches to the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, most of them explained this abstention by the fact that their sphere of responsibility did not include Syria, but here, again, personal opinion was a major factor – the Dutch consul-general, Schutz, for example, had consistently expressed his belief in the guilt of the Damascus Jews.⁶⁹

However, it would, of course, be Cochelet who would make or break the initiative. He had not hitherto interfered to sabotage Laurin's efforts on behalf of the Damascus Jews, but the plan about to be launched could only be understood as a resounding vote of no confidence in the Count de Ratti-Menton. His reply, explaining his refusal to sign, was addressed on 7 May to the Austrian consul-general. Its tone was deliberately sharp. He recalled that he himself had written to Damascus very early on, in order to warn the French consul against the use of torture. Beyond that strictly humanitarian issue, there was simply no place for outside interference in the affair:

As for me, sir, once having done all that humanitarian sentiment demanded, I am trying to maintain the greatest impartiality regarding what is a horrifying murder. I have seen the minutes of the judicial proceedings which today have been sent on to the department of foreign affairs [in Paris]; it will know how to evaluate all circumstances of the crime. I do not, moreover, believe that it is my duty to set myself up as the defendant of some rayahs, the murderers of a Franciscan monk under French protection – [especially] after all the enormous offers of money and gifts made to . . . induce the Count de Ratti-Menton to withdraw his plaint.

I more than anybody have deplored the publicity given the Damascus affair and the revelations to which it has given rise. The fact that ignorant and fanatical rabbis, living amidst peoples inflamed by their respective religions, have placed criminal interpretations on the Scriptures, is not something for which our own era would hold the [Jewish] nation

⁶⁸ "Aegypten," *LAZ* (13 July), p. 2118. On 20 May Laurin circulated a modified version of his original proposal among the consuls, who divided eight versus eight; the Sardinian consul, violently against, now proposed that – in view of Father Tommaso's nationality – his country should join France in prosecuting the case (Cochelet to Thiers [23 May, no. 192] MREA:CCC, pp. 480, 484–5; Cerruti to Cochelet [20 May] *ibid.*, p. 482).

⁶⁹ In a letter to the Dutch consul-general, Lehren accused him bitterly of yielding to "the prejudices and hatreds [of a barbarous country]" (Lehren to Schutz [8 May, no. 382] PVA). Cf. Steenwijk, "De Damascus-Affaire," pp. 72–3.

responsible – a nation which has long since enjoyed the broadest emancipation and has been admitted in France and England to the exercise of all civil and political rights.

Unfortunately, I no longer expect anybody to put an end to the controversy. . . . It is now desirable that the truth come out and it will undoubtedly do so as [the facts about] the judicial proceedings are published.⁷⁰

The stand thus adopted by Cochelet marked a clear escalation of the conflict between the consuls-general in Alexandria just at the moment when the affair in Damascus was starting to wind down. It did not take long until news of the exchange between Laurin and Cochelet (as well as of the split within the consular corps as a whole) reached the European press. On his part, Cochelet had made amply clear his belief that the French government should not hesitate to use the protocols of the interrogation in order to demonstrate the guilt of the Damascus Jews to the public at large. The note of menace in his reference to that document, a still secret weapon, was undisguised.

Cochelet's rejection of Laurin's project could well have been anticipated by Muhammed Ali, who now proved himself quite satisfied to allow the stalemate to drag on indefinitely. He did not reject the collective note, but neither did he do anything to implement the proposals that he himself had invited. Colonel Hodges, who went to the palace on 28 May and again on 18 June to deliver Palmerston's peremptory messages on behalf of the Damascus Jews, came away with no hope for any speedy resolution of the affair. On the first occasion, Muhammed Ali, in a benevolent mood, chose to engage in banter. "I am an illiterate man," he said, "but still, . . . if I remember rightly, the time is not so remote when England, too, was the scene of many an act as barbarous and cruel as those of Damascus."⁷¹

The second visit proved to be even less productive. The viceroy now declared that he would do "nothing in the matter until the arrival of the official report" to be prepared by the French vice-consul, Maxime des Meloizes, who had only just then reached Damascus. No good, reported Hodges to Palmerston, could be expected from that inquiry.

I say it of my own knowledge that the French consul-general in Egypt, the *élève consulaire* [des Meloizes], . . . and the majority of French subjects resident in this place, are strongly impressed with a belief in the culpability of the Jews; and I can by no means anticipate for their cause a cool and impartial consideration before a tribunal so completely biased. . . . In this affair the viceroy will certainly be entirely guided by the

⁷⁰ Cochelet to Laurin (7 May) FO 78/405, pp. 36–8; also in Meisl, "Beiträge zur Damaskus-Affäre," pp. 235–6.

⁷¹ Hodges to Palmerston (18 June, no. 45) FO 78/405, p. 31.

opinion and wishes of France; neither does it appear to me that the remonstrations of any other power will have on His Highness the slightest influence.⁷²

Determined to counter Laurin's campaign, Cochelet made sure that many of the Europeans in Alexandria were given the chance to familiarize themselves with the protocols of the Damascus trial (as prepared by Sibli Ayub in Arabic; translated into French, probably by Jean-Baptiste Beaudin; and annotated by Ratti-Menton). This lengthy document, with its (apparent) record of methodical cross-examination, corroboratory evidence by prisoners kept isolated from each other, and forensic proofs authenticated by medical experts could hardly fail to make a dramatic impact. It fueled the anger of those already convinced that the Jews were guilty and served to corrode the good will of the waverers inclined to give them the benefit of the doubt.

Thus, the Prussian consul-general, even though allied to Laurin on the issue, could report to his superiors that the protocols were being widely read; that "various important points remain shrouded in great darkness"; and that "here as in Syria, public opinion is split with regard to the guilt of the accused."⁷³ He judiciously refrained from stating his own opinion. The protocols possibly had their influence, too, on the Russian consul-general, another associate of Laurin. "I am sorry to say," wrote Hodges to Palmerston in July, "that Count Medem has in a most unaccounted manner become a convert to the prejudice against the Jews. He told me a few days ago that he very much feared that it was the Jews who had assassinated the Padre Tommaso."⁷⁴

The exasperation and anger then prevailing within the European community in Alexandria found ample expression in the various reports sent to the press in France and Germany. To illustrate this fact it is enough to refer, for example, to the batch of letters sent out on a single day, 26 May (when, no doubt, a steamship left for France). One such article, published in the Augsburg *Allgemeine Zeitung*, noted that "the longer it [the Jewish case] goes on, the greater the sensation it is creating – but there are also a greater number of contradictory reports." As for the proposal to hold an independent tribunal, argued the writer, it was simply naive. No European lawyer would be able to function effectively given the all-pervasive effects of bribery and intrigue, and, no less important, given the impossibility of relying on the translations provided by the dragomen (who acted "partly out of ignorance; partly out of malevolence").⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid., pp. 32–3.

⁷³ Wagner to Königsmark (26 May) in Meisl, "Beiträge zur Damaskus-Affäre," p. 234.

⁷⁴ Hodges to Palmerston (24 July, no. 9) FO 78/405, p. 178.

⁷⁵ "Syrien und Aegypten," *AZZ* (23 June), p. 1384.

And the author of another of these articles announced that he had a copy of the judicial protocols in his possession and would be forwarding them: "It is not possible, as the Jews in general would have us believe, that this entire case is a mystification."⁷⁶ Still a third report mocked the consuls, who now chose to lodge a formal complaint about the employment of torture when they themselves, if subjected to "some minor insult or other, demanded that those guilty receive three or four hundred blows of the bastinado." "Meanwhile," insisted the writer, "the seven men condemned for the murder of Father Thomas are still awaiting execution [although] Muhammed Ali in no way wants to precipitate things."⁷⁷

However much frustrated in his attempts to bring the affair to the same kind of clear-cut conclusion that was then beginning to take shape in the Rhodes case, Anton von Laurin was by no means prepared to abandon the field to Cochelet and the French consular team in Damascus. Now the object of constant accusations that he had been bribed by the Jews, he threatened libel actions and urged Merlato to do the same. And in his despatches to Stürmer and Metternich, he kept up a running battle against Ratti-Menton. The judicial protocols, he wrote on 13 June, made it amply clear that whether out of "ignorance or prejudice"⁷⁸ the investigators had never made any attempt to put themselves on the trail of the actual murderers. Furthermore, the notes and appendixes added to that document by the French consul contained outright slander against Austrian citizens and officials. There were grounds here for the submission of a formal complaint to the French government – a complaint that could be buttressed by the written testimony of various people (among them, Austrians) who had suffered from the arrogant, often brutal invasions of their homes by Ratti-Menton.

Kept well informed by Merlato of developments in Damascus, Laurin sustained the pressure on Muhammed Ali to improve the prison conditions of the ten Jews still incarcerated there and, on 15 June, he was able to report that the appropriate orders had been sent to Sherif Pasha. He also maintained a steady correspondence with the Rothschilds (although he, of course, stopped transmitting copies of Merlato's despatches to Paris once Metternich's angry rebuke arrived in mid-June). His increasingly irritated view of the role played by Cochelet and his colleagues was there given free rein. "The French," he wrote typically to Karl Rothschild,

have already sent over there [to Damascus] an official of the consulate-general, only he [des Meloizes] will be more intent on whitewashing his Ratti-Menton than on getting to the bottom of the affair; this official is,

⁷⁶ Ibid. (14 June), p. 1326. ⁷⁷ "Syrien," *LAZ* (17 June), p. 1837.

⁷⁸ Laurin to Stürmer (13 June, no. 916/80) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*, p. 35.

moreover, a very limited person. À propos, Ratti-Menton was vice-consul in Palermo in 1830 and had some unpleasantness there with the police who pressed for his recall; he had the same fate in Tiflis, as well.⁷⁹

At their end, the Rothschilds also sometimes took the initiative and one such move on their part involved Laurin in yet another approach to the Egyptian viceroy. In a letter to Salomon Rothschild, some leading Constantinople Jews had brought to his attention the reports from Damascus that, three days before his disappearance, Father Thomas had been involved in a brawl with a group of Arabs who had accused him of defaming Islam and had sworn revenge. At Rothschild's request, Metternich thereupon instructed the consul-general in Alexandria to try to have the men who had been involved in the clash with the Capuchin monk brought to Alexandria and "subjected to a strict and impartial investigation."⁸⁰

On this occasion, though, Laurin's interview with Muhammed Ali, which took place on 15 July, proved less than satisfactory. To respond positively to Metternich's proposal, the consul-general there argued, would not only "be a service to humanity [but also] to all the monarchs who count Jews among their subjects." However, the viceroy would have none of it, saying, as Laurin reported, that

the investigation has proved the Jews guilty, but that in order to spare the feelings of their co-religionists, particularly those in Europe, he is prepared to throw a veil over the nature of their crime; that he will do his best to substitute personal revenge as the motive in place of the need to obtain Christian blood. . . . This is the second time that the pasha has thus spoken to me of amending . . . the law case. . . . He does not doubt that those accused at Damascus are soiled in the Christian blood employed for the unleavened bread, but thinks that the motive for the crime has to be hidden to prevent the attacks on the Jews which are threatened by the Christians.⁸¹

Given the tenor of the conversation, Laurin decided that it would not be wise to press Muhammed Ali to adopt Metternich's proposal there and then. Whether the viceroy sincerely believed the Jews were guilty of ritual murder was something that Laurin never sought to evaluate in his correspondence. What would seem to be beyond doubt, though, is that the idea of making the murder a case of private revenge rather than of religious belief had been coordinated with Cochelet; and that Cochelet, in turn, was acting on the suggestion first put forward by Thiers in April.

⁷⁹ Laurin to K. Rothschild (25 May, no. 6) NMRA:RFam AD/2; (also in Frankel, "An Historical Oversight," p. 302).

⁸⁰ Metternich to Laurin (19 June) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*, p. 40.

⁸¹ Laurin to Metternich (15 July) in Brawer, "Homer hadash," pp. 290-2.

Meanwhile, the Austrian consul-general had been pursuing his own alternative line of action. If the entire case could not, for the time being, be retried before an independent court, at least it might be possible to undertake a private investigation. The French government had sent Maxime des Meloizes to conduct an inquiry into the affair. Why should not Austria follow suit? In a letter to Karl Rothschild on 25 May, he announced that Muhammed Ali had agreed to such a proposal and would allow the facts to be examined "by European lawyers whom the friends of the accused can choose . . . – send us here two good advocates."⁸²

At the same time, Laurin was cooperating actively with the leaders of the Jewish community in Alexandria in order to launch a similar initiative on the spot and with all possible speed. Until the arrival of lawyers from Europe, a private inquiry, under Austrian auspices, could be undertaken by Jews sent from Egypt. This was not a plan that Laurin chose to discuss in his despatches, but it was in full accord with his oft-repeated insistence that, unless the real murderers were found, the security of the Jews in the entire region would remain threatened. And news of it did reach the press. A communication from Alexandria, dated (again) 26 May, stated that the Austrian consul-general was "sending two or three Jewish businessmen to Damascus to collect information about the facts of the Father Thomas murder and about the judicial procedures followed."⁸³ "The Jews," reported the *Times*, "even the poorest, have opened a subscription to send two deputies to Damascus."⁸⁴

The men chosen for this mission were Isaac Loria and a Mr. Ventura. And yet another news item informed the readers of the *Times* that on 18 June, Loria in an interview with Muhammed Ali had sought to go to Syria as nothing less than the officially accredited defendant of the Damascus Jews. The viceroy gave him permission to go to Syria, but without authorization,

as it was an affair between the Jews and Christians to which France had already sent a delegate, and the others would send delegates shortly, and that he washed his hands of the whole business.⁸⁵

Damascus Again (June–July)

Thus, in his own inimitable way, by keeping some promises and not keeping others, by saying one thing one day and hinting at the opposite on the next,

⁸² Laurin to K. Rothschild (25 May, no. 6) NMRA:RFam AD/2 (also in Frankel, "An Historical Oversight," p. 302).

⁸³ "Affaire des Juifs de Damas," *Quotidienne* (10 June).

⁸⁴ [Malta 23 May], *Times* (11 June), p. 6. ⁸⁵ *Times* (7 July), p. 6.

Muhammed Ali gradually let it be understood that he had decided not to decide. If the European powers, the self-styled champions of civilization and humanity, were in open dispute over the Damascus case, he preferred to step aside. As the state adopted this stance of demonstrative indifference, it created a power vacuum; the result was one more in the string of bizarre episodes produced by the ritual-murder issue. Left by the government to their own devices, the French and Austrian consulates-general in Alexandria were now forced to conduct their conflict by remote control, launching private – and rival – investigations at Damascus.

The governor-general, Sherif Pasha, though aware that his own standing was at stake, had clearly decided by the month of May to distance himself from the affair as much as possible.⁸⁶ And the more he learned of Muhammed Ali's equivocations, the wiser such a policy must have appeared. Thus, the two competing inquiries were allowed to function largely without control, enjoying – thanks to a broad reading of the capitulatory agreements – quasi-governmental powers. Of course, Sherif Pasha's preference went to the French side, but the Jewish delegation, protected by the Austrian consulate, moved about largely unhindered in its search for evidence.

Maxime Renaud d'Avène des Meloizes, the vice-consul in Alexandria appointed by Thiers to conduct the French inquiry, reached Damascus on 19 June, and he had the field to himself for more than three weeks before the arrival of Loria and Ventura. His official mission was to conduct a thorough and objective inquiry into all aspects of the murder case; but few observers in either Paris or Alexandria had taken the assignment at its face value. Des Meloizes, at twenty-six, was not only some fifteen years younger than Ratti-Menton, but was also much lower in the diplomatic hierarchy. Moreover, before leaving for Syria, he would have had months to familiarize himself with Cochelet's very definite opinions on the Damascus affair.

From his report, which runs to some five hundred pages, and from the explanatory letters that he sent to Paris, it is possible to learn how he understood his function. In essence, he had to compile an elaborate brief in defense of Ratti-Menton and yet present it as an objective summary of the facts. Des Meloizes emerges (despite Laurin's contrary opinion)⁸⁷ as intelligent, capable, and, in contrast to Ratti-Menton, extremely, even icily, self-controlled. An unadulterated cynicism equipped him well for the task at hand.

Yet, in reality, the goal that he had been set was unattainable for two reasons. First, with the condemned men no longer subject to torture, what

⁸⁶ See, e.g., Sherif Pasha to Alexandria (25 May), where he defends himself against Laurin's charges (in Rustum, *Al-Mahfūzāt*, vol. 4, pp. 333–4).

⁸⁷ I.e.: "A sufficiently limited young gentleman": Laurin to K. Rothschild (5 August, no. 11) NMRA:RFam AD/2 (also in Frankel, "An Historical Oversight," p. 308).

can be called the “Picciotto phenomenon” was bound to recur; and, indeed, rumors had been circulating in the press for some time that a number of the prisoners had begun to repudiate their confessions. And, second, the prevailing conventions forbade the outright forgery of what was said in the official interrogations, thus making it impossible simply to wipe out embarrassing dialogue. (Picciotto’s adamant stance had thus already been recorded in the original protocols.) The end result, then, reads as a carefully staged defense of Ratti-Menton, not as a balanced search for the truth. This fact could not be disguised and it is, therefore, not surprising that the des Meloizes report, deemed unpublishable, lay hidden in the archives of the Quai d’Orsay for over 150 years until its recent discovery by Tudor Parfitt.

The guidelines that the French vice-consul set for himself and explained in letters to Thiers in 1840 and to Guizot in 1841 were implicitly designed to insure that no new evidence could emerge to demonstrate conclusively the innocence of the prisoners. As he put it in a despatch of 23 July, he did not, as a general rule, consider it necessary to extend his interrogations “beyond the circle of the condemned men.”⁸⁸ In other words, the crucial issue of the alibis did not fall within his chosen sphere of reference. In cross-examining the prisoners, as he explained later, he was seeking to find out if they had actually said what was recorded in the protocols of the trial; if, in accusing each other, they had been motivated by personal enmities; if their testimony had resulted from coaching (“illicit manoeuvres”);⁸⁹ and if the members of the French consulate had been involved in the application of torture. A glance at these questions suffices to show that, whatever the condemned men said in response, their credibility could always be impugned but never vindicated. The circle was ingeniously closed.

Nonetheless, the minutes of the interrogations conducted by des Meloizes make dramatic reading and provide invaluable information about the early development of the case in February and March. (Much of the material used in chapter 3 of this book is drawn from that source.) The cross-examinations conducted at the serail only began on 24 June, as the vice-consul had begun his inquiry with visits to the various sites, which he described in great detail, associated with the (supposed) murder of Father Thomas and the discovery of his remains.

The first two prisoners to be brought in, the barber (Solomon Halek) and David Harari’s servant (Murad el-Fatal), declared that their original testimony, describing the murders, was in fact true. They contradicted themselves on important points of detail – had they worn some outer garments to protect their clothes while dismembering the corpse? had they used a lantern

⁸⁸ Des Meloizes to Thiers (23 July, no. 4) MREA:TAD, p. 584.

⁸⁹ Des Meloizes to Guizot (14 May 1841, no. 8) *ibid.*, pp. 201–2.

when burying the remains? – and des Meloizes described them as the one more cynical than the other; but their statements must have basically satisfied him, as well as Jean-Baptiste Beaudin and the Count de Ratti-Menton, who were usually also present at the sessions of inquiry.

However, over the next seven weeks, the eight other prisoners, who were brought in at various intervals, all totally repudiated their earlier testimony. The first to do so was Moses Abu el-Afieh (or Muhammed Effendi), who admitted that he had, indeed, said the things and written the confessions ascribed to him. What followed was recorded thus in the minutes:

Q: But what you wrote, is it the truth?

A: No, it is a lie.

Q: . . . By that, do you mean to say that your entire written statement is false or only a part [of it]?

A: It is all a lie. My entire statement is false. We are merchants, we are not the people to kill anyone; it is unheard of.

Q: What is unheard of?

A: That the Jews kill for blood. . . .

Q: How did you know the details contained in your statement?

A: I heard them described by the barber and by the servant.

Q: Where?

A: Here in the courtroom.

Q: But what you said about the use of blood?

A: I made it up out of my head. . . .⁹⁰

This statement set the pattern for the many that were to follow.

Des Meloizes tried to stem the flood of retractions, frequently pointing out that the death penalty was still hanging over the prisoners, that (as he said to Abu el-Afieh) “the pardon, granted him on condition of his telling the truth, would be annulled if what he said now was found to be false.”⁹¹ But the only prisoner to retract his retraction was Aslan Farhi, who (in terror of Sherif Pasha) once again decided eventually that discretion was the better part of valor.

Time and again, it emerged that far from the incarcerated men having been kept strictly isolated, they had had ample opportunity in late February and early March to prepare jointly a consistent account of the murders and of the circumstantial evidence. Furthermore, the prisoners also spoke of being coached. Isaac Harari, for example, when asked how his testimony came to coincide so exactly with that of the barber and of el-Fatal, stated simply that Sherif Pasha’s scribe (Mansour Tayan) had “read me [their] statements.”

⁹⁰ Interrogation of Abu el-Afieh (25 June) MREA:TAD, pp. 368–70. ⁹¹ Ibid., p. 371.

Q: Before you had confessed?

A: Yes.

Q: Then your statements were dictated to you, and you did not invent them at all . . . ?

A: No, I did not invent them. Mr. Mansour read me the minutes on the order of the pasha before having me put in the pool [of freezing water].⁹²

Again, the issue of alibis was frequently mentioned, and the condemned men pointed out that the witnesses who could have proved them to be true had simply not been called in. Joseph Leniado, who was in mourning for a daughter on 5 February and so kept at home with a stream of visitors who had come to pay condolences, had the most impregnable case; and he had soon been beaten to death. Des Meloizes consistently changed the subject when the cross-examination unearthed the names of people still available who, according to the prisoners, could confirm specific alibis.

The interrogations provided a flood of details not only about the modes of torture employed and about the totally different ways that the prisoners had reacted to the gruesome pressure – varying from the most extreme heroism to paralyzed acquiescence – but also about their situation since the brutality had been halted in late April. It turned out, for example, that Aslan Farhi had written a letter to Muhammed Ali retracting his confession and (aided by a kawass of the Austrian consulate) had managed to smuggle it out to Caspar Merlato.⁹³ For his part, Moses Abu el-Afieh revealed much information about the complex relationship that he had developed with the governor-general. The following extract from the minutes illustrates that fact and also provides a typical example of the exchanges between des Meloizes and the condemned men:

Q: . . . Why did you accuse the five [of killing Ibrahim Amara] even though the pasha did not tell you to?

A: I saw that if I had written anything else, he would have had me flogged and killed. . . .

Q: When Meir Farhi asked you as a witness to confirm his alibi, that he was in synagogue, . . . why did you deny it?

A: I was afraid. . . .

Q: Here is still one more person whom your testimony could have saved and whom you sacrificed.

A: I could not have saved him without exposing myself.

Q: You are endangering yourself well and truly now without saving him.

⁹² Interrogation of Isaac Harari (1 July) *ibid.*, pp. 457–8.

⁹³ Interrogation of Aslan Farhi (9 July) *ibid.*, pp. 543–4.

A: For a long time I have been making my denial to the pasha. The pasha told me to swear on the Koran that I was telling the truth, saying: "How did it happen?" I asked for a pardon and he gave it to me.⁹⁴

On a few exceptional occasions, des Meloizes did interview people other than the condemned men; among them were the widow of Joseph Leniado, Esther (who came from Germany and had Austrian citizenship); and the wives of three of the prisoners: Lulu Harari (David's wife), Sarah Salonicli, and Ora Abu el-Afieh. The reason for this deviation from the rule, it can be surmised, was that a number of the women had already submitted formal charges against the Count de Ratti-Menton to the Austrian and British consulates; and by the summer they had reached not only the foreign offices in Vienna and London, but also the European press. A report sent at this time from Damascus to the Augsburg *Allgemeine Zeitung* even suggested that the complaints (much exaggerated in the view of the correspondent) put forward by the "beautiful Jewesses" could well "make it difficult for the [French] consul to continue, as hitherto, to fulfil his duties."⁹⁵

Des Meloizes no doubt hoped that he would somehow be able to find grounds for casting doubt on their evidence: However, the two meetings with the women did not go smoothly. At the first, because they adamantly refused to allow Beaudin to act as interpreter, another one had to be found; at the end of the session, they could not be persuaded to sign the minutes (which, in all likelihood, they were unable to read).⁹⁶

By the time that the second interview took place, some five weeks later, des Meloizes had lost all trust among the Damascus Jews, and the two women present, Esther Leniado and Ora Abu el-Afieh, proved angrily uncooperative. The following extract formed part of the exchange between the young vice-consul and Mrs. Abu el-Afieh.

Q: Did you address a complaint to the Austrian consul against the French consul?

A: Yes.

Q: Who wrote it?

A: I have forgotten.

Q: You said in your complaint that the consul put a rope around your husband's neck. Did you see that? . . .

A: I know nothing, I am saying nothing. The petition speaks for itself.

⁹⁴ Interrogation of Abu el-Afieh (30 June) MREA:TAD, pp. 432-4.

⁹⁵ "Der grosse syrische Judenprozess," *AZ* (Beilage: 13 September), p. 2042. (The author was probably K. von Hailbronner, although his account here was far less friendly to the Damascus Jews than his subsequent book.)

⁹⁶ Testimony of Mrs. Lulu Harari and others (21 June) MREA:TAD, pp. 337-41.

Q: Are you going to persist in not wishing to reply?

A: If any good would come of replying, I'd respond; otherwise I shan't.

Q: You seem to be ignoring the fact that I was sent by the French government to hear matters concerning the affair of Father Thomas.

A: My statement is there with the English consul.⁹⁷

Throughout the entire meeting, according to des Meloizes, the two women kept up a barrage of invective "against me and His Majesty's consul [Rattimenton] who was present." At the close they refused to have the minutes read back to them, and were not given the written copy that they demanded.

On leaving, these two women kept up the same shouts and invective outside the consulate. I considered that this conduct demanded punishment. His Majesty's consul shared that opinion, particularly because the invective against the French consulate was so public; and it was decided to demand . . . that they be imprisoned for a period of eight days.⁹⁸

Toward the end of July, des Meloizes sent Thiers a long interim report on his findings. He made the best of the poor material with which he had to work. The prisoners had been caught in frequent lies and their statements were unreliable. Torture, sometimes brutal, had been applied, but that was the responsibility of the Egyptian government, not of the French consulate. Two potential witnesses (Isaac Yavo and the watchman) had been savagely beaten to death, but that action could not have been ordered by Sherif Pasha, who was seeking confessions, not the death of those with evidence to give. Indeed, the only people with an interest in silencing witnesses were the Jewish suspects. ("However, . . . sir, I believe that it is not for me to augment still further, by such presumptions, the charges which led to the condemnation of the Jews as the murderers of both Father Thomas and his servant.")⁹⁹

As for the alleged alibis, they could not be proven — even though the French consulate had used "every suitable occasion to encourage [the families of the accused] to produce evidence of their innocence." Nor should public opinion be ignored: "While I have found that respectable and disinterested people have rallied spontaneously in praise of the character of the French consul . . . and the chancellor-dragoman [Beaudin], I have found no less that their detractors demonstrate irresolution and timidity."¹⁰⁰

The delegates from the Jewish community in Alexandria, Loria and Ventura, arrived in Damascus in mid-July. Much less is known about their activities there than about those of the French vice-consul, because the material that they collected has so far not come to light. But their basic aim

⁹⁷ Interrogation of Mesdames Abu el-Afieh and Leniado (3 August) *ibid.*, pp. 720–1.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 721–3. ⁹⁹ Des Meloizes to Thiers (23 July, no. 3) *ibid.*, p. 592.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* (27 July, no. 5), p. 630.

was clear enough. They were trying to do precisely what des Meloizes was systematically avoiding: to track down witnesses whose testimony could be used in a retrial, or in an appeal, to undermine the case against the condemned men.

Their efforts were directed toward prominent Muslims, presumably because it was considered impossible to find members of the Christian communities (Merlato's immediate circle apart) willing to give evidence voluntarily. A newspaper report written three weeks after their arrival noted that by then they had apparently collected some twenty signed statements with corroborating alibis or else confirming various allegations made against the Count de Ratti-Menton and his staff.¹⁰¹

Inevitably, it did not take long until the two Jewish investigators had a head-on collision with the French consular team. True, they initially made an effort to cooperate with des Meloizes, who while still in Alexandria had been told by Laurin that such a delegation was being organized. ("These two individuals," reported the vice-consul to Thiers, "have been sent effectively under the patronage of the Austrian consulate.")¹⁰² Introducing himself on 18 July, Isaac Loria told des Meloizes that many Jews were ready to come forward to testify about the conduct of the French consular personnel during the affair, but were holding back for "the lack of what, as they see it, is an impartial interpreter." In order to make it possible for these witnesses to be heard, Loria was ready to act in place of Jean-Baptiste Beaudin or, at the very least, to be present with the consular dragoman during the cross-examinations. Needless to say, this proposal, which, if adopted, could only have served to dredge up highly unwelcome evidence, was rejected – on the grounds that it would have made Loria the ultimate "guarantor of the complaints to be made."¹⁰³

If, as seems probable enough, the Jewish delegation made this offer anticipating its all but inevitable rejection, and primarily in order to cause embarrassment, then within a few days the French consulate had the chance to strike back tit-for-tat. According to evidence brought to light at a special hearing held at the governor-general's palace on 22 July, a high government official had expressed himself willing, in exchange for payment, to testify that one of the condemned men (Joseph Farhi, now a fugitive) had been at his home on the evening of 5 February. Bribery of this kind was, of course, an all-pervasive fact of life in the region; and Isaac Loria drew up the statement on the understanding that the witness would receive the large sum of six thousand piastres (most of it supplied by Mrs. Farhi) in exchange for his signature. But somehow the story came to light; two of the go-betweens were arrested as they were leaving the Austrian consulate; and des Meloizes,

¹⁰¹ "Der grosse syrische Judenprozess," *AAZ* (13 September), p. 2041.

¹⁰² Des Meloizes to Thiers (7 August, no. 6) MREA:TAD, p. 643.

¹⁰³ Interview with Loria (18 July) *ibid.*, pp. 659–61.

Ratti-Menton, and Beaudin were called to the palace to take part in the cross-examination.

This story of bribery by the Jewish emissaries was very soon on its way to the newspapers in Europe.¹⁰⁴ And the French consular team also sought to have Loria and Ventura brought to trial. Sherif Pasha in July, though, was no longer the man he had been in February and he refused even to send a letter of complaint to the Austrian consulate. For his part, Merlato rejected the request to hand over the two men for questioning by the French consular team. (It thus turned out that the respect verging on awe, with which Loria was apparently regarded in Damascus, had some basis in reality. One of the Muslim go-betweens asserted that he had not been afraid to participate in the bribery affair because "they said to me, 'there's a consul [Loria] who is in charge of this case and who is conducting it with the justice of God.'")¹⁰⁵

By mid-summer, then, the dispute in Damascus had taken on the character of shadow boxing, with each side busily preparing itself for some as yet ill-defined denouement. Muhammed Ali might, but then again might not, decide on a new trial. And, if held, it might be conducted by European jurists or, perhaps, by the Egyptian authorities.

The confused situation in the city was nowhere better reflected than in the despatches of the British consul to London. Always in the background were the rebellion in the Lebanese mountains (at its height in June, apparently suppressed by July) and the pervasive atmosphere of unrest – watched eagerly, but from afar, by the Lords Ponsonby and Palmerston, and with trepidation by Werry. "We are here," he wrote on 22 June, "in the midst of danger, trouble and difficulty and there is no knowing from one hour to another what may happen. As yet, things are tolerably quiet, but the population generally is ready for revolt."¹⁰⁶

He felt harried by Palmerston's angry letter rebuking him for his belief that the Jews were guilty of ritual murder and by the news from Alexandria that Pieritz was calling for his dismissal because he was unfit to represent his country. Much of his time was now spent preparing his own report on the Damascus affair which, when completed in August, would run to some one hundred pages. And he was irritated by the fact that the Austrian consul refused him all assistance in that task. "I am," he wrote in confidence to John Bidwell on 20 July,

excessively chagrined at Lord Palmerston's despatch to me. If we are not supported by our superiors to whom are we to look and what is to

¹⁰⁴ E.g.: "Eastern Affairs," *Times* (28 August), p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Interrogation of 22 July, MREA:TAD, p. 672. Even Cochelet advised Ratti-Menton that it was preferable to allow Loria and Ventura to proceed with their inquiries in Damascus, rather than have "Jews sent to Alexandria" for a new investigation: Ratti-Menton to des Meloizes, (7 September) MREA:N (Beyrout, Consulat, File no. 25).

¹⁰⁶ Werry to Bidwell (22 June) FO 78/410, p. 130.

become of us? . . . If I was a little easier in my circumstances I would not serve under him . . . ; harsh necessity obliged me to submit to so precipitate and harsh language which I believe could only emanate from the British foreign department.¹⁰⁷

He found it hard to imagine that his fall from grace had really been caused by the Jewish issue, tending to ascribe it, rather, to his "political opinions and sentiments on the Eastern question"¹⁰⁸ (meaning, his obvious sympathies for Muhammed Ali).

In his report, he speculated about the implications of a new trial and argued that, although all the condemned men (even the barber and Harari's servant) could there be expected to withdraw their confessions, an acquittal was by no means a foregone conclusion. The Egyptian and French governments might well unite in opposition to any such outcome; and, besides, it would be hard to explain away the fact that the accused had independently corroborated each other's testimony ("unless it can be demonstrated that the whole has been a concerted collusion among them and external instruments employed to establish the chain of confessions").¹⁰⁹

Very possibly, he suggested, the Jews had murdered Father Thomas not for his blood, but because they had been drawn into a violent altercation with him over the wording of his notice. ("It will be seen by this advertisement that, therein, Father Tommaso calls the Jews his blessed brethren which to them may have appeared, according to their religion and fanaticism, a profane and heinous charge.") Of course, the prisoners would not admit to this motive for, "so long as the cause of the blood is assigned, they have their nation and its protectors with them."¹¹⁰ Yet a third hypothesis had to be weighed – "that the primary object of the murder, not being for the blood, it became eventually a consideration and was thus destined for a religious purpose, a holocaust and an offering to the rabbis as an expiation for the crime committed."

The great advantage, he concluded, of opting for this "middle course" was that it might avoid a direct confrontation with the French and Egyptian governments. And it would then be easy to argue that, as the murders had not been premeditated, there were mitigating circumstances

which conjointly will be considered a boon, absolving the Jewish nation in all parts of the world in the participation of human immolation for such an object, and acceptable to them, in having obtained through their influence and measures, the pardon of the accused.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. (20 July), pp. 169–70. ¹⁰⁸ Ibid. (22 June), p. 132.

¹⁰⁹ Werry's report (18 August, enclosure no. 12) *ibid.*, p. 244.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 245. ¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 246–7.

Political polarization and the genesis of the mission to the East

When first received in Europe, the news of the Damascus affair had been treated primarily as a journalistic dilemma. Whoever controlled a given newspaper (the editors, proprietors, government officials, or some combination thereof) had to decide whether or not to publish a macabre murder story, commercially most attractive but possibly fictitious. At a later stage, following the publication of Crémieux's article of 7 April, it was realized that the case involved far wider issues. A final vindication, or alternatively a final condemnation, of the Jews might ultimately exert a real impact on the emancipation debate, on constitutional conflicts, and, hence, on the self-definition of the various European states. As a result, the ritual-murder problem was then refracted through a political and ideological prism.

In the period under consideration here (the late spring and summer), many observers persuaded themselves that the primary importance of the case lay in the sphere of international politics and that its outcome could somehow influence the relative positions of the great powers in their struggle for preeminence. As Metternich had warned in his despatch of 27 May to Alexandria, this development could only serve to complicate even further an increasingly ugly and entangled affair. If anything, opinion in Europe tended to become still more polarized. As the two camps took clearer shape – for and against the Damascus Jews – so the language employed became sharper, angrier; and there was less room for those, as neutrals or agnostics, trying to hold the middle ground.

For the emergent Jewish leadership, this new turn of events was especially chilling, because it had assumed that a thorough airing of the issues in the press would suffice to win over both governments and the public to its viewpoint. It was thus forced to seek out new modes of response. (Moreover, the belief, however specious, that the Damascus affair carried weight in world politics did much to foster the proto-Zionist ideas to be discussed in chaps. 11 and 12.)

The Parliamentary Debates and Adolphe Thiers

If there was any single factor that raised the war of words to a new level, it was the conflicting way in which the ritual-murder issue was handled in the French and British Parliaments during the months of June and July. As previously noted, the matter had already been broached in the House of Lords in mid-May, only to be thoroughly bungled by Lord Melbourne. On 2 June, though, a long debate on the Damascus affair took place in the French Chamber of Deputies.

It was set in motion by Benoît Fould, the only Jew in the Chamber and a prominent banker, who seized on the fact that the budgetary costs of the consular service were up for discussion in order to deliver a long, angry attack on the Count de Ratti-Menton. "Gentlemen," he said of the Damascus affair,

this is a question which not only impinges on the national honor [of France], but also concerns mankind as a whole. Two million people¹ today are under the yoke of persecution. . . . It was the duty of the consul to find out what had become of this churchman [Father Thomas]. . . . But, faced by the murder, he chose to accuse not an individual, not a family but nothing less than an entire nation. . . . What is involved is a religious persecution on the pretext that a churchman disappeared. The French consul incited the torture . . . [even though] the French nation sets an example not only of equality before the law, but also of religious equality.

Fould then ranged over a number of more specific issues. He declared, for example, that all the foreign consuls in Damascus had united in vehement opposition to Ratti-Menton (which was, of course, not true). And, in blunt terms, he criticized the decision to send a junior official to conduct the government inquiry into the affair: "He will either have to bend, or else he will create a case of insubordination which cannot be tolerated. I believe that a superior agent should have been sent. When the fate of two million people is at stake, it merits the trouble of sending a special agent."

He also took the opportunity to level indirect criticism at the papacy, noting that the censorship in Italy – a reference, doubtless, primarily to the states of Gregory XVI and to the Piedmont-Sardinia of Charles Albert – had rendered it impossible to publish the medieval papal pronouncements on the ritual-murder charge. (Specifically, he mentioned Innocent IV, Clement VI, Alexander VII, and Gregory IX.) "These [statements] are all from the Middle Ages and it is in the nineteenth century that their publication is refused." To conclude his speech he quoted from the sermon recently delivered at the

¹ Fould's 2 million could have been a reference to world Jewry (usually given exaggeratedly as 6 million at the time), or, in an overestimate, to "Eastern," primarily Ottoman, Jewry.

cathedral of St. Stephen in Vienna by Johann Emmanuel Veith, the official preacher of the Habsburg court and a converted Jew. "My brothers," Veith had there declared. "I swear by Him who gave His blood to save us, by this Christ whom I am holding in my hands, that the accusations made against the Jews of Damascus are as false as they are absurd."²

In response, Thiers sought to don the mantle of Olympian objectivity. Until all the facts were in – and the inquiry had yet to begin – this was an affair best handled with the utmost discretion. He had much secret information in his possession, derived from despatches, but it would be irresponsible to disclose that. However, as the debate proceeded less smoothly than he had hoped, he clearly allowed himself to become increasingly irritated and outspoken.

"For my part," he replied initially to Fould,

even though I have familiarized myself with all the documents and have read all the interrogations, I would consider it reprehensible if I were to express an opinion from this tribune about the innocence or the guilt of all those who have been accused in Damascus. Whatever my personal opinion, it is my duty not to state it here. I only want to do one thing . . . and that is to vindicate the conduct of an agent who we have to declare (until more fully informed) behaved in a way that an agent true to his duty would have had to. . . . If the desire is expressed that we be fair to the Eastern Jews, it must be permitted us to be fair to French agents who are in a difficult position, and do not have French power nearby to support them.

He could not have sent a higher official to conduct the inquiry, because such a move would have left no choice but to recall Ratti-Menton, "to sacrifice him to a foreign consul." Besides, to have despatched somebody from France would have meant a delay of two or three months. In sum, "I hope that in a little time I will be in a position to render an equitable and enlightened decision about this important and unhappy affair. (Hear, hear! Hear, hear!)"

At this point, two deputies, Alexander de Laborde and François Isambert, followed one another in a counterattack. Both belonged to the liberal camp and Isambert, like Crémieux, was a member of Odilon Barrot's grouping, which supported Thiers' government from just left of center but was not represented in it. De Laborde was a well known archeologist, had traveled (together with Lamartine) in the Middle East, and had written about his experiences.³

² *Moniteur Universel* (3 June), pp. 1257–8. When asked by a rabbi to confirm that he had in fact made this statement, Veith shrugged him off impatiently; but its authenticity is hardly to be doubted (Löw, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, pp. 363–4, 403–5).

³ Count Alexandre Louis Joseph de Laborde paid long visits to the Middle East in the late 1820s and early 1830s, subsequently delivering scholarly lectures on his findings.

"What was said by the president of the council," began de Laborde bluntly, "by no means satisfies me." He recalled how he and Lamartine had been received in Damascus by leading Jewish families with "the warmest and most open hospitality." It had to be remembered that "the Jewish nation in the East enjoys a merited esteem"; and he felt profoundly mortified in observing the disaster that had overwhelmed those families and, still more, in learning of the part "which our consul is supposed to have played in the atrocities. Such a suspicion, gentlemen, cannot pertain to a Frenchman and to a member of a respected family such as that to which the consul, now accused, belongs. . . . It is therefore, essential to examine most thoroughly what took place." So complex a task should never have been assigned to a mere vice-consul. "For centuries," he concluded, "the French name has been respected in the East where the memory of the ancient alliances between Francis I and Suleiman is preserved; let us avoid anything which might weaken that sentiment."

For his part, Isambert was predictably still more forthright. As the founder of the antislavery movement, which was much less popular in France than in England, he often had to swim against the current.⁴ He quoted from the letter sent by Francis of Sardinia (Ploaghe) on 5 March to demonstrate that everybody in Damascus was already then aware of the atrocities and that, nonetheless, the French consul had pursued the case with extraordinary zeal. "Torture was employed at Damascus," he said,

[but] it seems that the reports of our consul . . . remain completely silent about that (Noise in the chamber). . . . Unfortunately, there are ample grounds for the presumption that [he] . . . knew of these tortures (Shouts of denial). He made the grave mistake of taking part in infamous proceedings . . . ; the forms of torture used have been spelled out in many official documents; four people have already perished as the victims of this horrendous treatment. . . . To me it seems that it was his duty to oppose [this] . . . with all his might.

The last word went to Thiers, who replied at length. In order to maintain his mastery over the Chamber, he now chose to emphasize more strongly the patriotic theme, depicting the French consul as encircled by a ring of hostile agents. As the crisis in the Middle East was then approaching its climax, and the danger of French isolation was apparent, this form of rhetoric had a heightened appeal. Given the key position occupied by Thiers, and the fact that until 2 June he had maintained a total public silence about the Damascus affair, it is worth quoting him at length:

⁴ On François Isambert: *Dictionnaire de Biographie Française*, vol. 18, p. 207 (where he is described as driven by "a veritable hatred for the clergy"). Like de Laborde, Isambert was a respected man of letters, publishing a number of books.

Gentlemen, I am astonished at the confidence with which certain of our colleagues declare their knowledge of the facts. . . . I, too, if I so wished, could make thoughtless pronouncements; I have the documents in my hand. . . . But I respect my position as a minister . . . and would like the deputies to respect [theirs] . . . and not hastily cast dubious facts in the face of France. . . . Certainly, the Jews of Damascus constitute cause for concern. . . . But does not a French agent totally alone in Damascus, . . . opposed by all the foreign agents, deserve our protection? He is a Frenchman and is it not owed to him to hesitate before pronouncing against him (Hear! hear!) and declaring him guilty (Stir in the chamber) . . .

You protest in the name of the Jews and I protest in the name of a Frenchman who until now has carried out his duties with honor and loyalty. (Hear! hear! Hear! hear!). . . . When I said just now that all the foreign agents were against . . . Ratti-Menton, I should have added that the English consul sides with [him].

In summing up, Thiers turned his remarks toward the Jews in the West. "When the facts were known," he said,

they [the Jews] were aroused all over Europe and they brought to this affair an enthusiasm and heat which in my eyes do them profound honor. And, if I may be permitted to say so, they are more powerful in the world than they have pretensions to be. At this very moment they are putting forward their claims in every foreign chancellory. And they are doing so with an extraordinary vigor and with an ardor which can hardly be imagined. It requires courage for a minister to protect his agent under attack. . . . Gentlemen, you should know, and I repeat, the Jews at this very moment are in all the chancellories about this affair and our consul has no support except in the French ministry of foreign affairs.⁵

To judge by the outbursts of approval and disapproval recorded in the minutes, it appears that Fould and de Laborde were heard out in silence, while the more vociferous Isambert provoked noisy dissent. Not one spokesman for the very large conservative opposition ("the 221" deputies under Molé's leadership) joined the debate, and Thiers' appeal to the patriotism of the Chamber enabled him to rally great, possibly overwhelming, support.

About a month later, on 10 July, the issue was raised once more, but this time in the Chamber of Peers. The Baron Mounier, a veteran public servant from the days of Napoleon and Louis XVIII, urged Thiers to insure that the inquiry in Damascus be pursued with "scrupulous care" because "the honor of a French agent" was at stake. The ritual-murder charge he dismissed as "absurd," all too familiar from "barbarian times."⁶ In response, the premier chose to repeat in essence what he had said in the lower house, albeit in

⁵ *Moniteur Universel* (3 June), p. 1258. ⁶ *Ibid.* (11 July), p. 1663.

sharper tones. He again refused to state an opinion about the guilt or innocence of the condemned men; and now, too, he carefully skirted around the ritualistic core at the heart of the case. There was nothing to do but to await the results of the inquiry (now "in the hands of a very capable man").

In the meantime, though, more material had arrived from Damascus, and had confirmed Thiers still more in his support for Ratti-Menton: "I have to state that having read the protocols of this case, which have been sent to France, I have found no sign of anything with which the consul can be justly reproached. . . . I believe that [he] has done his duty." This view, moreover, was fully shared by Cochelet, one of France's "most valuable and deserving agents abroad."

As in June, Thiers presented himself as the embattled champion of the national interest holding off a challenge from a group absorbed in its own narrow concerns. Raising the stakes, he now clearly implied that the Jews in Europe were driven not so much by concern for the prisoners in Damascus as by the necessity to clear their own name. "I have to put more trust in him [Cochelet]," said Thiers,

than in a class which is, no doubt, very worthy of respect and to which I give credit for its zeal in seeking to demonstrate its innocence. But I cannot abandon to it an agent, who, I am convinced, did his duty. (Sounds of approval). Yes, I respect the Jews when they protest against the accusation weighing on them, when they show their indignation at such a crime.

No culpability, he concluded, could attach to the French consul unless, "rather than limiting himself to the demand that local justice be applied, he had [also] called for the torture and so become an accomplice and executor. But, hitherto, nothing authorizes such an idea. (New sounds of approval)."⁷ By thus setting the standards to be met at such a modest level, Thiers was obviously doing his utmost to insure that Ratti-Menton came out of the affair unscathed.

If any one man was responsible for turning the Damascus case into a prolonged dispute of major proportions it was Adolphe Thiers.⁸ He stood at the pinnacle of the hierarchy that led upward, rung by rung, from the chancellor-dragoman (Beaudin) via the consul (Ratti-Menton) on to the consul-general (Cochelet). He had learned of the case in April and could then have put a stop to it. After all, Metternich and Palmerston had not hesitated in the parallel affair of Rhodes to bring pressure to bear on a friendly government or to repudiate the actions of their subordinates.

⁷ Ibid. (Thiers was supported during the debate by Abel-François Villemain, the minister of education.)

⁸ On Thiers, e.g.: Allison, *Thiers and the French Monarchy*; Bury and Tombs, *Thiers*; Lucas-Dubreton, *Aspects de Monsieur Thiers*; Malo, *Thiers*; Reclus, *Monsieur Thiers*.

Thiers' behavior in the case thus became the object of speculation from the first, and Heinrich Heine could put forward his own theory on the subject as early as May. However, the question still remains puzzling today, and the pronouncements that Thiers is known to have made, whether in Parliament, despatches, or private conversation, do little to resolve it. As already noted, publicly he declared it presumptuous to state an opinion on the merits of the murder case, while privately, he at times declared his belief in the guilt of the condemned men. If the Jews in the Middle Ages had practiced ritual murder, as they apparently had, why (so he asked James Rothschild) should the benighted Jews of Damascus not do the same nowadays? "He was pitiless," wrote Crémieux in his diary of a later meeting. "To my face he said: 'Those people are guilty. They wanted a priest's blood and you do not know how far the fanaticism of the Eastern Jews goes. This is not the first instance of such a crime.'"⁹

Nothing, it might seem, could be more straightforward. That the ritual-murder charge could well be true was an idea accepted in France far beyond the clerical or the uneducated strata of the population. Voltaire himself had, after all, lent his name to the idea that ancient Judaism had prescribed human sacrifice;¹⁰ and all the major liberal newspapers had republished the details of Father Tommaso's murder with barely a critical comment. Thiers could thus have been speaking in all sincerity.

However, it is at least as probable that he systematically adjusted his statements to fit the given listener, or addressee, in accord with what he saw as higher political necessities. To Ratti-Menton he wrote curtly that the murder was very possibly the work of a few individual Jews motivated by mere whim ("revenge") – an idea that rapidly took on a life of its own. To Cochelet he confided the decided opinion that it had been an error to lend credence to Abu el-Alfieh's confession yielded under dire threat of torture and execution. To the public at large, he said that it was premature to express any opinion; and, in a similar vein, he must have asked the editors of the ministerial press to impose silence on the affair. To the Jewish leaders he expressed a firm belief in the factual basis of the ritual-murder tradition. Taken together, all this suggests a concerted attempt to damp down public interest. In that case, his vociferous public attacks on Jewish lobbying, and his private statements on blood rites, have, alike, to be understood as aimed at intimidation – if the European Jews did not abandon the ten condemned men to their fate, they would end up implicating themselves.

What really explained Thiers' behavior in the affair, argued Heine, was his determination to shore up his political support among those clerical

⁹ AC, p. 4.

¹⁰ E.g.: Voltaire, "Anthropophages." On Voltaire and the Jews: Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment*, pp. 280–313; Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, vol. 3, pp. 86–99.

circles (*le clergé rallié*) that had made their peace with the Orleanist regime.¹¹ "Mr. Thiers," he wrote, "is a man of great penetration and humanity. But he is also a statesman who needs not only the sympathy of revolutionaries, but help of another kind."¹² Unflinching support for Ratti-Menton was the price that Thiers had to pay to insure a safe majority in the Chamber of Peers. He simply could not afford a breach with the Ultramontane leader, the Count de Montalembert, and the *Univers*, even if that newspaper (as Heine put it) did "publish everything imaginable . . . in order to make the world believe that Jews gobble up old Capuchins and that the Count Ratti-Menton is an honest man."¹³

In reality, though, Heine in all probability exaggerated the influence of domestic politics on Thiers' reactions to the Damascus case. His majority in the Chamber of Peers was usually described as secure enough and, anyway, that institution lacked the standing to endanger the government.¹⁴ The *Univers* declared itself to be flattered by the importance that the *Allgemeine Zeitung* of Augsburg ascribed to it (Heine wrote there anonymously), but was clearly disbelieving.¹⁵

Far more telling evidence against Heine's hypothesis, though, is provided by the diplomatic correspondence between Rome and Paris. The one and only report on the local reaction to the Damascus affair did not leave the French embassy in the papal capital until 28 May, too late to have influenced the shaping of Thiers' policy. (In his despatch, the ambassador noted that in the upper levels of the church, Ratti-Menton was universally credited with having "discovered the truth.")¹⁶ At the other end, the papal nuncio in Paris made no mention of the affair until July, and even then only tangentially, in relation to another incident threatening to explode into public uproar. A baby boy, baptized without the knowledge of his Jewish parents (French citizens), had recently been dragged away from them by the papal police during their stay in Rome. Thiers, reported the nuncio at great length, had made it more than plain that unless the child were returned to his family, he would have no choice but to launch a public attack against the policy of the Holy See. Otherwise, he would be laying himself open to an onslaught by the press, which was not the least interested in the niceties of Canon Law. "This affair," explained Thiers, "has come up at the moment when I have adopted a position rather hostile to the Jews in regard to the assassination of Father Thomas in Damascus. . . . These circumstances oblige me all the more to urge effective assistance for the Jewish family under discussion; as they are

¹¹ On the politics of French Catholicism: Mourret, *Le Mouvement Catholique*.

¹² [Heine], "Paris (14 Mai)," *AAZ* (23 May), p. 1147 (*Säkularausgabe*, vol. 10, p. 33).

¹³ *Ibid.* ¹⁴ E.g.: "Paris (24 Juin)," *Constitutionnel* (25 June).

¹⁵ "France," *Univers* (5 June); cf. "Paris (4 Juni)," *LAZ* (10 June), p. 1756.

¹⁶ Maubourg to Thiers (28 May, no. 79) MREA (Rome, vol. 982/microfilm NF Z 43-120-11).



FIG. 13. "Thiers' balancing act." The "Eastern Question" and "European Equilibrium" mark the globe balanced on Thiers' nose; "Electoral Reform" and the "Press" pull to the left; the crowns and eagles on the right represent King Louis-Philippe and the European powers. (*La Caricature*, 12 April: original wording in italics)

French, it devolves on me."¹⁷ The nuncio accepted the logic of this argument and, eventually, thanks to Thiers' ever more violent threats as well as to an elaborate face-saving formula, the curia yielded.¹⁸

All the available evidence suggests, in fact, that what motivated Thiers' policy in the Damascus case was not the "clerical," or any other specifically domestic factor but, rather, his strategy in the Middle East crisis. His belief that stability at home depended on dramatic triumphs abroad was well known. The French conquest of Algiers, first launched in 1830, had no more enthusiastic an advocate; and in a symbolic gesture, he arranged in the spring of 1840 to have Napoleon's remains brought back from St. Helena for a grandiose reinterment in Paris.

¹⁷ A. Garibaldi to Lambruschini (8 July, no. 1420), Nunziatura Parigi, vol. 39, pp. 11–13 (Archivio Segreto Vaticano).

¹⁸ See the correspondence between Rayneval, the chargé d'affaires in Rome, and Thiers (26 June–27 July). What made possible the circumvention of Canon Law was the assurance, understood by all to be a fiction, that the French government would do its best to have the child raised within the Church.

His overriding goal in 1840 was to retain Muhammed Ali as a French ally in control of Syria. To that end, he constantly urged the Egyptian viceroy to reach a direct settlement with the Porte, even if that meant yielding control of huge areas (Crete, the Arabian peninsula, Adana) to the Ottoman government. A dangerous gamble was involved in this policy, which challenged all the European powers and, yet, could not count on the consistent support of Muhammed Ali. Always implicit in the French stance was the threat of war, in the Mediterranean, on the Rhine, or both. (With his usual wit, Heine wrote that it would have been safer for all if Thiers had been able to carry his historical writings beyond the period of the Consulate and up until 1812.)¹⁹

Viewed from the heights of this grand strategy, the Damascus affair had only one meaning for Thiers. It was a potential threat to the status of his two key diplomats in the Egyptian territories, Cochelet and Ratti-Menton. The more they clashed with their Austrian counterparts, the more they could count on the support of the foreign minister. He was nothing if not single-minded and logical. The rights and wrongs of so marginal an affair were in themselves of no interest to him. Following a number of meetings with Thiers, Crémieux made the following assessment: "He was afraid lest the testimony of witnesses produce terrible revelations about this agent [Ratti-Menton]. Mr. Thiers has sacrificed people who hardly move him and has had no regard for the just appeals of the Paris Jews who turned to him in the name of five or six million Jews."²⁰

The Damascus affair was brought up twice in the House of Commons, first on Friday, 19 June, when one of Palmerston's frequent absences precluded a lengthy debate, and then after the weekend when the foreign minister was there to respond. That the subject was thus raised at Westminster in June was doubtless a direct consequence of the stance adopted by Thiers in the Chamber of Deputies. His statement there had been received as a devastating rebuff by the Jews, who turned to the British Parliament in the expectation of a counterblow. In introducing the subject, Sir Robert Peel stated specifically that "he had been requested to say a few words by persons of the highest character belonging to the Jewish persuasion, who paid that compliment to the House of Commons, to express an assurance that the simple mention of the case would be sufficient to facilitate the great ends of justice and liberality."²¹

The element of dispute, even drama, which had marked the debate in Paris was absent from Westminster; but the various speeches did serve their purpose as an impressive display of support for the Jews. After all, Peel, who

¹⁹ [Heine], "Paris (27 July)," *AZ* (1 August), p. 1709; (*Säkulärausgabe*, vol. 10, p. 54).

²⁰ AC, p. 3. ²¹ *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* 54 (1840), p. 1383.

took it upon himself, on both Friday and Monday, to raise the question was then variously the leader of the opposition, the head of the Tory Party, and an ex-prime minister who was universally expected to become one again very soon (he would be the head of government from 1841-1846).²² Given the fact that the Tories consistently supplied most of the votes to defeat Jewish emancipation, Peel was no doubt only too pleased to speak out for the Jews on so relatively noncontroversial an issue. (Although Jews could not be members of Parliament, they did vote in the elections.)

Sir Robert chose to retell once more the story of Father Tommaso's disappearance and the subsequent events in Damascus, placing emphasis both on the torture employed and on the role not only of the Egyptian, but also of "some Christian authorities." Far more was involved than a particular murder case or even a particular city. "The greatest prejudice against the Jews," he said,

had been excited among the whole population of Damascus and the neighbouring country. This prejudice would affect the entire body of the Jews throughout the world unless some effectual step were taken to appease it. (Hear, hear). . . . The Jews of England, of every country in Europe which had communication with England, supposed that the interference of Britain, whether official or not, would lead to the investigation of the truth, and their protection from villainy and injustice if the charge was wholly unfounded. (Hear, hear). . . . He trusted . . . that the noble Lord [Palmerston] would tell them [the Commons] that whatever he could do he had done, to inculcate on British functionaries the exercise of their influence for insuring . . . a fair trial, since they [the Jews] could not have a trial according to British forms. (Hear, hear). Thus the noble Lord would be enabled to rescue that great portion of European society, the Jews, . . . from a charge which was founded on prejudice, and would subject them to the most grievous injustice. (Cheers).²³

As Peel had not mentioned the Rhodes case, the foreign secretary, responding, was in the happy position of being able to concentrate all his criticism on Muhammed Ali. If reports were true, he stated, here "was an instance of barbarity and atrocity which one could not have expected to hear of in these days in any . . . country having communication . . . with the civilized world." Colonel Hodges had been instructed to intervene with the Egyptian viceroy not, of course, in "an official character but . . . solely as suggestions which affected the pasha's own interests." And the British consul in Damascus, N. W. Werry, was under orders "to make a detailed report . . . of the case . . . and of the part which he and the other consuls might have

²² For a major (and relatively recent) biography: Gash, *Sir Robert Peel*.

²³ *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* 54 (1840), pp. 1383-4.

taken in it.”²⁴ Such information would be disclosed to the House, on request, when it reached London.

Among the subsequent speakers was Lord Ashley, who took the opportunity to lavish praise on “the great zeal and activity” that Palmerston had employed on behalf of the Damascus Jews “and also in the affairs of the Jews generally.” (As a leading figure in the London Society, Ashley probably had in mind, *inter alia*, the foreign secretary’s support for the Jerusalem missionaries.)

The otherwise complete harmony was somewhat disturbed by two members of the House who rarely missed a chance for controversy. The famous Irish leader, Daniel O’Connell, and the radical politician, Joseph Hume, now both chose to link the issue of Jewish emancipation in England to the Damascus affair. There was nothing surprising in this; O’Connell, for example, had been a powerful advocate of full equality for the British Jews ever since his own triumph in winning Catholic emancipation in 1829.²⁵

There was only “one way of vindicating [the members] . . . of the Jewish religion from the aspersions . . . cast on them,” O’Connell now said, “and that was by giving the British Jews, as British subjects, the full benefit of the English laws.” Peel’s fine statement “would have been much more forcible if it had proceeded from a Hebrew gentleman in that House.” Was the government, O’Connell and Hume both demanded, going to introduce a bill “conferring equal rights upon the Jews?” Replying for the Whigs from the front-bench was Lord John Russell, who, according to *Hansard*, “was almost wholly inaudible.”²⁶ He was nonetheless heard by some reporters as saying that, while he personally had always been in favor of such a measure, the government did not consider the matter of any pressing moment – if only because the British Jews were so very few in number.²⁷

If the debate in the Commons had been prompted by that in the French Parliament, it in turn very probably inspired the subsequent exchange on 10 July in the Chamber of Peers. Certainly, the Baron Mounier, in raising the issue there, referred specifically to the “emotional” words spoken at Westminster about the affair.

The Press during the Summer Months

From mid-April, then (as previously described), the European press, in responding to the ritual-murder affair, had divided along complex but recognizable lines. Where the influence of the Habsburg regime predominated,

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1385. ²⁵ E.g.: Salbstein, *The Emancipation of the Jews*, p. 123.

²⁶ *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* 54 (1840), pp. 1385–6.

²⁷ “Chambre des Communes,” *JdsD* (25 June).

news about the Damascus case remained sparse but sympathetic to the Jews. And yet, in contrast, the two most widely respected papers in Germany paid an enormous amount of attention to the subject, adopting a stance of neutrality more malevolent than benign to the Jews. In France, the journals subject to government pressure broke their silence about the issue (paid supplements apart) only on rare occasions; the militantly clerical press, above all the *Univers* (setting the tone for ultra-Catholic organs in such neighboring countries as Belgium and Spain), championed the case against the Jews whereas the conservative *Journal des Débats* took up their cause. Finally, across the English Channel, the newspapers initially took it for granted that the stories of human sacrifice were a farrago of medieval nonsense, but by May the *Times* was acting as though the issue of guilt or innocence was an open question still requiring thorough investigation.

This basic pattern, established in the spring, did not change significantly during the summer, but nonetheless there were new developments that continued to supply the affair – now become that of the Jewish people, or of Judaism, rather than simply of Damascus – with its ability to surprise and shock. Thus, in this period, as already noted, the idea that the time had come to restore the Jews to their ancient homeland in Palestine became a topical issue, arousing widespread comment. In Damascus itself, Ratti-Menton, casting off the veil of anonymity, had begun to send out a stream of letters and documents for publication under his own name. And it was in these months that the entire affair first attracted major attention in the United States.

Thiers probably hoped that his lengthy remarks on 2 June in the Chamber of Deputies would buy time, encouraging an abatement in the fierce dispute for the weeks or months required until the arrival of the des Meloizes report. And, indeed, the *Journal des Débats*, so often critical of his Damascus policy, accepted the logic of his argument, declaring on the next day that “it is reasonable . . . to await the definitive results of such an inquiry before pronouncing for or against the French consul.”²⁸

However, the most obvious effect of Thiers' first public statement on the case was to provide the forces hostile to the Jews (or, at least, to their efforts at self-defense) with a renewed impetus. Particular attention, for example, now focused on two short articles published in the *Commerce*, a paper usually described as Bonapartist and certainly not part of the ultra-Catholic wing of the French press. While Thiers had only spoken in general terms of the Jewish efforts to lobby the governments of Europe, the *Commerce* launched nothing less than an ad hominem attack against “the repeated measures

²⁸ “France,” *JdsD* (3 June).

taken by Mr. James de Rothschild in order to interfere in what is a diplomatic question, and in order to obtain the recall of the Count de Ratti-Menton."

Thiers, it stated, had resolutely refused to be intimidated, choosing rather to cold-shoulder Rothschild and to leave him waiting endlessly in his ante-chambers. (And, much to the chagrin of the opposition leader, the Count Molé, other bankers had been found more than willing to cooperate with the government in his place.) Moreover, although Rothschild was the Austrian consul-general in Paris, he had remained without the slightest support in his "singular pretensions" from his own ambassador, the Count Apponyi. True, his initiative had led the government to establish an inquiry into the Damascus proceedings, but that decision

was not enough to appease the wrath of the man who owns the splendid mansion on the rue Lafitte; what he sought at all costs was an official blow [*un coup d'état*] against Mr. de Ratti-Menton, our consul at Damascus, who appears to have behaved well throughout the entire Jewish affair; and who in no way deserves to have levelled against him those impassioned accusations that emanate from a source – on the one hand, political, and on the other religious – which is no longer a mystery to men of good faith.²⁹

Naturally enough, with its revelation of facts hitherto unknown to the public as well as its harsh attack on the Rothschilds – highly unusual hitherto, although common enough in later years – these articles caused a sensation and were widely quoted.

For its part, the *Univers* treated Thiers' statement as nothing less than a triumphant vindication of everything that it had been saying since late March. It noted that Thiers had risen three times during the debate in support of Ratti-Menton (who as the plaintiff in the Damascus case, rather than the investigating judge, would have had no control over the torture employed); and it emphasized as most significant the fact that the English consul sided with his French colleague. Only the *Univers* had defended Ratti-Menton through thick and thin; and now the prime (and foreign) minister had declared on the basis of diplomatic documents that he could find no grounds for blame in the consul's conduct. "Our readers," wrote the paper,

will certainly feel admiration for the firmness, the courage and the noble independence which marked the words of Mr. Thiers. We say courage, because that is what he needed in order to tell the truth despite the Jews and the chancelleries of Europe who are in league against our consul . . . , and in spite of the entire French press which allows itself to be

²⁹ As reproduced in "Affaire de Damas," *Courrier de la Meuse* (9 June).

paid to publish, without prior examination [of the facts] . . . , the most outrageous attacks against the victim [Father Tommaso], against the Christians in the East, and against the representative of France.

If the condemned men in Damascus were to escape their due punishment or if the French consul were removed, what then, asked the *Univers*, "would become of the protection which France provides the Catholics in the East?" It would be reduced to a "mockery."³⁰

As far as the *Univers* was concerned, there was only one benefit in the extraordinary activity displayed by the Jews in the affair. Their behavior gave the lie to the facile assumptions of modern liberalism.

It proves that, for all the rationalist assertions to the contrary, the Hebrew nationality is not dead and the Prophecies subsist – we say, "nationality," because this is not the simple sympathy of co-religionists. What religious connection is there between the Talmudists of Alsace, Cologne, or the East, and the Messrs. Rothschild and Crémieux? And this development is taking place, incidentally, just when the philanthropists are demanding that this people be granted naturalization and political rights in all European societies.³¹

Nowhere, perhaps, was the effect of Thiers's statement more apparent than in the legitimist *Quotidienne*, which now cast off much of the restraint that it had sought to exercise hitherto in the case. It, too, stressed the "political character [of this affair] still wrapped in mystery," suggesting that "the European powers will not be sorry to deprive France of its magnificent privilege as protectress of the Catholic religion in the East." Thiers had acquitted himself admirably in the Chamber of Deputies. "Until there is proof to the contrary, the cause of this agent [Ratti-Menton] is the cause of justice, the cause of France."³²

Commenting on the persistent rumors that the Jews had tried to bribe the French consul and had succeeded in buying up another diplomatic agent (Merlato was not mentioned by name), the *Quotidienne* took the opportunity to join in the attack on James Rothschild.

This immense expenditure of money which is not usual among the Jews, raises against the accused an enormous presumption [of guilt] . . . , [a view] reinforced still more in our eyes by the incredible arrogance of Mr. Rothschild. Does he want to intimidate the French agents in Egypt? We have to warn Mr. Rothschild that by his unbelievable persistence, he not only does nothing to vindicate his co-religionists in Damascus, but is actually compromising himself – and with him, perhaps, too, his co-religionists in France. Let him take care. We do not know if he can buy

³⁰ "Du Discours de M. Thiers sur l'Affaire de Damas," *Univers* (4 June).

³¹ "France," *Univers* (5 June). ³² "Affaire des Juifs de Damas," *Quotidienne* (6 June).

. . . certain more or less highly placed officials; but we are certain that he cannot buy . . . public opinion.³³

Of course, the ultra-Catholic press elsewhere did not hesitate to follow the lead of the Paris journals. Thus, for example, the *Gazette de Languedoc* on 12 June republished verbatim the warning given Rothschild by the *Quotidienne*, while the Belgian *Courrier de la Meuse* preferred to reproduce the attack on the Jewish banking magnate in the *Commerce*. And another piece in the *Courrier de la Meuse*, taken this time from the *Ami de Religion*, complained that while the guilty Jews in Damascus were the subject of so much sympathy, their victim seemed to have been forgotten. ("Should not the fact that he expired in the midst of torment move the philanthropists?"). But, then, after all, Tommaso was no more than a poor monk, while the condemned men were rich and "have to be saved at any price."³⁴

The belief that the debate in the Chamber of Deputies had dealt a severe blow to the Jewish cause was fully reflected, too, in the long report from Paris sent in to the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* on 4 June. All the themes that had been taken up in the ultra-Catholic press in France now reappeared in that north German Protestant paper. The clash between the consuls in Damascus (stated the article), reproduced in miniature and was the product of, the long-standing rivalry between the powers. It appeared that "a formal Jewish league against the [French] cabinet had been established over this affair," but Rothschild had been grandly rebuffed nonetheless. And the linked issues of Jewish separatism and emancipation had now been brought to the fore. "The French Jews, despite their emancipation, attained a long time ago," stated the correspondent,

have not succeeded in winning over public opinion. The reason is that, as in the present case, they seem completely disinclined to subordinate their religious interests – which still always tie them to a separate people [*Volk*] situated at all points of the globe – to the national and patriotic interests of their adopted countries. So the French Jews, without more ado and without any adequate knowledge of the circumstances in Syria, have taken sides against their own government, against the agents whom the regime is duty-bound to defend and, in order to do so, have linked themselves to the agents of a foreign power. . . . From all this, it emerges that the French Jews, by making payments to the Paris papers and cultivating the correspondents of the German press, are waging war on the government of their own country, blindly, on the say-so of foreigners . . . [even though] not only Cochelet . . . but also the English consul in Damascus have completely justified the conduct of the French consul. It seems to me that intelligent Jews, who wish to be accepted as

³³ "Affaire de Damas," *ibid.* (7 June). ³⁴ "Affaire de Damas," *Courrier de la Meuse* (7 June).

citizens of the states in which they live, can only be grateful if one draws attention to such abuses which cannot but retard the cause of emancipation.³⁵

During the summer months, the school of thought associated with the *Univers* found itself with an unexpected advantage. Just when Adolphe Crémieux ceased to publish despatches from Merlato and Laurin (presumably because of Metternich's opposition), the *Univers* began to receive a steady stream of material, including diplomatic documents that would normally have been treated as confidential, from the Count de Ratti-Menton.

There was much in these new publications to embarrass the other side. Letters from Merlato sent to Sherif Pasha early in the affair demonstrated beyond any doubt what had already been suggested by the *Univers* – that the Austrian consul had for a long time enthusiastically supported the onslaught against the Damascus Jews and that his vehement criticism of the cruel torture had come very late in the day. Another coup, for example, was the unveiling of hitherto unknown letters from Kilbee and Laurella, both long since famous in Europe as the men who had first raised the alarm in February on behalf of the Jews. Laurella, writing on 1 April, expressed himself as then totally outraged against the condemned men. ("We must, of course, no longer put any trust in the Jews. Isaac Picciotto also an accomplice! They [the prisoners] all deserve to be burned, and all the [other] Jews exiled to Siberia; let them make their Holy Land there.") And Kilbee, in a letter of 23 March expounding on the latest revelations about the Talmudic motives for the crime, wrote: "It had been predicted that 1840 would be remarkable, and the detection of these horrible crimes does mark an epoch in history."³⁶

The impact of these and other such documents, which could obviously have proved most damaging to the Jewish cause, was somewhat blunted in reality by the fact that many of them did not become very widely known. The one way to have had the material placed in the ministerial press in France was to buy supplementary space – and the sums available for that purpose to the circles associated with the *Univers* were clearly limited. For its part, the *Journal des Débats* simply refused to publish materials from the other side. However, a large number of documents were reproduced in various ultra-Catholic journals as well as in the Augsburg and Leipzig papers. And the flow of letters to the press from the Middle East – some signed by Ratti-Menton himself, some unsigned but clearly emanating from the French consulates in Damascus and Alexandria – now grew steadily in volume. The departure of des Meloizes for Damascus, his arrival in mid-June, and the

³⁵ "Paris (4 Juni)," *L'AZ* (10 June), pp. 1755–6.

³⁶ "Lettres de Damas," *Univers* (18 July).

realization that he was determined to write a favorable report must have done much to reinvestigate Ratti-Menton's battered self-confidence.

A recurring theme in these letters was the idea that nothing less than the status of France in the East was at stake in the affair. Thus, one such communication (published, for example, in the *Gazette de Languedoc* on 12 June) could state that Ratti-Menton was all too aware of

the dangers to which he was exposing himself, but he regarded it as a sacred duty to exercise that right of protection which France had preserved in the East on behalf of all the Catholics. . . . He is calm and, unmoved by all the clamor; he is awaiting the judgment of France on his conduct.³⁷

"To whitewash them [the Jews] by a new trial," reads a letter from Alexandria appearing in the *Univers* on 1 July, "would be to reduce the influence of France; and to throw away a victory."³⁸

And still another communication, sent to the newspaper from Damascus on 20 June, while supplying new information about the Talmud as the (alleged) source of the murders, also sought to explain the stance adopted by Laurin in the affair. Since the July revolution of 1830, it stated, Austria had been systematically looking for ways to replace France as the champion of the Catholics in the East. And now, could it "not be presumed that Mr. Laurin has suggested to Catholic Austria that she establish yet a third protectorate — one in favor of Jewry?"³⁹ Considerable financial benefits would accrue to the Habsburg empire from such a policy. (Developing this theory further in his unpublished despatches to Thiers, Ratti-Menton argued that Austria was doubtless also seeking enhanced political influence by wooing "the Jews spread over Asia.")⁴⁰

Increasingly confident that the tables were about to be turned, Ratti-Menton now looked forward to the day when France would make his cause fully her own. The letters sent to the press from Damascus in June anticipated the "exemplary punishment" that (at the insistence of Paris) would be meted out "to those three wretches who were not afraid to propagate the most odious slander against a representative of France."⁴¹ And Ratti-Menton systematically spelled out a series of charges against this "triumvirate" of enemies: Merlato ("puerilely envious and without character"); Laurin ("a personal enemy, incapable of impartiality"), and Pieritz ("a false apostate and avowed slanderer"). Of Merlato he wrote that not only was his hypocrisy manifest, but there were dark secrets still to be revealed. Laurin's hatred for him, declared Ratti-Menton, went back twelve years since the

³⁷ "Syrie," *GdeL* (12 June). ³⁸ "Affaire de Damas," *Univers* (1 July).

³⁹ "Lettres de Damas," *ibid.* (23 July).

⁴⁰ Ratti-Menton to Thiers (27 July, no. 33) MREA:TAD, p. 55. ⁴¹ *Univers* (1 August).

time when they had both served in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and it bore "the character of an incurable disease." The Austrian consul-general, too, was a hypocrite who, while in Naples, had once proved suspiciously slow in preventing an Austrian slave ship from sailing⁴² and, while in Alexandria, had been known to order floggings.⁴³ As for Pieritz,

such a man must have been born on an inauspicious day, and with some evil genius present. . . . I am sure that if his cranium were to be examined by phrenological methods, the most vile protuberances would be discovered. His alleged conversion to Protestantism is dissimulation. . . . And if he makes a crime of the convictions of others, that is all the more proof that he has none of his own.⁴⁴

Revealed in these letters, then, were precisely those qualities that from the first had entangled the French consul so inextricably in the ritual-murder affair: a hopeless lack of judgment, extreme impetuosity, and an uncontrollable temper. Nonetheless, the *Univers* considered it good policy to publish them.

However, when it came to the most extreme vituperation against the Jews, the *Univers* was undoubtedly surpassed by the Marseilles and Toulouse papers (*Sud* and the *Gazette de Languedoc*). In early June, for example, they both published a page-long article that set out to demonstrate systematically that, in historical and theological terms alike, the guilt of the Damascus Jews was all too probable. Dominating Jewish existence, ran the argument, was a total alienation from the rest of mankind:

Driven from their fatherland, dispersed across the entire surface of the globe, the Jews swore an implacable hatred for all the nations which gave them asylum; to them, the Christians and Muslims are simply rebel disciples who have corrupted [their] law. . . . Their origins, their memories and their prejudices have ever rendered the Jews a hostile nation living in the midst of, but never intermingling with, the other nations. The Jews considered, and still do consider, those nations to be impure, infidels and enemies whom they can, and should, cheat while they await the time when they will be able to enslave or murder them.

Specializing throughout the ages in usury, the Jews had frequently been able to acquire immense wealth and hence the power to corrupt kings and princes. But so great was the inevitable animosity thus aroused against them that even the papacy had often proved unable to protect them against popu-

⁴² "Variétés: Lettres de Damas," *ibid.* (6 August). (In the letter of 27 June reproduced here, Ratti-Menton wrote that Merlatto was trying to replace Beaudin by himself as the primary legal representative – *cosignataire* – of the Beirut and foreign merchant communities trading with Damascus.)

⁴³ "Lettres de Damas," *ibid.* (23 July). ⁴⁴ "Variétés: Lettres de Damas," *ibid.* (6 August).

lar fury (as during the Crusades). And the same pattern was evident in contemporary Europe. Napoleon, to be sure, had understood what the mediocre, office-seeking politicians of the present day did not – namely, that the Jews had to be kept firmly in their place. “He would not have authorized a Rothschild to decorate his carriage with the embossed escutcheon of the imperial eagle of France. He would not have accorded a usurer the honors which he reserved for valor or genius.” But it was fast becoming impossible to ignore

the present insolence of the Jews in both Europe and Asia; the would-be Prophecies which they have set in motion; their constant efforts to reconstitute themselves as a nation; their immense riches. . . . In Austria, in England, the influence of the Jews is enormous. In France, they dominate the stock exchange; they are entering the bench, the civil service, and are set to become ministers.

There were passages in the Bible that demonstrated beyond any doubt that the Jews had then practiced “human sacrifice” – not because of, but despite, Mosaic law. The foundation of Judaism was the Talmud, not biblical legislation, and it was replete with “principles of hatred for all men outside the so-called people of God.” And yet when the accusation of murder was raised against a mere few of their number, “a thousand voices were raised to demonstrate that the crime is impossible. The Jews, hitherto held in disrespect, are becoming saints, martyrs.” However, it had now turned out that no less a person than the president of the council, Thiers, was championing the French consul in Damascus, and that those German states which took the other side were merely acting under pressure from “powerful Jewish banking houses.”

The truth was that there were well-attested cases of ritual murder, such as that of St. Simon of Trent in 1475, and that only a few years back “the newspapers reported on similar crimes committed in a number of localities in Germany, most notably at Hamburg.” It was to be hoped that a reexamination of the Damascus case would finally establish the truth. In the meantime, though, what had been demonstrated beyond any doubt was that “between the partisans of the Talmud and the Christians no peace is possible, and that the deicidal people is the irreconcilable enemy of the Christians and Muslims.”⁴⁵

That there was an unbroken tradition of ritual murder linking the Middle Ages to the present day was a belief to which the *Gazette de Languedoc* soon returned. An article on 4 July described in detail the thirteenth-century affair of Haguenau in which (allegedly) the Jews, who had killed three young

⁴⁵ “Des Juifs Modernes et de l’Assassinat du Père Thomas,” *GdeL* (14 June) (earlier in *Sud*, 5 June, as reproduced in Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 349–60).

boys "for the celebration of their festivals," nonetheless managed to escape punishment by pressing a handsome bribe on the German emperor, Frederick II. This case, stated the journal, presented "an exact analogy with the assassination of Father Thomas." Moreover, in order to reinforce the same point, the article went on to relate that the Jews of the small Prussian town of Schwetz had in recent days been accused of just such a murder and had only been saved, by the arrival of armed forces, from the populace already enraged by news of the Damascus affair. (That the supposed victim was found alive and well apparently did not weaken the significance of the incident in the eyes of the *Gazette de Languedoc*.)⁴⁶

The Toulouse paper was undoubtedly speaking for a considerable part of the population in southern France. "From letters arriving from the Midi," stated the *Quotidienne*, for example, "we learn of the danger that there, in those impassioned regions, exalted narrations of the [Damascus] tale could inflame religious hatreds."⁴⁷ To publish in full some of the reports arriving from the Middle East would therefore, it concluded, be too provocative. However, that did not prevent the *Quotidienne* from republishing in August the story, which had already appeared in the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* and other German papers, of a ritual-murder attempt recently undertaken by the Jews of Tarnow in Galicia.⁴⁸

There was relatively little response in the French press during the summer to this steady flow of material hostile to the Jews. James de Rothschild and Crémieux had obviously concluded that no useful purpose would be served by the continuation of the major press campaign which they had waged in April and May. They were now looking for alternative ways to influence public opinion.

However, the *Journal des Débats* did continue steadily on course in its presentation of the case for the Jews. There the French reader could find reports on the initiatives undertaken by Laurin and the Jewish community of Alexandria, Pieritz's account of the affair, and news of the bustling public activity by Jews and Christians alike in England on behalf of the condemned men in Damascus. Following the debate in the Chamber of Peers on 10 July, it unleashed a frontal assault on Thiers himself. It did not, stated the journal, wish to discuss the question of guilt or innocence. "That is a mystery which can only be clarified by time and by the investigations already begun."

But how could Thiers have declared that Ratti-Menton had "done his

⁴⁶ "À propos de l'Affaire des Juifs de Damas," *Gdel* (4 July). (On the Schwetz affair: "Berlin [21 Juni]," *JdesD* [28 June]; Löwenstein, *Damascia*, pp. 316-17.)

⁴⁷ "Affaire des Juifs de Damas," *Quotidienne* (11 May).

⁴⁸ "Tentative d'Assassinat des Juifs sur une Jeune Fille Polonoise," *Quotidienne* (19 August). On the Tarnow case, e.g.: "New Charge Against the Jews," *Times* (13 August), p. 5; Löwenstein, *Damascia*, pp. 317-27.

duty and nothing but his duty"? The Damascus Jews had been dragged from their homes, mutilated, tortured to death. And these atrocities took place

under the auspices and the eyes of the French consul. . . . He heard the cry of the victims and did not say to the hangman: "Stop!" . . . Is this how a consul of France does his duty? . . . How did he not realize that he was becoming in some degree an accomplice . . . to the fanaticism, ignorance and shameful passions which – on the pretext of Father Thomas's murder – were bent on proscribing and pillaging an innocent people whose religion is, after all, that of the Bible? We do not hesitate to blame the conduct of Mr. Ratti-Menton in resolute terms. . . . [For Thiers this is only] a paltry question of etiquette and of administrative niceties. A few generous expressions in favor of reason, humanity, tolerance, would have made a better impression at the French tribunal than the incredible words: "Every country has its system of justice; oriental justice is not ours." This dry parliamentary language makes a striking and unhappy contrast with the eloquent protests delivered by Lord Palmerston and Sir Robert Peel . . . on behalf of the persecuted Jews of Damascus.⁴⁹

In an article written in June and refused publication at the time by the *Allgemeine Zeitung* of Augsburg, Heinrich Heine drew a comparison between the press in France and that in Germany. The German papers, he wrote, were hamstrung by fear of the censors, with their "deadly red ink," and were rendered all but incomprehensible by stylistic obscurity. The French journalists wrote more elegantly, with admirable clarity, and, in theory, enjoyed greater liberty. But pressing financial need rendered the vast majority of French papers even less free, in reality, than the German ones. Most French editors were condottieri who could not keep their papers going without outside subventions from government or party funds. And the journalists were so many "lieutenants and soldiers" kept strictly disciplined. As a result, the French press had largely kept silent over the Damascus case, or (like the *Messenger* and *Univers*) simply, as bidden, declared the Jews guilty.

The *Journal des Débats*, a rare exception, was truly independent. But

we do not have to praise [it] for that; [it is] doing its duty. Good God, how bad things are for the French, when one has to bestow words of praise on them for waxing indignant against superstition, torture and knavery.⁵⁰

In England, the Damascus affair – and related Jewish questions – continued throughout the summer months to attract considerable attention from the

⁴⁹ "France," *JdesD* (11 July).

⁵⁰ [Heine], "Die Juden und die Presse in Paris" (Part 2: 11 June) *Säkularausgabe*, vol. 10, pp. 43–5. (Heine, with much exaggeration, associated the *Courrier Français* with the *Journal des Débats* as championing the Jewish cause.)

press. But most of the papers now treated it as a nonissue, taking it for granted that the condemned men had fallen victim to a medieval witch-hunt. Much of what was published was of a routine nature: the parliamentary speeches, of course, and extensive reports of the public meetings held in favor of the Syrian Jews. (Such items appeared, too, as paid advertisements.) Informative documents emanating from the Middle East, and presumably translated on the initiative of the Rothschilds or other Anglo-Jewish leaders, likewise found their way into some papers. A letter from Haim Nisim Abu el-Afieh to Hirsch Lehren, for example, appeared in the *Sun*; and a letter from Isaac Picciotto, incarcerated in the Austrian consulate, to his brother in Constantinople, was published by the *Morning Post*.⁵¹ Moreover, a new and highly sensational dimension was added to the affair by the proto-Zionist, or "restorationist" articles appearing, inter alia, in the progovernment *Globe*.

However, when set against this general background, the policy now adopted by the *Times* was nothing less than extraordinary. What had been merely implicit in May was now stated explicitly. The guilt or innocence of the Jews, the truth or falsehood of the ritual-murder charge, had to be treated as an open question. The *Times* was ready to give the Jews the benefit of the doubt; they had to be assumed innocent unless overwhelming evidence of guilt were found; but, in the meantime, the paper declared its duty to be the systematic publication of material both pro and con.

The *Times* was undoubtedly the most prestigious newspaper in the world at that time, and its sheer bulk was the source of wonderment; the sixteen-page (or ninety-six-column) issue of 25 June, for example, was considered to be in all probability a record in the history of journalism. The advertising revenue alone from that issue, noted a commentator, must have come at one shilling a line to about £700.⁵² Thus, for the *Times* to declare itself open-minded on the Damascus affair was obviously a source of extreme embarrassment for the English Jews.

Possible explanations for the line developed by the *Times* have already been suggested (the opposition of so many Tories to the emancipation of the Jews; the paper's vehement hostility to Palmerston and consequent sympathy for France). But, of course, to that must be added two other factors which might have played a role: a desire to exploit the sales value of a sensational story; and a decision (whether conscious or reflexive) to give some adequate outlet to undercurrents of opinion otherwise hidden from sight.

To judge by the readers' letters published in the *Times*, the unanimity given voice by the House of Commons and by nearly all the press did not accurately reflect the wide range of views making themselves heard in society

⁵¹ "Persecution of the Jews in the East," *Sun* (6 August); "Turkey," *Morning Post* (28 May).

⁵² "Grossbritannien," *AZ* (5 July), p. 1490.

at large. Indeed, in a letter published on 6 July, one reader could even state with confidence that "I, and I firmly believe, nine-tenths of my fellow-countrymen . . . [share] the perception of the enormous guilt of the Jews of Damascus, brought home to them by proofs which, had they been before an English tribunal, would long ere have sealed their fate."⁵³

In order to permit both sides to be heard to the full, the *Times* published a vast number of documents relating to the ritual-murder charge and in some issues (including the record-breaking number of 25 June) set aside an entire, closely printed page to that end. Among many such documents emanating from Jewish or pro-Jewish sources were, for example, the various appeals for help sent in February and March to Constantinople from the communities in Damascus and Rhodes; the letters and analyses of Pieritz; and reports on the final stages of the Rhodes affair. In addition, on 6 July the paper devoted three entire columns to the refutation of the blood accusation presented to Cromwell in 1656 by Menasseh Ben Israel; and on 17 August it devoted almost as much space to the publication of long extracts from the Passover Haggadah (which, as the *Times* put it, "will be exceedingly curious in itself to most of our readers and has at the same time an evident bearing on the Damascus case").⁵⁴

Representing the case against the Jews were reports from Sherif Pasha sent early in the affair to Muhammed Ali; detailed letters about the damaging evidence written on 4 March by an anonymous correspondent in Damascus; and the text of Thiers' speech to the Chamber of Peers defending Ratti-Menton. The paper also saw fit to reproduce stories of contemporary ritual-murder attempts in the Polish lands (in Tarnow and Iwaniska). However, by far the most startling document on that side to be published was a lengthy extract from a work that had originally appeared in Romanian in 1803; it was reproduced by the *Times* under the heading "A mystery, hitherto concealed and now published for the first time, concerning the Hebrews, the blood that they take from Christians, and the use that they make of it, with proofs from the Holy Scriptures." This piece was rendered quite remarkably damning by three factors. First, its author purported to be a rabbi who had converted to Christianity and was now, as a monk, ready to reveal secrets learned in his previous existence. As the example of Pieritz had amply reconfirmed, probably the most effective defense against the blood charge was – and had been for centuries – the testimony of Jews become Christians; but, in like measure, the occasional counterstatements of other such converts were all the more threatening.

Second, the author provided a plausible explanation for the fact that so

⁵³ From "A Christian Reader," *Times* (6 July), p. 8.

⁵⁴ "Celebration of the Passover by the Jews," *ibid.* (17 August), p. 3.

many Jews, and ex-Jews, were sincerely convinced of the absurdity of the charges. It was, he wrote,

necessary to understand that this mystery of blood is not known to all Jews, but only by the rabbis, the haham (doctors), the Scribes and Pharisees . . . who preserve it with the strictest secrecy. . . . Jesus is my witness that when I arrived at the age of thirteen . . . my father said to me "I put on thy head the 'tefilis,' " and he then disclosed to me the mystery of blood, cursing me by all the elements of heaven and earth, if I should reveal it even to my brothers. "In case you marry," he said, "if you have ten sons, you must not reveal this mystery to all, but to him alone who is most discreet . . . and the most constant and immovable in the faith."⁵⁵

Finally, these revelations were replete with much circumstantial and concrete detail, describing the use of Christian blood in an array of Jewish customs.

Equal space for the defense and the prosecution likewise characterized the publication of letters to the editor. Many of those who wrote in, of course, took the innocence of the Jews for granted. Typical enough was the letter of Anthropos (the use of pseudonyms or initials was common), who warned that "a spirit of persecution once roused is not easily allayed; and we have only to refer to the records of our own country to learn what excesses fanaticism can commit when directed against the remnants of the Lord's people." He lashed out at Thiers and called on the Catholics of France to "teach this upstart minister the lesson that the leading attribute of the Christian religion is justice and its greatest attribute, charity." It was to be hoped, he concluded, that one beneficial result of the crisis in the East would be the "taking of the Jews [there] under the protection of the great powers of Europe."⁵⁶

On the other side, a wide range of arguments was marshalled to explain why the Damascus Jews were almost certainly guilty. To begin with, there was the circumstantial evidence (the discovery of the bones in the place previously indicated by the prisoners). And then, again, as one correspondent put it, the Jews were presumably "not cannibals, although Voltaire said they were," but nobody could deny that human sacrifice was commonly mentioned in the Bible. Besides, there were clearly many diverse groups among the Jews and "what might be a crime among the Jews in London might be no crime in the Jews of Damascus or elsewhere or vice versa."⁵⁷

A number of letters also arrived from correspondents speaking specifically

⁵⁵ "A Mystery Hitherto Concealed . . .," *ibid.* (25 June), p. 8. This document would be widely cited in anti-Jewish agitation later in the century; see chap. 10, n. 28.

⁵⁶ "To the Editor of the 'Times,'" *ibid.* (25 June), p. 8.

⁵⁷ "To the Editor of the 'Times,'" (From Sigma), *ibid.* (17 August), p. 3.

as Jews, and one of them even sent in some matzah for chemical analysis (which the *Times*, presumably sensing irony, declared to be absolutely uncalled for).⁵⁸ This same letter asked how Jews could go on murdering Christians year-in and year-out, while remaining undetected. And whose blood had the Jews used for human sacrifice before the advent of Christianity? "While you expressed the warmest desire that they [the Jews] should have a fair and impartial trial," wrote another correspondent to the editor, "you scarcely appear thoroughly convinced of the absurdity of the charge."⁵⁹

In a series of leading articles (editorials), the *Times* sought to explain its own policy. It considered it essential to publish documents from both sides in the interest of "our own impartiality," and also in the interest of the Jews themselves, who would thus be forearmed against their accusers. As for the work of the monk, first published in 1803, "a more abominable perversion of holy writ, we are persuaded, never occurred." Nonetheless, the issues involved still awaited clarification and were highly dramatic. "We have opened," declared the *Times* on 25 June,

one of the most important cases ever submitted to the notice of the civilized world, and upon which the very existence of the Jewish religion and of the Jews as a separate clan of the community may be said to depend. Admitting for the moment [the accusations to be true] . . . , then the Jewish religion must at once disappear from the face of the earth. No honorable or honest man could remain a member of such a community. We shall await the issue, as the whole of Europe and the civilized world will do, with intense interest.⁶⁰

And some two months later, the language remained almost as hyperbolic:

The leisure produced by the parliamentary recess will enable us to return to the subject of the Damascus Jews, than which nothing more important in its present bearings and future consequences, has probably arisen in our time, apart from the great political questions of the day. At the first view of it, which is that of an accusation of . . . murder . . . , there is little to excite interest or even curiosity. . . . The accusation, however, has brought with it another, in which all persons of the Jewish religion throughout the world are involved, and which imputes to them the commission of such murders, as a regular practise and rite of their religion, and sanctioned and prescribed by their priests and ministers. . . . The conduct of the Jews themselves shows that they attach to this charge all the weight it deserves.

The stakes were thus high; and if the Jews were to succeed (as expected) in proving their case, they would no doubt then "appeal to all Europe for a final

⁵⁸ "Persecution of the Jews at Damascus," (From EHL), *ibid.* (29 June), p. 5.

⁵⁹ From "A Member of the Jewish Community," *ibid.* (6 July), p. 8.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* (25 June), p. 12.

remission of those disabilities to which in countries calling themselves civilized, they are still exposed."⁶¹

Under normal circumstances, this statement would have been the last word of the *Times* during the summer of 1840. The clouds of war were fast gathering over the Middle East, and scant attention was left by late August for the condemned men in Damascus. But just at that point, reports sent in by a special correspondent of the paper (signing himself "An Impartial Observer") began arriving from Damascus. The writer, presumably George Stephens, explained that until he reached the city, he had been convinced that the case against the Jews was sheer fabrication. Once there, though, he "was made acquainted with the facts, was shown the *procès verbal* [protocols], both in Arabic and French, and had communicated with disinterested persons *au fait* of the real state of the case [and] was reluctantly obliged to alter my opinion." What could not be gainsaid was that the prisoners had confirmed each other's testimony, even though kept strictly apart. "The Jews in Europe," he concluded,

have been hasty in identifying themselves with these men, for it is generally believed here that they belong to a fanatic sect by which not only the laws of Moses and the Talmud are observed, but also certain oral traditions . . . handed down from the earliest times from rabbin to rabbin. . . . After having read . . . some atrocious passages in the Talmud, I am not astonished that such fanaticism should exist.⁶²

Much of the fascination with the crisis of the Syrian Jews – and of the Jewish people as a whole – had its roots, of course, in the intense interest in religion that characterized England at that time, with its interplay of high-church and low-church Anglicanism; Evangelicalism and the emergent Tractarian movement; assertive Nonconformism and a Catholicism urging the claims of unbroken historical continuity. No survey of the British journals can overlook the highly varied treatment of the Damascus case by the religious periodicals.

It turns out that the more staid Anglican journals, whether high-church (the *British Critic*) or Evangelical (the *Christian Observer*), chose to pay scant attention to the affair, although the latter publication did at one point declare the ritual-murder charge to be "a mendacious calumny." (It hastened to add, though, that "nothing can be more grovelling and demoralizing" than the religion practiced by the Jews in the Middle East and Eastern Europe; and that it was erroneous to be "falsely tender in exhibiting the dark traits of their character.")⁶³

⁶¹ Ibid. (13 August), p. 4.

⁶² An Impartial Observer [G. B. Stephens?], "Private Correspondence," *ibid.* (29 August), p. 5.

⁶³ "View of Public Affairs," *The Christian Observer* (1840), pp. 701–2.

In contrast, the monthly of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, the *Jewish Intelligence*, devoted most of its summer issues to the affair. The large increase in the membership and income of the Society during the year was, after all, directly attributable to the upsurge of public interest in the Jewish people. The London Society (its mission in Jerusalem and its leadership at home) had, of course, placed itself in the forefront of the campaign to defend the Damascus Jews, and these efforts were duly reported. Given this fact, then, the inclusion of many documents emanating from Damascus, which described in gruesome detail how the Jews had committed the murders, was highly surprising. It is impossible to escape the impression that the editors, even though denying their truth, still saw these reports as important, if only because they added to that aura of mystery and providential destiny they themselves associated with the Jewish people.

The new Catholic weekly, the *Tablet*, also paid significant attention to the Damascus affair. It was drawn to the issue specifically in direct opposition to the *Univers*, which it termed the "leading Catholic journal in Europe." There could simply be no excuse, it declared, for ignoring the fact – demonstrated by the fate of the early Christians and by the witch trials – that confessions exacted by torture were totally without value.

We confess we feel warmly on this matter. We too know what it is to be a minority. . . . Men now alive can remember that, in the cities of this very empire, poor deluded Protestants believed that on Good Friday, innocent children were murdered for the purposes of Catholic worship. . . . Is it for us to be the ready receivers, on no evidence at all, of wholesale calumnies against others?

It was truly regrettable, concluded the *Tablet*, that "a journal we esteem so highly as the *Univers* should have lent its countenance to these monstrous accusations."⁶⁴

It was only during the summer months of 1840 that the Damascus affair first attracted any significant degree of attention from the press in the United States (or so it would appear from the some dozen newspapers examined for this study). In essence, the reaction of the Americans was very similar to that of the English journals; in both countries the charge of ritual murder was received skeptically.

However, that said, the differences were striking. In England, the interlocking Jewish issues (the blood accusation; emancipation; the status of the Jews in the Middle East and in the Holy Land) were seen as matters of considerable public importance. For the United States, the Damascus affair

⁶⁴ "The Persecution of the Jews in Damascus," *Tablet* (6 June), pp. 58–9.

was extremely remote; news from the Middle East could, depending on the sailing dates, arrive up to ten weeks late. And the American government was in no way involved in the diplomatic crisis in the Middle East.

Moreover, the ritual-murder charge as such simply did not become a matter of public discussion; there was no equivalent in America of the *Times* determined to present both sides of what it described as a legitimate question. Reporting on the case was sporadic, disconnected, and marginal. Only with the advent, first in England, then in America, of the public meetings in support of the Damascus Jews did attention rise; but even then, it was the protest politics, not the murder charge, which aroused interest. As for the Catholic press, there was nothing comparable to either the *Univers* or the *Tablet*; it seems to have ignored the affair altogether.

When news of the case first reached New York, it was deliberately played down. Brief mention was made of it in the *Evening Star*, edited by Mordechai Manuel Noah (although not a Jewish paper), where it was suggested that Father Tommaso had probably been murdered by the Greek Orthodox Christians, "who are most violent against the Latins."⁶⁵ And on 18 May Noah (now transmitting the news from European sources that the murderer was a Druse) explained that he had chosen to all but ignore the entire story, "well aware, notwithstanding the unworthy prejudices which extended over Europe and even had weight in this country, [that] there was not a word of truth in it."⁶⁶

For his part, James Gordon Bennett, the editor of the turbulent *Morning Herald* (and Noah's unruly rival), did publish a reader's letter in May that urged him to take up the Damascus story, arguing that a highly lucrative sensation could be caused by linking unsolved disappearances in New York to the same cause – "the desire for human blood at the Jewish festivals." Bennett's response was succinct: "Answer: Bah! bah! bah!"⁶⁷

The news items that did appear were drawn from English or Austrian sources, and were favorable to the Jewish cause. (The one exception was an uncritical report in the *New York American*, entitled "New Charge against the Jews,"⁶⁸ which described the recent ritual-murder affairs in Tarnow and Iwaniska.) Not until June, though, did the New York public learn, for example, that the French consul had played a key role in building the case against the Damascus Jews.

⁶⁵ "The Jews," *Evening Star* (27 April). On Noah, e.g.: Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, and Oppenheim, "Mordecai M. Noah"; on reactions to the Damascus case in the United States: Ezekiel, "Persecution of the Jews"; Jacobs, "The Damascus Affair"; Blau and Baron, *The Jews of the United States*, vol. 3, pp. 924–55.

⁶⁶ "From the Courier's Correspondent," *Evening Star* (18 May).

⁶⁷ "Letter from H.," *Morning Herald* (15 April).

⁶⁸ "New Charge against the Jews," *New York American*. (The source was the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung*.)

Various millennialist, restorationist, and theological speculations with regard to the Jews clearly attracted much more attention (and Noah sought to respond to this interest). All in all, then, anyone looking for evidence of the much-discussed American “exceptionalism” in Jewish history will certainly find it in the reception of the Damascus affair across the Atlantic.

The Mission to the East and the Mobilization of Public Support

The determination of the French government to frustrate each and every move to reopen the Damascus case represented a direct challenge to the Jewish leadership. Thiers, after all, had made it more than plain in the Chamber of Deputies on 2 June that, as far as he was concerned, the Jews had already gone too far in their attempt to bring pressure to bear on his ministry; were in danger of stirring up public outrage against themselves; and would be well-advised to desist before more harm was done.

In reality, Thiers’ statements delivered so publicly and officially had exactly the opposite effect. The Jewish leaders in France and England felt compelled to escalate their response to the crisis, launching a radically new initiative. It was now that they decided, in the teeth of French opposition, to send out an extremely high-level team commissioned to conduct its own investigations in Damascus. As a deliberate act of policy, the “mission to the East,” as it became known, was provided with formal status as representative of Anglo-French Jewry and was organized amid a blaze of publicity.

There was no precedent in modern Jewish history for such an initiative, with its attendant mobilization of public support. And, naturally enough, it aroused great and widespread interest. At the same time, though, the more traditional forms of lobbying continued behind the scenes, largely hidden from public view.

The plan to send a Jewish delegation to the Middle East was, it would seem, formally adopted by the Central Consistory immediately after the debate in the Chamber of Deputies. On 5 June a letter from the Consistory was sent to Sir Moses Montefiore in London, announcing the decision of its vice-president, Adolphe Crémieux, to “leave without delay for Alexandria.” “We would,” continued the letter,

have expected nothing less from a man who since the start of this deplorable affair has dedicated himself with boundless zeal to what is a sacred cause. . . . Do you not think, sir, that it would be most advantageous if Mr. Crémieux were accompanied to the East by an eminent and influential personage who would worthily represent our brothers in England?⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Central Consistory to Montefiore (5 June) CCAE.

Although it was not specifically said, the reference was obviously to Montefiore himself (who had just replaced Joseph G. Henriques as president of the Board of Deputies). Before leaving for the East, stated the letter, Crémieux would be coming to London for consultations with Montefiore.

However, the idea of such a move had been in the air for a considerable time. Thus, it will be recalled, on 5 May Anton Laurin (then formulating his proposal to have the case reopened) had written from Alexandria to Salomon Rothschild, asking him to find a competent lawyer, to "seize hold of him and send him hither." And, as of early June, it would still have looked from the newspaper reports reaching Paris as though Laurin's formula for a retrial had been accepted by Muhammed Ali, albeit against Cochelet's urging. For his part, Crémieux had declared publicly on 16 May, long before Laurin's appeal could have reached the West, that, if it would help the cause, he was ready "to drop everything" in order to go to Alexandria or Damascus. And a proposal of Barnard Van Oven to send a "legal agent"⁷⁰ to the East had been brought to the notice of the Board of Deputies on 26 May.

Starting from 2 June, though, this project-in-the-making rapidly took on concrete form. Thus, writing to Lionel Rothschild on that day, Crémieux reported on the debate in the Chamber of Deputies, which was "not marvellous for our poor Jews in Damascus," and announced that he would be leaving for London four days later. What had upset him most was not the general tenor of the debate, which he had presumably anticipated, but Thiers' unexpected statement that Ratti-Menton's conduct, far from being aberrant, was supported by none other than the English consul. ("Can you find out what this is about and reply by return of courier?").⁷¹ A letter of 3 June from Nathaniel Rothschild, then in Paris, to his brothers in London, likewise brought up the issue of the English consul and illustrates the logic that was leading in England and France to the partial institutionalization of the Jewish campaign. (It also demonstrates how exaggerated was the belief that the Rothschilds everywhere had ready access to diplomatic secrets.) "Now," he wrote,

as I foresee [that] you will not find it an easy matter to discover what the English consul has written to the govt., I have recommended Crémieux to write an official letter as vice-president of the Consistoire to you and the Deputies of the British Jews and that will afford you an opportunity of addressing my Lord Palmerston on the subject. It is an unpleasant business but one must exert oneself to prevent such calumnies being spread against our religion and such horrid tortures being practised against our unfortunate brethren in the East.⁷²

⁷⁰ BofD, p. 156. ⁷¹ Crémieux to Lionel Rothschild (2 June) NMRA:RAL (XI/104/0).

⁷² Nathaniel Rothschild to London (3 June) *ibid.*

That the decision to despatch Adolphe Crémieux to the Middle East had been taken by 4 June emerges from yet another letter of Nathaniel written on that date:

The affair of the Jews of Damascus still makes a great noise here. I think it will do good when once over, to show people generally that the day is over by which any religious sect may be molested with impunity. You must exert yourself dear Rob [Lionel] and get up a good subscription to pay the expenses of sending Crémieux there fast. Put the house down for £1000 at once to make a beginning. I am curious to know what Isaac Goldsmid will do.

I am going to Versailles to see Billy's horse win. They tell me he is the favorite.⁷³

When Crémieux arrived in London on 8 June, it was still by no means certain that Montefiore would in fact join him on his voyage to the Middle East. In a letter from Paris to his cousins in London on 11 June, Anselm Salomon Rothschild could thus write worriedly that "I hope you will conclude something with Crémieux in favor of the poor Jews";⁷⁴ and, on the 12th, that "I hope Montefiore will feel engaged to sail with him [Crémieux] for Egypt. Fould wrote to me today that his departure is of the utmost necessity."⁷⁵

That the initiative had come entirely from the French side was confirmed by Nathaniel Rothschild who, as an English Jew then in France, was in an excellent position to judge. "With regard to the poor Jews of Damascus," he wrote, likewise on the 12th,

I agree with you that our Paris friends displayed rather too much warmth of feeling at first; on the other hand, you London gentlemen have shown no feeling at all. You know that I never was a great friend of commencing religious discussions, but upon this occasion when the prime minister of France declared in the Chambers that he thought the Jews committed murder for the sake of Christian blood to be used in a Hebrew religious ceremony, it strikes me that such a calumny upon all those who have any Jewish blood in their veins ought not only to be contradicted but proved to be false. The only practicable way of so doing in my opinion is to send Crémieux accompanied by some sober steady Englishman, who would moderate his zeal, to Damascus . . . and find out the guilty parties and the motives.⁷⁶

From that moment on, though, events began to move rapidly. Two meetings of the Board of Deputies, swelled (as on 21 April) by many nonmembers, were held in quick succession on 12 and 15 June. The first involved no more than a preliminary discussion and witnessed, *inter alia*, the defeat (by the vote

⁷³ Ibid. (4 June). ⁷⁴ Anselm Rothschild to London (11 June) *ibid*.

⁷⁵ Ibid. (12 June). ⁷⁶ Nathaniel Rothschild to London (12 June) *ibid*.

of eight Deputies to three) of a resolution calling for "a general public meeting of the Jews of London . . . on the subject of the Eastern persecutions."⁷⁷ Montefiore, presumably, was afraid of being stampeded into a decision not yet finally taken.

However, the second meeting proved to be a very different matter. Attended by almost the entire "Who's Who" of Anglo-Jewry and addressed once again by Crémieux, it resolved to request Sir Moses Montefiore to join the mission to the East – as a man "particularly fitted to be the representative . . . of the British Jews at the court of the pasha of Egypt and the defender of our persecuted brethren." In order to pay for the legal and other advisers who might accompany Montefiore, as well as for additional expenses, a subscription was opened (with the money to be received by Lionel Rothschild). This time, it was decided to call a "public meeting of Jews," on 23 June, in order to mobilize support for the projected mission.⁷⁸

Even at this stage, though, it should be noted that Montefiore still refused to commit himself formally. On 16 June he wrote to the Central Consistory that "I was urged by my friends and family not to give a decisive answer until I had taken further time to deliberate on the subject and . . . I assented to defer the announcement of my final determination until the meeting to be held on the 23 [June]."⁷⁹

In reality, of course, the decision must already have been made. Montefiore was obviously a natural candidate: president of the Board of Deputies; closely tied to the Rothschild family by marriage (Nathan Mayer's brother-in-law and Anthony's uncle); an ex-Sheriff of London; one of the few Jews to be knighted; a veteran of two visits to the Middle East; and a personal acquaintance of Muhammed Ali. But the way in which he dragged out his decision over a three-week period revealed much about the man. On the one hand, he had an excellent eye for publicity, for the newsworthy event, and by keeping his final decision back, he lent an added element of drama to the upcoming public meeting. As against that, though, his conduct in this instance also reflected a general inclination toward pomposity and self-aggrandizement.⁸⁰

The decision to organize an official delegation to Alexandria and Damascus provided the Jewish cause with that sharply defined rallying point it had hitherto lacked. Support – political, moral, financial – was sought for the enterprise from the public at large. And the most conspicuous result was a series of well-publicized meetings and speeches that followed one after the

⁷⁷ Special meeting (12 June) BofD, p. 164. ⁷⁸ Meeting (15 June) *ibid.*, pp. 171–8.

⁷⁹ Montefiore to Central Consistory (16 June) CCAE.

⁸⁰ For some of the very varied estimates of Montefiore's character and achievements: Wolf, *Sir Moses Montefiore*; Goodman, *Moses Montefiore*; Finestein, *Jewish Society*, pp. 227–56; Lipman, *The Century of Moses Montefiore*; *idem*, *Sir Moses Montefiore*; Franklin, *Sir Moses Montefiore*; and (extremely critical) Samet, *Moshe Montefiore*.



FIG. 14. Sir Moses Montefiore (1784–1885). Painting by Solomon Alexander Hart (1806–1881).

other in many parts of the English-speaking world. Such events, of course, were part and parcel of the political culture in the United Kingdom, the United States, and the British colonies. They followed a set ritual, with a series of resolutions drafted in advance; with speakers prepared to introduce and second them; and with the minutes and decisions edited in time for almost instant publication. (Expressing bemused admiration for the apparently endless capacity of the English to deliver speeches, fill halls, and applaud untiringly, one German observer suggested that the ubiquitous schoolboy debat-

ing societies had turned the entire nation into “born advocates.”)⁸¹ The ability of the Jews in the summer of 1840 to harness the public meeting and public speech to their cause can be seen in retrospect to have marked a conspicuous development in the evolution of modern Jewish politics.

Even though Montefiore had still not given his formal consent to join the mission to the East, the resolutions carried out by the Board of Deputies on 15 June were made public, printed as a broadsheet, and distributed. For his part, Crémieux, invited while in London to address the well-publicized conference of the antislavery society, took the opportunity to denounce the assault on the Damascus Jews. He was proud, he asserted, to be descended from the ancient Hebrews who had been the first to advocate the abolition of slavery and – in the form of the Essene sect that in turn had influenced Jesus – the first to declare it a crime. The Jews had likewise led the way in the renunciation of human sacrifice, and yet were now absurdly being accused of just such a rite. But, fortunately, “in this country – civilized England – the nation, the press, the government have shown themselves indignant at this base calumny.” (Daniel O’Connell, who also spoke there, of course welcomed Crémieux’s decision to go to Damascus, but reminded his audience with some relish that in the past “a hundred times over, the English people had believed such calumnies. [Hear, hear].”)⁸² Peel’s speeches in the House of Commons, on 19 and 22 June, should also be seen as part of what had by now become a concerted effort to rally public opinion. (What Peel had said, asserted Nathaniel Rothschild confidently, “will make Thiers a little more cautious in the instructions he sends out to the East.”)⁸³

There were two public meetings that proved to be the most important and made the greatest impression: the one, on 23 June, called by the Board of Deputies to speak for the Jews of London; the other, on 3 July, at the invitation of the Lord Mayor, to speak for the City. As anticipated, it was at the first meeting, which assembled in the Great Synagogue at Dukes Place, that Montefiore officially announced his agreement to accompany Crémieux to the Middle East. The occasion was, thus, solemn and buoyant.

However, the proceedings revealed the existence of two conflicting trends of thought. On the one hand, there was the wish to see the crisis as a localized issue, a product of Oriental barbarism, and the Jews in the West as the champions of civilization coming to the rescue of their brethren in the East. But, on the other hand, it was impossible to hide the fear that the contagion could, under certain circumstances, endanger the Jews in Europe as well.

The former view found expression both in the official report presented to the meeting of the Board of Deputies and in the speech of David Salomons.

⁸¹ “Briefe aus England,” *AZ* (9 August) (Beilage), p. 1763.

⁸² “British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Convention,” *Sun* (17 June).

⁸³ Nathaniel Rothschild to London (22 June) NMRA:RAL (XI/104/o).

Of course, the division was not absolute. The report, for example, spoke of the necessity not only "to protect the Jews throughout Asia," but also to "rescue the Jewish religion from the horrible imputation of . . . the shedding of human blood."⁸⁴ And Salomons, likewise, specifically warned that "when a calumny, such as that . . . is . . . not nipped in the bud, its effects will be extended to the remotest parts of the earth."⁸⁵ Nonetheless, in the last resort, the report certainly concentrated attention on the atrocities in the East (and on the extraordinary bravery displayed by a number of the prisoners), while Salomons insisted that it would be an error to "take the answer of the president of the French council [Thiers] as that of the French people." Moreover, following the lead given by O'Connell in the House of Commons, Salomons took the opportunity to point out that what was denied at Westminster was permitted in Paris, where a Jew (Fould) had been able to raise the Damascus issue in Parliament.

It fell primarily to Barnard Van Oven to emphasize what he saw as the profound threat lurking in the crisis. He set the tone in his opening words:

The subject which has called us together is not one of ordinary importance, any more than the place in which we are met is an ordinary place of meeting. Many of us are accustomed to meet together in matters of charity or on political questions . . . in taverns, in vestry-rooms, or in our own parlors; but we are now assembled in the synagogue itself, in the very temple of our faith, on the very spot where we offer up to our Creator our thanks for his past bounties, our prayers for his future protection.

The basic issue, he declared, was whether

a flame of persecution which has been lighted up in the East by avarice, be so fed with bigotry, that it shall increase, and spread, and go forth like some monster, destroying and to destroy, until the very name of a Jew shall be heard only with horror and disgust, and their persons shall sink under cruelty, oppression and contempt? . . . It is true that the persecution now rages in only one town in Asia, but who will dare assert that it will stop there, unless, by the exertions of this and similar meetings, the facts alleged against us be clearly disproved; the malice of our enemies be made manifest . . . ; [and] it be shown that not only these horrible accusations are not true, but that they cannot be true. (Cheers).

He himself, he went on, normally shared the commonly held view that it was best to ignore such absurd accusations and that it would be demeaning to credit them with a rebuttal.

But when I have since learned that in France – modern, enlightened France, the very headquarters of liberality and science – the governing power, if they do not openly avow their belief, at any rate refuse to take any

⁸⁴ "Persecution of the Jews at Damascus," *Morning Herald* (25 June). ⁸⁵ Ibid.

active measures showing their disbelief, when I learn that their consuls are the most active of our enemies . . . when even M. Crémieux himself told us, "La France est contre nous" . . . when I find one or two of our English newspapers much more disposed to open their columns to reports against us than to defend our cause . . . I do come to the conclusion that this horrible accusation . . . should be altogether refuted. . . . It is not, then, merely for the sake of humanity, not only for the sake of our oppressed brethren that we are called upon to act; it is our own battle we fight. . . . We must crush the spirit that is rising in the East lest it should travel westward.⁸⁶

In reality, it should be noted, one of Van Oven's concrete proposals – that leading rabbis declare under oath the falsity of the ritual-murder charge – had already been adopted by the Central Consistory on 12 May. And the chief rabbi, Emanuel Deutz, joined by many other French rabbis, had since signed such a solemn statement.⁸⁷ Similar declarations, essentially repeating in emotional terms the oaths of Menasseh Ben Israel and Moses Mendelssohn, were issued by the two chief rabbis in England, Solómon Hirschel and David Meldola, and published in the *Times* on 2 July – although Hirschel added, as a rider, his conviction "that in this enlightened country every such declaration is uncalled for and superfluous."⁸⁸

The meeting at the Great Synagogue undoubtedly constituted an impressive display of unity by the Jews of London. Such a degree of high-profile solidarity was rare in a community that was not only divided over the tactics to be used in the struggle for emancipation, but was also about to witness the breakaway creation of its first reform synagogue.⁸⁹ Even then, however, it proved impossible to set aside completely the tension between the more conservative camp (the Rothschilds and Moses Montefiore) and the more liberal (the Goldsmids and David Salomons). In yet another of his letters from Paris about the case, Nathaniel Rothschild explicitly criticized David Salomons (and Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, too) for seeking to link the Damascus affair to the much debated domestic status of the English Jews. "If it be seen," he wrote,

that the Jews wish to agitate for political purposes and to raise the question of emancipation because the heads of both parties have sympathized with them in the misfortunes of their coreligionists, I fear they will

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ E.g.: meeting of 12 June, CCPV, where it was stated that the rabbis of Paris, Bordeaux, Strasbourg, Metz, and Nancy had already signed Deutz's statement (which, intriguingly, does not appear to have been published at the time).

⁸⁸ "Persecution of the Jews at Damascus," *Times* (2 July), p. 6.

⁸⁹ Three members of the Goldsmid family, including Francis (but not initially Isaac Lyon) were among those involved in the breakaway, and in the creation of the West London Synagogue: on the crisis, see, e.g.: Lipman, *Three Centuries*, pp. 82–4; Roth, *History of the Great Synagogue*, pp. 250–63; Hyamson, *The Sephardim*, pp. 269–95; and Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, pp. 66–71.

defeat their own object and . . . the government will be afraid of being called upon for the prosecution of their claims hereafter; and will leave Sir Moses and his fellow missionaries to their own exertions. I do not think that Sir Moses will find it a very easy matter to establish the innocence of the poor Jews; the French interest at Alexandria is now the prevailing one and the French authorities will do all in their power to prevent the truth from being brought to light. It is therefore doubly necessary that our British brethren should do nothing . . . [to] occasion a degree of indifference on the part of the British govt.⁹⁰

"Persecution of the Jews in Damascus: Great Meeting at the Mansion House" – so was headed the three-column report in the *Times* on the second of the two major public meetings, held on 3 July. Possibly less dramatic than the meeting in the Great Synagogue – it met during the day, not in the evening; the Lord Mayor, delayed at work, took the chair only late in the proceedings; none of the speeches appears to have attained the intensity of Van Oven's – nonetheless, it constituted a landmark not only in the Damascus affair, but in modern Jewish history generally. It was a precedent, *inter alia*, for just another such meeting in the Mansion House which, some forty years later, would play so central a role in the unfolding response to the Russian-Jewish crisis of 1881–2.⁹¹

Whereas the speakers at the first meeting had been Jews, here they were all non-Jews. However, the Goldsmids, the Rothschilds, and many other prominent Jewish financiers and businessmen were present in "the hall, which was crowded to excess [and] was . . . graced by the presence of very many ladies." As emerged from the numerous speeches and resolutions, the meeting had a double purpose: first, to bring the pressure of public opinion in England to bear upon Muhammed Ali in the hope that he would agree to have the Damascus case reexamined; second, to reassure the Jews that Englishmen did not suspect them of practicing human sacrifice. To those ends, the text of Peel's speech to the House of Commons and Pieritz's report, replete with the gruesome list of tortures employed in Damascus, were read out loud. And the key resolution stated: "That this meeting has heard with the deepest emotions and with the greatest horror the recital of the cruelties inflicted upon the Jews in the East and . . . [calls] for an immediate and impartial public investigation . . . so as to disprove in the face of the whole world the atrocious calumnies invented . . . as a pretext for the infliction of cruelties almost unknown to the previous history of mankind." Of course, the fact that Montefiore was due, within days, to leave for the East added a sense of urgency to the entire proceedings.

⁹⁰ Nathaniel Rothschild to London (n.d./25 June?) NMRA:RAL XI/104/0).

⁹¹ On the Mansion House meeting of 1 February 1882 and its results: Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, pp. 70–4, 108–10.

Speaker after speaker assured the Jews that they were held in esteem as trusted and useful members of society. Emancipationist and "restorationist," religious and worldly themes (whether fully compatible in strict logic or not) freely intermingled. Believing Christians, said J. Abel Smith, M.P., for example, were duty-bound to see the Jews as

the people on whose history their faith was founded and whose full restoration to their rights, both as an act of policy and religion, they must look forward to. (Hear, hear). They were a people . . . notoriously adverse to taking any part in political discussions [and] were . . . known as being of the most peaceful inclinations. They desired only to give to others that degree of tolerance which they asked for themselves. (Hear, hear).

Other speakers chose to stress the role of the Jews as philanthropists who "did not confine their acts of benevolence alone to persons of their own religious persuasion [but] . . . were ever ready to extend the helping hand to every class and denomination of Christians. (Cheers)." For his part, John Bowring, the Benthamite expert on international trade, emphasized the importance of Jewish merchant houses in the Mediterranean economy, an issue of direct interest to the City of London. Basing himself on statistics acquired during his recent travels in the region, he estimated that the Jews under arrest in Damascus had had at least 16 million piastres* as the capital at their disposal. He warned the audience that Montefiore would face enormous difficulties in the East – "How great, therefore . . . his triumph should his mission be successful (Cheers)."

Bowring was among the speakers who explicitly linked the Damascus affair to emancipation at home ("whilst this country sent forth her remonstrances to other lands, let them . . . be just and admit that they had not yet dealt out tolerance to the Jews of this country. [Cheers]"). And, in turn, a popular Anglican churchman, B. Noel, chose to express shame that those primarily responsible for the persecution in Damascus were not "those who bowed down to idols of wood and stone," but Christians. (He even came up with yet another theory about the disappearance of Father Thomas: Was it not logical to suppose that he had been murdered by his servant, eager to escape with some of his valuables?)

The last major speech was delivered by Daniel O'Connell, whose willingness to appear in defense of any and every high-minded cause was remarkable. In his view, it was a mistake to be dragged into detailed disputes about the ritual-murder charge. "Every feeling of nature," he said,

every feeling of humanity, contradicted the foul, the murderous charge. . . . Was there a human being so degraded as to believe that they [the Jews] made human blood a part . . . [of] their ceremonies? Was not

* Approximately £160,000.

the Hebrew exemplary in every relation of life? Was he not a good father, a good son? Did they not make good mothers and daughters? Were they not firm friends? (Cheers).

In conclusion, with a flourish characteristic of the great orator that he was, he appealed to his audience "as Englishmen to raise their voices in behalf of the victims of an atrocious oppression. Let one cry run from end to end of Britain's Isle (Hear, hear), and if they wanted an Irish shout (Loud cheers, laughter), they should have that also."⁹²

In the wake of the Mansion House meeting, the Lord Mayor sent a letter to the foreign ambassadors in London, requesting them to inform their governments of the resolutions adopted; and in due course the replies found their way into the press. Some were pro forma, but others – notably those from the Spanish, Portuguese, American, and Russian ambassadors – expressed support in personal terms. Count Nesselrode, the veteran foreign minister of Russia, chose to send his own letter, stating that "the imperial government . . . partakes sincerely of the unanimous and lively interest which the fate of those unfortunate Israelites inspired in England, subjected as they have been to Egyptian authority."⁹³

Once having decided that the correct strategy was to give maximal publicity to the Crémieux–Montefiore mission, the leadership in London (acting through the Board of Deputies) proceeded boldly to appeal for help and solidarity to Jewish communities not only in Britain but in many other parts of the world. It was hoped in this way to raise considerable sums of money in order to underwrite the mission, and, even more important, to demonstrate to the public at large that the Jews were united in support of the initiative.

As a result, a series of well-publicized meetings, modeled on that held in the Great Synagogue, were summoned during the summer in many communities around the world in order to adopt resolutions and to launch subscriptions. Such events took place during June in Manchester, Liverpool, Dublin, Portsea, and Falmouth; on 1 July in Altona and on 5 July in Hamburg; during August in Bridgetown, Barbados; Kingston, Jamaica; Richmond, Virginia; New York; Philadelphia; Charleston, South Carolina; and Cincinnati; and in September in Curaçao and in Spanish Town, Jamaica. Moreover, meetings of solidarity held by the general citizenry at the behest of the respective mayors, following the example of the Mansion House, were held in Manchester; Savannah, Georgia; and Charleston.⁹⁴

⁹² "Persecution of the Jews at Damascus: Great Meeting at the Mansion House," *Times* (4 July), p. 6.

⁹³ Nesselrode to Brunow, "Persecution of the Jews in the East," *Times* (7 October), p. 7.

⁹⁴ On these meetings: BofD, pp. 245–6, 259–67, 272–3; (October–) pp. 40–3, 47–8, 55–6, 61–4, 72–7, 123–4, 175–7, 179; *Manchester Guardian* (1 and 25 July); *Evening Star* (NY) (21 August); Blau and Baron, *The Jews of the United States*, vol. 3, pp. 930–52.

Constraints of space make it impossible to describe the proceedings at these events in any detail. Suffice it here to point out that the meeting called by the mayor of Manchester demonstrated a broad interdenominational character absent in London (with Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Catholic churchmen among the speakers) and that the emancipationist theme was, probably for that reason, rendered very prominent. And at the Jewish event there, the sense of anxiety was given more tangible expression: "they were all," said one speaker, "affected individually by the persecution."⁹⁵

In the United States, particular interest lies, perhaps, in the statements of Mordechai Manuel Noah in New York on 19 August and of Isaac Leeser in Philadelphia on the 27th. Both men chose to stress the theme of Jewish solidarity. "Sir," said Noah,

it may be said that we are remote from the scene of these cruelties . . . , that the Almighty has cast our lot in a country of laws administered alike to Jew and Gentile, that . . . we are exempt from such outrages . . . We thank God that it is so. . . . But, sir, in every country on earth in which the Almighty has fixed the destiny of the Jew, . . . scattered by a wise Providence among every nation, we are still one people, governed by the same sacred laws and bound together by the same destiny; the cause of one is the cause of all . . . and if the time has not arrived when the strong arm of Israel can once more be uplifted in defense of the nation and its rights, we can yet raise our voice against . . . aggression.⁹⁶

And Leeser struck a similar, albeit more self-consciously spiritual, note – he was after all, a rabbi whereas Noah was a maverick newspaper editor and politician:

We have no country of our own; we have no longer a united government, under the shadow of which we can live securely; but we have a tie yet holier than a fatherland, a patriotism stronger than the community of one government, our . . . patriotism is the affection which unites the Israelite of one land to that of another. As citizens, we belong to the country we live in, but as believers in one God . . . we hail the Israelite as a brother, no matter if his home be the torrid zone or where the poles encircle the earth. . . .

And why should the case of the Jews be any less than that of the Greeks? . . .

The times . . . have produced spirits adequate to the emergency and a Crémieux . . . and a Montefiore will be long remembered as the generous, active friends of their people.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ "Persecution of the Jews: Meeting in Manchester," *Manchester Guardian* (1 July).

⁹⁶ "Persecution of the Jews at Damascus," *Evening Star* (21 August).

⁹⁷ "Report on the Philadelphia Meeting," in Blau and Baron, *The Jews of the United States*, vol. 3, pp. 935–7; cf. Marcus, *United States Jewry*, vol. 1, pp. 657, 659.

Noah and Leeser,⁹⁸ as members of the American nation in the making, clearly felt it necessary to provide ideological explanations for their participation in an international Jewish campaign. No such note had made itself heard in the parallel speeches given in England, where the image of the Jews as a single people or nation, despite their dispersal, was still largely taken for granted.

Of course, the American Jews could exert no influence on the development of the Damascus affair. The time gap was too great. The meetings in the Great Synagogue (on 23 June) and the Mansion House (3 July), for example, were both reported very extensively in Noah's *Evening Star* but not until 20 July and 11 August respectively – four to five weeks later. By the time that the Jewish communities began to involve themselves, the case was almost six months old and nearing its denouement.

Moreover, by a twist of irony, it turns out that the single initiative taken by the government of the United States came in response to the appeals not of the American Jews, but almost certainly to that of the Lord Mayor of London.⁹⁹ It was doubtless on receipt of the letter and documents from the Lord Mayor that the secretary of state, John Forsyth, promptly sent despatches in mid-August to the chargé d'affaires in Constantinople and to the consul in Alexandria. They were instructed to do what they could to put an end to the "barbarous measures" directed against the Jews of Damascus and Rhodes – insofar as was "consistent with discretion and your diplomatic character." Further, at the Porte it was to be emphasized that the United States, a country "acknowledging no distinction between the Mohammedan, the Jews and the Christian," naturally, wished to use its "good offices in behalf of an oppressed and persecuted race among whose kindred are found some of the most worthy and patriotic of our citizens."¹⁰⁰

Thus, when the appeal, initiated by the "Israelites of the City of New York" at their 19 August meeting, reached the president, Martin Van Buren, the secretary of state found himself in the fortunate position of being able to announce in reply that the matter had already been dealt with – he enclosed a copy of the despatch to Alexandria and quoted the above lines from that to Constantinople. Although Forsyth's actions remained totally without effect in the Middle East, his exchange of letters with the representatives of the New York Jews (I. B. Kursheedt and T. J. Seixas)¹⁰¹ was widely published at

⁹⁸ On Leeser, e.g.: Sussman, *Isaac Leeser*; Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue*, particularly pp. 58–78.

⁹⁹ The U.S. ambassador to London, A. Stevenson, assured the Lord Mayor on 13 July that he was forwarding to Washington all the materials that the latter had sent him and that the response of "the president and people of the United States" would be one of "deep sympathy" ("The Persecution of the Jews in the East," *Times* [15 August]); cf. Marcus, *United States Jewry*, vol. 1, p. 656.

¹⁰⁰ Forsyth to John Gliddon (14 August); and to David Porter (17 August) in Blau and Baron, *The Jews of the United States*, vol. 3, pp. 928–9.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 930–2 (reproduced, e.g., in the *Sun*, 16 September).

the time, and the entire episode would later be remembered as the first link in what would become the long chain of American diplomatic initiatives on behalf of beleaguered Jewish communities abroad.¹⁰²

There does not appear to be extant an exact record of the amounts of money raised worldwide in support of the mission to the East, but from the available figures it is possible to construct at least a partial picture. By far the most substantial sums came, of course, from the prominent Jewish families in Paris and London. Thus at a private gathering in Paris, as reported by Nathaniel Rothschild, over twenty thousand francs were donated, with contributions of between three thousand and seven thousand francs coming from the Foulds, the Rothschilds, Anselm Halphen, and Worms de Romilly (with "every one at the same time undertaking to double the amount should more money be [needed].")¹⁰³ Of this meeting, Anselm Rothschild wrote to London: "Do not speak about it; we do not wish it to be known as the French govt. is not favorable to our cause."¹⁰⁴ (He estimated that as much as one hundred thousand francs, or four thousand pounds, had in fact been pledged there.) An even greater sum was presumably raised in London, where Nathaniel Rothschild, as already noted, had told the banking house as early as 4 June to put down one thousand pounds.

As against this, the attempts to raise money from the provincial communities in France clearly ended in failure. Only Colmar and Nancy appear to have sent in contributions – a sum total of just over two thousand francs – and even that arrived some six months late.¹⁰⁵ At the meeting in Manchester on 30 June, in contrast, over two hundred pounds was raised in one evening.¹⁰⁶ Liverpool and Bristol both contributed £100; Plymouth and Portsmouth, £27 each; and Dublin, £20. From the twin north German cities of Altona and Hamburg the amount of over £550 was sent to Lionel Rothschild in London. Amsterdam, having decided that a public meeting was not customary and therefore inappropriate, nonetheless collected some 5,600 florins from over 250 donors.

By mid-August, the very substantial amount of twelve hundred pounds was on its way to London from Kingston, Jamaica. Later in the year £186 arrived from Gibraltar and £115 from St. Thomas.¹⁰⁷ Philadelphia sent \$850 (or £170), belatedly, and apologetically: "But the truth is that our

¹⁰² See, e.g.: Adler and Margalith, *With Firmness in the Right*.

¹⁰³ Nathaniel Rothschild to London (24 June) NMRA:RAL (XI/104/0).

¹⁰⁴ Anselm Rothschild to London (23 [?] June) *ibid*.

¹⁰⁵ Letters from Nancy (21 December) and Colmar (9 February 1841) CCAE.

¹⁰⁶ "Persecution of the Jews: Meeting in Manchester," *Manchester Guardian* (12 July); "The Mission of Sir Moses Montefiore to the East," *Voff* 24 (19 August 1842), p. 185.

¹⁰⁷ For these sums: BofD, p. 173; (October–) pp. 38–9, 55, 62–4, 171, 222; and "The Mission of Sir Moses Montefiore to the East," *Voff* 24 (19 August 1842), p. 185. The *Voice of Jacob*, noting the vast disparities in the sums donated, wrote that "we find so much both to praise and to blame that the balance is scarcely perceptible." The vast majority of Jews, the poor, had not given even symbolic amounts, suggesting "their want of interest" (*ibid.*).

congregation is small and by no means rich; and we are constantly and heavily taxed to support many poor coming from Europe, often in a very distressed situation, in want of everything." (There, as in a number of other cases, some "Christian gentlemen" had contributed.)¹⁰⁸ The sum total is not known, but it could hardly have been less than ten thousand pounds;¹⁰⁹ Montefiore and Crémieux could leave for the Middle East accompanied by a large entourage and backed by an ample expense account.

While the Damascus affair was thus being played out increasingly before the public eye, great efforts still went into initiatives taken behind the scenes. A case in point was the decision of the Rothschilds to transmit the substantial sum of twenty thousand francs (eight hundred pounds) to Damascus in order to help the distressed families there. Word of this donation eventually slipped out to the press, and the *Univers* declared that its purpose, in reality, was to buy the silence of those prisoners who were still refusing to cooperate.¹¹⁰

Mention should also be made of the attempts to gain a more favorable hearing from key newspapers in the Middle East. Already in the spring, it emerged, the amount of three thousand piastres had been paid by leading members of the Jewish community in Constantinople to the *Journal de Smyrne* in order to have their side of the story published in the paper.¹¹¹ And in July Karl Rothschild wrote to business associates in Malta (the Messrs. James Bell and Co.), asking them to use their good offices to moderate the hostile line – "articles false and without foundation"¹¹² – of the local Italian-language paper, the *Portofoglio*. (The editor, when informed of the complaints, insisted that he was responsible only for his own comments, not for correspondents' reports, but nonetheless he promised to be more circumspect in the future.)¹¹³ For its part, the Board of Deputies made a payment of twenty pounds to the *Malta Times*, whose editors had sent assurances that, as "Protestants . . . friends of toleration,"¹¹⁴ they would be more than willing to publish material friendly to the Jews.

Still greater energies were invested in the attempt to win at least some measure of support from the papacy. Throughout the latter half of 1840, and

¹⁰⁸ D. Samuel, I. Leeser, et al. to H. de Castro (25 November) BofD (October–), pp. 181–2.

¹⁰⁹ A correspondent to the *Voice of Jacob* wrote that £6,774 had been donated initially; but this sum did not include amounts collected in later stages of the campaign nor the money collected in France ("The Damascus Mission," *Voff* 24, [19 August 1842], p. 191). The paper reported that Montefiore had personally contributed £2,400 (p. 185). Crémieux's expenditures up until mid-October were 26,100 francs (£1044): AC, p. 126.

¹¹⁰ *Times* (25 July); "France," *Univers* (22 July).

¹¹¹ Frasis and Figli Kanuna to Salomon Rothschild (27 May) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*, pp. 30–1. (The editor of the *Journal de Smyrne* was Bousquet Deschamps.)

¹¹² Karl Rothschild to Messrs. James Bell and Co. (5 July) NMRA:RFam AD/2, no. 32.

¹¹³ Sam Christian to K. Rothschild (14 July) *ibid.*, no. 33.

¹¹⁴ James Richardson to Montefiore (16 May) BofD, p. 158; on the payment: pp. 160–1.

even beyond, the Rothschilds in particular never relinquished the hope that a key and positive role would eventually be played in the affair by the curia of Gregory XVI. This belief was based, it would seem, on a combination of three factors: their own close relationship as international bankers with Rome; their knowledge that so many popes had distanced themselves from the ritual-murder accusations in the past; and the fact that Austria, a great Catholic state, had shown itself ready to defend the Jewish case.

In this as in other instances, however, the Rothschilds were less well informed than popular legend had it and than they themselves often assumed. There was, in fact, nobody in the Church's leadership at Rome willing or able to engineer a public repudiation of the policy adopted by Cardinal Fransoni, who as head of the world missionary organization (the Propaganda Fide) had permitted the ritual-murder story to be widely published in its journals. In a despatch sent to Metternich in May by the Austrian ambassador to Rome, R. Lützow, we read that by then the atmosphere in the Vatican had been thoroughly poisoned by the missionaries in Syria, whose reports were marked by "the spirit of persecution and by blind hatred."¹¹⁵ And not only Fransoni, but also the secretary of state, Cardinal Lambruschini, had complained to him about the employment of Jews as Austrian consuls in the Middle East. Lützow added that the reports of Merlato and Laurin were causing disquiet, because they contradicted what had been said, for instance, in the *Univers* – a paper held in the greatest esteem by the most prominent figures in Rome.

Under these circumstances, it was certainly considered a mark of favor to the Jews that the local press made no mention of the Damascus affair. And, indeed, the fear that this silence might give way to open support for the ritual-murder accusation was a cause of constant anxiety to the Jews of Rome. It thus comes as no surprise to find James Rothschild, in a letter of June, calling on his brother, Karl, to exert all his influence to ensure that the *Diario di Roma* be forbidden to publish an attack, then rumored to be in preparation, on the Jews.¹¹⁶

Metternich doubtless understood the realities of the situation well enough, but despite, or perhaps because of, that fact he was determined to assert the Austrian view of the Damascus affair at Rome. Lützow, he wrote, had been absolutely right to defend the Austrian employment of Jews in consular posts. Austria regarded the function of consuls to be strictly commercial, in marked contrast to France, which assigned them a political role and thus encouraged them to play at politics, "each after his own fashion, which is rarely useful, at least if one does not count intrigue and noise useful things."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Lützow to Metternich (28 May) in Brawer, "Homer hadash," pp. 293–5.

¹¹⁶ James to Karl Rothschild (3 June) NMRA:RFam AD/2, no. 37.

¹¹⁷ Metternich to Lützow (n.d.) in Brawer, "Homer hadash," p. 297.

Similarly, Metternich was more than willing to take up a proposal put to him by Salomon Rothschild on 12 June. Following on a letter received from a well-known Jewish firm in Constantinople (Frasis and the Brothers Kanuna), Rothschild suggested that Austria pursue a number of concrete measures (only one of which concerns us here) to solve the mystery of Father Tommaso's disappearance. As it was possible, he said, that Tommaso had not been murdered at all, but was in hiding or had been hidden away, could not a search be mounted to look for him in the various Lebanese monasteries?¹¹⁸ This idea, wrote Metternich to Lützow on 19 June, should be put to the authorities in Rome with the urgent request that the pope issue the appropriate order to the Catholic institutions in Syria.¹¹⁹

As Metternich had probably anticipated, Cardinal Lambruschini rejected the proposal out of hand. The documents received by the Propaganda Fide from "highly respected people resident in the Levant," he wrote to Lützow, did not leave even "a shadow of doubt with regard to the truth of the perfidious and atrocious crime" imputed to the Jews. And it was particularly insulting to suggest that Tommaso – even if he had run away to escape the threat to his life – would have kept silent while so many people were being tortured in order to discover what had become of him. The simple truth was that Tommaso had fallen victim at the hands of the Jews to "a cruel, violent and criminal death."¹²⁰

Lambruschini's letter was written on 10 July. Three days later Sir Moses Montefiore and Adolphe Crémieux left Paris on their way to the Middle East.

¹¹⁸ Salomon Rothschild to Metternich (12 June) in Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*, p. 33. (He enclosed the letter of 27 May from Frasis and the Brothers Kanuna.)

¹¹⁹ Metternich to Lützow (19 June) *ibid.*, p. 38.

¹²⁰ Lambruschini to Lützow (10 July) in Brawer, "Homer ḥadash," p. 299.

PART III

*1840 – Perceptions,
polemics, prophecies*

The crisis: Jewish perceptions

Undoubtedly, the Jews in 1840 presented a bold face to the world. Combining traditional and modern forms of action, they had employed lobbying techniques (some private, some not) at the highest levels of government; press campaigns extending over a number of countries; parliamentary questions and exchanges; well-reported public meetings; fundraising on an impressive scale; and, last but not least, the drama associated with the quasi-diplomatic mission to the East. In important instances – the parliamentary debates, the open meetings – Christian support had likewise been mobilized to excellent effect. Given that the crisis was totally unexpected and without precedent in living memory, this campaign was certainly most extraordinary.

However, nothing would be more misleading than to leave the impression that this strongly focused and unified political activism accurately mirrored the thinking of the Jewish public at large. Of course, in studying an age in which opinion polls did not exist and in which the vast majority of the Jewish people lived in countries subject to censorship, it is impossible to determine what the “average Jew” – in itself a purely abstract concept – knew or felt. But the available sources (primarily the Jewish periodical press in France and Germany as well as private letters) reveal that the crisis at first produced great confusion; that there was much disagreement about its meaning and how best to respond; and that the public mood fluctuated wildly from month to month.

Mention has already been made of the fault lines dividing the leadership of Anglo-Jewry, with the optimistic “emancipationism” of David Salomons, for example, set over against both the caution of the Rothschilds, on the one hand, and the alarmed, almost cataclysmic, analysis of Barnard Van Oven, on the other. And it is similarly worthy of note that the Sephardic community in New York (“ever aloof and isolationist,”¹ in Leon Jick’s words) chose not to take part in the public meeting of 19 August.

Doubt and dissension, though, were most evident in France and Germany – partly because in those two countries there was a Jewish press to record opinion on a regular basis; and, partly, because there, in contrast to the

¹ Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue*, p. 65.

English-speaking world, the Jews found themselves subject to severe external pressures. Perceptions differed so widely that, to take one striking example, even the political response of the Jewish leadership in France could be explained in radically different terms.

Thus, at one extreme was Heinrich Heine who, in an article published on 2 June, attributed the spirited defense mounted by the French Jews to a single individual swimming against a remorseless tide of apathy. For him, Adolphe Crémieux was the lone hero in an otherwise shameful story. "Mr. Crémieux, the well-known lawyer," he wrote,

who at all times is ready to apply his generous eloquence to the defense not only of the Jews but of all the oppressed . . . is – with the exception of one beautiful woman and a few young scholars – the only person in Paris actually active in the cause of Israel. At the greatest sacrifice to his own interests, contemptuously ignoring every possible trap, he spoke out recklessly against the hateful insinuations, and has even promised to go to Egypt if the case of the Damascus Jews is transferred to the tribunal of the Pasha Muhammed Ali.

(The woman mentioned here was certainly the Baroness Betty de Rothschild, Salomon's daughter and James's wife, then thirty-five years old; the scholars, presumably, were Albert Cohn and Salomon Munk.)

As for the rest of the Jews in France, declared Heine,

they have been too long emancipated not to have loosened the tribal bonds; they have almost entirely submerged – or, more exactly, merged – into the French nationality. They are Frenchmen just like the others and so have outbursts of enthusiasm that last for twenty-four hours or, if the sun is hot, even for three days! And that goes for the best of them. Many among them still practice Jewish ceremonial observance, the externalities of religion, but they do so mechanically without knowing why, from habit. There is no trace of inner faith, because Voltaire's criticism, his acid wit, has wrought its destructive work in the synagogue as in the church. Among the French Jews, as among the rest of the French, money is the god of the day and industry the dominant religion.

It was, therefore, absurd to expect the millionaires grouped around the Central Consistory to provide either leadership or funds in the cause of the Damascus Jews. They would meet and talk, but hardly more. Hitherto, all they had done was permit Crémieux to publish some of the relevant documents. A man like Worms de Romilly, worth perhaps thirty million francs, would donate no more than a hundred in the current crisis. "The financial power of the Jews is really great, but experience teaches us that their miserliness is greater still." As for Benoît Fould, he would doubtless continue to

make fine speeches in the Chamber of Deputies about securities and bank rates, but would not say a word on behalf of his brethren "being tortured and strangled"² in Syria.

A totally different reading of the reaction to the Damascus affair was provided in another display of journalistic esprit – this one written by G. Ben Lévi and published in the October issue of the *Archives Israélites*. Like Heine, Ben Lévi was impressed by the speed with which profound social change had transformed French Jewry. Of course, he wrote, to every rule there were many exceptions and what was true of Paris was not necessarily true of the provinces, but the basic trends were all too clear.

Each generation of French Jews still alive had reached adulthood under a new political system and had its own distinct physiognomy. The old people, stamped by the ancien régime, assumed rejection by French society to be a fact of life, and clung to tradition, to "blind faith"; the members of the next generation had served under Napoleon, had made their way in the world as practical men of affairs, had poorly defined political beliefs, and displayed "indifference," apathy, in their attitude to religion; finally, their children, who had completed their education after the Restoration, were "totally French" and rejected all established religions as philosophically outdated. True, they might express respect for family history, but even that was only because they had fallen under the influence of Walter Scott. "The grandfather," he concluded,

believes; the father doubts; the son negates. The grandfather prays in Hebrew; the father *reads* the prayers in French; the son does not pray at all. The grandfather observes all the festivals; the father, only Yom Kippur; the son observes none. The grandfather has remained a Jew; the father has become an *Israélite*; the son is simply a deist . . . if not an atheist, a Fourier-ist or a Saint-Simonian.

Nonetheless – and here he was completely at odds with Heine – integration had not brought with it a corresponding loss of group consciousness. The new generation, he insisted,

will not permit under any circumstances that Jews be made the object of ridicule or reproach. And if in the most forgotten corner of the East, memories are stirred by a persecution of the Jews, you can be sure that our young people will rise as one man and neglect nothing to assure the success of their efforts. Joining their elders, they will produce a united roar of condemnation strong enough to inspire shame and fear in those who abet such cowardly and fanatical crimes.³

² [Heine], "Die Juden und die Presse in Paris (Paris 27 May)," *AAZ* (2 June), pp. 1229–30 (*Säkularausgabe*, vol. 10, pp. 36–9).

³ Ben Lévi, "Première Lettre d'une Humoriste: Les trois Générations." *AI*, pp. 527–30.

As is so often the case, here, too, the truth obviously lay somewhere in the middle. The Jews in France were not united as one man by Damascus, nor were they (three or four people excepted) all sunk in apathy. Heine himself would probably have written somewhat differently in the summer than he had in the spring. As luck would have it, on the very day that his article appeared, Benoît Fould introduced the issue of the Syrian Jews into the Chamber of Deputies with his sharp and dignified speech – although, as S. S. Prawer has pointed out, Heine did not publish an apology for his scornful jibes at the expense of the Jewish deputy until 1854.⁴ At their meeting a few weeks later, the financial elite, including Worms de Romilly, likewise belied Heine's predictions by producing substantial sums to underwrite the mission to the East. And, judging by the letters of James to his brothers, there was no reason to have credited the initiatives of the Rothschild family to Betty alone (although she presumably played a major role behind the scenes).

And yet as so commonly with Heine, together with the spite, the exaggerations, and the sheer inaccuracies came insights of great intuitive power. Above all, he was certainly right to have used hyperbole in describing the way that Adolphe Crémieux had from the first moment taken the lead in the affair. Again, as already noted, the fundraising drive in the provinces did prove disastrous. A glance through the letters reaching Paris from the regional consistories reveals their notable lack of enthusiasm. Even where it was decided to open a subscription, as in Nancy or Bordeaux, for example, nothing was in fact done for months on end and reminders had to be sent out from Paris in October.

In response, Marseilles coolly announced that whatever money had already been collected was now to be retained for local use as "our co-religionists, while certainly recognizing the utility of this mission, nonetheless think that the sums already collected in Paris and London to that end should be sufficient."⁵ And Metz went further still, providing two different reasons in a letter of 24 September for its outright refusal to participate. First, as there were very few wealthy members in the community, no considerable sum of money could be raised without a large meeting – but that "would entail a degree of publicity which, for the sake of prudence, is to be avoided."

Second, there was reason to suppose that the very idea of the mission to the East would "not win sufficient general support among the enlightened Jews of our city." A significant body of opinion considered the bold step taken by the Central Consistory to be

⁴ Prawer, *Heine's Jewish Comedy*, p. 302.

⁵ Marseilles consistory to Central Consistory (25 October) CCAE.

by its very nature of the kind to revive the all too frequent accusation that the Jews, as a religious sect, are so dominated by sentiment for their own nationality that they cannot sincerely, and on principle, adhere to the nationality of their country.⁶

Rather than entering into an adventure evidently doomed to failure, it would have made greater sense to have publicized the scholarly arguments against the ritual-murder charge more widely.

That the consistory of Metz refused to follow Paris was probably no random phenomenon. The chief rabbi of that city, which housed the only rabbinical seminary in France, had come out in bitter opposition to the plans for synagogue and consistorial reform then being debated across the country. And the extreme polarization caused by his stance would doubtless have made it all but impossible to unite the community in support of any political initiative, let alone the Crémieux–Montefiore mission.⁷

At the same time, though, it is equally true that the fears expressed in the letter from Metz were far from unique. By no means did everybody share Crémieux's belief that attack was the best form of defense. Thus, in a report to Paris sent on 19 June, the members of the Gironde consistory explained why they had decided not to react publicly to the inflammatory article against the Jews and Judaism in the *Gazette de Languedoc*. To enter into a newspaper polemic, they feared, might well "stir up that fanaticism which unfortunately is still so very much alive in certain localities of the Midi."⁸

A resolution carried on 3 August by the Paris consistory (a body separate from the Central Consistory) reveals still more the doubts lurking just below the surface. The special subcommittee (with its seven members) established by the Central Consistory in June to oversee the mission to the East, stated the resolution, was duty-bound to keep tight control over all the relevant information to be released to the press and "to prevent those publications by individuals which, because of both their form and their content, have from the first produced an unfortunate effect on opinion in France."⁹ Although it was not said in so many words, the resolution should presumably be read as a direct criticism of the press campaign waged in April and May by Adolphe Crémieux with the backing of James Rothschild.

Still more revealing was the open clash that occurred at Crémieux's final meeting with the subcommittee of seven on the eve of his departure for Alexandria. (Among the members were Anselm Halphen, Émile Péreire,

⁶ President of Metz consistory to Central Consistory (24 September) *ibid.*

⁷ See, e.g.: Netter, *Vingt Siècles d'Histoire*, pp. 364–79; Berkovitz, *The Shaping of Jewish Identity*, pp. 212–13. (The chief rabbi of Metz was Lion-Mayer Lambert.) On the proposed reforms in the control and conduct of the synagogues in France, see, too, Albert, *The Modernization of French Jewry*, pp. 66–77.

⁸ Gironde consistory to Central Consistory (19 June) *ibid.*

⁹ Procès-verbaux de consistoire de Paris (3 August) CCAE.

Max Cerfbeer, and Anselm Rothschild.) The profound anxieties produced by the fact that, throughout, the French Jewish leadership was forced to act without the support of – and even against – its own government, here found acute expression. “Together with the keen desire to obtain justice at Damascus,” Crémieux also (as he recorded in his diary) found himself faced at the meeting by

a very profound fear that any move, even the slightest bit bold, could compromise the position of the Jews in France. A letter against our government was seen as an immense danger, and I was told very firmly that if Cochelet were to demonstrate hostility, whether open or veiled, I was not to make any protest unless it were approved by the committee. I had no choice but to declare in turn that I wanted to be in charge; that as a lawyer, I knew better than my clients – who are so numerous and are dispersed over the globe – what is to be done in their best interest; that as a Frenchman I would not be so mad as to gamble with our future; but that, delegated to a mission which placed me in a special, an eminent, position, I would not hear of being kept in swaddling clothes.¹⁰

How this confrontation was concluded, Crémieux did not record.

Beyond the borders of France, Crémieux’s line of policy likewise became the object of controversy and contradictory comment. This was made amply clear, for example, in the correspondence to and from the secretary of the Jewish community in Rome, Salvatore Scala – letters, which have possibly since disappeared, but were described in a most informative article, predating the Second World War, by Enzo Sereni.

Thus, writing to Scala on 15 April, the head of the Jewish community in Vercelli, Joseph Levy, argued that if all the relevant declarations by Innocent IV, Gregory IX, and other great churchmen of the past were presented in orderly form to the pope, Gregory XVI would probably issue a parallel statement of his own against the ritual-murder charge. Such an approach was far more reliable than any “other kind of publicity and than apologetics.” The danger of anti-Jewish violence in Piedmont, he added, gave ample grounds for “worry and fear – it is as if we have gone back two hundred years.”¹¹

The extreme disquiet of the Jews in Piedmont was similarly the theme of a letter sent at the same time to the Central Consistory in Paris by the community leaders in Turin. In contrast to Levy, they welcomed Crémieux’s forceful statement for the defense, but they pointed out that almost no French papers were allowed into Piedmont and that it was therefore essential to try to place favorable news or comment in the *Gazette de France*.¹²

¹⁰ AC, p. 3. ¹¹ Sereni “Hakehilah hayehudit beRomah ve’alilat Damesek,” pp. 219–20.

¹² From Commissione Speciale Israelitica del Piemonte to the Central Consistory (12 April) CCAE.

Censorship was very much to the fore, too, in the comments sent to Scala by a leader of the Livorno community, A. Basevi. A polemical dispute in states lacking a free press, he commented, would in all likelihood end up as a fight "waged with unequal weapons."¹³ It was, therefore, of crucial importance that in Livorno as in Rome it had proved possible to persuade the authorities to prevent all discussion of the case in the press.

For his part, Scala went further still, arguing that any counterattack by the Jews would simply compel "whoever has remained silent to come out against us in self-defense." He did not hesitate to attack Crémieux explicitly for having indulged at such a time in "sharp criticism of the non-Jews." Little faith, he insisted, was to be placed in the more secular governments of Europe, "which know how to command their artillery but not their own public opinion . . . which is always against us."¹⁴ His own efforts were concentrated on the preparation of a joint appeal to be submitted to the pope by the Jewish communities in Italy, and by May he had gained the adherence of Livorno, Ancona, Pesaro, Ferrara (and perhaps other cities, too). Ironically enough, Scala himself felt compelled in the end to compose a refutation of the ritual-murder charge, and it was published in one of the news bulletins under the control of Cardinal Frasoni.¹⁵

Much in this Italian correspondence had, of course, a very traditional ring to it: the appeal to precedent, the fear of publicity and public opinion, the consequent reliance on censorship, the attempt to win protection from the Church by quiet persuasion. It would be erroneous, though, to ascribe such policies simply to conservatism or to the thought patterns of Jewish Orthodoxy. Reflected here, rather, were the realities of life in the post-Restoration Italian states (apart from the the Habsburg regions).

In this perspective, it is revealing to note that Hirsch Lehren, the very pillar of religious Orthodoxy in Western Europe, chose on 11 April to send a long paean of praise to Adolphe Crémieux, writing that "we wish to express the unanimous gratitude of our entire, insulted nation for the fact that you have selected to undertake the defense for which your exceptional talents so uniquely qualify you."¹⁶ Living in the constitutional and secure context of Dutch society, he clearly found it natural enough to welcome Crémieux's dramatic counterattack – even though he would never have contemplated initiating so modern a move himself.

It is in the Jewish press that the confused, contradictory, and volatile reactions to the crisis can best be observed. It is true that in 1840 there were only a handful of periodicals, either weeklies or monthlies, which (among other

¹³ In Sereni, "Hakehilah hayehudit beRomah ve'alilat Damesek," p. 220. ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 221.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 221–2. ¹⁶ Lehren to Crémieux (11 April, no. 356) PvA.

things) reported and analyzed current events of concern to the Jewish world. All the journals were of the most recent origin, the oldest – the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* – only going back as far as 1837; and they were confined to Germany and France.

Nonetheless, the rapid growth of a Jewish periodical press clearly signified that there was a demand for journals that presented readers with material on all the major aspects of Jewish life. Their subscription lists were small, to be counted at best in the hundreds, but they provided a forum for those Jews who had received a general education, as autodidacts or in high school and sometimes also in a university, but who still retained an interest in the Jewish world either professionally (as rabbis, teachers, or scholars) or out of personal concern (as businessmen or professionals).¹⁷

The Jewish press had not been founded to deal with crises of the Damascus type. On the contrary, the proclaimed purpose of the journals was to inform their readers about the progress of emancipation; about the modernization of Jewish life and possible religious reform; about Jewish history, culture, theology, and scholarship – issues which, at the time, were held to be closely interdependent. But the Damascus affair could not be avoided; and in the later stages of the crisis, at least, it was this press that kept a relatively broad circle of Jews in France and Germany well informed about the unfolding events and provided a forum for a wide-ranging discussion of its significance. Among the many factors that distinguished the crisis of 1840 from earlier such episodes, the existence of a Jewish press, however inexperienced, was perhaps the most significant.

Understandably enough, the news of the ritual-murder cases in Damascus and Rhodes threw the editors of the five major periodicals (four in Germany, one in France) sharply off balance. It is evident that they were, for the most part, unsure how to react to the fact that so many of the major European newspapers had reproduced the story of Father Thomas's cruel death as if it were fully proven. When the dust had settled, it turned out that each journal had reacted in its own way.

At one extreme was the little known monthly edited by Mendel Hess, a university-educated rabbi, then thirty-three years old – the *Israelit des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*. As its name was meant to suggest, the journal stood four-square for religious reform, for conscious adaptation to the progressive spirit of the age. The editor saw its role as essentially didactic. When faced by the ritual-murder crisis, for a long time he simply ignored it. Not until the June issue did the first, very brief and inconspicuous, reference to the Damascus case appear. And then, Mendel Hess chose to put a most positive gloss on the behavior of the German press.

¹⁷ On the emergent Jewish press: Mevorah: " 'Ikvoteha shel 'alilat Damesek," pp. 46–54.

"It does the sense of justice of the Germans credit," he wrote, "that the same journals which at first failed to declare the accusations baseless, are now ardently doing just that. Given that even in our days it is not uncommon to find negative opinions held by people about religious groups other than their own, we are happy to excuse the earlier credulity."¹⁸ He was referring, presumably, to the *Oesterreichischer Beobachter* and its satellite press; and, nonetheless, his judgment represented an extraordinary refusal to face up to glaring, albeit highly unpalatable, facts – most notably, the ill-concealed hostility of the Augsburg and Leipzig dailies.

At the other pole was to be found the *Orient*, a weekly edited by Julius Fürst, who had recently received a lectureship (in semitic studies) at the University of Leipzig (an unprecedented appointment for a Jew at the time) and who, like Mendel Hess, was then only in his mid-thirties. During the crisis of 1840, the journal developed all the markings of an incipient Jewish nationalism and it is, therefore, not surprising to find that Fürst reacted very quickly to the news of the affairs in Damascus and Rhodes. The first reports appeared on 11 April under the heading of "Medieval Accusations"¹⁹ (although, ironically, lacking independent material of its own, the *Orient* was forced to rely on the *Sud* of Marseilles).

Two weeks later, Fürst published his own full-scale refutation of the blood accusation, basing his argument, *inter alia*, on the fact that the early Christians had frequently been charged with ritual murder by the pagans – "and so this blood-thirsty accusation has migrated not only from century to century, but from nation to nation, from the pagans to the Christians and from the Christians, now for the first time, to the Muslims." Nothing could be more shameful, he wrote, than the fact that the French journals reproduced the macabre stories from Syria "without gloss or apology." And the "weirdness and absurdity of the situation is in no way reduced by the fact that these rumors are now making the rounds of all the German and French papers."²⁰

The two other Jewish journals published in Germany were left to occupy the middle ground. Thus, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, edited by Ludwig Philippson (a preacher, then a mere twenty-nine years old, in the Jewish community of Magdeburg), buried its first brief mention of the case deep inside its issue of 18 April. The following week the journal implicitly acknowledged that the ritual-murder charge had nevertheless to be taken seriously, republishing Crémieux's April article.

However, Philippson still found it impossible to admit the evidence before his own eyes and he put forward the argument that the French press had

¹⁸ "Geschichte des Tages," *Israelit des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (June), p. 111.

¹⁹ "Mittelalterliche Beschuldigungen," *Orient* (11 April), p. 109.

²⁰ "Damaskus," *ibid.* (25 April), pp. 125–6.

proven far more gullible than the German in its acceptance of the blood accusation emanating from Syria. "Germany," he wrote, "which knows Jewry better, laughs over it. The German newspapers at once saw things correctly and presented the entire case as a method of extortion by the pasha." (This was a reference to a short item first published by the Augsburg daily.) He concluded that, nonetheless, "however that may be, it is sad, sad, and cannot but upset our present [Passover] festival."²¹

At a certain point in mid-April, though, Philippson – whose reports from Magdeburg for some reason tended to predate the publication of the journal in nearby Leipzig by some two weeks – steeled himself to face reality. In an article, first appearing in the *Magdeburgische Zeitung* and reproduced in his own weekly on 2 May, he declared that the truly horrifying aspect of the case was not the behavior of some Oriental satrap in Damascus, but the fact that a

miserable, false and self-contradictory report . . . was taken up and transmitted by all the newspapers of France and Germany without delay, without waiting for officially authenticated information. As a result, the religion of Moses is once again, in our time, branded before the eyes of European humanity with the most terrible mark of shame. This cannot but arouse the greatest astonishment, indignation and revulsion.

Even then, Philippson still felt compelled to seek out the inner logic immanent within the chaos of the contingent – an impulse natural enough given the Hegelian and quasi-Hegelian philosophies of History then so prevalent. Rather than accuse the present age of failing in "justice and tolerance," he wrote, "it is preferable to look for some higher providential message in the unfolding tragedy." "We discern here the hand of Him who is all-benevolent and is omniscient and who like a father punishes in order to effect good." The crisis should provide the Jews with the redoubled strength to confound "the enemies of mankind" and to prove the simple truth. "With hand raised to Heaven, we shall swear that Judaism teaches nothing else but: 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18)." It was surely a "sign of the times" that the battle was to be fought out not in Syria, but "on the banks of the Seine, the Rhine, the Elbe." But victory, even if assured, would not come easily – "the road travelled by mankind is long, to the kingdom of love as to the kingdom of light."²²

Isaac Marcus Jost, the editor of the *Israelitische Annalen* – (published in the city-state of Frankfurt-am-Main) was clearly much less willing than Philippson to make a rapid readjustment of preconceived assumptions. Forty-seven years old, he had already achieved fame with the appearance in the 1820s of his nine-volume history of the Jews from Maccabean times to

²¹ "Syrien," *AZdZf* (25 April), p. 236. ²² "Magdeburg," *AZdZf* (2 May), p. 252.

the present day. Reared on the values of eighteenth-century rationalism, he waited a long time before treating the ritual-murder charge seriously in the *Annales*. The first mention did not come until 24 April, when blame for the accusations was placed on the age-old traditions of the Christian churches. Referring to Crémieux's article of 7 April, the journal declared it unnecessary to place it in its "entirety before enlightened Germany. It is well known how much credibility should be given to newspaper reports originating in unknown sources."²³ In the following issues, Jost continued to downplay the crisis although he did provide space for the statements issued by Rabbi H. Aud of Munich and Rabbi Pinchas de Segura of Smyrna. "It is truly progress," he wrote bitingly, "that the rabbis, too, no longer suffer in silence and no longer refrain from standing up to opponents in a worthy manner."²⁴

It is less easy to trace the thinking of Samuel Cahen, the editor of the *Archives Israélites*, during the initial stages of the ritual-murder affair. The *Archives* was a monthly that tended to appear many weeks later than the official date. Thus, the April issue was, in reality, probably not published until the end of May. But it would seem that Cahen (the director of a Jewish school in Paris) decided at a very early stage that it was the task of his journal to defend the Jewish cause by the publication of as many well-chosen – meaning, favorable – documents as possible. In that sense, he was a loyal ally of Adolphe Crémieux and James Rothschild.

He himself, however, usually avoided polemics, declaring that the crisis was "a true anomaly in the century in which we are living" and that "to attempt to refute this calumny would be to insult the good sense of Christianity."²⁵ The journal did not join Crémieux in a frontal attack on the French press, although it did rebuke the *Gazette de France* for having published the case against, but not the case for, the Jews – thus endangering the Jewish communities in Piedmont (which, as already noted, did not import any other major French paper).²⁶ And the *Archives* also reprinted an article from a Protestant paper critical of the treatment of the Damascus affair by the newspapers in France.²⁷

Cahen chose, rather, to assume that in the last resort, France would inevitably come out in defense of the Jewish cause. Indeed, what appears to have worried him most was the fear that the Central Consistory would decide to stand aside – yet another indication suggesting that Heine's skepticism in regard to that institution had not been entirely misplaced. "We, therefore," wrote Cahen,

²³ "Nachrichten und Korrespondenzen," *LA* (24 April), p. 150.

²⁴ *Ibid.* (1 May), p. 157.

²⁵ "Persécution Exercée contre les Juifs en Orient," *AI*, p. 207.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

²⁷ *L'Espérance* qu. in *AI*, pp. 220–1.

urge the Central Consistory to make an approach [to the government] which no liberal ministry can fail to take under serious consideration. And if it is said . . . that we [Jews] are Frenchmen, that we no longer form a people, and that we cannot busy ourselves with events elsewhere, . . . then we would have to reply that such an answer is not French. If [it] . . . does not concern you as Jews, then at least let it concern you as men. France had tears and money for Greece and Poland . . . ; it would be worthy of her also to raise her voice in favor of the millions of Jews in the East. For the [French] Jews that is a duty. . . . All the French Jews at this moment have their eyes fixed on the Central Consistory, and are counting on the support of the government.²⁸

A poem in the same issue of the *Archives*, dedicated to the Damascus Jews, expressed total confidence in the French response; the following lines are typical:

Israël, Israël! au sein de ta souffrance,
 Tourne tes yeux mourants vers la terre de France. . . .
 La France est aujourd'hui cette terre promise,
 Dont ce parlait jadis ton prophète Moïse.²⁹

As more and more facts about the ritual-murder affairs in Damascus and Rhodes, with all their myriad ramifications in Europe, became public knowledge, so the Jewish press carried a growing variety of related news, comment, and assessment. The picture reflected there during the months from May to October was nothing less than kaleidoscopic in its frequent change of tone and emphasis. In seeking to describe or evaluate the constant flow of information, the writers – editors, correspondents – often gave free rein to dark, pessimistic judgments and fears. Clashes of opinion on occasion became exceptionally harsh.

But, at the same time, the underlying faith in progress, in the essential rationality of the modern age, was not to be easily shaken off by journals that had all been founded in accord with precisely that faith. The clash between a deeply rooted system of beliefs and harsh reality was palpable. As so often in cases of cognitive dissonance, the drive to neutralize the psychological impact of the negative facts, to find new foundations for the old credo, was constantly at work.

The blackest despair found expression in the journals of Jost and Philippson during late spring. The incipient nationalism of Fürst served to cushion

²⁸ *AI*, p. 223.

²⁹ Antoni Deschamps, "Aux Juifs d'Orient et aux Habitants de Damas," *ibid.*, p. 224.
 O Israel, Israel in the midst of pain
 Turn your dying eyes to the land of France . . .
 France is that promised land today
 The Land of which your Prophet, Moses, told long ago.

the shock of the incoming news. Mendel Hess was not willing to publish anything negative unless balanced by something positive. And Cahen kept his own comment to a minimum.

In a typical article, Philippson sought to understand why the press in France and Germany had adopted the ritual-murder stories with such alacrity, even though they had provided it "with an ideal opportunity to demonstrate the humanity of which it talks so much; to represent the innocent and to denounce injustice, tasks which it so often claims as its preserve." None of the editors involved could have doubted that to publish the charges originating in Syria was to play with fire.

You know the influence you have on the public well enough to realize that an accusation of this kind once made is not easily erased. . . . Such prejudices maintain themselves and mislead great masses of men. Whoever implants such ideas is committing a sin, too heavy to bear, before God and mankind.

If, nonetheless, the story had been so widely reproduced, there was only one explanation: "This is a matter which involves Jews and Judaism." Here was an excellent opportunity to bypass the humanistic taboos that normally granted a minority some immunity in the nineteenth century. "How welcome, then, must be the chance to discredit Judaism openly without risking anything oneself." And the truth is that no general outcry of protest had greeted the series of reckless publications. "Nobody is upset; nobody reacts except the accused, the Jews themselves."³⁰

And on another occasion, Philippson bluntly urged his readers to look harsh reality in the face. "We are still," he warned, "far from having reached an Eldorado of general justice and tolerance as applied to us. Because of the illusion that we Jews are finished with the horrors of the past . . . we allow ourselves to rest upon our laurels. It is time . . . to take note that the ground is shaking beneath our feet!"³¹

In the case of Jost, it is possible to trace his changing mood week by week. Abandoning his initial decision to downplay the crisis, he eventually produced his first major evaluation of it, still optimistic and positive in tone, on 22 May. He there elaborated on what he selected as his central theme — Lord Palmerston's assurance to the Jewish leaders in London that they could count on British support. It could be assumed, concluded Jost, that Austria and France were committed to the same humanitarian stance and this gave grounds for confidence. "Civilization," he wrote,

has arrived at the truth; the enlightened men who stand at the head of states no longer look on with indifference when cruel tyrants . . . mur-

³⁰ "Tages-Kontrolle," *AZdesJ* (9 May), p. 271. ³¹ "Deutschland," *ibid.*, (11 July), p. 401.

der the innocent in cold blood. They watch with paternal concern lest the terrible contagion carry its toxin . . . into the clean homes of cultured peoples, poisoning even well-intentioned nations with bitterness and hatred – until, even there, wild passions and blind fury start to rage. . . .

That this cognition has finally emerged in our century, providing mankind with a sense of security, is so important that . . . the terrible case in Damascus will be remembered for having given a beneficial impetus to the higher development of morality. It is seldom that a noteworthy advance in history takes place without many flowers being trampled underfoot.³²

By 12 June, though, Jost was writing along totally different lines. The stance adopted by Thiers in the Chamber of Deputies, taken together with the fact that the German intelligentsia (apart from a few exceptions) had proved itself demonstratively unwilling to rally to the support of the Jews, must have dealt a shattering blow to his self-assurance. "Where now," he asked,

is the demi-god needed to fight the Hydra of our times which shoots out its many-hundred heads each with its innumerable hissing tongues? The very spirit of Evil was required to create such a monster; and our century is fighting it . . . all in vain. A poison has entered the very organs of peace and love and who knows for how long it will continue to do its work. What good are the protestations of innocence, the reliance on justice and the confidence in prevailing morality, when innocence is held suspect, when justice is subject to error, and when the masses, so susceptible and, barely weaned from prejudice, are deceived by these phantasmagoria which . . . restore the thorns of hatred?

These words come from Jost's introduction to an elaborate refutation of the blood accusation first published in 1753 (and now partially reproduced in the *Annalen*) by a convert from Judaism, scion of a famous family and professor at the University of Vienna, Aloysius von Sonnenfels.³³ In opting to republish an eighteenth-century Christian defense of the Jews, Jost was following in the footsteps of Philippson who, some weeks earlier, had included a similar document in his journal (a formal declaration issued by the [Protestant] Theological Faculty of Leipzig in 1714).³⁴ A complaint now constantly heard in the Jewish journals was that nothing could be more demeaning – and anachronistic, in the nineteenth century – than this perceived necessity to

³² "Nachwirkungen der Ereignisse von Damask," *IA* (22 May), p. 179.

³³ "Eines gelehrten Proselyten unumwundene Erklärung," *IA* (12 June), p. 205. The plan of the prominent reform rabbi, Aron Chorin, to republish Sonnenfels' work in full was vetoed by Metternich, who (as Leopold Löw put it) was simply following the maxim then current in Vienna: "Speech is silver, but silence is gold" (Löw, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, p. 365).

³⁴ "Tages-Kontrolle," *AZdesJ* (9 May), pp. 272–3.

react as though Judaism were on trial in Germany. ("It is sad, very sad," as one rabbi put it, in presenting yet another analysis of the ritual-murder charge, "to have to write even one word against such nonsense.")³⁵

Naturally enough, some of the disagreements within the Jewish world produced by so totally unexpected a challenge found expression not only in private correspondence, but also in the Jewish press. Thus, for example, suggestions that the German Jews had not reacted with sufficient speed to the crisis could be found not infrequently on the pages of Fürst's *Orient*. It was there that Gabriel Riesser, the veteran, courageous, and much-admired advocate of Jewish emancipation in Germany,³⁶ found himself the object of criticism. Why, asked one correspondent early in May, had he of all people not taken up "the defense against those terrible medieval accusations which can still drive fanaticism to bloody deeds?"³⁷ And Fürst himself declared two weeks later that Riesser had inexplicably chosen to step aside, leaving Adolphe Crémieux as the preeminent "champion" of the Jewish people in the current crisis.

Fürst, likewise, lashed out at "the silence of the [other] Jewish journals" – a policy that he saw as "out of step with the times."³⁸ (In reality, by the time that this statement was published, it was only true of the *Israëlites des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*.) Yet another such complaint in the *Orient* was directed at the Jewish community in Berlin, which was reported as sunk in apathy toward the "Jewish nationality and religion." As few members of the community read the Jewish journals, they were ill-informed and "show themselves indifferent to the persecution of the Jews in Damascus as to similar atrocities which . . . take place in civilized countries, too."³⁹

However, it was in France, on the pages of the *Archives Israélites*, that the Damascus affair brought forth a truly harsh controversy within the Jewish intelligentsia – the exchange of views and insults between Salomon Munk and Orly Terquem (better known by his pseudonym, Tsarphati). Munk, a young but already eminent Orientalist, who would soon leave for Alexandria as a member of Crémieux's entourage, launched into an attack on Tsarphati in the June issue of the *Archives*. What had provoked Munk's ire was an article published in the *Courrier de la Moselle* by Tsarphati, a doctor in Metz, who had achieved fame (or notoriety) since the 1820s because of his outspoken calls for the most radical reform of Judaism.⁴⁰

³⁵ S. W. Rosenfeldt (Bamberg), "Erklärung und Antrag eines Rabbinen über denselben Gegenstand," *IA* (12 June), p. 208.

³⁶ On Riesser, e.g.: Rinnot, "Gabriel Riesser." ³⁷ "Deutschland," *Orient* (9 May), p. 142.

³⁸ "Damaskus," *ibid.* (23 May), p. 157.

³⁹ "Deutschland," *ibid.*, (26 September), pp. 299–300.

⁴⁰ On Munk, e.g.: Schwab, *Salomon Munk*; on Terquem: Berkovitz, *The Shaping of Jewish Identity*, pp. 118–26, 137–9.

In a sharp jab at the established liturgy, Tsarphati had asked in his article who was intended as the object of the imprecation in the Passover Haggadah: "Pour forth thy wrath on the nations [*goyim*] who know Thee not." Not replying directly himself, he had left it to his readers to assume that this was a curse called down upon the Christian world. Munk, who as an impassioned disciple of German Idealist philosophy and theology – he came originally from Germany – had no patience for Voltairean rationalism, took up the challenge. The passage in the Haggadah, he wrote, was taken from the Psalms,⁴¹ doubtless selected by the medieval rabbis to use against the Crusaders who, "with their monomania for conversion and thirst for blood, wanted to make their crimes into a sacred mission."

That was understandable enough. What could not be understood so easily was the fact that

Mr. Tsarphati, shocked and injured in his sentiments of love and charity, is denouncing the Jews to public opinion. And what moment did he choose for that? – the moment when the hoary myth about the use of Christian blood to celebrate the Passover festival has risen again like a spectre from the tomb; when this horrendous fable has been carried by the Christians into the midst of a people which hitherto has known no other stories but the harmless "Thousand and One Nights"; when the gruesome details of an imaginary murder are complaisantly described by all the newspapers without a sign of doubt; when a representative of the French nation is accused of the most cowardly, barbaric behavior – and yet the minister of foreign affairs does not deign to find out the truth . . . or to utter a word [from] the national tribune against the hangmen come from France.

There could be no excuse, concluded Munk, for such an act of betrayal by a fellow-Jew. "Mr. Tsarphati stands totally unmasked . . . , has lost the right ever again to mix in our internal affairs, and has destroyed his prospects for radical religious reform with his own hands."

But the basic problem, of course, was not Tsarphati, continued Munk. It was France:

If the prosperity and distinction enjoyed by a few among us are destined to excite such base envy; if beyond the [hostile] ministers, deputies, journalists, there does not stand a nation more generous and intelligent than they, then we say to the Christians: "Take back what you have given us; you only paid a debt of honor, but it was torn from you in a moment of revolutionary fever and you have not yet reached that level of humanity which alone would allow you to see all men as brothers. Take

⁴¹ Psalm 79:6 (in the King James Version, "Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known Thee"). Cf. Jeremiah 10:25.

it all back, but leave us our honor, and do not profane the dignity of our faith with your blasphemy and slander."⁴²

For his part, in a letter published in the July issue of the *Archives*, Tsarphati stated that a full reply would have to await Munk's return from the Middle East, but, in the meantime, he could not but remark that "in order to conserve the *symbols* of separation, this Prussian scholar is apparently ready to sell off our French emancipation very cheaply. Such a sacrifice is naturally of little cost to a man who is foreign to our country and to our kin."⁴³

This controversy continued to reverberate in the *Archives Israélites* for well over a year. The editor, Samuel Cahen, and Albert Cohn both came to Munk's defense; and it emerged that he was soon to become a naturalized French citizen. Munk was absolutely right, added Cahen, "not to want emancipation if that meant to surrender the honor of his faith."⁴⁴ But Tsarphati stuck to his guns. The Jews in France, enjoying the rights of equal citizens, had to be ready to change their ancient customs. The Passover prayer that he had quoted and "all the other similar ones are – in the France of the nineteenth century – abominations." Munk could not see this, but that fact simply demonstrated "all the immense distance which separates the feudal pariah from a citizen."⁴⁵

As the ramifications of the crisis appeared to broaden, so ever greater attention was paid by the Jewish press to the issue of ritual murder not only in the Middle East, but within Europe itself. Even Jost in his still optimistic article of 22 May had noted that because of the wave of incitement, the Jews of one community in Alsace had narrowly escaped assault by a local mob during a fire. And if that could happen in France, with "its free-spirited citizens,"⁴⁶ how much more dangerous things could become in the Polish regions to the east – at that very moment, after all, the alleged attempt at ritual murder in Tarnow was still under investigation by the Austrian authorities. And a correspondent in the *Orient* brought the issue still closer to home, pointing out (likewise in May) that "in Germany the blood accusation has been brought up six times since 1830 and each time the life of many Jews has been endangered."⁴⁷

Correspondents, writing from numerous localities, now began to report on the spreading public excitement caused by the allegations against the Jews. "In all the taverns, in all the beer-parlors," wrote an eyewitness from Glogau (Silesia) in May, "the blood question is being discussed – I mean, the

⁴² Munk's review of Israel Biding's book, (*Nikmat Yisrael: la Vengeance d'Israel*) *AI*, pp. 330–2.

⁴³ "Nouvelles," *ibid.*, p. 399.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* (For Albert Cohn's response: "Correspondence," *ibid.* [1841], pp. 314–15.)

⁴⁵ Ts[arphati], "Réponse aux Critiques de M. Salomon Munk," *ibid.*, p. 233.

⁴⁶ "Nachwirkungen der Ereignisse von Damask," *LA* (22 May), p. 179.

⁴⁷ "Deutschland," *Orient* (9 May), p. 142.



MAP 2. Ritual murder accusations, 1840

question of whether the Jews mix Christian blood in their Passover bread.”⁴⁸ Fortunately, as yet, calm had nonetheless been maintained. Similarly, a report from Galicia could state that there, too, “this nightmare has caused a noisy sensation and in some of the largest, most populous and important cities things have reached such a degree of hatred that brawls have resulted.” (According to this source, a new case not dissimilar to the earlier incident in Tarnow had occurred very recently – a maid had disappeared; urgent orders were given to find her before Passover; and “this instruction, which was deeply wounding to the Jews, was carried out to the letter; one looked, scurried around, searched, and in the end she was found in a brothel, having blessed the world with an illegitimate child.”)⁴⁹

In June a report in the *Orient* even threw some light on an area that was still largely terra incognita for the West – Jewish life in the empire of

⁴⁸ “Glogau,” *AZdesJ* (30 May), p. 316. ⁴⁹ “Aus Galizien,” *ibid.*, pp. 318–19.

Nicholas I. Writing from somewhere vaguely designated as "the Russian frontier," the correspondent noted that

the scandalous case in Damascus has finally reached here too, awaking in us the painful and sad feeling that, unfortunately, hatred and religious fanaticism are as ever enflaming people's hearts as in the time of Chmielnicki. It is hardly ten years since a similar accusation in Podolia led to the imprisonment of many families. And almost no Pesach passes without the joy being marred by some such tragedy in one corner or another of this great empire – even when the strict measures taken by the authorities do not permit the matter to develop.⁵⁰

Particularly worrisome in the long run for the Jewish minority, suggested the writer, was the fact that it had become fashionable to preach an exclusive Russian nationalism and to demand that the Russian people be kept untainted by outside influences. Another article on life in the Pale of Settlement described a meeting of the author with the survivors of the ritual-murder case in Velizh, who in the mid-1830s had emerged from ten years in prison totally impoverished and now had to live as beggars. Even though Nicholas I had since issued orders not to permit any more such prosecutions, another case, in Reziza, had been far advanced until "the truth intervened."⁵¹

Writing from Hungary in September, a correspondent of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* expressed satisfaction that no hue-and-cry had arisen there in the wake of the blood accusation. But he was not willing to draw any very encouraging conclusions from the local experience, still less from that in Germany. "Is it not possible," he asked,

that it is only our modest demeanor which has made us lucky enough not to be treated as in Damascus? And who knows? Are we so very secure against scenes such as those taking place in Damascus? *Odi profanum vulgus!* We still remember how not so long ago the highly educated land of Germany was occupied with the story of "Hep! hep!" And we know how it is behaving now with its quick wits; how it is waiting for the wink from the criminals in the [Middle] East in order . . . slowly to starve the Jews out – or, what comes to the same thing, in order to prevent their earning either bread or honor, without which man cannot live.⁵²

⁵⁰ "Russland (Russische Grenze)," *ibid.* (20 June), p. 196. (News of the Damascus affair first reached Odessa not from Europe, but from Palestine. In response, one of the leading Jews in the city sent copies of I. B. Levinsohn's book of 1837 refuting the blood libel, *Efes Damim*, to Palestine [Natanzon, *Beer Yizhak*, p. 99]).

⁵¹ "Getreues Bild von der Beschaffenheit der Israeliten in Podlesie, Lithauen und Reussen von einem Einheimischen," *LA* (28 August), p. 296.

⁵² "Oesterreich (Papa)," *AZdesJ* (24 October), p. 613.

In this context, it is worth noting that a report from Nuremberg to the same journal described how the growing number of Jews emigrating from Bavaria to America had been denounced as disloyal in several of the regional newspapers. But, wrote the correspondent, given the legal restrictions on Jewish marriages in Bavaria, many Jews felt that they had been left with no choice. ("How often has it been said to them: 'Go!' One important person declared: 'It would be as well if not a single Jew remained in the country!' And now that they are going and have to take leave, broken-hearted, from parents, brothers and sisters, and from their homeland, they are accused of lack of . . . persistence!")⁵³

With so much attention concentrated on the ritual-murder issue in Europe, it also became common to report on the hardy, and highly disturbing, survival of popular traditions linked to various historic crimes allegedly committed by Jews against Christians and Christianity. A correspondent in Galicia, for example, recalled that the Habsburg emperor, Maximilian I, had ordered the expulsion of all the Jews from Styria in 1496 because some among them had been condemned as child-murderers and that this ban had remained in force there, as in Carinthia, up until the present day.⁵⁴ Another article described the great religious festival ("la grande kermesse") held annually in Belgium on 24 March – "with processions, folk celebrations, businesses closed and museums opened, towns specially lit up and crowds pouring in from far and wide"⁵⁵ – in order to celebrate the miracle that had occurred in medieval Brussels in the wake of Jewish attempts to desecrate the Host. Similar festivities, it was noted in this same piece, took place every year in northern Italy, in the city of Trent, to memorialize the two-year-old boy allegedly murdered by the Jews in 1475 and later canonized as St. Simon. Such myths, argued the writer (probably Julius Fürst), could only serve "to maintain the old hatred of Israel and to nourish fanaticism."⁵⁶

And yet, despite everything, the underlying impulse of the Jewish press was to resist disillusionment and despair. It had taken the quick succession of hammer blows delivered in the period from April to June to summon up so many expressions of black pessimism from deep within the collective psyche of the Jewish intelligentsia. At the same time, though, it was only natural that the editors and correspondents were ready to seize eagerly on every turn of events that could be interpreted as in conformity with some higher historical or providential scheme of things.

Statements by the bishop of Magdeburg, Dräseke, and by a famous Munich professor, G. H. von Schubert, condemning the charges against the

⁵³ "Nürnberg," *ibid.* (1 August), p. 450.

⁵⁵ "Leipzig," *Orient* (31 October), p. 338.

⁵⁴ "Oesterreich," *AZdeJ* (13 June), pp. 341–2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* (7 November), p. 345.

Jews were widely reported in the Jewish journals. ("The competent judgment of a von Schubert, a Lamartine, or a de Laborde," stated a correspondent in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* on 18 July, "carries more weight than a thousand articles by German hack journalists.")⁵⁷ And Philippson had noted earlier "with great satisfaction that both the great powers of Germany [Prussia and Austria] are apparently acting as the first to restrain the Oriental brutality."⁵⁸

However, it was England that soon came to be seen as the one country that could, perhaps, restore confidence in the age. Every relevant event there was observed closely in the Jewish press. Thus, Lord Melbourne's hopelessly erroneous (or inaudible) statement in the House of Lords that England had taken no action in the Damascus affair had a mortifying effect on Philippson. And his subsequent relief when the opposite proved to be true was palpable. The speeches in the House of Commons and at Mansion House were fully reported. As anger mounted against the France of Thiers, so the stance adopted by the government and by public opinion in England came to be seen as exemplary. (The policy of the *Times*, which so disturbed the English Jews, was all but ignored by the Jewish press on the Continent.)

The meeting at Mansion House, wrote Jost in July, demonstrated that "all the noblest men of England in all the religious confessions"⁵⁹ were united in hope for the success of the Crémieux-Montefiore mission to the East. Sir Robert Peel's statement and the attitude of the British newspapers, we read in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* in July, "demonstrated clearly enough that among the peoples of Europe it is only among the English that the pure love of humanity is firmly and organically rooted."⁶⁰ And a subsequent article in that journal declared that "through the centuries, from before Cicero and Tacitus, nowhere have so many laudatory judgments about the Jews been openly pronounced as at the great meetings in London and Manchester."⁶¹ (The support given the Jewish cause by the English missionaries – the London Society and, above all, G. W. Pieritz – was duly noted, but somewhat downplayed; as a phenomenon, declared Philippson, it could only be considered "peculiar.")⁶²

However, doing still more, perhaps, to stimulate the hope that hidden in the crisis there was some lesson or meaning or providential design were the developments within the Jewish world. Crémieux's newspaper campaign, the

⁵⁷ "Ingolstadt," *AZdesJ* (18 July), p. 415.

⁵⁸ "Zeitungsnachrichten: Syrien," *AZdesJ* (16 May), p. 282.

⁵⁹ "Flugschriften über das Ereigniss von Damask," *LA* (24 July), p. 255.

⁶⁰ "Grossbritannien," *AZdesJ* (1 August), p. 443.

⁶¹ "Zeitungsnachrichten: Grossbritannien," *ibid.* (22 August), p. 481.

⁶² "Syrien," *AZdesJ* (6 June), p. 325.

lobbying effort by the Anglo-Jewish leadership, and, above all, the decision to launch the mission to the East came to be seen by the Jewish press as a source of light amid the general gloom. In Germany, the fact that the Hamburg community had organized itself both effectively and with much publicity in support of the Crémieux–Montefiore initiative was particularly emphasized (if only to compensate for the unwillingness of other centers to follow suit).

Even Mendel Hess in the *Israelit des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* could declare in the September issue that here, at last, he had good reason to break the silence which he had preferred so long as the Damascus affair had “presented nothing elevating, but only scenes of darkest barbarism.” Despite all the common assumptions, he wrote, the extraordinary efforts made by the Jewish elites during the crisis had now proved that “the indifferentism of our rich and our educated brethren is not so great that they shrink . . . from coming out in support of their brethren . . . persecuted for their faith.”⁶³

And Jost had spoken in very similar terms in July, when he had advanced the thesis that perhaps, despite everything, the three monotheistic religions would emerge spiritually strengthened from the crisis: Christianity less intolerant; Islam less cruel; and Judaism less inclined to continue along the path of “far-reaching self-denial.” The Jews, he argued, had been encouraged to defend themselves vigorously by the example of those prisoners in Damascus – some now “martyrs” – who

with fearless courage demanded justice and, in their deaths, bore witness to how far mankind had sunk; they inspired all belonging to the same faith with a powerful feeling of self-consciousness and with the urge to assert [their] innocence not quietly or patiently, but rather with loud demands that the truth be uncovered.⁶⁴

Similarly, an article in the *Orient* (doubtless by Fürst) noted that the crisis, as it stood in June, had left the Jews with no choice but “to rely more on their own forces, to take action themselves, and not to entrust everything most sacred to the politics of an English or a French minister.”⁶⁵ And the same point had been made forcefully by Salomon Munk in his attack on Tsarphati. “Let this cruel catastrophe, he argued,

serve at least to make us recognize our own isolation which is certainly cause for grief, but unfortunately all too real; let it show us that in moments of extremity, we are abandoned to our own efforts; and let the ties which once united us be reasserted. . . . If there are those among us who, out of egotism, declare that “the misfortune will not reach us,”

⁶³ “Geschichte des Tages,” *Der Israelit des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1 September), pp. 147–8.

⁶⁴ “Flugschriften über das Ereigniss von Damask,” *IA* (17 July), p. 246.

⁶⁵ “Licht und Schattenbilder aus der jüdischen Geschichte der Gegenwart,” *Orient* (29 August), p. 271.

they deserve nothing but our contempt; because it is better to refuse dignities and honors than to have ourselves exposed to infamous calumnies and to abandon the human dignity so dear to us.⁶⁶

The tone adopted by Philippson in the summer was less decisive, but he, too, stressed that the very active response to the ritual-murder affair had been essential even if it laid the Jews open to the charge of disloyalty to their own countries. "What," he asked rhetorically, "would people have said if we had remained silent!"⁶⁷ And in September he declared that even if the mission to the East were to fail – as then seemed all too probable – "we shall emerge from this [crisis] conscious of the fact that we have done our duty!"⁶⁸

In their news items, the Jewish journals similarly concentrated great attention on the Crémieux–Montefiore mission. Reports on their journey throughout Europe – they traveled separately across France and together by ship down the Italian coast – emphasized the extraordinary interest produced by their arrival in one Jewish community after another: in Avignon, Nîmes, Carpentras, Marseilles, Livorno. Everywhere, they were met with "enthusiasm"; "crowds pressed around them"; and in Livorno, "all the Jews were in the streets."⁶⁹

Likewise reported was the fact that prayers, specially composed to supplicate divine aid for the mission to the East, were recited during synagogue services in various countries. The prayer composed by the militantly Orthodox rabbi of Breslau, Solomon Tiktin, for example, was said to have been recited on a regular basis in many of the larger communities of Upper Silesia. Of this phenomenon, the *Orient* wrote that "it provides the best witness to the way in which the sense of shared Jewish interests is awakening among us."⁷⁰

Of course, it is not possible to obtain any real insight into the thinking of the most conservative and Orthodox sections of the Jewish people from journals that were all committed on principle to change of one degree or another. And, ideology apart, the fact that the majority of the Jews in Europe, most of whom still lived in highly traditional settings, were cut off in the tsarist empire made it even more difficult for the press to transmit anything like a complete picture of the Jewish world. But it is known from various sources that, as would be expected, the catastrophe in Damascus was often interpreted in Orthodox circles as a sign of divine retribution against Jewish wrongdoing.

⁶⁶ Munk's review of Biding's book: *AAI*, p. 332. ⁶⁷ "Syrien," *AZdesJ* (27 June), p. 371.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* (12 September), p. 526.

⁶⁹ "Voyage et Arrivée à Alexandrie de MM. Montefiore, Crémieux, Munk et des autres Personnes de leur Suite," *AI*, p. 503.

⁷⁰ "Personalchronik und Miscellen," *Orient* (3 October), p. 320.

At least one rabbi in the strictly observant community of Jerusalem, for example, blamed the Damascus Jews specifically for their own downfall, asserting that their lax observance of the laws of sexual purity (*nidah*) had called down punishment from on high. (Or, as he put it, "they transgressed in blood, and were penalized in blood").⁷¹ This accusation, doubtless, came naturally enough given that, in contrast to the strict (and penurious) ways of Jerusalem, a strong pleasure-loving streak was clearly observable in the lives of many of the wealthy Damascus Jews.

However, more commonly, blame was assigned to the Jewish people as a whole or in large part. Yehuda Alkalai, observing the crisis from his position as a rabbi not far from Belgrade, declared in traditional fashion that certainly "we have sinned [*anahnu hatanu*] against God."⁷² And the letters of Hirsch Lehren despatched far and wide from Amsterdam were replete with the idea that the Damascus crisis resulted directly from divine anger at the rapid erosion of traditional Jewish life. (Here and there, he also hinted that if the Jews only observed their own laws strictly, they would be less suspect of favoring strange rites.)

"Can this," he asked Crémieux rhetorically in a typical letter of 25 May,

be anything but punishment from God for the transgressions against the Divine Law which, alas, are increasing every day among our co-religionists? The Jews the world over form a single body; this is a miracle plain to see and one of which every Jew is convinced. The Jews living in different countries form the limbs of this body which has suffered maltreatment through all the centuries. No sooner does the ill-treatment of the Jews cease in one country than it renews itself in another; and all that remains to us is the Divine Consolation ([see] Leviticus 26:44). . . . The Jews do not observe the prescribed rules and their enemies say that they commit atrocious crimes. Let God . . . inspire the Jews with the wish to repent.

He hoped that Crémieux would use all his "brilliant eloquence" to urge their fellow-Jews to return to a strict observance of the religious rules. Then, he concluded, "the complete deliverance of Israel will come with all speed."⁷³

⁷¹ As quoted by Alkalai, "Minhat Yehuda," *Kitvei harav Yehudah Alkalai*, vol. 1, p. 221.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Lehren to Crémieux (25 May, no. 420) PvA. (Arye Morgenstern has drawn my attention to a letter in Hebrew, likewise from Amsterdam, but from an unknown source, similarly interpreting the affair as divine punishment [Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Amsterdam: file of various Hebrew documents].)

The religious polemics

The German Jewish scholars, Jost, Graetz, and Martin Philippon, all considered it justified to include an entire chapter on the Damascus affair in their respective multivolume histories of the Jewish people. But none of them chose to describe the many religious, or theological, declarations, arguments, and polemics that had accompanied the affair. Graetz alone mentioned this aspect of the crisis, but even he devoted a mere two sentences to the fact that the Talmud had become an issue of serious controversy in 1840. The historians preferred to focus, rather, on the alleged murder case in Damascus itself and on the multifarious political reactions that followed in the West.

It is true that, seen from some angles, this particular feature of the Damascus affair could appear not to warrant great attention. As far as newspaper coverage went, probably no more than one article on theology was published for every two dozen or more on the criminal case in Damascus and its political repercussions across the world. Indeed, most newspapers chose to bypass the exegetical duels of the time, with their often highly abstruse thrust and counterthrust.

Moreover, from the scholarly point of view, there was very little new in the arguments presented for and against the claim that hidden within the religious works of the Jews were the ordinances prescribing human sacrifice. After all, the idea that rabbinic Judaism in general, and the Talmud in particular, had to be subjected to minute scrutiny by the Church in order to lay bare every blasphemous, misanthropic, and criminal belief contained therein, had an unbroken history going back as far as the twelfth century. The ritual-murder charge and the anti-Talmudic campaign were by no means both of a piece – the thirteenth-century popes issued a number of Bulls casting serious doubt on the blood accusation against the Jews and yet it was one of the most prominent among them, Gregory IX, who authorized the famous Jewish-Christian disputation of 1240 in Paris that ended in the decision to ban the Talmud and to have the existing copies destroyed.¹ The

¹ On the Paris dispute and Gregory IX, e.g.: Rosenthal, "The Talmud on Trial"; Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the Thirteenth Century*, vol. 1, pp. 29–33, 240–3; Baer, "Levikoret havikuḥim." (For the contemporary Hebrew description: Eizenstein, *Ozar vikuḥim*, pp. 81–6, translated in Braude, *Conscience on Trial*, pp. 33–68; for the papal Bulls on the ritual-murder charge: *Die päpstlichen Bullen*, pp. 2–23.)

murder charge in the High Middle Ages, as later, tended to receive its greatest support from below, from broad sections of the population, and from local or regional authorities; while the assault on the rabbinic literature was undertaken by the ecclesiastical and scholarly elites. That perfect fit between upper-level demonology and the folk belief in black magic, maleficium, which fueled the witch-craze of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was never fully achieved with regard to the ritual-murder accusation.²

Nonetheless, the two forms of attack on the Jews, however intrinsically distinct – and potentially contradictory – had originated in the same place and time, Western Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and had ever since frequently reinforced each other. Most of what could be said on ritual murder as rooted in Jewish law had been said long before and was merely repeated in 1840. If the one side drew freely on Lucio Ferraris, Matthäus Rader, Johann Andreas Eisenmenger, and Johann Christoph Wolf, the other could turn to Shlomo Ibn Verga, Menasseh Ben Israel, Johann Christoph Wagenseil, Aloysius von Sonnenfels, and Moses Mendelssohn;³ and both were able to find forceful support in Luther's vast, vehement, but not always consistent corpus of work.⁴

It should also be noted that, for the most part, the scholarly level of the polemics in 1840 was not high. Anybody entering into this exegetical mine-field ideally requires extensive knowledge not only of the vast Tanaitic and Amoraic literature (the Mishnah, the Tosefta, the Mekhilta, the Sifra, the Sofrei, the Palestinian Talmud, the Babylonian Talmud); of the variant texts produced both in manuscript and in print since Talmudic times; and of the

² The possible interrelationships between ritual-murder accusations and witch hunts is the subject of historiographical controversy. Trevor-Roper has argued that persecution of the Jews and of the "witches" in late medieval and early modern Europe tended to develop in inverse ratio and "interchangeably" – in the search for scapegoats "either the Jew or the witch will do, but society will settle for the nearest" (*The European Witch-Craze*, p. 34). This hypothesis has been disputed, and it is a fact that in Poland, for example, the witch-hunts and the ritual-murder cases both reached their height at the same time (approximately 1700–40). For analyses of the historical research on the dynamics of the witch-hunt, e.g.: Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, pp. 1–32; Leavack, *The Witch-Hunt*, pp. 146–244.

³ Lucio Ferraris, *Prompta Bibliotheca Canonica, Juridica, Moralis, Theologica* (Bologna: 1746); Rader, *Bavaria Sancta* (Munich: 1615–27) 4 vols.; Eisenmenger, *Endecktes Judentum* (Frankfurt-am-Main: 1700; Berlin: 1711) 2 vols.; Wolf, *Bibliotheca Hebraea* (Hamburg: 1715–33) 4 vols.; Ibn Verga, *Sefer shevet yehuda* (Ottoman empire: c. 1550); Menasseh Ben Israel, *Vindiciae Judaeorum, or a Letter in Answer to Certain Questions Propounded by a Noble and Learned Gentleman Touching the Reproaches Cast on the Nation of the Jews* (London: 1656); [Wagenseil], *Johann Christof Wagenseils Benachrichtigung wegen einiger die Jüdischheit betreffenden wichtigen Sachen, worin (i) Die Hoffnung der Erlösung Israels; (ii) Wiederlegung der Unwahrheit als ob die Juden Christen-Blut brauchen . . .* (Leipzig: 1705); Sonnenfels, *Judaica Sanguinis Nausea, seu Judaismus de Usu Insontis Christiani Sanguinis Accusatus, Inquisitus et Absolutus* (Vienna: 1753); Mendelssohn in *Menasseh Ben Israel: Rettung der Juden . . . Nebst einer Vorrede von Moses Mendelssohn* (Berlin: 1782).

⁴ For summaries of the extensive literature on Luther and the Jews: Brosseder, *Luthers Stellung zu den Juden im Spiegel seiner Interpreten*; Sucher, *Luthers Stellung zu den Juden*, pp. 125–99.

post-Talmudic rabbinic commentaries and rulings; but also of the many ecclesiastical sources, primarily in Latin and German. None of the participants in the disputes of 1840 could have possessed all these extraordinary qualifications.

However, if the polemics are regarded not in terms of their scholarly originality, but of their impact on the public mind, there is no doubt that they were of the greatest importance. The accusation that their holy books, and specifically the Talmud, sanctioned ritual murder was perceived by the Jewish spokesmen from the first as the most dangerous aspect of the Damascus case. Such a charge made it impossible to treat the affair as a local aberration confined to the Middle East; it put Judaism as a religion on trial.

Thus understood, the stakes were high indeed. And even if most newspapers did not involve themselves in theological discussions, the fact remained that two of the most influential papers in Europe, the *Times* and the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung*, provided them with more than ample space.

It was in Protestant Germany, following a tradition going back to the Reformation, that the religious controversy attracted the most thorough scholarly participation. But in order to understand how devastating an impact could be exerted by such confrontations, it is preferable, perhaps, to turn to the *Times*. In June (as already noted) that paper had published a statement in translation by a Romanian monk, a convert from Judaism, first made in 1803, detailing the numerous ritual and medicinal uses to which the Jews put Christian blood. The *Times* had then stated that if this accusation were true – as it might be – “the Jewish religion must at once disappear off the face of the earth.”⁵

This same dire sentence was quoted approvingly in a long letter published by the *Times* in October from an anonymous correspondent in Oxford (a certain TJC), who spelled out a whole series of theological arguments in favor of the ritual-murder charge.⁶ And, in turn, the *Times* then declared that as the Jews, since the start of the affair, had been unable to mount a satisfactory defense of their religion, “there can be no alternative but to reopen the subject which our correspondent [TJC] seems to have done in a temperate and judicious manner.”⁷

Just how seriously the English Jews took the religious arguments was made clear in the response published on the very next day, 21 October, by Barnard van Oven. Inter alia, van Oven readily accepted “the assertion of your correspondent [TJC] that the doctrines of the Jews are (if we except the

⁵ [Leading article], *Times* (Supplement) (25 June), p. 12.

⁶ “To the Editor of the *Times*,” *ibid.* (20 October), p. 3. (The identity of TJC remains unknown.)

⁷ [Leading article], *ibid.*, p. 4. (TJC, it was there stated, had written “a very able letter on the case of the Jews of Damascus.”)

small sect of Karaites) the same throughout the world, and that Eastern Jews cannot be regarded as a distinct and bigoted sect . . . but are guided by the same laws and conditions as the Jews of Europe." The attack on the Jewish community in Damascus was an attack on the Jewish faith everywhere, and had to be rebutted point by point.⁸

Even though a few of the participants in the disputations of 1840 belonged to the critical schools of theological thought (Left Hegelianism, for example), most spoke in the name of established religions. Thus, the defense of Judaism was taken up primarily by mainstream rabbis; by respected, noncontroversial Jewish scholars; and by millennialist Evangelicals (both Lutheran and Anglican). The assault was mounted mainly by traditionalist members of the Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican churches.

The writers attacking the Jewish religion generally preferred anonymity, selecting a variety of pseudonyms and acronyms, but it would appear that the most prominent scholars in Germany known for their hostility to Judaism – H. E. Paulus or A. T. Hartmann, for instance – preferred to watch silently from the sidelines. Whatever erudition was displayed on the anti-Jewish side (the radical critics apart) appeared primarily on the pages of the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung*, whereas the Catholic writers tended to appeal more to the emotions.⁹

In this context, the analysis of R. Po-chia Hsia is extremely illuminating. Even when in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, German Jews were no longer being convicted of ritual murder, he writes,

the popular belief that Jews had actually murdered Christian children in the past persisted in collective memory. . . . In this process of cultural preservation and transmission, both Lutheran and Catholic Germany were involved. . . . In Lutheran Germany, this process took the form of the study of Judaism . . . ; in Counter-Reformation Germany . . . past Jewish "crimes" . . . served to fuel new devotional practices and to establish a bond between baroque and medieval Catholicism.¹⁰

Both these separate traditions, it turns out, sustained themselves into the nineteenth century and both left their stamp on the polemics of 1840. However, what also became crystal clear then (and, doubtless, could have been observed throughout) was that in many areas of Germany, as of Europe generally, the belief in the criminal rites of the Jews related not only to a vanishing past, but also to a very tangible present.

⁸ "The Jews (To the Editor of the *Times*)," *ibid.* (21 October), p. 3.

⁹ For an exception to this rule: "Feuilleton de l'*Univers*: Doctrines des Juifs sur la Haine des Chrétiens: Théorie du Judaïsme par le Professeur Chiarini," *Univers* (10 October).

¹⁰ Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, p. 208.

The mode of defense most favored by the champions of the Jewish religion in 1840 was to rely on the authority of the Bible. This polemical device was central, for example, in the earliest rebuttals published in April by the rabbis of Marseilles and of Smyrna as well as by Crémieux.

Above all, constant reference was made to the commandment oft repeated, particularly in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, forbidding the consumption of blood ("Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh; for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof; whosoever eateth it shall be cut off").¹¹ If, went the argument, animal blood was thus taboo, so, still more, was human sacrifice and even simple murder: "Thou shalt not kill."¹² Or, to take another passage (from Genesis) quoted in a formal declaration by yet one more German rabbi, S. W. Rosenfeldt. "Whosoever sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made He man."¹³

Appeal was similarly made to the New Testament, primarily but not exclusively by Christian opponents of the blood accusation. A typical example was provided by Alexander McCaul, an Anglican churchman and the spiritual leader of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, who in mid-1840 rushed out a book in response to the Damascus case. Entitled *Reasons for Believing that the Charge Lately Revived against the Jewish People is a Baseless Falsehood* (and dedicated with royal permission to Queen Victoria) it constituted what was probably the most effective work defending the Jewish case published at the time – expert, lucidly argued, ruthless in its exposure of the inconsistencies and absurdities on the other side.

No doubt, wrote McCaul, Judaism had repellent features, but no Christian should ever forget that Jesus had been a member of that faith. It was impossible to extrapolate a belief in cannibalism from mere exclusivity and a contempt for others. Had not "our blessed Saviour himself [said], . . . when the Syro-Phoenician woman applied for help: 'It's not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs' (Matthew, 15:26)"?¹⁴

The appeals to the Bible undoubtedly placed the traditionalist Christians in the anti-Jewish camp in an awkward position. They could hardly ascribe belief in ritual murder to the Mosaic law which, after all, had always been accepted by the Church as of divine origin, even though long since largely supplanted by the new dispensation. The Scriptures were one source that they generally preferred to leave unquarried.

Nonetheless, even the mainstream polemicists found it hard to skirt the Bible entirely; and various ways were found to suggest that, despite every-

¹¹ Leviticus 17:14. ¹² E.g.: Deuteronomy 5:17.

¹³ Genesis 9:6 (qu. by Rosenfeldt in his "Erklärung und Antrag eines Rabbinen über denselben Gegenstand," *LA* [12 June], p. 208).

¹⁴ McCaul, *Reasons for Believing*, p. 39.

thing, the murder cult of the Jewish people could have had its origins in Old Testament times. One method of dealing with the problem was to be found in a book hastily published in Bavaria at the time, *Der grosse Prozess gegen die Juden in Damaskus wegen Ermordung des P. Thomas und seines Dieners daselbst*.*

The anonymous author, writing in the spirit of Ultramontane Catholicism, developed a long-established theme, contrasting the God of love revealed in the New Testament with the harsh God of the Old – “the ally and revenger of His chosen people . . . punishing the other nations to the advantage of the Jews.”¹⁵ The question had to be asked, he wrote, whether contemporary criminality did not have its roots in the Bible, in that “hatred against everybody not belonging to the chosen people”? But having dared raise the issue, he drew back. “In this holy book,” he concluded, “there is no teaching, no law, prescribing hatred toward non-believers but, rather, it teaches one to demonstrate justice and love toward all men.”¹⁶

A somewhat bolder tack was taken by the author, likewise a Catholic militant, of the full-page attack on the Jews that appeared in the *Gazette de Languedoc* in June.¹⁷ He actually pinpointed some of the key passages in the Old Testament that could be read as prescribing human sacrifice. From Leviticus he took verses from chapter 27: “Notwithstanding, no devoted thing, that a man may devote unto the Lord of all that he hath, whether of man or beast . . . shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord. None devoted, that may be devoted of men, shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death.”¹⁸

And in Ezekiel he referred to chapter 39: “And thou, son of man, thus saith the Lord . . . gather yourselves on every side to My sacrifice. . . . Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of earth.”¹⁹ Of course, the writer in the *Gazette de Languedoc* hastened to add, a correct reading of the Bible would demonstrate that any literal “interpretation of these texts is undoubtedly false.” But what could be more natural than that the Jews, in their blind hatred for others, should have misguidedly found there sanction for their crimes?

The correspondence columns of the *Times* also produced attempts to link the blood accusation to the Scriptures. In one letter (signed by “A Clergyman of the Established Church”), for example, it was said that however sacred the biblical commandments, it was impossible to escape the fact that the Jews had rarely obeyed them – the Old Testament was one long tale of the “continued violation, by a portion at least of them, of their law.”²⁰

* *The Great Trial of the Jews in Damascus for the Murder of Father Thomas and His Servant.*

¹⁵ Yonah, *Der grosse Prozess*, p. 19. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ “Des Juifs Modernes et de l’Assassinat du Père Thomas,” *GdL* (14 June).

¹⁸ Leviticus 27:28–29. ¹⁹ Ezekiel 39:17–18. ²⁰ *Times* (26 August), p. 5.

Hence, the criminal rites practiced by Jewish sects could, despite their legal codes, be of the greatest antiquity.

Much less caution was displayed by the correspondent from Oxford, TJC, who almost casually came up with the rhetorical question (based on a verse from Leviticus): "Does the law of Moses say, 'It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul?'"²¹ Naturally enough, Tobias Theodores (a well-known Anglo-Jewish scholar) seized on this slip in his rebuttal, published in the *Times* on 5 November. The implication of the "Oxford man"'s question, he wrote, was clearly to carry the blood accusation back to Moses himself:

Then, according to this gentleman's hermeneutics, the Jews were in duty bound, for at least a millenium and a half, kings, Prophets and all, together with the founder of the Christian religion (who according to Christian belief lived all his lifetime in obedience to the law of Moses) to drink human blood for the atonement of their souls. . . . And as it is clear that this argument proves too much, more than the propounder himself wishes to prove, it explodes itself and the whole of his logical bubble.²²

As already noted, Crémieux made much of the fact that the Jewish abhorrence of blood was so great that a mere spot of it inside an egg rendered it forbidden food (a point already made by Menasseh Ben Israel).²³ But here again, as throughout these polemics, for every argument there were counter-arguments.

It was a fundamental principle of rabbinical Judaism, wrote TJC in the *Times*, that in order to fulfill higher obligations, the Jews had, if necessary, temporarily to set aside lesser ordinances. Even if, for instance, a baby's circumcision fell on the Sabbath, it still had to be performed. "If, therefore, the use of blood is indispensable, the precept to abstain from blood is neutralised, and becomes of no import."²⁴ (The choice of circumcision as the example selected here to illustrate a general principle of rabbinic law was hardly coincidental. Since the twelfth century, the ritual of circumcision, with its blood-letting and its covenantal, or boundary-setting, implications, had been associated with the murder myth – the Jews, it was often asserted, circumcised their child victims before torturing them to death.)²⁵

Moreover, continued TJC's letter to the *Times*, according to rabbinical rulings, food was only rendered impure if a nonkosher additive was greater

²¹ Ibid. (20 October), p. 3 (the reference is to Leviticus 17:11).

²² "The Jews (From a Correspondent)," *Times* (5 November), p. 6. (For the identification of the author as Theodores: Montefiore to de Castro [7 December] BofD [October–], p. 148, there referred to as Theodore; and Finestein, *Jewish Society*, p. 145.)

²³ Menasseh Ben Israel, *Vindiciae Judaeorum*, p. 4. ²⁴ *Times* (20 October), p. 3.

²⁵ E.g.: Desportes, *Le Mystère du Sang*, pp. 60, 65–6, 82.

than one part in sixty;²⁶ and therefore no problem of inedibility would arise if the human blood constituted only a minute proportion added to the unleavened Passover bread. "The Jews . . .," he concluded, "have tried to deceive public opinion and to mislead it, by setting up a colourable defence, destitute of truth or real foundation – a subterfuge to which they would not have resorted had any valid defence remained to them."²⁷

In the statement of the Orthodox monk first published in 1803 and re-published in the *Times* on 25 June 1840 under the title, "A Mystery Hitherto Concealed,"²⁸ there were listed six specific purposes for which the Jews employed Christian blood: as a cure for certain horrifying hereditary diseases; and as an additive to be mixed in different ways with the egg to be eaten by the bride and groom just before their wedding (a motif, it will be recalled, encountered by Pieritz in Damascus in early April); with the wine to be drunk after a circumcision; with the ashes made to commemorate the destruction of the Temple (on the 9th of Av); with the small cakes made for Purim; and, of course, with the matzot of Passover. (According to various popular myths, there were, in fact, still more such uses: in childbirth, at the deathbed, in certain ceremonies of the synagogue, and in the making of love potions.)²⁹

An obvious response to these accusations was to ask how the Jews could possibly obtain the lavish quantities of blood required to maintain so many rites. One letter to the *Times* from a Jewish reader estimated that for the festivals of Purim and Passover alone, two Christians would have to be "murdered annually for each synagogue. Now in this city [London], there are eight synagogues, so that sixteen Christians would be killed yearly."³⁰ (A similar calculation had been made by Isaac Ber Levinsohn in his *Efes Dammim* of 1837, which was published in English translation* by Louis Loewe in 1841).³¹ "The Jews," wrote McCaul along the same lines,

²⁶ An interpretation based on the phrase in the Talmud: "mishmonah beshminit" ("an eighth of an eighth") (Sotah 5,a).

²⁷ *Times* (20 October), p. 3.

²⁸ "A Mystery Hitherto Concealed and Now Published for the First Time," *Times* (25 June), p. 8. (This work, first published in 1803 in Romanian – or Moldavian, as it was termed in the *Times* – appeared in many later editions, e.g.: Neophytos/Neofit, *Infruntarea jidovilor* (Jassy: 1839) (later publications under the same title: 1871, 1877, 1922); idem, *Jidovii . . . hahamulu botzatu sau cîteva taine ale judoviloru* (Bucharest: 1871); idem, *Il Sangue Cristiano nei Riti Ebraici della Moderna Sinagoga; Rivelazioni di Neofito ex Rabbino* (Prato: 1883). (For biographical details on Neophytos [Noah Belfer], see the letter of Yaakov Psantr in the Romanian Yiddish journal: *Hayoets* [15 November 1885].)

²⁹ McCaul, *Reasons for Believing*, pp. 22–3; Daumer, *Der Feuer und Molochdienst*, p. 77; Desportes, *Le Mystère du Sang*, p. 84; Oertel, *Was glauben die Juden?*, p. 131.

³⁰ "Persecution of the Jews at Damascus," (From EHL), *Times* (29 June), p. 5.

³¹ Levinsohn, *Efes Dammim*, p. 111.

* *Efes Dammim: A Series of Conversations at Jerusalem Between a Patriarch of the Greek Church and the Chief Rabbi of the Jews Concerning the Malicious Charge Against the Jews of Using Christian Blood*.

are most scrupulous in fulfilling the requirements of their religious system. . . . If therefore Christian blood were required by the Jewish religion it would most undoubtedly annually be shed – and if annually shed, some one case, either in England or Holland or France or Prussia or Saxony etc. must have been detected, examined and proved during the last one hundred years. One such case is not to be found. . . . Does it not lead us to conclude that if the rack had been as little employed in centuries gone by . . . the execution of Jews for child murder would have been unknown?³²

However, there were answers readily available, often very old, to arguments such as these. Indeed, the twelfth-century chronicler, Thomas of Monmouth, in his account of the first (alleged) ritual murder – that of William of Norwich in 1144 – had recorded a story which bypassed the problem entirely. In his version, the elders of the Jewish nation assembled annually from far and wide, in secret conclave, in order to decide where the single murder for that year was to take place.³³ (But, of course, he had written of a crucifixion; the blood motif probably did not appear until the next century.)

The most obvious variation on this theme was to suggest that only a small minority within the Jewish people was still involved by the nineteenth century in this particular tradition: certain rabbinical families, or closed sects, or isolated communities. This proposition had already been advanced by Johann Eck in his polemic of 1540 with Andreas Osiander.³⁴ And it became the most popular theory in 1840 among the champions of the anti-Jewish cause. True, a hypothesis such as that removed at a stroke much – although by no means all – of the political and moral onus from the Jewish people as a whole, if not historically, then at least in the modern era.

As against that, though, it had the great advantage of plausibility. The mid-nineteenth century, after all, was a period in which many geographical regions relatively or wholly unknown to the West were being explored and numerous strange rites were being reported. The point was made in the press at the time that the knowledge recently gained about the Thugs in India – who did possibly sacrifice their victims to the goddess, Kali – lent a definite verisimilitude to the case against the Jews in Damascus.³⁵

Was it not very possible that what had been a widespread and well-recorded religious practice among the Jewish people in the Middle Ages had

³² McCaul, *Reasons for Believing*, p. 3.

³³ Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich*, pp. lxxi, 94. (Thomas apparently obtained the idea of a worldwide conspiracy from Theobald of Cambridge, a Jew converted to Christianity.)

³⁴ Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, p. 128.

³⁵ E.g.: "Syrien," *LAZ* (16 July), p. 2150. (Drumont would later argue for the existence of a small group of Jewish fanatics committed to ritual murder analogous to the "Assassins . . . , to the Skoptsy in Russia and to the Thugs in India" [*La France Juive*, p. 419].)

been abandoned in civilized Europe but not, to quote from the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung*, "in a barbaric country, at a lower level of education"?³⁶ Or, as Heinrich Heine mocked, "A great many Frenchmen are not averse to the belief that Eastern Jews drink human blood at their Passover feast; (it is out of courtesy that they do not credit the Western Jews with such a thing)."³⁷

What can be termed the theory of the "fanatical sect" enabled its adherents to dismiss out of hand a tactic highly favored by the Jews in mounting their defense in 1840: the solemn, usually rabbinical, oath. Crémieux, as already mentioned, had chosen at the very outset to reproduce both Menasseh Ben Israel's impassioned words and their reaffirmation by Moses Mendelssohn. Certainly, it is impossible not to be impressed by the awesome conclusion to Menasseh's oath: "If I lie in this matter, then let all the curses mentioned in Leviticus and Deuteronomy come upon me; let me never see the blessings and consolations of Zion, nor attain to the resurrection of the dead."³⁸

The declaration of the chief rabbi of England, Solomon Herschel (backed up by the Sephardi rabbi, David Meldola), published in the *Times* on 2 July 1840, was equally solemn. He had, he there stated, been a rabbi in England for nearly forty years

and for more than ten generations my ancestors have with great renown held the highest clerical dignities among us. Their instructions have been transmitted from father to son until it reached me, so that if any man . . . ought to be acquainted with all our laws, precepts, customs, rites and observances I may without the slightest tincture of vanity . . . declare that I am that man. Moreover, I am far advanced in life [and] . . . not . . . very long ere . . . I shall appear before the Supreme Judge of the universe, the Holy One of Israel . . . who on Mount Sinai proclaimed "Thou shalt not kill," and "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. . . ." I voluntarily come forward . . . and join in the awful oath of expurgation which . . . , in the name of the whole Jewish nation, was taken by . . . Menasseh Ben Israel, to whose efforts the Jews owe their readmission into Great Britain.³⁹

And Menasseh's own solemn affirmation then followed. (The parallel statement of the chief rabbi of France, Emanuel Deutz, seconded by many other French rabbis, was drier in tone⁴⁰ and was, it seems, never published – probably because the press campaign first launched by Crémieux and James Rothschild in April had been brought to a halt by June.)

³⁶ "Deutschland," *LAZ* (3 May), p. 1348.

³⁷ [Heine], "Paris (30 July)," *AZ* (6 August) (Beilage), p. 1740; (*Säkularausgabe*, vol. 10, p. 59).

³⁸ Menasseh Ben Israel, *Vindiciae Judaearum*, pp. 13–14.

³⁹ Hirschel to Montefiore, *Times* (2 July), p. 6.

⁴⁰ "Déclaration du Grand Rabbin, E. Deutz" (submitted to Central Consistory [12 June]) CCAE.

Nothing was easier than to declare Herschel and Meldola to be honorable men, while dismissing what they had to say as based on total ignorance of life in the Arab East. They were naive, and their oaths therefore meaningless. However, not everybody was willing to accept the logic of this approach, which exempted the Jews of the West from all suspicion.

In his letter to the *Times* of 20 October, the anonymous correspondent from Oxford (TJC) who, as we have seen, explicitly rejected the theory of the "fanatical sect," produced his own all-embracing reason to dismiss the rabbinical declarations. It was a simple fact, he pointed out, that the evening service ushering in the Day of Atonement opened with a communal prayer, Kol Nidrei, which read: "All vows, obligations, oaths or anathemas . . . which we shall have sworn . . . shall be deemed absolved." Nothing could be plainer than that, and given this avowal "on the very day which he [the Jew] considers the most holy . . . of what value is the oath taken voluntarily by Chief Rabbi Herschel . . . ! Of what value, indeed, is the oath of any Jew on any occasion!"⁴¹

The Kol Nidrei prayer had long been a matter of controversy, and Bernard van Oven, Morris Raphall, and Tobias Theodores had no difficulty in producing what was a standard response. The oaths to be annulled were those concerning the private obligations of man to God, not the obligations undertaken by man to man.⁴² Van Oven pointed out that this explanation was to be found in the standard prayer book as a preface to the Yom Kippur service.⁴³ And Theodores noted that even Buxdorff and Eisenmenger had accepted this interpretation as valid.⁴⁴

Naturally, none of this satisfied their opponent, who in his rejoinder argued that "a lame and unsatisfactory note by the translator" could hardly outweigh the literal meaning of a prayer which had to be "three times repeated in a solemn and tremulous voice." What was more, he concluded, when the routine explanations were presented to "the governments of Württemberg, Saxe-Weimar, and other states in Germany . . . [they] were so little satisfied that in their dominions they have caused this objectionable and immoral formula to be expunged from the synagogue service."⁴⁵

One area in which the defense appeared to have a clear advantage over the prosecution was in its ability to accumulate a large number of statements made by authoritative Christians against the blood accusation. This applied above all to Jews who had converted to Christianity. Historically, such proselytes, who had sometimes acquired deep knowledge of Judaism before

⁴¹ "The Jews (To the Editor of the *Times*)," *Times* (27 October), p. 3.

⁴² E.g.: Raphall, *Judaism Defended*, pp. 7-8.

⁴³ "The Jews (To the Editor of the *Times*)," *Times* (21 October), p. 3.

⁴⁴ "The Jews (From a Correspondent)," *ibid.* (5 November), p. 6.

⁴⁵ "The Jews (To the Editor of the *Times*)," *ibid.* (27 October), p. 3.

abandoning it, had often been prepared to deny the murder charge vigorously. Thus, during the famous confrontations in early-sixteenth-century Germany, Johannes Pfefferkorn, while waging a relentless war to have the Talmud banned, had at the same time declared the stories about human sacrifice and the use of blood to be absolutely false.⁴⁶

And reference has already been made to the key role played by Pieritz in the Damascus affair and to the dramatic declaration of Johann Emmanuel Veith in the Vienna cathedral. Considerable attention was also paid to a statement, brief, but along the same lines, issued during the Damascus case by August Neander, the famous professor of church history at the University of Berlin (a Protestant converted from Judaism).⁴⁷ However, it was Alexander McCaul who made by far the most effective, even dramatic, use of ex-Jews. In his book of 1840 he included a statement signed by no less than thirty-five such converts, who included a professor at King's College, London (Michael S. Alexander); a member of Queen's College, Cambridge (Israel F. Herschel, "formerly of the Duchy of Posen"); and Erasmus Scott Calman ("a native of Lithuania"), the well-known missionary working for the London Society. The majority of the signatories had been born, and many were still living in, Central and East Central Europe, particularly in the Duchy of Posen. "We the undersigned, by nation Jews," read their declaration,

and having lived to the years of maturity in the faith and practice of modern Judaism, but now by the grace of God members of the Church of Christ, do solemnly protest that we have never . . . heard of, much less known amongst the Jews, of the practice of killing Christians, or using Christian blood, and that we believe this charge so often brought against them formerly, and now lately revived, to be a foul and satanic falsehood.⁴⁸

The greatest weight was similarly assigned (as already noted) to the declarations made by many popes and Holy Roman emperors warning against easy acceptance of the blood charge. And Benoît Fould went to considerable pains in his speech in the Chamber of Deputies on 2 June to bring the significance of these facts to the public's attention.

Even here, though, the other side in the disputation was by no means easily bettered. The declaration of one convert that he personally, while still a Jew, had gained knowledge of the ritual murders as a fact, was sufficient to undermine the statements of any number of ex-Jews claiming ignorance. (Or, as Van Oven put it, "An Oxford man should know that it is impossible to

⁴⁶ Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, pp. 120–4.

⁴⁷ E.g.: "Magdeburg (12 Juli)," *AZdesJ* (25 July), p. 434.

⁴⁸ McCaul, *Reasons for Believing*, p. 45.

prove a negative.”)⁴⁹ After all, if only certain sects, families, or rabbis were involved, then naturally most Jews would be unaware of the secret. It was this paradox that provided the document of 1803, republished by the *Times*, with its great impact; however grotesque, it apparently represented a firsthand report from within the Jewish world. And in previous centuries there had likewise been converts to Christianity ready to testify, albeit with varying degrees of conviction, to the existence of the blood rite. In particular, reference was made in 1840 to the evidence provided in the works of two ex-Jews: that of Samuel Friedrich Brenz, published in the seventeenth century, and that of Paul Christian Kirchner (an ex-rabbi), published early in the eighteenth century.⁵⁰

During the Damascus affair itself, a Jewess by the name of Ben Noud (but known as Catherine after her conversion to Christianity), who had proved ready to provide details about the Jewish use of human blood, became the center of considerable attention in her hometown of Latakia in Syria.⁵¹ And, of course, Moses Abu el-Afieh's signed confession was widely reproduced in the European press.⁵²

As for the statements of the popes, they dated back to the Middle Ages and had not been reendorsed in modern times, except by Cardinal Lorenzo Ganganelli (later Pope Clement XIV) in his report of 1759. And however forthright the medieval papal Bulls, their effect was much weakened by the fact that Pope Gregory XVI was unwilling to issue a single word of support for them and by the fact that their republication in the papal and other Italian states was forbidden. Indeed, it is possible that Fould focused attention on the medieval popes during his speech in the Chamber of Deputies as a way of evading the censors in Piedmont-Sardinia – the *Moniteur Universel*, which carried the parliamentary debates, being one of only three French papers allowed into that country.

Furthermore, the effect of the papal declarations delivered in the Middle Ages was largely neutralized by the republication of late medieval accounts, based on Jewish confessions, describing in horrifying detail the murders that (allegedly) took place in 1462 and 1475 respectively. In both cases, the child victims had subsequently been canonized, becoming St. Andreas of Rinn (in the Tyrol) and St. Simon of Trent (in northern Italy). These acts of canon-

⁴⁹ *Times* (21 October), p. 3.

⁵⁰ Brenz, *Theriaca Judaica* (otherwise known as *Jüdischer abgestreifter "Schlangen-Balg"*) (Nuremberg: 1681); Kirchner, *Jüdisches Ceremonial [Zeremoniell]* (Jauer: 1716) (both works referred to as authoritative by Oertel, *Was glauben die Juden?*, pp. 127–32).

⁵¹ For the account of Catherine Ben-Noud, as reported by the Count de Durfort-Civrac: Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 320–3. (She described in gruesome detail a ritual murder that she claimed to have witnessed at age fourteen at the home of relatives in Tripoli.)

⁵² E.g.: “Die Juden in Damaskus,” *AZ* (13 May) (Beilage), p. 1116.

ization could only serve as a major hurdle standing in the path of any senior Catholic ecclesiastic wishing to repeat what had been said in favor of the Jewish people in the thirteenth century. Thus, Cardinal Ganganelli had felt impelled in his report to pronounce the cases of Rinn and Trent to be authentic even as he denied the general validity of the blood accusation.⁵³

If the Old Testament constituted the ideal ground on which to wage the defense of Judaism, the same could certainly not be said of the later Jewish texts. A letter, dated 20 June from Damascus and published in the *Univers*, commented on this fact: "Did you ever notice that the chief rabbis of Smyrna and Marseilles, as well as Mr. Crémieux, *always* quote the Bible and Moses as being Jewish law, and that they *never* talk about the Talmud. That is because it is the Talmud which delivers the *knock-out blow*."⁵⁴ This was certainly a perceptive remark, probably penned by Ratti-Menton, although the letter was unsigned.

Astonishingly early in the affair, as announced in a report from Damascus on 2 March, Sherif Pasha (doubtless at the urging of the French consulate) had already set three of the local rabbis to work at translating the Talmud.⁵⁵ Further, according to a later letter, very probably true, penned by Ratti-Menton on 22 April, Sibli Ayub had been offered very large sums by leaders of the local Jewish community in a futile effort to persuade him to stop the work of translation – which constituted, in their words, "a humiliation for the [Jewish] nation" – and to insure that no extracts from the Talmud be included in the juridical protocols.⁵⁶

And, indeed, the last thing that any advocate of the Jewish cause could have wanted was to be drawn into disputations centered on the Talmud. He would know, of course, that there was nothing in the vast corpus of rabbinic literature commanding ritual murder or the consumption of human blood, but he would be no less aware of the fact that the Talmud could serve as an endless source of quotations damaging to the good name of the Jewish people.

The Talmud, after all, was based on a dualistic concept of law, with one system applicable to the Jews as the chosen people and another system (or even systems) to the other nations, to the Gentiles. As the Provençal rabbi, Menahem Meiri,⁵⁷ had already demonstrated in the fourteenth century, it

⁵³ In Roth, *The Ritual Murder Libel*, p. 83. (Ganganelli added: "I do not believe . . . that by admitting the truth of the two facts of Brixten [Rinn] and of Trent, one can reasonably deduce that this is a maxim, either theoretical or practical, of the Jewish nation," p. 85).

⁵⁴ "Lettres de Damas," *Univers* (23 July). ⁵⁵ "Nouvelles d'Orient," *Quotidienne* (17 April).

⁵⁶ Ratti-Menton to Sherif Pasha (22 April) in Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 88–9.

⁵⁷ On Meiri (or Hameiri), e.g.: Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*, pp. 114–28; idem, "Sovlanut datit"; Urbach, "Shitat hasovlanut"; Katz, "'Od 'al sovlanuto shel R. Menahem Hameiri"; Blidstein, "Yahaso shel R. Menahem Hameiri lenokhri"; idem, "Maimonides and Meiri"; and Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew*, pp. 351–6. (On the radically conflicting ways in which nineteenth-century Jewish scholars sought to explain – and, in some cases, explain away – the Talmudic modes of exegesis: Harris, *How Do We Know This?*, pp. 137–263.)

was possible to describe this principle of jurisprudence as essentially equitable. A Gentile who abided by the basic rules of conduct prescribed by God to mankind, the so-called Noahide laws*, could earn his place in the world-to-come no less than a Jew.

But this truth could not disguise the fact that in the many closely printed folio volumes of the Talmud there were numerous rulings and passages that, if read literally, could only be understood as particularistic, discriminatory, xenophobic, and even criminal. The operative applicability of many such pronouncements had been set aside from the very beginning by any number of factors: the destruction of the Temple, the dispersal of the Sanhedrin, and the exile from the Holy Land, for example; or recognition of the fact that the Jews had no rational choice but to reach accommodation with their neighbors – an idea embodied in the general concept that the good name of the Jewish people and the importance of peace (*kidush hashem*; *mishum darkei shalom*; *mishum eivah*) could override lesser obligations.⁵⁸ Moreover, much of the Talmud was made up not of legal rulings and precepts (the *halakhah*), but of miscellaneous comments, sayings, fables, and speculations (the *agadah*) that lacked the force of law.

The fact still remained, though, that while the complex, dialectical method of rabbinic jurisprudence permitted practical reinterpretations of legal precedent, it was not possible, unless coercion from without was applied, simply to amend or repudiate the ancient texts. It was for this reason that German Jews had gone to such lengths in the eighteenth century to prevent the publication of Johannes Eisenmenger's highly critical study of the Talmud (which ran to some two thousand pages in length) – an effort which had ended eventually in total defeat.⁵⁹

That the question of the Talmud was to be of special concern to the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* first became apparent at an early stage. Thus, in the second week of May it published a succession of reports describing how the governor-general of Damascus had variously confiscated "all the mystical and religious books"⁶⁰ of the Jews; ordered the translation in triplicate of the Talmud; and declared that he was satisfied that the three separate Arabic versions, so far produced, were in agreement. A statement from the editors of the paper on 12 May announced that some of the material (retranslated into Italian) had reached Leipzig, "but its contents are such that we are

* I.e., The prohibition of idolatry, blasphemy, murder, sexual sins, theft, and eating from a live animal, together with the maintenance of a system of law.

⁵⁸ On the historical development of rabbinic rulings and interpretations regarding Jewish-Gentile relations: Y. Cohen, "Hayaḥas el hanokhri": Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew*; Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*. (Cf. idem, *The "Shabbos Goy."*)

⁵⁹ On Eisenmenger, and for a most lucid analysis of the basic issues involved in the Christian-Jewish conflict over the Talmud: idem, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, pp. 13–22.

⁶⁰ "Türkei," *LAZ* (7 May), p. 1361.

delaying its publication until its authenticity can be vouched for by experts in the language and the subject matter."⁶¹ (As it turned out, what had arrived, although this was never said, were the extracts from the eighteenth-century work of Lucio Ferraris, which had been distributed far and wide by the French consulate in March.)

The paper now also published a long article entitled "Eisenmenger on the Jewish Murder of Christians," which had been sent in by an anonymous correspondent (designating himself simply by his home region, "from the Saale"*). The author went to considerable lengths to demonstrate that he was speaking as an objective scholar and a humanist. He deplored the fact that, as a direct result of the blood accusation, "thousands of [Jewish] innocents were murdered in Western Europe during the Middle Ages." Similarly, he noted that even Eisenmenger had never claimed to have found any reference to human sacrifice in the Talmud; and he also reproduced an extract from Ibn Verga's *Sefer Shevet Yehuda*⁶² defending the Jewish cause.

But, at the same time, he slipped in Eisenmenger's damaging reference to Ezekiel, chapter 36 – "Therefore thou shalt devour men no more"⁶³ – and to the comment of Don Isaac Abarbanel (the fifteenth-century Spanish Jewish scholar), who had seen in this biblical passage an anticipation of future tragedies that would befall the Jews in Christian Europe.⁶⁴ He concluded his article with Eisenmenger's statement that as so many authorities expressed belief in the blood accusation, and as so high a percentage of child murders took place at the time of Passover, "one can conjecture that not everything has to be untrue. I leave it open whether it is or it is not the case."⁶⁵ Thus whatever his intentions, the overall effect of what the author had written was to depict the ritual-murder charge as entirely undecided, and to be studied with all due scholarly care.

It was on 20 May that the paper published the extracts (supposedly) from the Talmud which it had in its possession together, as promised, with the opinion of an expert who, as it emerged, was none other than the same writer "from the Saale."⁶⁶ Of the various blasphemous and criminal ordinances ascribed to the Talmud by Lucius Ferraris, the one most relevant to the murder theme read:

* I.e., the River Saale.

⁶¹ "Beirut (7 April)," *ibid.* (12 May), p. 1421.

⁶² On Shlomo Ibn Verga's work: Yitzhak (Fritz) Baer's introduction to *Sefer shevet yehudah* (ed. A. Shohat) (Jerusalem: 1947), pp. vii–xv.

⁶³ Ezekiel 36:14.

⁶⁴ Yitzhak Abarbanel, *Perush 'al neviim aharonim* (Jerusalem: 1956), pp. 570–1.

⁶⁵ "Eisenmenger über den Christenmord durch Juden (Von der Saale)," *LAZ* (2 May) (Beilage), p. 1306.

⁶⁶ "Die Juden in Damaskus: Von der Saale," *ibid.* (20 May) (Beilage), pp. 1518–19.

Tractate IV, chapter 8, paragraph 4: "The Jews have to regard the Christians as animals and treat them as such. The Jews are not obliged to display either good or evil towards the pagans; but with regard to the Christians, they are duty bound zealously to use every means, every ruse, in order to kill them; and if they [the Jews] see one of them on the edge of an abyss, they must instantly push him over."⁶⁷

(These same passages would be published as part of a report from Damascus in the *Univers* on 23 July.)⁶⁸

In his analysis of this document, the scholar "from the Saale," described as an "Orientalist" by the paper, declared that the extracts in question were not literal translations, but "in their spirit they are in agreement with many sayings and teachings of the Talmud." The issue, he maintained, was complicated by the fact that the editions of the Talmud published in the West had been heavily expurgated lest they provoke the wrath of the powers-that-be. Even the relatively complete edition of the Talmud that had come out in Amsterdam in 1644 omitted (because it was as too dangerous) the saying from the Tractate Sanhedrin: "You should kill even the best of Gentiles [*goyim*]."⁶⁹

Besides, it was well known that those passages in the Talmud that referred in highly negative terms to Ammonites, Kutis, or *goyim*, for example, were interpreted by later commentators, like Rashi and Maimonides, as applicable to the Christians. A typical instance was to be found in the famous codification of the Talmud by Maimonides, where it was stated that "it is forbidden to save a Kuti when he is near death; for example, if you were to see that one of them has fallen into the sea, you should not pull him out."⁷⁰

It could logically be assumed, continued the Orientalist, that in regions under Muslim rule the Jews used editions of the Talmud, published perhaps in Salonica or Constantinople, which were unexpurgated, undoctored, and, hence, still more menacing. All in all, he concluded, the Western Jews had demonstrated incredible recklessness in rushing to the defense of their brethren in a place like Damascus.

Other articles carrying the same message appeared in the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* in May, but there is no doubt that it was the analysis of the

⁶⁷ Also sent by Chasseaud to the U.S. secretary of state (24 March); for a slightly variant version: Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 395–6. (The text was neither a translation nor a précis, but a gross distortion of the supposed rabbinical original.)

⁶⁸ "Lettres de Damas: Traductions du Talmud qui autorisent le Meurtre des Chrétiens par les Juifs," *Univers* (23 July).

⁶⁹ See n. 72.

⁷⁰ Moshe Ben Maimon, *Mishneh Torah* (standard edition), *Nesikin: Hilkhot rozeah ushmirat nefesh* IV:II. (Medieval manuscript versions refer to Gentiles/*goyim* rather than to Kutis or idolators.)

Orientalist from the Saale that produced the most profound shock among the German Jews. True, anybody the least familiar with rabbinics would have realized that the Orientalist scholar lacked firsthand knowledge of the sources and drew his information mainly from Eisenmenger or Wolf. But they would likewise have known that the article contained references, however inaccurate or distorted, to passages in the ancient texts which showed the Jews in the worst possible light and which could not be explained away lightly.

Thus, Shimon Bar Yochai, the famous second-century rabbi, was quoted in the Talmud as saying: "You [the Jews] are called men [*adam*] and the Gentiles [or, in variant versions, the pagans] are not called men."⁷¹ The similar saying ("You should kill [even] the best of Gentiles"), likewise attributed to Bar Yochai, was not, as assumed by the Orientalist, to be found in the Babylonian Talmud, but it was in the accessible editions of the Palestinian Talmud.⁷² And it had been used as ammunition against Judaism as early as the disputation of 1240 in Paris.⁷³ As for the rabbinic discussions about whether and when, in strict halachic theory, to save Gentiles from drowning, they were hardly easier to defend.

That the attacks on the Talmud in the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* were seen as a genuine menace by German Jews became apparent immediately. On 22 May the paper carried a paid advertisement signed by "several Jewish businessmen" (they were clearly Orthodox and could not resist the opportunity to settle old scores with the reform-minded rabbi, Abraham Geiger). "We are less surprised," they wrote,

by the fact that some Christian scholars are seeking to satisfy their fanatical urges by the investigation of Talmudic passages long since faded from memory, or unknown, or misinterpreted, than by the fact that so many Jewish scholars have failed to provide an adequate response, using the weapons of truth and justice. The brilliant and learned Dr. Zunz is writing about old medals, and our Riesser remains silent; but, surely, there is one person who will no longer hold his peace – the most dauntless hero of our faith, Dr. Geiger.⁷⁴

In reality, there proved to be no lack of rebuttals, primarily from leading Jewish scholars, but also from a number of Christians, writing anonymously.

⁷¹ Yebamot 61, a.

⁷² Kidushin IV:66, b (also, with many variant formulations, in *Masekhet sofrim*, [ed. Michael Higer], pp. 281–2. For comments on this passage, e.g.: Graetz, "Beleuchtung," p. 486; Y. Cohen, "Hayahas el hanokhri," pp. 268–72.)

⁷³ I.e., by Nicolas Donin (Braude, *Conscience on Trial*, p. 52). (Donin also brought up the issue of "Kol nidrei" which, he declared, "nullifies all oaths and vows made to non-Jews"; Rabbi Yehiel's counterargument anticipated that advanced by the Anglo-Jewish spokesmen in 1840; *ibid.*, pp. 47–50.)

⁷⁴ "Bemerkung" (from "Mehre jüdische Kaufleute"), *LAZ* (22 May), p. 1540.

Zunz, Geiger, and Zacharias Frankel all published rejoinders in the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung*; and the Talmudic disputation took up most of a chapter in the large book on the ritual-murder crisis, *Damascia*, which Lipmann Hirsch Löwenstein managed to bring out even before the year 1840 had ended.

A number of very different approaches were adopted in response to the article of the Orientalist. The easiest form of counterattack, obviously, was to demonstrate that he was hopelessly lacking in the expertise needed to act as an authority. It was with manifest pleasure that Zunz and Löwenstein pointed out that "Jevamot" should be "Jebamot"; that *goyim* was a plural, not a singular; that the page numbers provided were meaningless; and that no editions of the Talmud had ever been published in Salonica or Constantinople.⁷⁵ (Ironically, for all their vastly superior knowledge of the subject, they were less than accurate with regard to the latter point.)⁷⁶

Löwenstein mockingly gave the Orientalist three months to find where, in the relevant tractate, gentiles were called "animals."⁷⁷ And he made much of the fact that this so-called expert had failed simple linguistic tests: "What! A scholar, a German scholar, a Leipzig scholar, and no etymology! . . . Not only no logic, no enlightened ideas, no truth, no toleration – one can let all that pass – but actually no etymology! That subject, the pride of so many German scholars, has to be denied the Orientalist from the Saale!"⁷⁸

A different way of tackling the problem was to produce passages from the Talmud and other ancient texts which, it was argued, were more representative of the true spirit pervading those vast compilations. In an article, unsigned but clearly written by a Christian (and published in the Leipzig paper on 27 May),⁷⁹ for example, almost a dozen such quotations were reproduced. Did not Rabbi Meir, for instance, declare that "a Gentile who studies the Torah is like unto the High Priest";⁸⁰ and did not Rabbi Yirmiya state that the gates were open to all good men, not just to the Jews⁸¹ – a belief grounded on Psalm 118 ("This [is] the gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter")⁸² For his part, Frankel recalled the midrashic tale of the rabbi who had made extraordinary efforts to prevent a shipwrecked Roman from freezing and starvation.⁸³ And Zunz insisted that "the Talmud accords eternal salvation to righteous non-Jews because it contains more

⁷⁵ Zunz, "Damaskus, ein Wort zur Abwehr," *ibid.* (31 May) (Beilage), pp. 1645–6; Löwenstein, *Damascia*, pp. 265–9.

⁷⁶ Various tractates of the Talmud, although not the complete complex, were published in the Ottoman empire in the sixteenth century.

⁷⁷ Löwenstein, *Damascia*, p. 268. ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 248–9.

⁷⁹ "Die Blutfrage des Judentums," *LAZ* (27 May) (Beilage), p. 1598. ⁸⁰ Sanhedrin 59, a.

⁸¹ Sifra, Ahrei mot, 13:13. ⁸² Psalm 118:20.

⁸³ Z. Frankel, "Erklärung," *LAZ* (28 May), p. 1618. For the account of the shipwreck: *Midrash Rabah: Kohelet* (Vilna ed.) (Kohelet/Ecclesiastes 11:1).

love than is to be found in the report of the scholar from the banks of the Saale."⁸⁴

Of course, it was not nearly so simple to face up to, and explain away, the damning quotations from the rabbinical texts now hauled into public view. For his part, Löwenstein sought his way out of this dilemma by following a line of argument not very different from that which had been employed by Rabbi Yehiel in the disputation of Paris exactly six hundred years earlier and by Jacob Antebi before Sherif Pasha in March and April.⁸⁵ All the violent denunciations of the Gentiles (*goyim*) made by the sages of old, he insisted, had been directed against the pagans and clearly did not apply to the monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam, which had renounced idolatry.

In support of this argument, Löwenstein turned to the thesis of Menahem Meiri: that within Christian and Muslim doctrine was subsumed an implicit pledge to obey the seven Noahide laws. Thus, the privileged status assigned by Jewish theology to any non-Jew (*hasid umot ha'olam*) who followed those laws was ipso facto applicable to God-fearing members of the two monotheistic religions – or, in Meiri's words (reproduced for double effect by Löwenstein in the original Hebrew), "Hence, it goes without saying that this is true of those nations which bind themselves to follow the ways of religion and ethical behavior [*beumot hagdurot bedarkhei datot venimusim*]."⁸⁶ (Such an approach was certainly venerable and legitimate, but what Löwenstein failed to point out was that Maimonides, for instance, cast doubt on its applicability to Christianity, which he tended to regard, because of its Trinitarian doctrine, as idolatrous.⁸⁷ And, arguing against Antebi in the governor-general's serail, Moses Abu el-Afieh had maintained vigorously that all the rabbinic exemptions made in favor of the monotheistic religions were simple "falsehoods introduced for fear of the Gentiles.")⁸⁸

In his rebuttal, Leopold Zunz sought to turn the tables on the Orientalist of the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* with less all-encompassing arguments. To take one such instance, he held that, if seen in context, the phrase "You should kill [even] the best of Gentiles" was clearly hyperbolic and not to be taken seriously because it was preceded by the words "[And] the best of doctors are condemned to hell."

⁸⁴ Zunz, "Damaskus, ein Wort zur Abwehr," *LAZ* (31 May) (Beilage), p. 1646.

⁸⁵ Löwenstein, *Damascia*, pp. 285–6. (Cf. Rabbi Yehiel: "I will tell you [the Christians] what can give you salvation even according to your own belief; if you heed the seven [Noahide] precepts." [Braude, *Conscience on Trial*, p. 58]; Antebi: "And I would reply that what was written there [in the Talmud] referred to the Gentiles of ancient times who were pagans and did not believe that there was a God in the world." (Elhalil, "Te'udah mekorit," p. 44).)

⁸⁶ Löwenstein, *Damascia*, p. 287.

⁸⁷ On Maimonides' approach to Christianity and Islam, e.g.: Twersky, *Introduction to the Code*, pp. 452–3.

⁸⁸ Elhalil, "Te'udah mekorit," p. 45.

Again, he wrote, it was true that Maimonides in his legal codification had ruled that a *goy*, in danger of drowning, should not be rescued. That was, indeed, highly uncharitable. But what the scholar from the Saale had overlooked was that in the very same passage, Maimonides had made it plain that, according to Jewish law, no active step could be taken to further the death of a Gentile. "Thus murder, whether direct or indirect, is forbidden; and the question of the murder of the best of Gentiles disappears; and the charge that Jews slaughter Christians is revealed in all its nakedness as false."⁸⁹

Following yet another tack, nearly all the opponents of the scholar from the Saale appealed to historical relativism as perhaps the most effective type of advocacy. Was it the least surprising, asked Frankel, that the medieval Jews, so "contemptuously oppressed, did not speak well of their oppressors?" And Zunz pointed out that Shimon Bar Yochai had been forced to live through the period of "terrible persecutions perpetrated by the Romans."

In polemics of this kind, the most obvious form of defense is attack; but there was an understandable reluctance on the part of the Jewish scholars to launch a frontal assault on Christian doctrine, church history, or ecclesiastical intolerance. That said, however, it is likewise true that they did not always consider it necessary, or perhaps even possible, to restrain themselves entirely. "How the Church Fathers," noted the usually controlled Frankel, "let themselves loose against their enemies." And Zunz was even more outspoken in addressing the Orientalist from the Saale: "When the Jew sees that you are now treating him just as he has been treated over the centuries, should he not conclude that Christians are permitted to kill Jews?"⁹⁰

But it fell to Löwenstein, who allowed his anger almost full rein, to go farthest in this direction. Christians, he stated, had been responsible for the religious persecutions in Damascus, and

it was Christian teachings and dogmas which very probably constituted the root cause of this blood-soaked horror. We realize the full import of such a statement and are no less aware of the external and the intellectual power which the ruling churches can bring to bear were they erroneously to interpret our statement as an attack upon them. . . . But the power of truth is at all times greater still. . . .

Which religion was it that made its primary dogma the belief in sin; in sin [absolved] through blood; through human blood; finally, through the blood and suffering of a totally innocent man?⁹¹

If the ritual-murder charge in Syria had been directed at the Christians instead of at the Jews, what could have been more natural than to assert that

⁸⁹ Zunz, "Damaskus, ein Wort zur Abwehr," *LAZ* (31 May) (Beilage), p. 1646.

⁹⁰ Frankel in *LAZ* (25 May), p. 1618; Zunz, *ibid.* (31 May) (Beilage), p. 1646.

⁹¹ Löwenstein, *Damascia*, pp. 385-6.

human blood had been required "to mix with the wine and the Host for the mass"?⁹² After all, had not Jesus, as reported by Matthew, declared that the disciples should eat the bread, for "this is my body," and drink the wine, "for this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins"?⁹³ And Löwenstein developed this explosive theme over some twenty-five pages.

It was the good fortune of the German Jews that nobody with anything near the erudition of Eisenmenger entered the lists against them in these disputations. The Orientalist from the Saale did attempt a reply to Zacharias Frankel, but he could do no more than produce a series of (unreliable) quotations from secondary sources. What was now urgently needed, he concluded, was a complete and accurate translation of the Talmud into German in order that the issue of Jewish emancipation could be objectively judged.⁹⁴

The author of *Der grosse Prozess gegen die Juden in Damaskus* was still less equipped to debate at a high scholarly level. But he did include in the book a long extract from a Bavarian paper, the *Fränkische Kurier*, which took strong objection to Zunz's hypothesis that Ratti-Menton ("a second Haman") and Francis of Sardinia (an "ambitious . . . apostolic missionary") had smuggled Father Thomas alive and well out of Damascus in order to create "a lucrative saint." Such language was nothing less than "that extreme and, indeed, impolitic insolence with which a Jew [*ein Jude*] . . . permits himself to launch the most impertinent attacks against Christianity and specifically against the Catholic religion." Was not Zunz's aim in all this "to recruit the Protestants against the Catholics under a Jewish banner"?⁹⁵

As already noted, the traditionalist polemicists challenging Judaism were for the most part reluctant to do anything more than hint at a possible link between modern-day ritual murder and the Old Testament. They chose not to respond to the question where the Jews had found the blood required by their religion in the millennium before Christianity. And they were hardly more forthcoming when asked (by Joseph Salvador, for example)⁹⁶ why the blood accusation had first been leveled persistently by the Romans not against the Jews, but against the early Christians; and why it had taken over one thousand years after the death of Jesus until it was turned against Judaism.

These questions, however, were of the greatest interest to some members

⁹² Ibid., pp. 390-1. ⁹³ Matthew 26:26, 28.

⁹⁴ "Erwiderung," *LAZ* (28 May), p. 1618. Explaining his plan shortly thereafter, to translate the Talmud into German, a leading Jewish scholar referred specifically to the Damascus affair, and to 1840 as "one of the most fateful years through which the Jews have ever had to live." (E. M. Pinner, "Vorrede," *Talmud Babli: Babylonischer Talmud; Tractat Berachot, Segensprüche. Mit deutscher Uebersetzung*, vol. 1, [Berlin: 1842], p. 7).

⁹⁵ Yonah, *Der grosse Prozess*, pp. 35-6. ⁹⁶ [Salvador to the editor], *JdesD* (12 May).

of the radical school of biblical criticism and theological iconoclasm, which by 1840 had already succeeded in creating major scandals in Germany and beyond. David Friedrich Strauss's *Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* had been published in 1835 (and Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* would follow in 1841). In the aspiration of the critical school to subject sacrosanct beliefs to a fearless and anthropocentric reexamination, the joint influence of both Voltaire and Hegel was strongly felt.

A letter to the *Times*, signed "Sigma" and published in August, clearly reflected this rebellious spirit. The correspondent assembled a large number of passages from the Old Testament which, he argued, made it obvious that human sacrifice had been commonly practiced by the Jews in biblical times. In addition to the verses already mentioned from Leviticus and Ezekiel, he also recalled how Jephtha had sacrificed his daughter,⁹⁷ and how Samuel had "hewed King Agag in pieces, though Saul spared him, and for his improper clemency, Saul was reprov'd by the Lord and forfeited his kingdom."⁹⁸

Furthermore, he asked, if

the Egyptians, Chaldeans and Greeks had their human sacrifices [and] these were the enlightened nations, how could the Jews, an ignorant, stiff-necked and idolatrous people, as their whole history attests, escape . . . so bright an example? . . . The religion of the Jews was . . . essentially a bloody one and . . . [their] altars not only reek[ed] with the blood of sheep, goats and oxen, but the sanguine stream of human victims also crimsoned the astounded earth and flowed in propitiation to Jehovah.

His conclusion was unambiguous: "If a Jew really and implicitly believed every word of the Old Testament, how could he in his secret mind believe human sacrifice a crime, acting according to the text[s] I have quoted, no matter how he may outwardly conform to the civil institutions . . . of the country in which he lives?"⁹⁹

By the next day, a response (from "A Christian") had already made its appearance in the *Times*. It seemed, stated the writer, that "under the pressure of business which engrosses your time," the editor had permitted the publication of a letter which "under a very thin disguise make[s] a most offensive attack upon the religion of the Old Testament, which is as much a part of the faith of Christians as of Jews." He proceeded to argue verse for verse with the correspondent of the day before (Jephtha's daughter had been condemned to lifelong celibacy, not to death; the firstborn sons were redeemed, not sacrificed). "It requires," he asserted,

but a slender knowledge of the neological – I should rather say, infidel – school of modern Germany to recognize its worst doctrines in the letter

⁹⁷ Judges 11:30–40. ⁹⁸ 1 Samuel 15.

⁹⁹ "To the Editor of the *Times*, (From Sigma)," *Times* (17 August), p. 3.

of [yesterday]; and I am happy in the conviction produced by the imperfect acquaintances with our language so manifest in his letter, that the writer himself is not one of our countrymen.¹⁰⁰

In Germany itself, the Damascus case served as a major stimulus to the development of what was occasionally called the Nuremberg school of biblical studies, referring to two scholars of that city: Georg Friedrich Daumer and Friedrich Wilhelm Ghillany. They were both well trained in Protestant theology, but had come into growing conflict with the Lutheran Church during the 1830s. Since 1835 Daumer had begun to elaborate more and more on the theme that would eventually become perhaps the main hallmark of their published work: the idea that the God of the Old Testament Jews, Jehovah, and the gods of the surrounding peoples, Moloch and Baal, were in reality nothing more than a single deity insatiable in its demand for human blood. Not until the Babylonian exile in the sixth century B.C., did Judaism begin to shake off this ancient cult.¹⁰¹

During the crisis of 1840, Ghillany published his views on the Damascus affair. While acknowledging that he was unable to judge the case because he lacked firsthand knowledge of the evidence, he did insist that the entire issue could only be understood if seen in historical perspective. The fact had to be recognized that Moses himself had put the stamp of approval on the practice of human sacrifice, which had first come under attack only with the Later Prophets. The scholarly challenge in such a statement of the issues was all too clear. Somehow, it was essential to seek the missing link between the (allegedly) long tradition of ritual murder, which had largely disappeared underground a few centuries before Christ, and the blood cult, which by 1840 had a well-documented history of almost one thousand years.¹⁰² Both Ghillany and Daumer¹⁰³ would devote massive tomes to the subject during the coming decade.

The winds of radical change were, of course, blowing through the Jewish world, too, albeit with nothing like the extremism to be found in the works of a Daumer, a Ghillany, or a Feuerbach. Of the younger, reform-minded rabbis in Germany, it was Abraham Geiger, then thirty years old and already the founding editor of the *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie*, who played the most prominent role in the Damascus affair. As the community preacher in Breslau he had been embroiled since 1838 in a bitter conflict with the chief rabbi of the city, Solomon Tiktin,¹⁰⁴ and had thus

¹⁰⁰ "Alleged Uses of Human Sacrifices by the Jews," *ibid.* (18 August), p. 4.

¹⁰¹ Daumer first put forward these theories in his book *Züge zu einer neuen Philosophie der Religion und Religionsgeschichte* (Nuremberg: 1835).

¹⁰² Ghillany, *Die Menschenopfer*, pp. iii–iv.

¹⁰³ Daumer, *Der Feuer und Molochdienst* (followed by his *Geheimnisse*); and Ghillany, *Die Menschenopfer*.

¹⁰⁴ E.g. Geiger, *Die letzten zwei Jahre*; cf. Harris, *How Do We Know This?*, pp. 157–64.

come to symbolize the highly controversial idea that the spirit and practice of Judaism had to change in accord with the philosophical thought of the modern age. Wasting no time, Geiger took up the challenge presented in the advertisement of 22 May by the "Jewish businessmen," and a week later, published an article on the blood accusation, likewise in the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung*.

Of course, he dismissed the murder charge as "laughable and a sheer fabrication, without the slightest foundation in even the most trivial work ever penned by a Jew." But, at the same time, he saw no point in trying at all costs to defend the Talmud,

which, as I am far from denying, includes – in the spirit of the age that gave it birth – inhumane pronouncements as much against Jews considered in Talmudic terms to be living irreligiously, as against non-Jews. For my part, I state without any hesitation, that the private views of the Talmudists do not enjoy any divine authority, and are of no more than historical significance. Such hostile statements have long since lost all validity in real life.

It was blunt declarations of this kind that had already served to split the Breslau community into two warring camps. But Geiger did not stop there, and he turned on the anonymous group that had placed the insulting advertisement in the paper. Their initiative, he declared, was "highly inappropriate" and extraordinarily ill-timed. Why, he asked, had they, as Orthodox Jews, appealed to him of all people, and not "to the venerable rabbis who see the study of the Talmud as the only road to salvation, and who regard themselves duty-bound to denounce anybody who wants to forego even an iota of rabbinical Talmudic Judaism – and yet will not raise their voices loudly to save the honor of Judaism, of Talmudism, of rabbinism."¹⁰⁵

Geiger's angry response set in motion a wave of advertisements in the Leipzig paper, with both his enemies and friends in the German Jewish community bombarding each other with heavily ironical and furious retorts.¹⁰⁶ But in order to gain a fuller understanding of Geiger's personal view of the Damascus affair, it is necessary to turn to a private letter that he sent on 22 November to his close friend, Joseph N. Derenburg, then in Paris. Nothing less than a great spiritual revolution in Judaism, he there wrote, was demanded by the present age, by "the truly imposing mighty spirit of truth." But there was no sign that any such all-encompassing change was immanent, still less imminent, within the Jewish world. Even an open schism did not appear to be practicable.

Seen in that light, argued Geiger, the mission to the East undertaken by

¹⁰⁵ "Breslau, 25 Mai" (from Geiger), *LAZ* (31 May), p. 1642.

¹⁰⁶ *LAZ* (4 June), p. 1686; (8 June), p. 1736; (19 June), p. 1864; (21 June), p. 1892.

Montefiore and Crémieux was a great act of humanitarianism, but had no relevance to the profound crisis of Judaism. If Crémieux were to succeed in establishing a modern Jewish school system in the Middle East, as he was planning to do, that would be a cause for genuine enthusiasm; but the political campaign waged by the European Jews in 1840 was of mere transient interest. The excitement would pass and the fundamental truth remain: "Our world-historical significance is over; we are just dragging along."¹⁰⁷

Geiger was hardly representative of the reform-minded rabbis and scholars in this view of the community crisis. For his part, Derenburg (to take just one example) was then planning to bring out a compendium of documents on the ritual-murder case, and to subject the entire affair to a close historico-philosophical analysis.¹⁰⁸ But in his belief that history had to advance by revolutionary and dialectical change – either spiritual or political or both – Geiger spoke for a significant segment of the younger intelligentsia (both Jews and non-Jews) in the Germany of 1840.

The religious disputations continued much longer in the *Times* than in the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung*. And the frequent repetition of, and elaboration on, the accusations certainly disturbed the Jews in England. A meeting of the Board of Deputies, for example, was called in late October specifically "to take into consideration the propriety of adopting any measures with reference to the editorial remarks in the *Times* newspaper on the 20th inst., [which] call[ed] attention to the letter . . . of TJC in that day's paper." (A series of closely contested votes left the Board unable to decide on any action.)¹⁰⁹

However, for their part, the German Jews appear to have drawn little comfort from the fact that their scholarly champions clearly had the better of the duel in the Leipzig paper. That the large number of Christian theologians remained, for the most part, silent on the issue of ritual murder was felt as a harsh blow. Lipmann Hirsch Löwenstein even felt compelled to pen an impassioned appeal, calling on the German scholarly community to speak out against the blood accusation, to "offer the hand of brotherhood . . . and not to fear that we are trying to recruit you under the Jewish banner."¹¹⁰ At the same time, though, he permitted his readers a glimpse into his own nightmare. "What," he asked,

¹⁰⁷ Geiger to Derenburg (22 November), as published in *AZdZ* (5 June 1896), pp. 283–4. (It was this letter that contained the phrase, often quoted, but usually out of context: "For me it is more important that the Jews in Prussia should be able to become pharmacists or lawyers than that all the Jews in Asia and Africa be rescued, even though from the human point of view I feel deeply for them.")

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 284. ¹⁰⁹ Meeting (29 October) BofD (October–), pp. 68–9.

¹¹⁰ Löwenstein, *Damascia*, pp. 413–14.

would we, not just we Jews, but also we Germans, have to expect, were certain Orientalists, certain scholars, to gain influence or even power—God help us! . . . What would become of enlightenment, civilization, benevolence, the freedom of thought and of religion, if such intellectuals were to attain the pinnacle of the fatherland? . . . [Imagine] a republic with the Orientalist from the Saale as prime minister, . . . with Dr. Paulus as the minister of religion and education, the water-logged Dr. Holst as minister of the navy, Mr. Streckfuss as minister of justice, Dr. Edward Mayer as police minister etc. etc. — and see then where you and we should be!¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 292–3.

Christian millennialists, Jewish messianists, and Lord Palmerston

In the mid-summer of 1840 public interest in Judaism and the Jews veered from the ritual-murder question to another, only partially related – and, if possible, still more remarkable – issue. From late in July, the idea gained ground that the British government was about to adopt a plan to open Palestine to resettlement by the Jewish people; to undertake, as it was commonly phrased at the time, the “Restoration of the Jews.” Significant, and often highly excited, support for such a project found its way into the press in England; and Palmerston was rumored to be in favor of it. These developments, in turn, were widely reported by the continental papers, and encouraged the argument, there sometimes expressed, that the Damascus affair had really been caused by the struggle among the European states for control of greater Syria, and, more specifically, of the Holy Land.

The sudden shift of attention to the future of Palestine was caused by the fact that on 15 July a treaty to settle the crisis in the Middle East had finally been signed in London by the representatives of the Ottoman empire, Great Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia. The agreement was a hard-won, and very personal, triumph for Palmerston. It threatened to employ force against Muhammed Ali unless he agreed, *inter alia*, to evacuate most of his Syrian territories and to forego all hereditary claims to what remained (Palestine south of a line from Ras en-Naqura to Lake Tiberias).¹ As a result, the looming question of war or peace – in the Middle East, and perhaps also between France and the other powers – held Europe in its grip from late July until October. Much time had to pass until the ultimatum was delivered to Alexandria; until the twenty days of grace granted Muhammed Ali expired; and until news of his decision could arrive back. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, speculation about the destiny of the Holy Land naturally intensified.

Yet, although the “Restoration of the Jews” thus became a topic of urgent concern only because of the five-power treaty, the concept itself was anything but new. Its roots were deeply planted in English history; and it had

¹ For the text of the treaty of 15 July: “Convention between the Four Powers and the Porte,” *Times* (15 September); on the diplomatic background, e.g.: Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. 2, pp. 665–94; Bourne, *Palmerston*, pp. 578–96.

been gaining support for years, even decades, before the international crisis of 1840. A number of long-term and very different, factors had gradually converged to gain a growing body of committed disciples for the idea.

Nearly all the "restorationist" projects that emerged, or reemerged, in 1840 had their origin in Christian millennialist circles. This phenomenon was not confined to Great Britain. There were millennialist advocates of Jewish "restoration" on the Continent and in North America, but only in England and Scotland did they coalesce at that time into a political force of some significance.

The belief that the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth could not start until the Jewish people, regathered into its own homeland, was finally ready to welcome him as the messiah had a long and unbroken history in England going back to the period of the Reformation.² Once the Bible, rather than the Church hierarchy, came to be widely accepted as the ultimate source of religious authority, the idea naturally developed in radical circles – Calvinists, Puritans, Independents, Fifth Monarchists – that the Jews had to their name not only a unique past, as the people of God, but also a still more glorious future. If, as many insisted, a literal reading of the Scriptures made it possible to foresee the preordained destinies of mankind, so startling and at times heretical a conclusion could appear as nothing less than inevitable.

In Catholic doctrine, adopted in the main also by the Protestant episcopal churches, the survival of the Jewish people was held necessary merely to bear visible witness to the truth of the biblical narratives and of the Prophecies foretelling its downfall, humiliation, punishment. The innumerable passages in the Bible that spoke of the dispersal and subsequent redemption of the Jews were understood to refer to the Babylonian exile and its reversal after the period of seventy years.

But a direct confrontation with the text revealed that some of the Prophets involved (Zechariah and Malachi, for example) postdated the return from Babylon; and that the New Testament also frequently assigned a key role to the Jews in the fulfillment of Christ's destiny. Thus, to take one example, it is possible to read in Luke that "the Lord God shall give unto him [Jesus] the throne of his father David and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."³ Or, again, Paul was quoted in Romans as saying: "And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written: There

² On the development of "restorationist" doctrine within Protestant, and particularly millennialist, circles since the Reformation, e.g.: Vereté, "The Restoration of the Jews"; D. Katz, *Philo-Semitism*, pp. 89–126; Kobler, *The Vision was There*, pp. 11–57; Sokolow, *History of Zionism*, vol. 1, pp. 47–59, 91–4; Hill, "Till the Conversion of the Jews"; Kochav, "Shivatam shel hayehudim."

³ Luke 1:32–33.

shall come out of Zion the deliverer and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob, for this is my covenant unto them when I shall take away their sins.”⁴ Similarly, according to Luke, Jesus said to his disciples at the last supper: “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”⁵

On the basis of these and many other such passages in the Old and New Testaments, a continuous tradition was built up within both the Anglican and the dissenting churches that linked the onset of the millennial age to the reestablishment of a Jewish kingdom in the land of Israel. Jesus Christ, enthroned in Jerusalem, reconciled to his own people at last, surrounded by the twelve apostles, would there rule the world for one thousand years until the battle of Gog against Magog and the final day of judgment.

Over the centuries, the popularity enjoyed by this particular vision of the future fluctuated greatly. It was often of the most marginal significance. Moreover, there was no agreement as to precisely how, or when, this apocalyptic process of change would be set in motion.

However, during the Civil War in England, millennialist ideas flourished as never before, and there was a wealth of speculation about the role assigned by Providence to the Jewish nation. The assumption at that period, and in the seventeenth century generally, was that the conversion of the Jews would precede their restoration to the promised land. (It was this belief which Menasseh Ben Israel, himself an ardent messianist, sought to exploit at the time of Cromwell, arguing from the Book of Daniel* that Prophecy demanded the dispersal of the Jews across the world, including England.)⁶ During the Puritan revolution, the popular estimate, based on the Book of Revelation – “his number is six hundred threescore and six”⁷ – was that the millennium would commence in 1666. (Whether this fact influenced Shabetai Zvi, who declared himself the Jewish messiah in that year, remains a matter of great controversy among the historians.)⁸

With the restoration of the Stuarts, the apocalyptic and eschatological fervor could hardly survive, but the belief that a map of future events lay ready to be discovered in the Bible proved remarkably tenacious. A number of the most famous philosophers and scientists in eighteenth-century England,

⁴ Romans 11:26–27. (This passage contains quotations from Isaiah 59:21 and Jeremiah 31:33–34.)

⁵ Luke 22:29–30.

⁶ On Menasseh Ben Israel's use of this argument: Katz, *Philo-Semitism*, pp. 147–8.

⁷ Revelation 13:18.

⁸ For a recent critique of Gershom Scholem's argument that Shabetai Zvi was not influenced by Christian millennialism: Barnai, “Christian Messianism.”

* Daniel 12:7: “And when He shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all things shall be finished.”

including Isaac Newton, David Hartley, and Joseph Priestley, linked the second coming of Christ to the restoration of the Jewish people to Zion.⁹ Contemporaries would have found little cause for surprise here. If the physical world followed exact laws laid down by the deity (the watch created by the master watchmaker), why should not history advance in accord with the logic revealed by God to man in Scripture?¹⁰

In this period, the idea began to emerge that it was, perhaps, erroneous to rely exclusively on direct divine intervention, on a miracle, to return the Jews to their country. Newton, for example, mentioned that one of the European naval powers could have a role to play in the process. And Hartley noted that the Jewish people had its own messianic hopes and might contribute its part to the anticipated historic drama.¹¹

The French revolution and Napoleonic wars once again transformed eschatology in general, and restorationism in particular, from the esoteric pursuits that they had become in the eighteenth century into an issue of major popular concern. James Bicheno's works first published in the 1790s, *The Signs of the Times* and *The Restoration of the Jews: the Crisis of all Nations*, were printed in numerous editions; and he was only one of many arguing in print that the overthrow of European monarchies and the exile of the pope signified the imminent approach of the millennium. Bicheno, it should be noted, believed that the conversion of the Jews would follow their restoration.¹²

Frequently, the exact date for the start of the millennium was placed in the 1860s – an estimate based on key passages in Daniel and Luke, interpreted as predicting that 1,260 years would have to elapse between the rise to domination of the corrupt ("apostate") Roman Church and the end of history as hitherto known.* The invasion of Palestine by Napoleon in 1798, his rumored proclamation to the Jews at that time promising support for their return to the Holy Land, and his assembly of the Sanhedrin in Paris in 1807 were all events that lent themselves perfectly to millennialist interpretations of the Jewish future.¹³

⁹ On the "restorationism" of Newton, Hartley, and Priestley: Kobler, *The Vision was There*, pp. 39–42; for the theological aspects of Newton's thought: Quinn, "On Reading Newton Apocalyptically"; and Westfall, *Never at Rest*, pp. 319–30, 345–56, 590–1, 804–28.

¹⁰ For the eighteenth-century background to millennialist thought e.g.: Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, pp. 33–41.

¹¹ Kobler, *The Vision was There*, pp. 38, 40.

¹² On Bicheno: Vereté, "The Restoration of the Jews," pp. 38–42; Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, pp. 46–50.

¹³ For Napoleon's policies toward the Jews: Kobler, *Napoleon*; Schwarzfuchs, *Napoleon, the Jews and the Sanhedrin*.

* Daniel 12:7: "it shall be for a time, times and a half" – a passage understood to mean three and a half years. With 360 days in a year, that makes 1,260 days, or years, if one day is taken to signify one year. Luke 21:24 states: "and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." The "times of the Gentiles" was often identified by restorationist exegetes with the 1,260 years.

With the foundation of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews in 1809, a new dimension was added to the relationship between the millennialists in England and the Jewish people.¹⁴ Although the organization was not officially committed to eschatological beliefs and could be seen as simply one among the many missionary bodies established during the same period, it became in practice a major rallying point for adherents of the restorationist concept. It is true that two of the most prominent leaders, Lewis Way and Sir Robert Grant, for instance, put the emphasis on the conversion of individual Jews, and in consequence, no doubt, were actively committed to the cause of Jewish emancipation.¹⁵ And it is also true that the dozens of missionaries scattered across Europe by the London Society usually measured their success or failure by the number of converts chalked up to their credit.

However, within the top ranks of the organization there were influential figures who had infinitely more ambitious hopes and plans. They saw mass conversion and the return of the Jewish nation to Palestine as two closely linked, practicable goals. Alexander McCaul, the leading theologian of the Society in the 1830s, spelled out the basic strategy: "The first step would be that . . . the prejudice of the Gentiles be overcome . . . and that some preach to the Jews. . . . The next step would be the rise of small [converted] Jewish communities, and then the increased action of the heaven of the Gospel until the whole mass shall be leavened."¹⁶

In a letter to the executive committee of the Society, sent in November 1839, McCaul argued strongly that, with the "great work of Israel's national conversion" in view, it was essential to shift the missionary effort from France and Germany to "Poland and the shores of the Mediterranean."¹⁷ For McCaul and his school of thought, this was not just a question of how to reach the main centers of Jewish population. Equally or perhaps more important in their eyes was the fact that in Eastern Europe and the Ottoman empire, the Jewish communities still retained their traditional way of life and their faith in the messiah who would lead them back to the promised land.

In the West, went the argument, "infidelity" to the national heritage, "Epicureanism," and religious reform were corroding true Judaism, that

¹⁴ On the varied, sometimes conflicting, theories within the London Society: Scult, *Millennial Expectations*, pp. 124–42; Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, pp. 89–98. Cf. Kedem, "Tefisot hageulah."

¹⁵ Scult, *Millennial Expectations*, pp. 106–9, 132–8.

¹⁶ McCaul, *The Conversion and Restoration of the Jews*, p. 14. (McCaul's son-in-law, James Finn, served as the British consul in Jerusalem, 1845–62; and was actively involved in various restorationist projects – as well as in the general protection of the Jewish population in Palestine; see, e.g.: Finn's work on Palestine during the period of the Crimean War, *Stirring Times*.)

¹⁷ McCaul to Committee (29 November 1839): London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews: Minute Books (Bodleian Library, Oxford).

"wonderful system which, compounded of revealed truth and human addition, still prevails."¹⁸ Thus, the journal of the Society, the *Jewish Intelligence*, could carry a report in January 1840 in which a highly respected churchman described a visit to the reformed synagogue in Hamburg – "a temple without a Shekhinah . . . They have erased all mention of the . . . messiah. Alas! Poor dry bones, they think their hope is lost; but the time shall come when 'the spirit of life shall enter into them.' "¹⁹ (In the light of this approach, it was not surprising that the most committed restorationists, including Lord Ashley, tended to oppose the emancipation of the Jews.)

Many of the enterprises launched by the Society were guided by the idea that it was possible to win the Jews over en bloc, as a nation still sustained by its messianic faith. Enormous efforts were thus made to employ Hebrew in a multitude of ways – in the services of the chapel established in the East End of London; in the Jewish boys' school, where the pupils were taught to sing hymns in that language; and, of course, in the translations of the New Testament and other religious works. (Publications in Yiddish were also common.)

So, too, in his letter of 1839 to the executive committee, McCaul laid it down as a principle that all the mission stations in Poland and the Mediterranean area should conduct services in Hebrew twice a day; and that "the missionaries ought to spend at least two hours [daily] in the study of the Talmud or rabbinical commentators." And he assigned a crucial role in the great enterprise that he envisaged to Jewish converts (including graduates of the boys' school), who would "spread the Gospel amongst their nation."²⁰

Starting from the year 1835, the London Society began to focus ever increasing attention on the city of Jerusalem. It had had missionaries stationed there at irregular intervals and for short periods prior to that date, but only then did the Society decide that it should attempt to erect its own church in the Holy City. To realize such a plan would obviously entail enormous difficulties, because Ottoman rules forbade the construction of new churches (although permitting the repair of those already in existence). But John Nicolayson, the representative of the Society in Jerusalem and a man not easily deterred, pushed ahead doggedly with the scheme.²¹

What drew the executive committee in London into this particular quagmire was the belief that an imposing presence in the Holy City might serve, as nothing else could, to capture the imagination of the Jewish people. It was to be "a Hebrew Christian church," with its services conducted in the sacred

¹⁸ W. Ayerst, "Rabbi Hirsch's Essays on Israel's Duties in Diaspora," *Jl* (April 1839), p. 78.

¹⁹ "Hamburg," *Jl* (January), p. 10.

²⁰ McCaul to Committee (29 November 1839), London Society: Minute Books.

²¹ On Nicolayson and the plans for the Jerusalem church, e.g.: Gidney, *History of the London Society*, pp. 178–81; Tibawi, *British Interests*, pp. 37–43.

tongue of the Jews and (in marked contrast to the "idolatrous" Greek and Roman churches) would conduct a simple Protestant service reminiscent of the apostolic period – "Christian worship in its purity."²² By 1840 Nicolayson had been joined by four more missionaries, all converted Jews – among them, of course, George Wildon Pieritz.

To decide on the plan was one thing; to make it a reality, quite another. And from the moment that the project was launched, the London Society had no choice but to involve itself in the complex politics of the Middle East – more specifically, in the attempt to gain a maximal degree of British protection for its Jerusalem scheme. Despite the formidable obstacles to be overcome, though, the Society could also count on certain favorable circumstances.

Most important of all, perhaps, was the fact that in 1835 Lord Palmerston had once again become foreign secretary. Eager to give concrete, everyday expression to British influence in the Middle East, and especially in the disputed territories ruled by Muhammed Ali, Palmerston was often willing (as already noted) to throw a protective net over groups and projects that another foreign secretary would doubtless have chosen to keep at arm's length.

For its part, the London Society enjoyed ready access to the highest powers in the land. Since 1815 it had become a purely Anglican organization and it counted well-connected public figures among its leadership. As a conspicuous subsection within the amorphous world of Evangelicalism, it benefited from the growing prestige and power of that movement.²³ Many in the Church of England regarded the millennialist tendencies of the Society with suspicion, and even outright hostility, but it was certainly not considered beyond the pale. (Or, as historian, William H. Oliver has put it succinctly, "prophecy was a normal intellectual activity in early nineteenth century England.")²⁴

Thus, when Nicolayson arrived from Jerusalem in 1836 to mobilize support for the planned church, he was ordained by none other than the Bishop of London.²⁵ And when Sir Thomas Baring appealed personally to the foreign secretary in February 1837 to take the Jerusalem project under his wing, he received a positive response: Palmerston sent out appropriate instructions to the consul-general in Alexandria.²⁶

The London Society likewise employed its influence to insure the ap-

²² *Jl* (January 1835), p. 1, qu. in Gidney, *History of the London Society*, p. 179.

²³ On Evangelicalism in Britain generally, e.g.: Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party*; on its millennialist wing: Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*; and Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, pp. 3–41.

²⁴ Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, p. 11.

²⁵ On Nicolayson's admission to holy orders: Gidney, *The History of the London Society*, p. 180.

²⁶ Vereté, "Why Was a British Consulate Established," pp. 341–4.

pointment of a British vice-consul in Jerusalem (a step first broached in 1834, but not implemented until late 1838).²⁷ Increasingly, in this period, the Society was able to count on the interventions of Lord Ashley (later to become the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury), who had been appointed one of its vice-presidents in 1835 and who had a close personal connection to the foreign secretary – his mother-in-law, Lady Emily Cowper, was Palmerston's mistress and then, from 1839, his wife.²⁸

Ashley was a Tory who regarded life on earth as hopelessly sinful and nothing but preparation for the eventual day of judgment. (On the occasion of his mother-in-law's marriage to the foreign secretary, he wrote in his diary, for example, that now she would be "making her account with politics and fashion, when she ought to be making her account with God.")²⁹ Palmerston was a Whig, a pleasure-loving man of the world, fully absorbed in the game of power politics – for its own sake and for the sake of carefully calculated British interests. And yet the two men found a common language. Ashley saw their family ties as possibly providential in nature ("things the most unpromising are oftentimes fruitful. . . . May it be so here.")³⁰ On his side, Palmerston was ready enough to give the London Society its head, so long as its projects could be reconciled with *Realpolitik*.

Doubtless, it was Ashley's hand that was to be discerned in the decision to delineate the area of the vice-consul's responsibility as the whole of Palestine within its "ancient limits."³¹ The gloss Ashley himself put on this foreign office decision was that the vice-consul, W. T. Young, was "thus accredited, as it were, to the former Kingdom of David and the Twelve Tribes."³² Young was elected to the general committee of the London Society before his departure for the East, and in a letter sent to Palmerston in July 1838, he emphasized his eagerness to visit the Jewish communities in Tiberias and Safed "from time to time. . . . To cultivate among them a friendly feeling might, I think, my Lord, be no inconsiderable means of spreading among them and their neighbours, the natives, also a favourable impression towards

²⁷ The historians do not agree about the reasons for the establishment of the British consulate in Jerusalem: Tibawi, *British Interests*, pp. 29–37; Vereté, "Why Was a British Consulate Established."

²⁸ On Palmerston, Lady Cowper, and her daughter, Minny (the wife of Lord Ashley): Bourne, *Palmerston*, pp. 185–227; Finlayson, *The Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, pp. 128–31 (Emily Cowper, née Lamb, was a sister of Lord Melbourne, the prime minister).

²⁹ Ashley's diary (16 December 1839) (Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Young's appointment was officially to "Jerusalem and Palestine" (Campbell to Young 21 [November 1838] FO 78/368) in Hyamson, *The British Consulate in Jerusalem*, vol. 1, p. 2. Lord Ashley asserted that the British government meant by this the Holy Land in its biblical frontiers: see his review of Lord Lindsay's book, *Letters on Egypt, Edom and the Holy Land*, in the *Quarterly Review* 63 (1839), p. 188. (Cf. "Proceedings of the Church of Scotland in Behalf of the Jews," *Jl* [September], p. 275.)

³² *Quarterly Review* 63 (1839), p. 188.

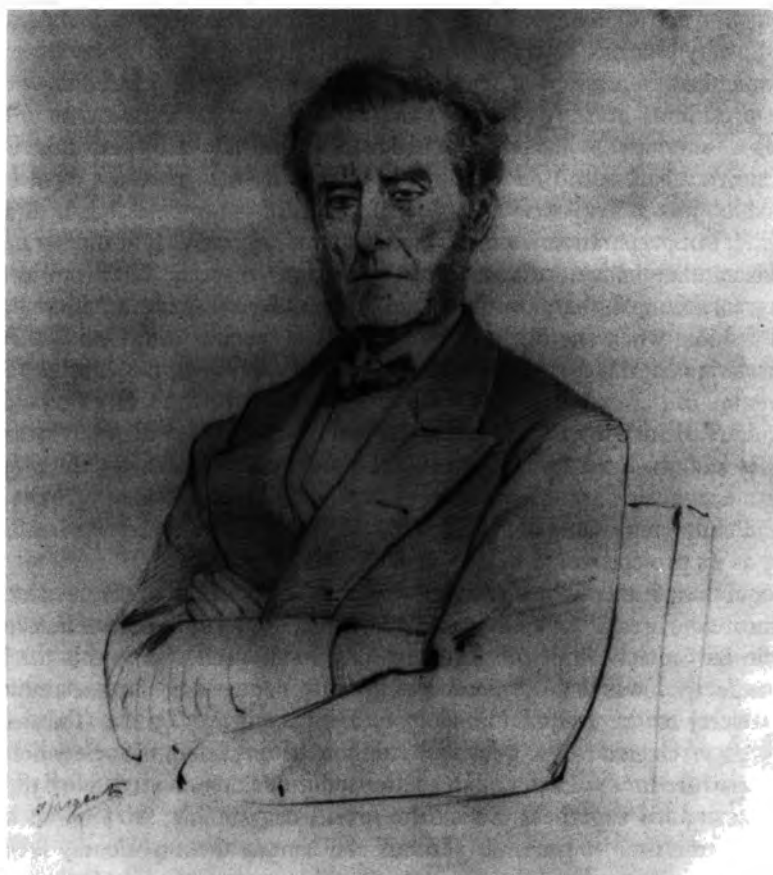


FIG. 15. Lord Ashley (Anthony Ashley Cooper, later the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, 1801–85). Pencil drawing by Frederick Sargent (d. 1899).

our country."³³ For his part, Palmerston (as already noted) informed Young in a despatch of 31 January 1839 that one of his duties would be "to afford protection to the Jews generally; and you will take an early opportunity of reporting . . . upon the present state of the Jewish population in Palestine."³⁴

Developments of this kind were naturally interpreted by millennialist members of the London Society as "signs of the times." The entry of Lord Ashley's diary for 29 September 1838 reads typically:

³³ Young to Palmerston (16 August 1838) FO 78/340 in Hyamson, *The British Consulate in Jerusalem*, vol. 1, p. 1.

³⁴ Bidwell to Young (31 January 1839, no. 2) FO 78/368; *ibid.*, p. 2.

Took leave this morning of Young who has just been appointed Her Majesty's vice-consul at *Jerusalem!* . . . What a wonderful event. . . . The ancient city of the people of God is about to resume a place among the nations, and England is the first of the Gentile kingdoms that "cease to tread her down." . . . God put into my heart to conceive [this] plan for His honour, gave me influence to prevail with Palmerston, and provided [the right] man for the situation.³⁵

In a long (unsigned) article that he published in the *Quarterly Review* in 1839, Lord Ashley gave the public at large a glimpse into his hopes. Palestine, he wrote, lay desolate, as ordained by Prophecy, but the soil was awaiting the return of the Jews to work it once again. "The Jews," he stated, "who will betake themselves to agriculture in no other land, having found in the English consul a mediator between their people and the pasha [Muhammed Ali], will probably return in yet greater numbers, and become once more the husbandmen of Judea and Galilee."³⁶

England, he continued, had long since become the beneficiary of "never-slumbering Providence," for "no sooner had she given shelter to the Jews under Cromwell and Charles [II] than she started forward a commercial career of unrivalled . . . prosperity."³⁷ Bonaparte had understood the "value of an Hebrew alliance," and "that which Napoleon designed in his violence and ambition, we may wisely and legitimately undertake for the maintenance of our empire."³⁸

A two-column summary of this article appeared in the *Times*, submitted by an anonymous correspondent who noted that its author (Lord Ashley),

treading in the steps of the Bishops of Lowth, Butler, Horley and van Mildert, has turned the public attention to the claims which the Jewish people still have upon the land of Israel as their rightful inheritance and [to] their consequent political importance . . . in that great struggle which has already commenced in the East.³⁹

There was clearly a concerted campaign afoot (as Ashley's diary, indeed, suggests), and in the same month, January 1839, a memorandum – signed "on behalf of many who wait for the restoration of Israel" and couched in restorationist terminology – was privately submitted to all the heads of the Protestant states in Europe and North America. Composed primarily of quotations from the Bible, it referred to the Church of Rome as the "Great Babylon" about to "sink in the abyss of an unfathomable perdition . . . when her hour arrives (and it is very near!)."

³⁵ Ashley's diary (29 September 1838) (qu. in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, vol. 1, p. 233).

³⁶ *Quarterly Review* 63 (1839), p. 189.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 191. ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

³⁹ "The State and Prospect of the Jews," *Times* (24 January 1839).

With a rhetorical flourish, the document appealed to the Protestant governments to act to restore its inheritance to the people of Israel: "Who is there among you high and mighty ones of all nations" ready to act in "the spirit of Cyrus, King of Persia?" The sense of urgency was palpable: "The fullness of the Gentiles is at hand (Romans 11:21) and unto Israel the dominion shall return (Micah 4:8)."⁴⁰ Lord Palmerston was asked to submit this document to Queen Victoria and he did so.

In such documents, an important place was generally assigned the argument that the Jews had already begun to return to the Holy Land and that they themselves were living in imminent expectation of their redemption. This proposition was, doubtless, based largely on wishful thinking. The Jews in the more modern areas of Europe and those who had come under the influence of the Haskalah (the Hebrew enlightenment) tended to be preoccupied with the issue of emancipation and equal rights in those countries where they lived. And in the traditional world, the Jews believed, for the most part, that no action was required of them to advance the arrival of the messiah except prayer, repentance, and good works.

At the same time, though, the Christian restorationists followed the demographic development of the Jewish community in Palestine very closely; and, indeed, the monthly of the London Society, the *Jewish Intelligence*, often published valuable material on the estimated size of the Jewish populations across the world – a service that Isaac Jost, for one, readily acknowledged.⁴¹ Reports in the journal usually put the number of Jews in Palestine at about ten thousand. Despite the earthquakes, outbreaks of the plague, and rebellions that made life in the country extremely hazardous, the Jewish community in Jerusalem had certainly grown under the dominion of Muhammed Ali. Or, as Lord Ashley put it in the *Quarterly Review*, "they are increasing in multitude by large annual additions."⁴²

The millennialists were also very much aware of the fact that, according to a belief widespread in the Jewish world, the long-awaited messiah would finally come during the year 5600 – which was the equivalent in the Christian calendar of the period from 9 September 1839 until 27 September 1840.* This estimate was based, in general terms, on the idea stated in the Talmud that the messiah would arrive before the end of the sixth millennium

⁴⁰ For this document, "Memorials Concerning God's Ancient People of Israel," see "Restoration of the Jews," *Times* (26 August). (The reference is actually to Romans 11:25.)

⁴¹ E.g.: [Jost], "Geschichte und Literatur der Spanischen Juden," *IA* (11 June 1841), p. 187. (Cf. [idem], "Statisches aus den Berichten der Scottischen Mission," *ibid.* [8 January 1841], pp. 9–10.)

⁴² *Quarterly Review* 63 (1839), p. 178. In Jerusalem, the Jews often looked on Muhammed Ali in a most favorable light.

* Or 22 October, if the end of the annual reading of the Torah was regarded as the crucial date.

and, in specific terms, on the Zohar which, by a series of mystic calculations had fixed, as early as the thirteenth century, on the date 5600.⁴³ And in 1814 the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews published a work by a Jewish scholar, Joseph Crool, in which he noted (writing in 1811) that "in the opinion of one great and eminent scholar there are only twenty-nine years to his [the messiah's] coming."⁴⁴ (The reference was possibly to the famous Gaon of Vilna, whose disciples had formed a conspicuous group within the immigration to Palestine since early in the century, and had received permission in 1836 to complete the Hurvah synagogue.)⁴⁵

In the *Quarterly Review*, Lord Ashley could state that reliable reports spoke of thousands of Jews in the tsarist empire who "had bound themselves by an oath that as soon as the way is open for them to go up to Jerusalem they will immediately go thither." A knowledgeable observer, long familiar with East European Jewry, he added, had "found a mighty change in their minds and feelings in regard to the nearness of their deliverance."⁴⁶

It was the expectation of the millennialists that Jews in large numbers – their hopes dashed by the end of the year 5600 – would then be ready to recognize Jesus as their messiah. The report of the London Society presented to the annual conference in 1840 announced, for example, that one of its missionaries, a converted Jew, was

to visit his brethren in the distant parts of Russia and Turkey in consequence of the extraordinary excitement now prevailing amongst them on the subject of their messiah's coming. Your committee has received accounts of this general expectation from many parts of the world. . . . This fact . . . proves the great importance of immediate spiritual exertions for setting before them the doctrine of the word of God.⁴⁷

And, in 1839, some four or five hundred Christians assembled in Liverpool for prayer on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), "when there was a more particularly solemn and general meeting of the Jews throughout the world than there has been upon any former occasion since their dispersion." Supplication to heaven was made at the Liverpool gathering in the hope that the Jewish people would finally entreat "the Lord to return to Jerusalem in mercy."⁴⁸

⁴³ Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation*, pp. 90–1.

⁴⁴ Crool, *The Restoration of Israel*, p. 48.

⁴⁵ What precisely the Vilna Gaon – and, subsequently, his disciples in Palestine – believed with regard to TaR (1839–40) as a messianic year, is a controversial issue. See particularly the exchange of articles between A. Morgenstern and I. Bartal which originally appeared in *Cathedra* 24 (1982), pp. 52–70; 31 (1984), pp. 159–81; and *Zion* 52 (1987), pp. 117–30, 371–97, and has been partially republished in their respective books: Morgenstern, *Geulah bederekh hatev'a*, pp. 1–27, 97–138; Bartal, *Galut baarez*, pp. 236–95.

⁴⁶ *Quarterly Review* 63 (1839), pp. 177–8.

⁴⁷ "Abstract of the Thirty-Second Report of the London Society . . .," *Jl* (June), p. 155.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

Far more attention was paid to these messianic trends by the millennialists than by the Jewish press in France and Germany. But Jost's *Israelitische Annalen* did publish a long article in January 1840 warning against the dangers inherent in these mystical expectations. Was there not a danger that a false messiah on the model of Asher Lemlein, Shabetai Zvi, or Joseph Frank might shortly appear, only in the end to cause disillusionment and apostasy? Silence in the face of this threat was understandable, but erroneous. The Jewish people should be guided "away from their sentiment for Palestine and toward the countries to which they belong."⁴⁹

Such fears (or hopes, as seen from the Christian standpoint) appeared to receive dramatic confirmation from the reports emerging from Poland early in 1840 that the famous Hasidic rebbe, Menahem Mendel of Kotsk, had stood up in the synagogue to announce that Jesus was possibly the messiah. The story, stated one correspondent in the *Jewish Intelligence*, had reached him in Kalish, "and spread, as it has been by the Jews themselves had made a deep impression on their [the Jews'] minds as no doubt it has done everywhere."⁵⁰

In reality, of course, no self-declared messiah appeared in the years 1839–40 (even if the *Jewish Intelligence* did report from Lublin on a "Jewish fanatic" there who, employing kabbalistic calculations, "announces himself almost a kind of messiah").⁵¹ There was no flood of immigrants to Palestine immediately before or during the year 1840 and no mass conversions to Christianity afterwards. The rebbe of Kotsk did not become a Christian, although he did shut himself away in isolation from the public for the rest of his days, almost twenty years, thus turning himself into a living legend.⁵² And Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai of Semlin (in the Ottoman Balkans), who, in a work of 1839, had written anxiously of the approaching messianic year, corrected himself in 1840 to argue that 5600 (or "TaR") was to be seen, rather, as the start of what would be a long process of redemption.⁵³

As for the future of the Holy Land, the only Jew of note who, in this period, undertook an initiative with obvious political implications was Sir Moses Montefiore. During his visit to the Middle East in 1839, he spent May and June in Palestine, returning to Europe via Alexandria. He met with Muhammed Ali on 13 July, and presented him with a most ambitious plan

⁴⁹ "Messiasberechnungen," *IA* (24 January), p. 32. ⁵⁰ "Warsaw," *Jl* (May), p. 117.

⁵¹ "Lublin," *ibid.*, p. 116.

⁵² On Menachem Mendel of Kotsk: Gliksman, *Der Kotzker rebe*. (Menachem Mendel was given a major role in the novel of the Yiddish writer Joseph Opatashu, *In poylisher velder*, first published in 1921; and brought out in English, *In Polish Woods*, in 1938.)

⁵³ Alkalai, "Sefer shelom yerushalayim," *Kitvei harav Yehuda Alkalai*, vol. 1, pp. 33–7. Hebrew dating is based on the numerical value of the letters of the alphabet; in this case, T(taf:400) and R(resh:200) brings one to 5600, with the 5000 being understood.

for the settlement of Jews in large numbers as farmers in Palestine. The project, as recorded in Montefiore's diary, involved the application

to Muhammed Ali for a grant of land for fifty years; some one or two hundred villages; giving him an increased rent of from ten to twenty per cent, and paying the whole in money annually at Alexandria, but the land and villages to be free, during the whole term of every tax or rate . . . ; and liberty being accorded to dispose of the produce in any quarter of the globe. The grant obtained, I shall, please Heaven, on my return to England, form a company for the cultivation of the land, and [for] the encouragement of our brethren in Europe to return to Palestine. Many Jews now emigrate to New South Wales, Canada etc., but in the Holy Land, they would find a greater certainty of success. . . . I hope to induce the return of thousands of our brethren to the Land of Israel.⁵⁴

This scheme was received by Muhammed Ali and his veteran adviser, Boghos Bey, in characteristic fashion; they were extremely polite, even encouraging; but they played for time, seeking various excuses for the refusal to commit any clear-cut response to writing.

At one point, Boghos Bey, an Armenian Christian, engaged Louis Loewe, who was accompanying Montefiore, in a religious disputation about the biblical passage, "And the Eternal shall be King over all the earth."⁵⁵ Loewe's summary of the conversation reads: "He seemed to be under the impression that this would be an earthly king. I soon succeeded in allaying his fears, and convincing him that the words of the prophet Zechariah referred to the King of Kings, the Almighty in heaven."⁵⁶ Be that as it may, what really interested Muhammed Ali and Boghos Bey was the possibility that Montefiore would be ready to initiate the foundation of a joint-stock bank for the development of the region. In the final resort, of course, nothing came of either the agricultural project or the bank. "Weeks and months passed," wrote Loewe later, "and no reply came from Egypt."⁵⁶

Whether Montefiore's plan was inspired in one degree or another by the messianic expectations in the air at the time (a possibility implicit in some of Arye Morgenstern's findings)⁵⁷ cannot be ascertained from the available sources. In all probability, he was simply moved by his long-standing interest in the welfare of the pious Jewish community in Palestine and by the calculation that Muhammed Ali was most eager to obtain Western capital.

It is also true, though, that Montefiore was willing enough to conduct a dialogue with the Christian millennialists – a dialogue, however amicable, in which each side was doubtless on the lookout for ways to exploit the other's religious beliefs. According to the report, for example, of two Scottish

* Zechariah 14:9.

⁵⁴ [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 167.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁵⁷ Morgenstern, *Mashihiut*, pp. 206–7.

churchmen, members of a missionary inquiry commission, who met Sir Moses frequently in his encampment on the Mount of Olives (the walled city was closed to him by the plague), "he conversed freely on the state of the land, the miseries of the Jews and the fulfilment of Prophecy."⁵⁸ Looking down on Mount Moriah (the Temple Mount), he told them, "he had read Solomon's prayer* over and over again" – a prayer replete with the promise of redemption.

No less worthy of note is the fact that a few months after Montefiore's visit to Alexandria, a prominent member of the London Society, the Reverend Thomas S. Grimshawe, met Muhammed Ali, and again pressed the Egyptian viceroy to encourage the large-scale transfer of land to be farmed by the Jews in Palestine. Raising the same questions, though, he was given the same tantalizingly evasive answers.⁵⁹

Logically, it would not have been the least surprising to find that the ritual-murder case in Damascus had been triggered, or at least aggravated, by the resentment aroused against the Jews by these unusual developments – the focus of messianic and millennialist expectations on the years 1839–40 (or, more specifically, 5600); the heightened missionary activity; and Montefiore's visit, almost royal in the excitement it caused among the Jews of Palestine. Reports from Jerusalem, published in the German press, reflected just such fears, as demonstrated by the following grotesquely exaggerated account, which first appeared in the *Berliner Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung*:

The Anglican liturgy has been translated into Hebrew . . . and the missionary, Nicolayson, attracts some four hundred Jews every day; and of these about one hundred have been converted. . . . Furthermore, unflagging efforts are being made to have Palestine colonized by Jewish immigrants. The English consul is seeking to win the assent of Muhammed Ali to the idea that the Jews should undertake to restore to themselves the land of their fathers, and significant areas of land have been purchased for foreign immigrants. Somewhere there is a Talmudic dictum that when twenty-five thousand Jews again live in the Holy Land, the laws . . . which existed when Palestine was still a Jewish state will again come into effect. The rabbis in Turkey are working to reach this number by the colonization of the Holy Land – which with the powerful support of England will not be difficult.⁶⁰

In actuality, however, nowhere in the many hundreds of pages contained in the judicial protocols of the Damascus case and in the consular reports on the affair was any mention made of Jewish land purchase in Palestine, the

* 1 Kings 8:22–61.

⁵⁸ Bonar and M'Cheyne, *Narrative of a Visit to the Holy Land*, p. 143.

⁵⁹ *Jl* (June 1841), pp. 169–70.

⁶⁰ Reproduced in "Syrien," *LAZ* (19 May) (Beilage), p. 1508.

messianic year, or Moses Montefiore. The one hint of a possible connection came in the letter sent by Kilbee on 23 March. "It was predicted," he wrote, "that 1840 would be an extraordinary year, and the discovery of these horrible crimes will mark an epoch in history."⁶¹ But, of course, Kilbee was in Beirut and not directly involved in the case. It is thus certainly tempting to conclude that if neither the interrogators nor the interrogated alighted on the idea that the ritual murder was linked to 5600, then there was probably much less consciousness of that year's significance (in Damascus, at least) than the missionary and other sources might have one believe.

Although the millennialist enthusiasms of the time exerted no visible impact on the case in Damascus, the reverse was certainly not true. The ritual-murder affair, accompanied as it was by so much public uproar, greatly heightened the interest in the Jewish people and its future as foreshadowed by Prophecy. It is enough to examine the proceedings of the London Society's annual meeting in May 1840 to see how events in Damascus naturally intertwined there with restorationist rhetoric. There were unprecedented members in attendance; annual donations were up from some £17,000 to £22,000; and the general air of excitement was palpable.⁶²

Adopting a relatively cautious tone, Dr. Marsh, for example, merely expressed confidence that "the government of our country will do everything in their power to give protection to the ancient people of God in those Eastern parts of the world where they are suffering persecution."⁶³ But the Bishop of Ripon did not hesitate to introduce the theme of restorationist politics. "It is most cheering," he declared,

to observe the signs of the times, and to mark the way in which it pleases the Lord by secondary means to accomplish his great purposes. I hold in my hand an account of a visit lately made to Muhammed Ali by a deputation from the Scotch Church and also by clergymen of the Church of England. Through the kindness of the consul, they were speedily favoured with an interview. . . . The first question which they put was: Whether upon the supposition that the Jews of any country really wished to return to their native land, any obstruction would be thrown in their way; and whether they would be allowed to rent and purchase land so as to become cultivators and proprietors of the soil. The answer was emphatically that [there] . . . would be no obstruction.⁶⁴

And the Reverend Hugh Stowell warned that unless Great Britain acted forcefully to further the providential design, others would overtake her.

⁶¹ "Lettres de Damas," *Univers* (18 July).

⁶² "Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Anniversary," *Jl* (June), p. 130 (cf. p. 149 for the exact figures).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 132. ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

"Everything indicated," he stated, "that if we do not precede Israel . . . and help guide them to Zion, we shall only have, I might almost say, the shameful honour of catching hold of the skirts of their garments.* . . . For assuredly no man who calmly . . . looks into . . . Prophecy . . . can fail to see the drying up of the Euphrates,** the decay of Turkish power, the favour of the pasha of Egypt to the return of the Jews to their own land."⁶⁵ (This speech was given to introduce the resolution on the Damascus case.)

The same message ran through the special course of lectures delivered in Liverpool by ministers of the Church of England in the autumn of 1840 (and later published in book form under the title *The Destiny of the Jews and their Connection with the Gentile Nations*). The "general sympathy"⁶⁶ for the Jews produced by the ritual-murder affair was there numbered by one lecturer as among the major signs of the times while another declared that "the persecution at Rhodes and Damascus will probably be the last remnant of barbarous oppression prior to the restoration of the Jews."⁶⁷

News of the five-power treaty signed on 15 July did not leak out to the press for some two weeks – initially in France on 26 July and, a couple of days later, reproduced from the Paris papers in London. Such a dramatic turn of events could only have an electrifying effect on the Christian restorationists. The future of greater Syria, including Palestine, was now a matter of open international dispute. Turkey, weakened by a series of catastrophic defeats on the battlefield and with a divided leadership (the new Sultan, Abdul Mejid, was still in his teens), depended totally on the great powers, and specifically on Great Britain and Lord Palmerston. Under these circumstances, surely it would be no great problem for England to induce the Ottoman government to encourage Jewish colonization of the Holy Land. Or, alternatively, why should not the great powers decide among themselves simply to create an independent state for the Jews in that country?

The belief that such ideas belonged not only in the realm of theological speculation, but also in that of practical politics received great encouragement from an article in the *Globe*, published, as news of the treaty was about to break, on 27 July. This London newspaper was in the Whig camp and generally considered to be the vehicle most favored by Palmerston for the dissemination of his unattributed views and diplomatic schemes. (He actually wrote many of the articles himself anonymously.)⁶⁸

* Cf. Zechariah 8:23.

** The "drying up of the Euphrates" (Revelation 16:12) was generally understood, as in this case too, to refer to the impending collapse of the Ottoman empire.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 141.

⁶⁶ Lecture of the Rev. James Haldane Stewart, *The Destiny of the Jews*, p. 16.

⁶⁷ Lecture of the Rev. Thomas Shuttleworth Grimshawe, *ibid.*, p. 319.

⁶⁸ Bourne, *Palmerston*, p. 490; but the article of 27 July is not among the many manuscript copies still surviving and therefore was probably not written by Palmerston himself (see Broadland papers, Hartley Library, Southampton University, PRE/B/199–22).

Certainly, large parts of the article reflected the strategic thinking of the foreign secretary exactly. The key to military victory in the Middle East, it was there stated, lay with the Maronites and Druse who, if united, could "deliver their land from the usurper [Ibrahim], the son of Muhammed Ali." And if they needed outside aid, "a small body of marines would settle the matter." Of course, the French would deliver loud protests, but "our answer is short. England does not exist by the permission, nor act by the dictation of France." Once Syria was thus liberated, Britain should guarantee all the "reasonable demands" of the local populations – a guarantee that could be underwritten effectively if the Ottoman officials in that country were ordered to "act in all things in conformity with the views of the British representatives."

"The Jews," continued the *Globe*,

would, of course, be included in such an arrangement; and a period be put to those terrible persecutions which have lately excited so much sympathy in this country. We indulge no visionary notions that the Jews will, as by some natural impulse, return all at once to their native land. But it seems highly probable . . . that numbers would repair to Judea, and help to make it what it was once, a region of traffic. Jews in this country would have their agents there, who . . . by their encouragement . . . [would] stimulate the Jews of Palestine to cast off their pensive and despairing habits, and bestir themselves in the active pursuit of gain by reputable commerce. There is a blessing on record for those who show kindness to the children of Abraham. Now is the time for Britain to set about deserving it.⁶⁹

This easy admixture of arguments drawn from economics, on the one hand, and from Prophecy, on the other, was typical at the time. England under Palmerston's direction had, it should be noted, signed a major commercial treaty with the Ottoman empire in 1838; and, against that background, it was natural to envisage the Jews in Palestine as destined to concentrate not on agriculture, but on international trade and development.

Both the *Univers* and the *Quotidienne* published translations of, and commented on, this article in the *Globe*. "The English," stated the *Univers*, "are continuing to demonstrate the liveliest interest on behalf of the Jews; what is being considered is the sale of Syria to them and the creation of a Jewish kingdom."⁷⁰ For its part, the *Quotidienne* took the opportunity to touch on an idea that was then gaining ground in France and had found a vigorous champion in Lamartine. Why should not the Maronites be granted their own state, thus reviving a dream that could be traced back to the Crusades? "We realize," wrote the paper, "everything that France could gain by backing the independence of the Christians in Lebanon and their recognition as a

⁶⁹ "From Our Correspondent," *Globe* (27 July).

⁷⁰ "Revue des Feuilles Anglaises," *Univers* (4 August).

nation. But what it is impossible for us to understand is what interest we could have in following in the wake of England to establish the Jews there."⁷¹

On 17 August the *Times*, which continued (as already noted) to treat the guilt or innocence of the Damascus Jews as an open question, also turned its attention to the restorationist issue. "The Jews, with all their faults," remarked the leading article,

must be regarded as among the first who essentially contributed to the civilization of the world, as the holders of a pure and simple faith, and as the herald of one still more spiritual and sublime. And there are . . . none who will not rejoice if, in cooperation with the advancing spirit of government and society in the East, they should again raise in the ancient seats of their glory . . . a bulwark against . . . lawless tyranny and social degeneracy . . . All who have paid any attention to modern Judaism know that, especially in recent years, the minds of Jews have been eagerly directed toward Palestine; and that, in anticipation . . . of the Jewish state, many are prepared to avail themselves of the facilities which events may afford, to return to the land of their fathers. . . .

Christians . . . are endeavouring . . . to remove obstructions and are intently watching those coming events whose shadows are . . . passing over the political horizon.

The article went on to describe approvingly the address (or memorial) sent in 1839 to the Protestant monarchs and governments of the world; and it noted, in particular, the argument therein expressed that "no lasting solution of the Eastern crisis can be expected" without the "restoration of the Jewish polity." Of course, the *Times* continued, "the Scriptural grounds . . . do not belong to our province," but it was impossible to escape the fact that the Jews, although divided by "diversities of language, of custom, of occupation and of opinion [still] . . . seem with invincible tenacity to adhere to all distinctive national characteristics. . . . It is for Christian philanthropists and enlightened statesmen . . . to consider whether this remarkable people . . . under national institutions might not be advantageously employed for the interests of civilization in the East."⁷²

In the course of this article favorable mention was made of the restorationist activity of Lord Ashley. And from entries in Ashley's diary, it is possible to trace his growing enthusiasm for the cause during the summer of 1840. On 24 July he was apparently still unaware of the five-power treaty, for he then wrote of the Egyptian rule in Syria as a given: "It seems as though money were the only thing wanting to regenerate the world. . . . Why, money

⁷¹ *Quotidienne* (3 August). See, too, the article "Affaires d'Orient" (a review of Clot-Bey's new book on Egypt), which argued against the establishment of a Jewish "kingdom" in Syria and for a "Christian kingdom" there, *ibid.* [9 August].

⁷² [Leading article] *Times* (17 August), p. 4.

would almost restore the Jews to the Holy Land. Certainly as far as Muhammed Ali is the arbiter of their destinies."⁷³

By the 31st, though, he was clearly finding it very difficult to keep his excitement under control, and was worried lest his emotions were leading him to misread the providential message:

Anxious about the hopes and prospects of the Jewish people. Everything seems ripe for their return to Palestine: "the way of the Kings of the East is prepared."* Could the five powers of the West be induced to guarantee the security of life and possessions to the Hebrew race, they would now flow back in rapidly augmenting numbers. But is this step an endeavour to hasten the times and seasons which the Father hath put in His own power? Consulted Bickersteth; he says decidedly not.⁷⁴

(Edward Bickersteth, the rector of Walton in Hertfordshire, was an influential member of the London Society and a committed restorationist.)

Lord Ashley, a prominent figure in the Tory Party, had close connections to the *Times*, and later in the year, with England involved in war against the Egyptian forces in Syria, he would use his influence to persuade the paper to put an end to its furious attacks on Palmerston's foreign policy.⁷⁵ It turns out, however, that he was in no way involved in the publication of the leading article about the return of the Jews to Palestine. And he was particularly taken aback to discover that the paper had obtained and published a copy of a survey which he was proposing to conduct in order to ascertain Jewish attitudes toward the restorationist project. "The *Times* of 17 August," he noted in his diary,

filled me with astonishment. I wish I had put down at the moment, what I felt on reading it; half satisfaction, half dismay; pleased to see my opinions and projects so far taken up and approved; alarmed lest this premature disclosure of them should bring upon us all the charge of fanaticism. How did the article get there? By what means were those queries [of mine] sent to the paper? . . .

Now who could have believed a few years ago that this subject could have been treated in a newspaper of wide circulation, gravely, sincerely and zealously, and yet so it is; and who sees not the handwriting of God upon the wall? The very insults, misrepresentations and persecutions of the Jews at Damascus bring forward the main question.⁷⁶

* Revelation 16:12.

⁷³ Ashley's diary (24 July) qu. in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, vol. 1, p. 310.

⁷⁴ Ashley's diary (31 July), Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts. (Hodder attributed this entry erroneously to 24 July.)

⁷⁵ On Ashley's influence at the *Times*: his diary (4 November) in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, vol. 1, p. 315; cf. *History of the "Times,"* vol. 1, pp. 380-3, where it is suggested that the editor, Thomas Barnes, reduced the opposition to Palmerston in the hope that he might be won over to the Tories.

⁷⁶ Ashley's diary (24 August), Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (partially quoted in Hodder, vol. 1, p. 311).

It was, in reality, no cause for surprise that Ashley's questionnaire had been leaked to the press without his knowledge. The diplomatic crisis of the summer months – taken together, it is possible to surmise, with the approaching end of the year 5600 – now unleashed a variety of individual, and probably little coordinated, initiatives.

Thus, the correspondent, who had taken it upon himself to reveal Ashley's projected survey, left no doubt about his own position. "The proposition to plant the Jewish people in the land of their fathers," he insisted, "is no longer a matter of mere speculation, but a serious political consideration." Nobody could ignore the fact that the ministerial press was floating trial balloons in an effort to advance the prospects of such a plan. Furthermore, added the anonymous writer, it was important to note, in this context, the "deeply interesting discovery . . . made on the south-west shores of the Caspian, enclosed in a chain of mountains, of the remnants of the Ten Tribes."⁷⁷ (Fascination with the lost tribes of Israel was, of course, common to both the Christian millennialists and the Jewish messianists, who shared the assumption that those tribes, too, would play a key role in the redemptive process.)⁷⁸

Letters to the *Globe* and the *Times*, likewise published in August, elaborated further on the restorationist theme. It was argued, time and again, that the Jews had always retained their attachment to their ancient homeland. "Their little children are taught," wrote "An English Christian," "to expect that they shall one day see Jerusalem. They [the Jews] purchase no landed property and hold themselves in readiness at a few hours notice to revisit what they and we tacitly agree to call 'their own land.' It is theirs by a right which no other nation can boast."⁷⁹

Furthermore, argued another letter, to permit the Jews to purchase Palestine would free the area from the rival claims of the great powers – "one great cause of dissension between France and England would be at once removed; for both the Porte and Egypt are decidedly in want of money and will gladly sell their respective rights in the Syrian territory." Provided that they were guaranteed law and order in the county, "I have reason to believe that the Jews would readily enter into such financial arrangements as would secure them the absolute possession of Jerusalem and Syria."

In this respect, the much enhanced position held by the Jews in the modern world was of crucial significance: "The moral and intellectual position of the Jews in the present day, as well as their commercial connections, has enabled them to assume a political sphere of activity at once lofty and

⁷⁷ "Syria – Restoration of the Jews (From a Correspondent)," *Times* (17 August), p. 3.

⁷⁸ See, e.g.: the debate over the ten lost tribes in seventeenth-century England: Katz, *Philosémitism*, pp. 127–57.

⁷⁹ "To the Editor of the *Times* (From 'An English Christian')," *Times* (26 August), p. 6.

extensive." (Moses Mendelssohn and Benjamin Disraeli had both foreseen this development.) All in all, there was "no reason . . . why the Hebrews should not restore an independent monarchy in Syria as well as the Egyptians in Egypt and the Grecians in Greece."⁸⁰

Intermingled, of course, with such arguments drawn from the spheres of diplomacy and commerce were the appeals to the millennialist readings of Prophecy: the references to the 1,260 years now "not very far from its termination,"⁸¹ and the quotations from the books of Daniel or Revelation. Here, surely, was the chance for England to seize its moment in sacred history. "Cyrus, for permitting the captive Jews to go up to Jerusalem, was honoured with an everlasting memorial upon the pages of inspiration. Britain will not miss a recompense of equal worth and honour for an act of the same enlightened benevolence."⁸² (It should be noted that it was in this period, too, on 26 August, that the memorandum sent privately in January 1839 to the Protestant states of the world was first published in the *Times*.)

In parallel with the letters to the press there was a flow of restorationist appeals from private citizens directed to Lord Palmerston. The foreign office archives contain close to a dozen such documents delivered during the course of 1840, nearly all of them dated from August or September. The reasoning presented therein to the foreign secretary did not differ essentially from that already described here, although the letters are not without their own points of particular interest. In one case, for example, it was proposed that a "Syriac Judean empire" be established by the powers and that "the sovereignty of the new nation be conferred on Prince George of Cambridge, married to a daughter of the King of the French."⁸³ Another correspondent (J. Theophilus Lee) looked forward to that "powerful kingdom [of the Jews] which would prove an effectual stop to future struggles between the governor of Egypt and the Sultan."⁸⁴

And a certain Charles Samuel Powell offered, on 18 August, to carry despatches for Palmerston to the Middle East – "Your lordship has identified with the Jewish cause and so have I. . . . Could not your lordship, by enhancing the importance of the present mission under Sir Moses Montefiore, depute messengers with further instructions and to act as auxiliaries to the cause?"⁸⁵ In a number of letters, moreover, it was suggested to Palmerston that if he adopted the proposal made, he could win fame for himself and his name would "be handed down to posterity."⁸⁶

⁸⁰ To the Editor of the *Times* (From FB)," *ibid.* ⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² "The Eastern Question (From a Correspondent: L)," *Globe* (14 August).

⁸³ H. F. to Palmerston (25 May) FO 78/420, pp. 226–8.

⁸⁴ J. Theophilus Lee to Palmerston (13 August) FO 78/422, pp. 4–5.

⁸⁵ Powell to Palmerston (18 August) *ibid.*, p. 46.

⁸⁶ E.g.: Lee to Palmerston (13 August), *ibid.*, p. 5.

Obviously, however, it was Lord Ashley who was best placed to carry the restorationist message to the foreign secretary. He doubtless had that task in mind when he decided to draw up his questionnaire to gauge Jewish opinion. After all, a skeptic such as Palmerston would naturally ask before all else whether the Jews themselves had any interest in the repossession of Palestine. And, clearly, there was no movement visible in the Jewish communities of the West to parallel, or encourage, the restorationist upsurge apparent in certain Christian circles during the summer of 1840.

As a result, there were those millennialists who argued that, *faute de mieux*, no demands should be made upon the Jews and that the Holy Land should simply be handed back to them on a silver platter. Thus, we read in a restorationist pamphlet, published in 1840 and sent to Lord Palmerston, that the Jews did not obtrude "their wishes . . . upon the nations . . . because they now understand that the event is to be brought about by the . . . zeal of the . . . Christian powers."⁸⁷ And one of the Rothschilds was quoted in the *Times* (whether accurately or not) as having declared some years back that "Judea is our own; we will not buy it; we wait till God shall restore it to us."⁸⁸

But, given his determination to translate restorationist belief into the terms of practical politics, Ashley could not accept Jewish passivity with such equanimity. Key questions in his list, for example, read: "Would the Jews of station and property be inclined to return to Palestine, carry with them their capital, and invest it in the cultivation of the land if . . . life and property were rendered secure?"; "How soon would they be inclined and ready to go back?"; and "Would they go back entirely at their own expense?"⁸⁹

In his diary, under the date of 1 August, Ashley described one of his attempts, which caused him considerable anguish, to win over the foreign secretary:

Dined with Palmerston. After dinner left alone with him. Propounded my scheme, which seemed to strike his fancy; he asked some questions, and readily promised to consider it. How singular is the order of Providence! . . . Palmerston has already been chosen by God to be an instrument of good to His ancient people; to do homage, as it were, to their inheritance, and to recognize their rights without believing their destiny. And it seems he will yet do more. But though the motive be kind, it is not sound. I am forced to argue politically, financially, commercially; these considerations strike him home.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ *Settlement of the Jewish People in Palestine* (pamphlet sent to Palmerston by Henry Innes, 11 August) FO 78/421, p. 239.

⁸⁸ "To the Editor of the *Times* (From 'An English Christian')," *Times* (26 August), p. 6.

⁸⁹ "Syria – Restoration of the Jews (From a Correspondent)," *ibid.* (17 August), p. 3.

⁹⁰ Ashley's diary (1 August), *qu.* in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, vol. 1, pp. 310–11.

The foreign secretary was as good as his word; and on 11 August he sent a despatch on the subject of the Jews and Palestine to Lord Ponsonby in Constantinople. His opening paragraph could have been copied directly from almost any millennialist document:

There exists among the Jews dispersed over Europe a strong notion that the time is approaching when their nation is to return to Palestine; and consequently . . . their thoughts have been bent more intently than before upon the means of realizing that wish. It is well known that the Jews of Europe possess great wealth; and . . . any country in which a considerable number of them might choose to settle would derive great benefit from the riches which they would bring into it.

Whether or not the viceroy of Egypt retained *de facto* possession, it would be to the benefit of the Sultan, as the ultimate sovereign, "to encourage the Jews . . . to settle in Palestine." Equally important, the Jewish people, once invited in by the Ottoman regime, "would be a check upon any future evil design of Muhammed Ali or his successor." Ponsonby was, therefore, instructed to urge "the Turkish government . . . to hold out every just encouragement to the Jews of Europe to return to Palestine." Such a development depended, of course, upon the establishment of "impartial courts of justice." Even if relatively few Jews took up such an offer, concluded Palmerston, "still the promulgation of some laws in their favour would spread a friendly disposition toward the Sultan among the Jews of Europe; and the Turkish government must . . . see how advantageous it would be to the Sultan's cause thus to create useful friends in many countries by one single edict."⁹¹

The great encouragement thus received from the foreign secretary did much to stoke the flames of Ashley's imagination, which had already been so greatly stimulated by the editorial stance of the *Globe* and the *Times*. "Palmerston," he noted in his diary on 24 August, "tells me that he has already written to Lord Ponsonby to direct him to open an intercourse with Reshid Pasha . . . respecting protection and encouragement to the Jews. This is a prelude to the antitype of the decree of Cyrus."⁹² And the entry for the 29th reads:

The newspapers teem with documents about the Jews. Many assail and many defend them. I have as yet read nothing (except McCaul's treatise) which exhibits any statement either new or clever . . . The *Times* . . . has stirred up an immense variety of projects and opinions; every one has a thought and every one has an interpretation. What a chaos of schemes

⁹¹ Palmerston to Ponsonby (11 August, no. 134) FO 78/390 in Hyamson, *The British Consulate in Jerusalem*, vol. 1, pp. 33–4.

⁹² Ashley's diary (24 August), qu. in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, vol. 1, p. 311.

and disputes for the time when the affair of the Jews shall be . . . fully before the world! What violence, what hatred. What combination, what discussion. What a stir of every passion . . . in men's hearts.⁹³

(It was doubtless this kind of emotionalism in Ashley that so irritated his new mother-in-law, who told him that her friends regarded him "certainly as an honest man, but as a fanatic, an extravagant.")⁹⁴

Probably at Palmerston's request, Ashley now drew up a formal memorandum, addressed to the foreign secretary on 21 September. Phrased concisely and logically, it set out the restorationist case without mention of biblical Prophecy. The Jews, he wrote, had the wealth and skills to develop Palestine more cheaply than anybody else. "Long ages of suffering have trained this people to habits of endurance and self denial," which could now be put to good use in "the service of their ancient country." Moreover, "having been, almost everywhere, trained in implicit obedience to autocratic rule," they would prove loyal subjects of the Sultan if (as seemed probable) Turkish rule were to be restored in the region.

He employed balanced tones in assessing the possible Jewish reaction:

It is not to be expected that the effect of a proclamation on the part of a Sultan . . . will be instantaneous; that the Jews will flock back either speedily, or at first in great numbers. The rich will be suspicious . . . ; the poor delayed by the collection of funds – a few will prefer a seat in the House of Commons . . . ; and some . . . of the French-Israelites (as now they call themselves) may entertain like sentiments. The reformed, or infidel, Jews of Germany would probably reject the proposal; but throughout the whole world, the rabbinical Jews . . . would joyfully accept it. The earliest immigrants will come from Poland, Russia proper, and the shores of northern Africa – their wealthier brethren, . . . unwilling to hazard the mass of their capital, will invest in the cultivation of the soil; Sir Moses Montefiore, it is well known, has already signified his intentions to that effect; mercantile enterprise . . . and a successful agriculture . . . will obtain an annually increasing expenditure of foreign capital.

Only in his concluding sentence did Ashley permit himself a slightly more emotional note. "The world," he wrote, "is waiting a decision; and it appears probable that this final settlement has been reserved by Providence for your Lordship's administration."⁹⁵

Together with his own memorandum, Ashley enclosed a statement from Erasmus Scott Calman, the well-known missionary (a converted Jew) who

⁹³ Ibid. (29 August). ⁹⁴ Ibid. (3 September), Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts.

⁹⁵ Ashley to Palmerston (25 September) (enclosure no. 2 with Palmerston to Ponsonby [25 November, no. 251]) FO 195/165 in Hyamson, *The British Consulate in Jerusalem*, vol. 2, "Addenda and Corrigenda," pp. lxxi–lxxiii.

had spent many years in Syria and Palestine, but was then in London. He had been given a copy of the questionnaire by Ashley and it is possible that Ashley's own analysis of the Jewish situation was prompted, in part, by Calman's response. Calman stated it as his considered opinion, first, that even the Jews already living in Palestine would in many cases be ready to become farmers if only they could work the land unmolested. He himself in the past had presented a scheme to the chief rabbi of England, Solomon Herschel, proposing the development of agriculture as a way to lift the Jews in the Holy Land out of abject poverty. "Rabbi Herschel perfectly concurred with me . . . promis[ing] to lay it [the project] before the rich Jews in London."

And, meanwhile, Sir Moses Montefiore had adopted the same idea. It had to be admitted, though, stated Calman, that unless law and order were guaranteed, the Jews would (with a few exceptions) prefer the relative safety of the towns. Wherever he went, Calman had found that he was asked by both Jews and Muslims, all eager for good government, "When will you English come and take possession of this country?" (However, he added, in two villages near Safed Jews were already earning their keep from the land; and they were the men who had supplied most of the bodyguard that had accompanied Montefiore "armed with swords and pistols all the way to Beirut – and such was the formidable and imposing appearance of this armed party that Sir Moses was in consequence distinguished by the title of king of the Jews.")

Far more significant in the long run, though, was the fact that in the tsarist empire, large numbers of Jews had already settled as pioneer farmers in the

underpopulated southern steppes. And no sooner should there be an opening to cultivate the soil in Palestine than the Jews from the Russian dominions would flow into it, and especially if Palestine should be placed under British protection . . . A proclamation like that of Cyprus would be echoed by hundreds of thousands of Jews in Poland, Russia and elsewhere; and by the rich as well as the poor.⁹⁶

Lord Ashley was convinced that his memorandum would in all probability prove to be of extraordinary historical importance. "This now done," he wrote in his diary on 25 September, "I committed to God for the result, submitting to His glory and the welfare of Israel." He addressed the document to the foreign secretary from his country home, St. Giles House – "and it will sanctify the dear place and cause its name to be mentioned with reverence in future generations."⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Calman to Ashley (3 August) *ibid.* (enclosure no. 1), pp. lxxiii–lxxi. (On the Jewish farmers near Safed, cf. [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1. p. 166; on the bodyguard to Beirut, *ibid.*, pp. 190–2, where a much less heroic picture is painted.)

⁹⁷ Ashley's diary (25 September), Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts.

By then, though, Palmerston had the beginnings of a war on his hands; and he did not forward the memoranda of Ashley and Calman to Ponsonby – together with similar proposals made by committees of the Church of Scotland – until late November. He then introduced yet another factor to be brought to bear in conversation with the Ottomans. The issues involved, he wrote,

excite a very deep interest in the minds of a large number of persons in the United Kingdom and the Sultan would enlist in his favour the good opinion of numerous and powerful classes in the country if he were immediately to issue some formal edict granting such Jews as choose to fix themselves in any part of the Turkish dominions, but more especially in Syria, full security for their persons and property.

To insure that such conditions actually be created, “the Jews in Palestine . . . should be at liberty to transmit any complaints to the Turkish government through the British consular offices . . . and the embassy at Constantinople.”⁹⁸

However, at no time did the foreign secretary ever suggest that Palestine be detached from the Ottoman empire. Approached by one correspondent with such a project, Palmerston had replied on 17 August that, while he was grateful for the suggestion “that the Jews . . . be established in Syria as an independent nation,” he considered “the plan you propose to be impracticable.”⁹⁹

As for the possibility of a decree to the Jewish people in the name of the Sultan, that would have to await the final outcome of the hostilities in Syria and the postwar diplomatic negotiations.

⁹⁸ Palmerston to Ponsonby (24 November, no. 248) FO 78/391 in Hyamson, *The British Consulate in Jerusalem*, vol. 1, p. 35.

⁹⁹ Palmerston to Lee (13 August) FO 78/422, p. 40.

Jewish nationalism in embryo

Writing on the Damascus affair in 1924, Ben Zion Dinur (Dinaburg) argued that the international crisis of 1840 had presented the Jewish people with a remarkable opportunity to consolidate its position and to prepare the way for its future sovereignty in the land of Israel. It was then, he wrote, that "the question of a Jewish state in Palestine emerged as a political issue facing European diplomacy for the first time."¹ The moment was missed because the Jewish leaders found themselves totally caught up in the ritual-murder affair.

Indeed, Dinur went so far as to argue that the Damascus affair had been specifically engineered to frustrate Jewish plans to develop agriculture in Palestine. And the plot, he declared, had succeeded all too well. The idea of Jewish colonization was overwhelmed by the struggle against the blood accusation, and if it was somehow barely kept alive thereafter, it was not by "the men of action and national leaders, but only by naive innocents awaiting the messiah."² (Among such messianic advocates of proto-Zionism, Dinur mentioned Alkalai and Kalischer.)

Of course, there is much in this set of hypotheses that has no factual basis. Thus, as already noted, Palmerston bluntly rejected the requests reaching him from Christian millennialists that he adopt the cause of a Jewish state in Palestine. That issue thus never came under consideration by the governments of Europe in that period. There is, in fact, something anachronistic in the very suggestion that the establishment of a Jewish state could have come under serious consideration by the European powers at a time predating the establishment of the first nationalist movement, *Hibat Zion*, by four decades.

Furthermore, it has been argued throughout this study that there was no preconceived plot against the Damascus Jews. And once the ritual-murder case was under construction in February and March 1840, none of the many people involved, whether the hunters or the hunted, chose to link it with Jewish claims to the Holy Land.

Nonetheless, it would appear that Dinur was correct in his belief that a diplomatic opportunity had been missed in 1840. After all, in 1839 Montefiore had presented his ambitious proposal for the development of Jewish

¹ Dinur, "Haofi hamedini shel 'alilat Damesek," p. 521. ² Ibid., p. 528.

agriculture to Muhammed Ali; and in 1840 Palmerston sent two despatches urging the British ambassador at the Porte to obtain guarantees for the security of Jewish settlers in Palestine. If the appeals of the Christian millennialists had been reinforced at that stage by Montefiore, with the backing of the Rothschild family, the foreign secretary would in all probability have acted with still greater urgency and persistence. In consequence, Reshid Pasha might well have agreed to issue a formal statement assuring Jewish agriculturalists that they would receive all necessary protection.

True, such a declaration would not, it can be assumed, have radically altered the development of the Jewish community in Palestine over the coming decades, until 1881, but it might well have marginally strengthened its bargaining power vis-à-vis Ottoman officialdom. However, as Dinur understood, the ritual-murder affair threw the Jewish leadership on the defensive, and all diplomatic efforts were absorbed in the campaign against the blood charge. Montefiore did not raise his agricultural plans in his meetings with the Middle East rulers during the latter half of 1840.

At the same time, though, it would be a mistake to assume that the issue of Jewish settlement in Palestine was raised in 1840 by nobody except the occasional religious messianist, such as Alkalai, caught up in the hopes and fears associated with the year 5600. First, as Jacob Katz has pointed out (and as already mentioned), Alkalai was, in reality, still absorbed in the attempt to interpret providential signs at that time, and had not as yet come up with any coherent man-made strategy of his own.³ As for Kalischer, he had indeed presented a concrete proposal in 1836 for the purchase of land in Palestine to Amschel Rothschild in Frankfurt,⁴ but his voice apparently did not make itself heard during the crisis of 1840.

Second, and conversely, there was a recognizable body of opinion, sprung not from the traditional but from the modernized sections of the Jewish world, which demanded that a positive response be made to the restorationist challenge. On the one hand, a group of students centered at the University of Vienna sought in 1840 and after for practical ways to advance Jewish colonization in Palestine. And, on the other, Julius Fürst opened the columns of his new weekly, the *Orient*, to the advocates of such programs. At a certain point, members of the student group also began to publish articles in the *Orient*; and it eventually emerged that Fürst himself was enthusiastically committed to a strategy of Jewish settlement in the Holy Land.

Even when added together, of course, none of this activity constituted anything but a most marginal factor amid the political whirlpool that had

³ Katz, "Meshihiut uleumiut," pp. 14-15.

⁴ Kalischer to A. Rothschild (25 August 1836) in [Kalischer], *Haketavim haziyoniyim*, pp. 1-14; on Kalischer's messianic and proto-Zionist thought: Myers, "Seeking Zion"; and Katz, "Demuto hahistorit."

caught hold of the Jewish people in 1840. Thanks, though, to the publicity that Fürst was able to provide, the idea of Jewish colonization in the land of Israel now became the source of considerable attention, controversy, and even – in some circles – excitement within the Jewish world.

The *Orient*, on 27 June, published a long article signed by a certain DBH, resident in the town of Konstanz in the state of Baden and on the German-Swiss frontier. In the wake of the blood accusation (*die jüdische Blutfrage*), he wrote, he felt compelled to issue an appeal “from a Jew to his brothers.” What followed was argued with great emotion, but also with logic and a firm grasp of contemporary politics.

The Ottoman empire, he insisted, was doomed to destruction. “The Slavic provinces in the north have created their own regimes; Greece has broken away; the Wallachias are counting the days until their full independence.” The Arabs were on the move. “No power on earth can stand in the way of its [the empire’s] total overthrow.” Every nationality with a stake in the area was making good its claim. “Will Israel alone keep its hands in its pockets?” There could be no greater error, because “the finger of God is [to be seen] in the events in the East.”

Was it not, he asked, for just such an opportunity that “we . . . have maintained our particular morals and customs, language and religion for so many hundreds of years in the face of all the storms?” Surely, the ultimate purpose of such steadfast survival could not be the contemporary scramble for emancipation. Civil equality, if granted, was a formula for the self-annihilation of the Jews as a separate people. But, in reality, emancipation was the exception, not the rule; and, meanwhile, the Jews had to humiliate themselves with the submission of “endless petitions requesting ameliorations.”

Emancipation held out no hope, because it did nothing to reduce the hostility, deeply rooted in the mass of the people, against the Jews. “Look at the states where the democratic element has the upper hand; one finds there not good will, but hatred and contempt.” (The writer, presumably, spoke here in part of his own neighboring Switzerland.)

The Jews were not only perceived as outsiders, aliens, but also as marked by a profound racial disparity.

The difference between those of basic Southern stock [*Urstammes*] and the blond migrants who came to the North is too ineradicably marked in both body and soul to permit an equalization. We are not Germans nor Slavs, neither Welsh nor Greek. We are the children of Israel from the same ethnic origin as the Arabs. . . . That we have to beg for the rights allowed a guest causes us unheard-of misfortune, but we shall not always lack for that sacred word – a fatherland.

The Turks and Arabs had their own territories, but they did not include the ancient homeland of the Jewish nation, which was inhabited by a "chaotic mixture of all peoples and tongues." Beyond doubt, therefore, "Syria and Palestine are free." Now was the time of decision. "What stands in the way? Nothing but our own lack of action! No Pharaoh would hinder our journey; no Legions block our passage."

Given their penurious and precarious position, both the Ottoman and Turkish governments could be brought to see how "advantageous it would be to become the protector of a peaceful and rich people – rather than always struggling with the never-ending need for men and money." The backing of one or more of the European powers should not be hard to obtain. "Have not the Serbians and Greeks found support?" If the French had involved themselves in North Africa, the British in India, and the Russians in Mongolia, "will no regime be found to wrest Syria from the all-engulfing anarchy which reigns there in order to replace it with a school that can bring humanity and education to the East?"

Palestine and Syria lay astride potentially vital trade routes, and were tailor-made to serve as a great center of international commerce. The Jewish people was ideally equipped to make the maximal use of such potentialities. "Our years of training have been long spent in all the countries between the north and the south poles; there is no trade, no skill, which we have not acquired."

The writer concluded on an exalted note:

Jehovah's people, awake from your thousands of years of slumber!
Gather around a leader; if you truly wish it, a Moses will not fail to appear. . . . Take possession of the land of your fathers. . . . Build there the Third Temple on Zion, greater and more splendid than before! . . . He [the Lord] will not desert you in your last battle.⁵

It is very possible that this article was, in fact, written by a Christian convert from Judaism. After all, millennialists of Jewish origin were, in many cases, accustomed to refer to themselves as Jews, as members of the Jewish nation. The arguments advanced by DBH were of the kind much more commonly found in the Protestant than in the Jewish worlds at that time. Evangelical millennialism, moreover, was well represented in Switzerland, while there was only a minuscule Jewish population in that country; in Konstanz itself, the ban on permanent residence by Jews, first introduced in the fifteenth century, was still in force in 1840.⁶

However that might or might not be, Fürst published the article without comment, and it proved to be the first in a long series of articles, all the rest

⁵ "Deutschland" (article by DBH), *Orient* (27 June), pp. 200–1.

⁶ See L. Löwenstein, *Geschichte*, pp. 19–56.

of which were presumably written by Jews, on the question of settlement in Palestine. A direct response to the article from Konstanz, sent in by an anonymous writer from the Neckar valley, appeared in the *Orient* on 25 July.

"No thinking or feeling Jew," admitted this correspondent, could "remain entirely deaf" to the serious issues raised by DBH, but there was a danger of too much heat producing too little light. There were fundamental flaws in the appeal emanating from Konstanz. It was highly questionable, for example, whether the Jews of the present day were able or inclined to take up the challenge. The Jewish people had, certainly, developed a unique set of rules to regulate its life, but they were hardly of a kind suited to "the existence of a modern Jewish state." On the other hand, in the contemporary era could it really be said that Hebrew still served as a "living bond" uniting Jews around the world? "The answer is to be found . . . in every word of ours and in the *German* of the author himself."

Again, it might well be true that the future lay with national states based on exclusive principles such as Magyarism and Slavism (*Magyartum, Slaven-tum*), but the fight for liberal policies was thereby rendered doubly urgent. Even if organized along national lines, the new states would contain large ethnic minorities. There was, thus, no choice but to defend "that theory of the state which seeks to assure that differences of origin and belief exert the least possible influence in civil and governmental affairs." The recent meeting of the antislavery society in London could serve as an inspiration for everybody with faith in the equality of man.

It was all too easy to draw the wrong conclusions from the persistence of Judeophobia, in general, and from the Damascus affair, in particular. After all, it could by no means be taken for granted that Ratti-Menton (the "new Haman") and Thiers spoke for the French nation at large. But, then, who could be surprised if somebody tied to Switzerland – a country "falsely accused of being democratic" – should take a particularly bleak view of popular xenophobia? ("We have come to learn that it is in states and places where Jews are not known that they are most hated . . . , Norway being an honorable exception.") And to argue (as did DBH) that the Jews, originally agriculturalists, had always been a trading people, was not only false but would also supply their worst enemies with ready ammunition.

This lengthy preamble appeared to be leading to a total rejection of the case for Palestine, but the article now changed course: "The enthusiasm and love for the promised land of our fathers," demonstrated by the writer from Konstanz, deserved every praise. If the Crusaders had set out to conquer the Holy Land by force, "why should not a Jew for once have the idea of peaceful settlement in the country – previously occupied by his ancestors – under the protection of its legal sovereign and of the . . . civilized powers?" Everybody, of course, had the right to emigrate to whatever

country he chose, and "this applies just as well to Palestine as to North America."

Moreover, the Jews certainly had a collective interest in trying to "civilize the Jewish inhabitants" already resident in Palestine. "And this goal can be better achieved by the erection of factories and the encouragement of artisan trades than by the large influx of charity which by-passes the real poor and attracts idlers hiding under religious guise."

There was clearly room for a major initiative here. Many Jews of the type now going to the United States might well prefer to go to the Holy Land. "If," concluded the writer from the Neckar, "a society were formed, under the leadership of a highly placed and influential person, it could aid such emigrants to settle in Palestine by providing material and . . . [other] support."⁷

The author, doubtless, had Sir Moses Montefiore primarily in mind when he wrote these words. Montefiore's plans for the large-scale transfer of Jews to agriculture had become public knowledge by the summer of 1840. Moreover, frequent reports in the press spoke of industrial projects. "At this moment," we read, for example, in the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* of 30 May, "Jews in England, Italy and the East are actively seeking to set up manufactories and factories at various points in Judea in which only Jewish workers will be employed."⁸ (And later in the year, the *Journal des Débats* could bring out a report that Montefiore was ready "to take up residence [in Jerusalem] if it comes to the formation of some kind of [Jewish] republic there.")⁹

Starting in September, the *Orient* began to publish articles authored by members of the student group centered in Vienna. Relatively little is known about this organization which, as a political club, had to function secretly to escape the attention of the Austrian police. But the historians N. M. Gelber and Salo W. Baron both discovered a number of documents in the Austrian and British archives that throw light on its activities during the years 1840-2; and their findings, published during the interwar period, still remain the primary source of relevant information.¹⁰

The student society had its origins in Prague, where its nucleus was formed in 1836 by two young students attending the university there, Moritz Steinschneider and Abraham Benisch. (They would later become prominent figures in the Jewish world, the former as a famous bibliographer, the latter as an editor of the *Jewish Chronicle* in London.) Gelber, presumably quoting from original documents that have since been destroyed, stated that the society took as its aim "the restoration of Jewish independence in Pal-

⁷ "Vom Neckar," *Orient* (25 July), pp. 226-8. ⁸ "Syrien," *LAZ* (30 May), p. 1629.

⁹ "France," *JdesD* (27 October).

¹⁰ Gelber, "Agudat studentim beOstriyah"; Baron, "Abraham Benisch's Project."

estine.”¹¹ It should, perhaps, be noted here that Benisch and Steinschneider, who both came from the provinces – the one from Drossau in Bohemia, the other from Prossnitz in Moravia – shared a first-class grounding in rabbinic literature.

When they moved on to the University of Vienna in 1837, they eventually refounded their club there. Among the members was Albert Löwy (who would later play a key role in the foundation of the Anglo-Jewish Association in 1871) and it is to him that we owe the only eyewitness account, however belated, of the club:

Fifty-five years have elapsed since Benisch . . . attracted around him a large number of his Jewish fellow-collegiates to whom he used to propound, at Steinschneider's and my residence, or during excursions in Vienna's charming outskirts, his scheme for promoting, in a cautious and peaceful manner, the liberation of our Jewish fellow countrymen . . . from intolerance and oppression. After deliberations, extending over many months, . . . [it was] decided to form a secret society. . . . [Its aim was] a gradual emigration from what was called our "stepfatherland." The society assumed the name "Unity" [*Einheit*] and had for its symbol the numeric figure "1." Our eyes were directed towards Turkey . . . inclusive of Palestine.¹²

Löwy mentioned that the club was represented in "foreign countries," and he himself was to be found in London during the year 1840, seeking to win support for its program. Presumably he was the source of the frequent (unsigned) reports from England that began to appear in the *Orient* from the autumn on. Some of the articles he perhaps wrote himself, but most were apparently composed by Steinschneider on the basis of material supplied from England. However, Benisch arrived in that country in mid-1841, and he, too, doubtless then began to send his own contributions to the journal.¹³

Thus, on the initiative of the student group, at least six major reports from London now appeared in the *Orient* on the British phenomenon known as the movement for the "Restoration of the Jews." By concentrating the spotlight on this theme, the authors were clearly determined to impress on the German Jews that Christian restorationism represented a powerful and deep-rooted force in English life. It opened up political perspectives that the Jewish world had no right to ignore.

The correspondents showed themselves to be exceptionally well-informed on the subject, and they clearly made maximal use of their close contacts with a most valuable source, Morris J. Raphall, the well-known Anglo-Jewish scholar. Raphall was among the Jews (and ex-Jews) who had been

¹¹ Gelber, "Agudat studentim beOstriyah," p. 108.

¹² A. Löwy, "Dr. Benisch," *JC* (Jubilee Supplement) (13 November 1891), p. 30.

¹³ Baron, "Abraham Benisch's Project," pp. 74-5, 75-6, n.

asked by Lord Ashley for an assessment of Jewish attitudes toward a return to Palestine, and had apparently been commissioned by him to write a report on the subject.¹⁴

Nonetheless, even though the articles were intended to convey a political message, it cannot be said that they conveyed that message in a single or unambiguous voice. There was no disguising the radical differences of appraisal dividing one article from another – the result either of inner doubts or else of the fact that more than one hand was involved in the composition. Moreover, the fact that the brilliant Central European students, with their youthful high spirits, would not miss a chance for ironic comment on the oddities and eccentricities of English life likewise weakened the power of the signals being transmitted to their German Jewish readership.

The more they came to know about the missionaries to the Jews and about the restorationists, the more they expressed their astonishment. "This party," stated a report to the *Orient* in November, "represents in its overall effort an idealistic and material force far more effective than even the Jews here who, in that respect, leave so much to be desired."¹⁵ And a later article presented a detailed analysis of the millennialist lobby and its extraordinary political potential:

If one bears in mind the persistence of this island people in pursuit of its plans; . . . the systematic ambition of this [restorationist] class . . . to turn its own ideas into the aspirations of the nation as a whole; and, finally, . . . the influence which public opinion exerts here on the government, and which the government in turn enjoys at the Porte – then one can understand just how important is the viewpoint of this nation with regard to the situation [in the Middle East]. The English, who are so very remote from the Idealism of the Germans, are to the highest degree practical. When they examine some idea, they ask not only, "Is it good?" but also, "Under what conditions can it be achieved?" [Hence] they are not thinking – at least for the time being – of any kind of independence for the Jews. They know full well . . . that in disputes between nations, soldiers are the most eloquent spokesmen. By the "Restoration of the Jews," they understand the dissemination of civilization among the Jews in the region and the prevention of any arbitrary encroachment . . . on the rights of the Jews as guaranteed by law.¹⁶

¹⁴ [Steinschneider]. "London, 13 November," *Orient* (5 December), p. 379; on Raphall, e.g.: Morais *Eminent Israelites*, pp. 287–91. (Raphall had been the editor of the weekly, published in London 1834–5, the *Hebrew Review and Magazine of Rabbinical Literature*.)

¹⁵ [Steinschneider], "London, 3 November," *Orient* (29 November), p. 372.

¹⁶ "London, 26 Juli," *ibid.* (28 August 1841), p. 235. (This belief in the extraordinary power of the "restorationist" camp was given expression – in part, doubtless, ironic and at the expense of her son-in-law, Lord Ashley – by Lady Emily Cowper (Palmerston), who in November 1840 told Princess Lieven that "we have on our side the fanatical and religious elements, and you know what a following they have in this country. They are absolutely determined that Jerusalem and the whole of Palestine be reserved for the Jews to return to; this is their only longing" [Webster, *The Foreign Policy*, vol. 2, p. 761].)

Obviously here was a lever of remarkable power that the Jewish people could put to its own use; but the students were by no means single-minded when it came to assessing their potential allies. In some of the articles there was a transparent decision to transmit nothing but a most positive picture of British attitudes to the Jews. Thus, the reader of the report in the *Orient* of 19 September, for example, could only have concluded that the *Times* published nothing but material in support of the Jews.¹⁷ In November the actual situation was laughed off in a single sentence. ("If you think that your German readers might be interested in a disputation about 'Kol Nidrei,' which supposedly discredits the oaths of the Messrs. Herschel and Meldola, and about 'Pour Forth Thy Wrath'* which is supposed to reinforce the blood accusation, you could report on it in extenso.")¹⁸ It was not until January 1841 that still another article, likewise addressed from London, gave due weight to the unpleasant truth that the *Times* also opened its columns freely to bitter attacks against the Jewish people.¹⁹

On a number of occasions, too, efforts were made to subject the motives of the restorationists to close scrutiny. The tone adopted was sometimes gently mocking. Nobody could read the huge output of millennialist literature, stated one report, without realizing that "here too the old rule holds true that everybody finds in the Bible what he brings to it."²⁰ Or, again, Alexander McCaul's role in the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews was compared to that of "the sun around which the rest of the members revolve like planets."²¹

But, at other times, the reports made no attempt to hide the extent of the missionary ambitions harbored by so many in the restorationist camp. It was their belief, we read, that a return of the Jews to Palestine would permit the "conversion of the Jews as a collectivity, *en gros*, as opposed to those less concentrated efforts which have failed."²² Uprooted from their traditional environment, poverty-stricken, and adrift in a new country, the Jews in the Holy Land would be exceptionally vulnerable to missionary efforts.

Despite all such doubts, however, the message arriving from London was, overall, that the Jewish people should climb aboard the restorationist bandwagon. Indeed, the arguments put forward by the millennialists were, at times, reproduced verbatim and with undisguised approval. This was true, for example, of a letter to the chief rabbi, Solomon Herschel, from William Filson Marsh, who insisted that the only way to prevent episodes of the type recently witnessed in Damascus and Rhodes was to opt for a return

* The terms "Kol Nidrei," and "Shfokh hamatka" (Pour Forth Thy Wrath) were printed in Hebrew characters.

¹⁷ [Steinschneider], "London, 26 August," *Orient* (19 September), pp. 289-90.

¹⁸ [Idem], "London, 3 November," *ibid.* (29 November), p. 372.

¹⁹ [Idem], "London, Dezember," *ibid.* (16 January 1841), p. 18.

²⁰ [Idem], "London, Januar," *ibid.* (20 March 1841), p. 91. ²¹ *ibid.*

²² [Idem], "London, 13 November," *ibid.* (5 December), p. 379.

to Palestine. As quoted in the *Orient* of 29 November, Marsh had written that

You cannot defend yourselves effectively against the eruption of similar acts of violence unless you once again become a nationality inhabiting its own land. Which country is as suited to such aspirations as your own? . . . Foreign consuls will provide protection. The country is ideally suited to commercial development. . . . If its purchase involves £1.5–2 millions, it will soon provide good interest as well as fame.²³

Ultimately, though, the reports to the *Orient* ran up against the same problem as that facing Lord Ashley. "It would be most implausible," stated an article from London in September, "to imagine that the great powers of Europe will be moved by an idea such as this unless the Jews themselves are prepared to go further and demonstrate in much clearer terms what they regard as their own interest, how the goal is to be achieved, and how it would contribute to the security of the neighboring states as well as the general maintenance of peace."²⁴

Try as they might, the student writers could not bring themselves to express any great confidence in the ability of British Jewry to take up this challenge. True, the Jews in England had responded vigorously to the Damascus affair, but there was no denying, as a rule, just how "indolent the mass of the English Jews are."²⁵ The only hope, therefore, lay "in the good intentions of a number of rich Jews who are talking about the colonization of Syria. . . . At their head is Sir Moses Montefiore who, given his position, his acquaintanceship with the rulers in the Orient, and particularly his great wealth, believes himself to be destined to provide the focal point."²⁶

And, certainly, stated an article dated 13 November, Montefiore was becoming a magnet for rising expectations. The colonization of Palestine, it was increasingly felt, could prevent future harassment of the Jews in the region and also provide a safe haven for Jews seeking to escape oppressive regimes elsewhere. "Sir Moses, as it is well known, has placed a standard [bearing the word] 'Jerusalem' in his coat of arms – somewhat premature, you may say! But emblems here do little harm; and fancies often lead to action."²⁷

At this same moment, mid-November, the students still in Vienna were trying to launch a lobbying campaign which, they hoped, would eventually reach and mobilize Montefiore. On the 17th, Adolphe Crémieux arrived in the Hapsburg capital on his way back from the Middle East; and two mem-

²³ [Idem], "London, 3 November," *ibid.* (29 November), p. 373 (here retranslated from the German).

²⁴ [Idem], "London, 26 August," *Orient* (19 September), p. 291.

²⁵ [Idem], "London, Dezember," *Orient* (16 January 1841), p. 18.

²⁶ [Idem], "London, 13 November," *Orient* (5 December), p. 379. ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

bers of the society, Abraham Benisch and Wilhelm Österreich, managed to arrange a meeting with him. Thanks to the Austrian security services, which intercepted their subsequent correspondence and filed away copies, some information about this meeting has been preserved.

The two young men expounded on their project for "Jewish settlement in the Holy Land,"²⁸ and Crémieux not only listened politely, but also promised to lend a helping hand. Specifically, he was ready to provide them with a letter of introduction to Montefiore. His own views on the subject were summarized in a note sent to Benisch and Österreich on 22 November. Crémieux sought to encourage them, but only on the understanding that their colonization plans would not be directed at the Jews in those countries that had granted them equal rights. "Situated as you are, in some sense, at the center of Germany," he wrote,

and coming, as you do, into daily contact with the Jewish population which is so numerous both in the country where you live and in the neighboring lands, you are better equipped than I to judge the importance and utility of this project. When I consider the factors stressed by you, I view its success as probable and its advantages as weighty. We French Jews who have our own fatherland very close to our hearts, will have less understanding than most of the Jews scattered across the globe for the necessity of such a colony in Palestine. But, without any doubt, our prayers and sympathies will accompany those of our brothers who return to that country, where our ancestors were so powerful, in pursuit of such a noble and useful goal as that proposed by you. In undertaking to create a settlement worthy of the epoch in which we live they will be benefiting civilization. The world now has its eyes fixed on the East. . . . You have chosen the most opportune moment to propagate your idea. But, before all else, it has to be approved by the councils of the major states; your future colony must enjoy effective, primarily European, protection.²⁹

In his letter introducing them to Montefiore, Crémieux referred to Benisch and Österreich as "two young pilgrims who have formed the noble project of attempting to create a Jewish settlement in the Holy Land." There was nobody, he continued, better equipped "than you to understand their project and to explain to them what can be hoped for in the future if their project were to be realized."³⁰ He was sure that Montefiore would hear them out with all due attention.

Once supplied with copies of these letters, the minister of police in Vienna requested a detailed report on the students involved and on their project for

²⁸ Crémieux to Benisch and Österreich (22 November) in Gelber, "Agudat studentim be-Ostriyah," p. 125.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 125-6. ³⁰ Crémieux to Montefiore (22 November) *ibid.*, p. 126.

Palestine. Fortunately for them, the chief of police, von Amberg, was able to state that Benisch and Österreicher had never been involved hitherto in clandestine politics. As for the planned "Jewish colony," it appeared to be nothing but "a half-baked monstrosity produced by still youthful minds; a fantastic idea on to which they have stumbled during their student years and which will vanish once they enter practical life." No action, he recommended, should be taken against them.

He was equally skeptical with regard to their proposed patrons; and his analysis with regard to Crémieux, however uncomplementary, was rather perceptive. "As far as Montefiore and Crémieux are concerned," he wrote,

their vanity may well have been flattered by the fact that in this affair, they have been asked for their advice and protection; such an opportunity allows them to bask in their new-won Jewish national fame. At least as far as the latter is concerned, he could not bring himself to display any special faith [in the project] as is made clear enough from certain passages in his letter.³¹

The chief of police pointed out specifically what Crémieux had written about the French Jews and the necessity of approval by the powers.

Montefiore did not return to Europe until early in 1841 and he bypassed Vienna. Abraham Benisch had to go to England in order to meet him for the first time, probably in the summer of that year. It was then, too, that Julius Fürst produced a long article in the *Orient* marking the first year since his publication of the appeal by DBH of Konstanz – "an emotional appeal," as Fürst put it, "to the Jews by a Jew where in ardent terms he reminded the remnant of Israel, scattered from pole to pole, of their own fatherland, belonging to them from the beginning to the end of time."

Fürst noted with great satisfaction that the contents of this article had been widely reported in various countries. The *Weekly Herald* in New York had reproduced it in translation (as incidentally, unmentioned by Fürst, did the missionary *Jewish Intelligence* in London), while the *Baseler Monatsschrift* had fully endorsed, and elaborated on, the appeal. More important, he declared, it had exerted an extraordinary impact on the Jewish youth in Central Europe. "In a thousand young hearts, still not demoralized," he wrote,

this inspiring appeal still echoes powerfully. It animates many people, some of whom always carry it with them like an amulet, while others find themselves moved by it to work for the national idea. Until then, this idea had existed as an unnamed sentiment slumbering in every honest

³¹ Von Amberg's report (8 May 1841), *ibid.*, pp. 129–30.

and true Jew, but this call for the first time translated it into the appropriate words.³²

Of course, there is no way of knowing just how widespread or enthusiastic such support for the idea of a return to Palestine really was among the German Jewish youth. But there is no doubt that Fürst was describing a phenomenon of genuine significance. Thus, for example, Moses Hess, who was then twenty-eight years old, almost certainly found himself caught up in the excitement produced jointly by the Damascus affair and the restorationist speculations. He devoted much space to that episode in his life in two different accounts he wrote later.

In his famous book of 1862, *Rome and Jerusalem: the Latest National Question* – which is rightly regarded as the first major exposition of modern Jewish nationalism and a work of genuinely classic stature – he devoted almost an entire chapter to the impact made upon him by the crisis of 1840.³³ He there included a long passage from a manuscript that he had composed (or so he said) at the time of the ritual-murder case. The original manuscript, though, has never been found, and it is impossible to tell what (if anything) was written during the period of the affair and what was written or rewritten some twenty years later.³⁴

However, that the account in *Rome and Jerusalem* was based on an actual experience is confirmed by a second work, "The Poles and the Jews," an unpublished manuscript justly assigned great significance by Edmund Sil-

³² "Palästina," *Orient* (26 June 1841), p. 189. In an oft-quoted entry of 1840 in his diary, Ferdinand Lassalle, then fourteen years old, wrote that he dreamed of placing himself, "arms in hand, at the head of the Jews in order to win them their independence." But this expression of nascent Jewish nationalism was dated 2 February, hence preceding the ritual-murder affair. In later entries, Lassalle did refer to Rhodes and Damascus, primarily in order to state his disgust at what he saw as Jewish pusillanimity, a reference particularly to the "confessions" conceded under torture by some of the accused. ("Even a worm turns, but tread on you, and you simply cringe the more!" [21 May].) However, the entry for 30 July noted that the blood accusations "were now being raised at all corners of the globe," and he wondered whether the most appropriate response would not be revolutionary action – whether "the time will not soon be ripe to help ourselves by really shedding Christian blood. Aide toi et le ciel t'aidera. The dice are cast" (in Na'aman, *Ferdinand Lassalle*, pp. 111–14).

³³ Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, pp. 22–8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–8. For the argument that "it may be doubted whether [the passages in *Rome and Jerusalem*] . . . really bear witness to what Hess thought in 1840," see Avineri, *Moses Hess*, pp. 178, 237–8 n. 12; for the opposing view that Hess "changed the form but not the content" of a manuscript originally written at the time of the Damascus affair: Silberner, *Moses Hess*, p. 62. Entangling a complex question still more is the fact that the relevant passage as copied by Hess in the ms. of *Rome and Jerusalem* (pp. 32–8) is not heavily corrected – despite the assertion to the contrary by Silberner (doubtless misled by a quirk of memory). (The ms. of *Rome and Jerusalem* is in the Schocken Library, Jerusalem; B 203 in Silberner's inventory, *The Works of Moses Hess*.)

berner and dating, it would seem, from 1841.³⁵ These two sources, when compared with what else is known about Hess's development, lead to the hypothesis that early in that year he was powerfully drawn to the idea of Jewish colonization in Palestine.

In his younger years he was very much a German patriot, and he tended to the view that Germany (the home of the great philosophical truths, of the Idea [*Geist*]), together with France (driven by the will for social change), was destined to lead mankind into the quasi-messianic epoch of equality and justice. When Europe appeared headed for war in the latter half of 1840, he thus identified himself in a most emotional way with the German side against the French; and (as he wrote to his friend Berthold Auerbach in December) even earned some local fame in Cologne by putting the highly belligerent poem of Nikolaus Becker, "They shall not Possess it, the Free German Rhine" – "the German Marseillaise" – to his own music.³⁶

It was his futile attempt to begin a correspondence with Becker that proved, as he later told it, to be his breaking point. Already "deeply embittered" by the response of the "rabble" to the blood accusation in Damascus, he was now thrown back on to that deep-rooted sense of Jewish pride which had placed so firm a stamp on his book of 1837, *The Sacred History of Mankind*.³⁷ As recorded in *Rome and Jerusalem*, Becker replied to his overtures, overflowing with German nationalism, "in an icy tone; and, as if to fill the cup of bitterness to the brim, he wrote on the other side of his letter, in a disguised hand, the words, 'You are a Jew [*Jude*]'* . . . I took Becker's 'Hep! Hep!' as a personal insult."³⁸

Hess was aware of the movement for the "restoration of the Jews" in England, and, in the wake of the *Orient*, was powerfully attracted to the idea that here, perhaps was a *deus ex machina* which would enable the Jews, faced by so hostile an environment, to attain a national homeland of their own. But in contrast to Benisch and Fürst, for example, who developed a long-lasting commitment to this project, for Hess it proved, at that stage in his life, to be no more than a momentary episode. Within a short time, he had returned to the idea that the Jews could not escape their age-old role. ("Jews must exist as the thorn in the flesh of Western mankind . . . [Since

³⁵ Silberner, *Moses Hess*, pp. 62–5. Silberner dated the manuscript of "Die Polen und die Juden" to 1840, but the text suggests that it was written somewhat later – after the crisis of 1840, with its upswing of "restorationist" expectations, had passed. (The ms. is in the Central Zionist Archive, Jerusalem; B 228 in Silberner, *The Works of Moses Hess*.)

³⁶ Hess to Auerbach (11 December) in [Hess], *Moses Hess: Briefwechsel*, pp. 67–8.

³⁷ On the place of *Die heilige Geschichte der Menschheit* in Hess's intellectual development: Avineri, *Moses Hess*, pp. 21–46; Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, pp. 7–11; Na'aman, *Emancipation and Messianism*, pp. 39–95; Silberner, *Moses Hess*, pp. 31–57; Zlocisti, *Moses Hess*, pp. 24–35.

³⁸ Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, pp. 25–6.

* *Israelit* would have been considered the polite usage.

Christ] they have wandered like a ghost through the world of the living . . . and they can neither die nor be resurrected.")³⁹

Two different factors, he explained, had in the last resort impelled him to abandon the colonization project. First, he came to the conclusion that the restorationist movement in England, while ostensibly idealistic, was in reality nothing but one more example of the legendary British rapacity. "The matter," he wrote in "The Poles and the Jews,"

stands thus: according to an ancient Jewish prophecy, the messiah was to come in that year [1839-40]. . . . But then, the English know how to make a profit out of everything. When they developed trade with China, they discovered that there was a belief among the Chinese that their country would be ruled by a woman in the year 1840. What other woman could that be but Queen Victoria? In the affair of the [Middle] East, the Jewish prophecy was, only a short time back, no less convenient.

(The year 1840 witnessed the first Anglo-Chinese, or "opium," war.)

A far greater problem for Hess, though, as for the *Orient*, was the fear that the Jewish people was not ready to rise to such a challenge. For him, that question proved decisive: "How can the political rebirth of a people be realized without its own free and powerful will – and that will is here totally absent." These considerations taken together, he declared, had "cured me forever of this error."⁴⁰

That the appeal of the restorationist idea went beyond the relatively narrow circle of the student society in Vienna and of Julius Fürst's journal was confirmed, however regretfully, by Ludwig Philippson, the editor of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*. He regarded the phenomenon as negative, but as all too understandable. In a long article published in September, he noted that the statements in the *Globe* of London on the possible restoration of the Jews had produced great excitement among the Jewish youth in Germany. Rationally speaking, wrote Philippson, such declarations, even if coming from the British ministerial press, had to be regarded as mere fantasy or whimsy, but "it is a fact that recent – particularly the most recent – times have brought with them so much that is amazing, peculiar and unique that one has to speak seriously of things which until a short while ago would have been considered cause for uproarious laughter."

The young Jews in Germany were eager to contribute fully to the country of their birth – "moved by an ardent enthusiasm, an inner drive, to find a role and recognition, in accord with their abilities, as integral members of the wider society." But they also had their own self-respect. "They are far from

³⁹ Hess, *Die europäische Triarchie*, pp. 111-12.

⁴⁰ Hess, "Die Polen und die Juden," ms. (Central Zionist Archives: A49, file 18, no 4), pp. 61-8; cf. Silberner, *Moses Hess*, p. 63.

that unholy, empty indifference which led gifted Jews during the twenties to treat a change of religion as if it were a fashionable change of clothes." The youth now felt itself absolutely rejected.

The accusations against the Jews are mouthed with an impudence that could never have been anticipated. Those who defend the Jews are impertinently called Philistines and out-dated egalitarians. In open debates, people are afraid to speak out for [the Jews] . . . The restrictions imposed on them are treated as self-understood.

Inevitably, a sharp reaction had set in.

Is it surprising if this situation produces inner bitterness; awakens ill-defined longings; arouses deep loathing of these indigenous conditions; induces weariness with this useless encirclement; and renders the flimsiest sign, the most fantastic project, attractive so long as it promises a total change of circumstances?

Woe to him who seeks to denigrate such a state of mind! Who can be surprised if the Jewish youth wants to know that there is some tiny place on earth – yes, merely to know – where the Jew can find the recognition, open and complete, that he too can be a man, without having to cease being a Jew. . . . Would not Jewish youth be most superficial and shallow if it were otherwise?

Even though granting the inevitability of this nascent nationalism, Philippson nonetheless rejected it firmly on both practical and ideological grounds. The Jews could not seek a refuge in Palestine, which as part of greater Syria was a veritable death-trap. That country "remains today, as three thousand years ago, the home of brigands. What is there for us to do there?"

Besides, no reliance could be placed on the great powers. "Do you believe that European diplomacy could ever serve on our behalf as the messiah of Israel?" And even if this incredible project were somehow to succeed,

what would a pitiful [Jewish] Free State be able to create in that empty corner except some trivial, doubtful, existence amidst the Muslims and Egyptians? What would a colony of homeless Jews be able to do? It would exist only by the grace of distant powers; its character would be dependent on the commands of others; its essence deprived of purpose and direction.

More important, though, such schemes stood diametrically opposed to the basic direction of Jewish history. The Jews had maintained their independence during the biblical era until its task

in Palestine had been completed, . . . until by God's will the Roman colossus dispersed Israel across the countries of the earth. . . . From then on, there began the new mission of Israel. . . . The present says unto us: you must exist among mankind until you and they have matured enough to make mutual influence possible again. Now you have nothing

else to do but to raise yourselves up into mankind; absorb the great achievements of the age; and everywhere attain equality in place of that narrowed, accursed existence which you have suffered hitherto. . . . For our part, we protest against the article in the *Globe* . . . , against all this empty talk.

The students should complete their studies; forget idle dreams; seek a useful role in life; contribute to society; and await better days. "Let that be our . . . plan, our project. Leave Syria to those fighting over it."⁴¹

Given so forthright a stance, Philippson might well have launched a crusade against the *Orient* and its youthful correspondents. But he did not do so, probably counting the time inappropriate. And Isaac Jost's position as the editor of the *Israelitische Annalen* was guided even less by his general ideological position. Although he argued that the Jews had long ceased to constitute a separate nation, he refrained from criticizing the policy of the *Orient*, and even published extensive materials originating in British restorationist circles.⁴² In one instance, he referred most remarkably to the English, in this context, as "this great people [which] knows how to encourage every seed, no matter how obscure, which can contribute to the advance of world-historical progress, and help bring it to fruition."⁴³

No discussion of emergent Jewish nationalism in 1840 can avoid at least a passing mention of Mordechai Manual Noah, then editor of the *Evening Star* in New York. After all, despite its attendant elements of buffoonery, his scheme to establish "a colony for the Jews of the world"⁴⁴ on Grand Island near Buffalo had attracted considerable attention in Europe during the years 1820-5; and, in 1821, Noah had been elected an extraordinary member of the Society for Jewish Culture and Scholarship in Germany, which included among its young membership Heinrich Heine, Eduard Gans and Leopold Zunz.⁴⁵ Noah had made it clear in 1825 that Grand Island, or "Ararat," could be no more than a temporary substitute for Palestine as the Jewish homeland.⁴⁶

In his fascinating biography, Jonathan Sarna has demonstrated how Noah sought, with considerable success, to win notice and popularity by demon-

⁴¹ "Tages-Kontrolle," *AZdesJ* (19 September), pp. 542-4.

⁴² E.g.: reports on Churchill's speech at Raphael Farhi's home (from the *Morning Chronicle*); on the public meeting in Carlow (22 February 1841), which called on the British government to insure that "the Jews shall return to their own land" (from the *Jewish Intelligence*); and on Montefiore's reported plans to build factories in Palestine (*LA*, 1841, pp. 165-6, 192-5, 268-9).

⁴³ "Vorhandlungen in England betreffend die Beschützung der Juden in Palästina," *ibid.* (18 June 1841), p. 192.

⁴⁴ Petition to the New York legislature (1820), *qu.* in Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, p. 62.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-5. Cf., e.g.: Oppenheim, "Mordechai M. Noah."

⁴⁶ Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, p. 68.

stratively flaunting his restorationist views.⁴⁷ Such a strategy was logical enough in a period when Mormonism had just sprung from the farmlands of western New York and when William Miller was attracting tens of thousands to the belief that 1843 would witness the Second Coming⁴⁸ – and, it might be added, when Dickens was to produce *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

It thus comes as no surprise to find Noah in May 1840 introducing the (would-be biblical) *Book of Jasher* (*Sefer hayashar*), actually a thirteenth-century Hebrew work, which he published in English translation with the following flourish: “The discovery of the missing books referred to in Scripture . . . joined to the signs of the times in relation to the chosen people give great interest to this and similar works.”⁴⁹ In June, the *Evening Star* carried a long article, probably written by a Christian millennialist, calling for the “civilized powers of Europe to restore the Jews their rights as a nation” – an event that “would open a new era in the history of the world.”⁵⁰ And Noah in his speech of 19 August on the Damascus case described how his initial reaction had been to see “the finger of God” in the news from Syria, and to anticipate that moment when the “Jews will be free . . . ; will feel as the nation felt as old . . . ; the promise God made to them will be fulfilled . . . ; [and] the Redeemer will come unto Zion – everything is leading to this result.”⁵¹

All in all, though, while such pronouncements are of interest in the context of Noah’s life and of American Jewish history, they exerted no noticeable influence in Europe at the time of the Damascus crisis.

Certainly, then, the year 1840 witnessed the emergence of a nascent Jewish nationalism amid the student youth of Central Europe – a phenomenon that found its clearest public expression on the pages of the *Orient*. Projects for the settlement of Palestine by the Jews, and for an eventual Jewish state, were there advocated in all seriousness. Moreover, despite the considerable publicity given such ideas, they met very little opposition in the Jewish press or in the organized Jewish communities; but neither did they gain effective, practical support. It was as though the Jewish world had adopted a stance of “wait and see.” As a result, while the Christian restorationists were able to mark up significant achievements during this period both on the diplomatic front and in Palestine itself, the small group of young Jewish nationalists could not advance beyond paper plans and projects.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 130–42.

⁴⁸ On the Millerite movement, e.g.: Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, pp. 42–58.

⁴⁹ “The Book of Jasher,” *Evening Star* (5 May); on the Book of Jasher (*Sefer hayashar*) and its publishing history: Chiel, “The Mysterious Book.”

⁵⁰ “The Jews,” *Evening Star* (13 June).

⁵¹ “Persecution of the Jews at Damascus,” ibid. (21 August).

PART IV

Last things

*Alexandria on the eve of war:
Crémieux, Montefiore, and
Muhammed Ali*

When the idea of the mission to the East first took on concrete form in early June, it was assumed that Muhammed Ali had decided to reopen the case, to permit a new investigation (with the participation of lawyers from Europe), and to organize a retrial of the prisoners in Alexandria. By the time that news of Cochelet's formal opposition to such a project began to circulate in France – the text of his letter of 7 May angrily rejecting Laurin's initiative appeared, for example, in the *Quotidienne* on 7 June – the decision had been made to send Crémieux to Egypt. And even much later, well-informed observers remained unaware of the fact that Muhammed Ali had, in effect, withdrawn his original offer to Laurin. Thus, speaking at the Mansion House on 3 July, Dr. Bowring could declare confidently, and to "loud cheers," that "he had a letter in his possession [stating], . . . that the sovereign of Egypt was ready . . . to assent to any species of tribunal which the English consul would wish to have."¹

But by mid-July, when Crémieux and Montefiore were about to leave Paris for Marseilles, it had begun to dawn on the Jewish leadership, at least in France, that the mission to the East might well be heading straight for a political cul-de-sac and ignominious failure. The subcommittee of the Consistory ("the committee of seven") had, as already noted, sought at its final meeting with Crémieux to forbid him absolutely from entering into any open dispute with Cochelet, even though such a ban would clearly deprive him of his most effective weapon – the threat of an adverse press campaign. For his part, Crémieux met Thiers on a number of occasions in a desperate attempt to obtain at least a minimal form of accreditation from the government, but in the end he had to leave bereft of any official standing and without even the promised letter of introduction from the premier to the French consul-general in Egypt.²

In contrast, Montefiore had the backing of the British foreign office, and

¹ "Persecution of the Jews in Damascus: Great Meeting at the Mansion House," *Times* (4 July), p. 7.

² AC, p. 4.

letters went out from Palmerston to the consuls in Alexandria, Beirut, and Damascus informing them that

Her Majesty's Government feel the deepest interest in the welfare of the Jewish community in the East and are anxiously desirous that . . . the mission of the gentlemen [Montefiore and his entourage] mentioned in this despatch, may . . . secure for their brethren in religion who inhabit the Turkish empire, the peaceable enjoyment of their property, and freedom from all . . . molestation from the local authorities.³

At the same time, though, Palmerston refused official protection to the non-British members of the mission (Louis Loewe, who was a Prussian subject, and, of course, Crémieux); and he also denied Montefiore permission to read Dr. John Bowring's extensive report on conditions in Syria.⁴ Moreover, as mentioned in a letter to London from Anselm Rothschild in Paris on 10 July, the foreign secretary had made it clear to Montefiore that the situation awaiting him in the East was anything but auspicious:

I cannot tell you how sorry I am about the contents of the despatch of Lord Palmerston; I could not help communicating them to him [Montefiore] as your letters arrived just during a meeting where Sir Moses was present. Besides, I think it much better for him to know exactly the state of things before he arrives. Sir Moses has, notwithstanding, good hopes and my wishes accompany him; but I am much afraid that his mission will be of no great avail.⁵

"I . . . find," wrote Montefiore to the "correspondence committee" of the Board of Deputies in London on 13 July,

that the French influence in Egypt is likely to be predominant and that I shall have much greater difficulty to encounter with than I anticipated. Nevertheless, neither difficulty nor danger shall divert me from the prosecution of my mission, trusting on Him who can direct and overrule all things for good to His people, Israel.⁶

The fact is that as Crémieux and Montefiore were making their way toward Egypt (they left Paris on 13 July and reached Alexandria on 4 August), so the odds against the success of their enterprise appeared to be mounting rapidly. On 15 July the treaty directed against Muhammed Ali was signed by Turkey and four of the five European powers, to the conspicuous exclusion of France. Wasting no time, Palmerston immediately sent out reports to Ponsonby and Hodges explaining the significance of the treaty and

³ E.g.: Palmerston to Niven Moore (Beirut) (27 June), (Gaster Papers, Mocatta Library: M.M.5), (cf. Foreign Office to Montefiore, same date, FO 78/420, pp. 235, 237).

⁴ Foreign office to Montefiore (2 July) FO 78/421, pp. 7-9; and to Bowring (3 July) *ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵ Anselm Rothschild to London (10 July) NMRA:XI/104/0.

⁶ Montefiore to London (13 July) BofD, pp. 278-9.

setting forth the military preparations that would now have to be taken with all possible speed. The despatch to Alexandria was received there two days after the arrival of Crémieux and Montefiore in the city.

With the outbreak of armed hostilities looming on the horizon, the Jewish emissaries now found themselves entangled in a peculiarly intractable diplomatic web. Increasingly, the international conflict was taking on the form of an almost personal battle of wills among Muhammed Ali, Adolphe Thiers, and Lord Palmerston. Like gamblers at a grim game of poker, the Egyptian pasha, the French premier, and the British foreign secretary kept raising the stakes, and the resultant situation threatened to shut out the Jewish delegation altogether.

At one corner was Muhammed Ali who, since his decisive victory over the Ottoman army at the battle of Nezib in June 1839, had had to reckon with the possibility that some or all of the great powers might unite to restore by force much of the vast territory under his control (Crete, the Arabian peninsula, greater Syria) to direct Ottoman rule. The strategy that he adopted in the face of this danger was to present himself to the world as a desperado who would stop at nothing to hold on to his key possessions. Since the winter of 1839–40, he had been furiously building up his armies in Egypt and Syria; and by the summer, he was stating confidently that he had no less than two hundred thousand soldiers under arms.⁷

He counted on the reputation of his son, Ibrahim Pasha, as an invincible general, to reinforce the idea that any military attack upon him would prove to be too costly in men and matériel. If pushed beyond endurance, he often declared, he would not hesitate to launch Ibrahim and his armies across the Taurus mountains, deep into Anatolia, headed straight for Constantinople. Calling for a Muslim holy war against the Christian powers that had battered on to the Porte, Muhammed Ali would unleash mayhem and revolution throughout much of the Ottoman empire. Certainly, he was fond of saying, his course involved risks, but he was a fatalist and far too proud to permit himself to be bullied.

The more defiant his stance, the more crucial became his ties to France. He shared with the French leadership the belief that the ideal solution lay in a direct arrangement between the Egyptian viceroy and the government of the Sultan (even though any such step would be in direct defiance of the five-power note of 27 July 1839). In that way, Muhammed Ali could gain the most advantageous terms and France, as the unofficial go-between, would enhance her diplomatic standing in both Constantinople and Alexandria. Given the fact that the Sultan, Abdul-Majid, a mere nineteen-year-old, was new to the throne; that his court and his mother's harem were the centers of endless political intrigue; and that Turkey's would-be allies (Russia, Austria,

⁷ E.g.: Hodges to Palmerston (23 August, no. 84) FO 78/406, p. 69.

ACTUALITES.



FIG. 16. "Ibrahim Pasha is worried!" (Ibrahim:) "Dad, it seems to me that you are giving up everything! Nothing will be left for me!" (Muhammed Ali:) "Don't worry, Ibrahim, I'm hardly giving them an inch! If they're not satisfied, I'll balk and then, 'Goodbye to the Equilibrium of Europe!!'" (On the piece of paper: "Receipt for Syria"). (*La Caricature*, 25 October; original wording in italics)

England) had radically opposing interests, the idea of a separate peace between Egypt and the Porte hardly appeared far-fetched.

Publicly backed by France, the Egyptian viceroy was able to present himself effectively as a potent danger not only to the survival of the Ottoman empire, but also to European peace. Colonel Hodges who in January, on first arriving in Alexandria, had stated confidently that "Muhammed Ali will submit so soon as he sees a force able to compel him to do so at hand, but not until then,"⁸ soon began to change his tune. Only a few weeks later, he was writing to Palmerston that if pushed "to the last extremity – should his territorial possessions be restricted to Egypt alone – . . . his self-love might possibly lead him to risk a struggle. He counts much on . . . insurrection not only in Asia Minor, but also in Constantinople and Turkey in Europe."⁹

The fiercely warlike stance adopted by the Egyptian viceroy was doubtless necessary to enhance his diplomatic credibility, but unfortunately for Paris,

⁸ Hodges to Palmerston (4 January, no. 1) FO 78/404, p. 4.

⁹ Ibid. (21 February, no. 25), p. 95.

he tended to act as though he believed in his own threats. Despite the constant urgings of the French government throughout the year following the battle of Nezib, he adamantly refused to offer the concessions needed to tempt the Porte into a separate peace. On the contrary, the more menacing he loomed, the more compelled the Turkish statesmen were to cling for dear life to Anglo-Russian protection.

During his tenure as the premier and foreign minister of France, Soult had tried to handle this intractable dilemma by making it doubly clear, behind the scenes, that France would not permit herself to be dragged into war by the Egyptian pasha. And he expressed increasing impatience with Cochelet for failing to deliver the message to Muhammed Ali with sufficient force. In one despatch, for example, he told the consul-general that the government was "in no way satisfied with the language you employ [toward the viceroy] – this show of finesse, the tones of mystery, the evasive formulae mixed with compliments and promises."¹⁰ Cochelet, though, insisted that he was helpless to make any difference:

It would be difficult, sir, for you to conceive how opinionated Muhammed Ali is – and even how foolish – in everything that touches his glory and vanity. He is old and surrounded by flatterers. . . . All his life he has been spoiled by praise. Everything he has done has succeeded, and he believes that fortune will not desert him. I pointed out to him the example of Napoleon who lost everything because he abused his power. The comparison pleased him and he said that his downfall would be a matter of indifference if his name survived.¹¹

Once Soult was replaced by Thiers on 1 March, France's ability to impose her will on Muhammed Ali was reduced still further. Eager to consolidate his shaky parliamentary majority, to win over public opinion, and to isolate King Louis-Philippe, Thiers did not hesitate to promise in the Chamber of Deputies that France would stand by the Egyptian viceroy and would never "sacrifice this powerful vassal, this man of genius."¹² These sentiments, wrote Cochelet, had been greeted enthusiastically in Alexandria ("a political idea . . . fitting for the honor and dignity of France"),¹³ but Thiers' despatches had already warned that Muhammed Ali should not deceive himself, that "a man of his sagacity should understand that such language [as I used] is meant to have its effect more on the outside and is by its very nature subject to considerations which do not permit it to be considered the absolute and complete expression of His Majesty's Government."¹⁴ But the fact remained that Thiers had no way of inducing Muhammed Ali to yield

¹⁰ Soult to Cochelet (27 November 1839) in Driault, *L'Égypte et l'Europe*, vol. 2, p. 35.

¹¹ Cochelet to Thiers (6 May) *ibid.*, pp. 275–6.

¹² "Chambre des Députés," *JdesD* (25 March).

¹³ Cochelet to Thiers (16 April) in Driault, *L'Égypte et l'Europe*, vol. 2, p. 252.

¹⁴ Thiers to Cochelet (17 April) *ibid.*, p. 252.

ground and that he had, for all intents and purposes, placed his own political future in the hands of the Egyptian ruler.

Aware of the profound rivalries separating Russia, England, and Austria from each other and of the deep fissures dividing Lord Melbourne's cabinet¹⁵ as well as British public opinion, Thiers doubtless felt that, given the potential political dividends, the risk was not excessive. But in making that calculation, he underestimated the fact that in Lord Palmerston he was faced by a man possessed of immense determination and confidence in his own intuitions. Palmerston, backed to the hilt by Ponsonby in Constantinople, was ready to stake his reputation on the (apparently madcap) idea that a few thousand Turkish troops, if led by European officers, reinforced by a small force of British marines, and backed by the Royal Navy, would be sufficient to produce a victorious uprising of the Druse and Maronites in the Lebanese mountains. With both land and sea routes between Egypt and Syria endangered, Ibrahim would not dare invade Anatolia and, even with his army of perhaps one hundred thousand, would suffer speedy defeat. No Russian troops would be required, despite the widespread fears to the contrary; and France would have no time even to consider military action to save Syria for Muhammed Ali. Egypt and France, he insisted, were bluffing and he would call their bluff.¹⁶

All too obviously, this fast-moving crisis left Crémieux and Montefiore on their arrival in Alexandria with almost no room for maneuver. They had expected help from Hodges and Laurin, but the former had made himself practically persona non grata from his first meeting with Muhammed Ali – indeed as early as March he had written to Palmerston that “I cannot but be of the opinion that further intercourse between myself and the pasha's government should be avoided at present as much as possible. It is really useless and worse than useless.”¹⁷ Laurin's relations with the viceroy were less strained but they also deteriorated as it emerged that Metternich, however reluctantly, had determined to follow the Anglo-Russian lead.

Over against this, the ever-growing mutual dependence characteristic of Franco-Egyptian relations served to enhance Cochelet's standing at the court of Muhammed Ali still more. There was now less reason than ever, though, for Cochelet to take any steps to help the Jewish emissaries reopen the case of Father Thomas's disappearance. It was not just that he himself had throughout given full backing to Ratti-Menton, and in turn had received

¹⁵ Three members of the cabinet (Lord Holland, Edward Ellice, and Lord Clarendon), assisted by the ambassador to France (Lord Granville), vigorously opposed Palmerston's Middle Eastern policy in 1839–40; such was their effectiveness in rallying other ministers to their side that Palmerston even handed in his resignation on 5 July 1840 – a forceful move that proved effective. (See e.g.: Bourne, *Palmerston*, pp. 568–93.)

¹⁶ E.g.: Palmerston to Hodges (18 July, no. 16) FO 78/403, pp. 44–50.

¹⁷ Hodges to Palmerston (31 March) FO 78/404, p. 141.

support, both private and public, from Thiers. Equally significant was the urgent necessity to avoid any step that might further antagonize the Catholics in greater Syria, and particularly the Maronites in the Lebanese mountains.

The Maronite rebellion (joined, too, by some Druse detachments) was swiftly and brutally suppressed in June and July by the forces of Muhammed Ali, a fact that severely damaged French prestige in the region. France had lent diplomatic support to the Egyptian authorities in this confrontation, overriding the contrary opinion of the French consul in Beirut – who, in accord with instructions sent out from Paris on 29 July, was therefore summarily recalled. His replacement was none other than Maxime des Meloizes, who had to leave Damascus in late August.¹⁸

With war threatening in Syria, wrote Thiers to Cochelet, it was now more essential than ever to emphasize the fact that France “is the natural protector of the Catholics in the Levant”;¹⁹ and Cochelet sent similar instructions to Ratti-Menton, ordering the chancellor of the Damascus consulate to tour the Maronite region in order to stem the disillusionment with France: “I count in this respect on the zeal and activity of which Mr. Beaudin has often given proof, and on the influence which he rightly enjoys in the area of Mount [Lebanon].”²⁰ (So great was the anxiety in Paris that Thiers now despatched the head of the Lazarist order, the abbé Étienne, to Lebanon on a pro-French mission.)²¹

Faced with this desperately difficult situation, there was little that Montefiore and Crémieux could do to mount an effective response, but their best bet would probably have been to present themselves as a solidly united delegation, unconnected to the rivalries of the great powers speaking for the Jews of the world and for the conscience of mankind. In exchange for some movement – however gradual and conditional – toward a new investigation of the Damascus case, the delegation could have promised a flood of favorable publicity in the European press for both Muhammed Ali and Cochelet.

Montefiore and Crémieux had, certainly, brought with them an impressive entourage, including two Orientalist scholars (Salomon Munk from France and Louis Loewe from England), a second lawyer (D. N. Wire), and a doctor with government connections and much experience in the East

¹⁸ Thiers to Cochelet (29 July) in Driault, *L'Égypte et l'Europe*, vol. 3, p. 83. (The wheel of fortune soon turned for the consul, Nicolas Prosper Bourée, ignominiously withdrawn by Thiers from Beirut. With greater Syria returned to Ottoman control and with his popularity among the Maronites newly valued, he was reappointed to his former post in April 1841. Eventually, in 1866, he rose to be ambassador to the Porte: MREA: Bourée/Personnel, Série 1).

¹⁹ Thiers to Cochelet (29 July) in Driault, *L'Égypte et l'Europe*, vol. 3, p. 80.

²⁰ Cochelet to Ratti-Menton (20 August) *ibid.*, p. 147.

²¹ Thiers to Cochelet ([early] September) *ibid.*, pp. 211–12.

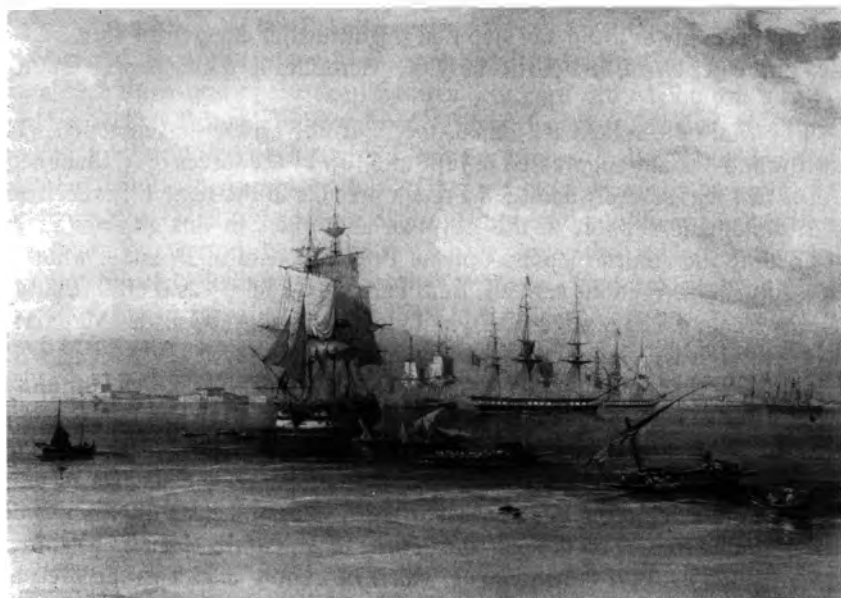


FIG. 17. Port of Alexandria. Lithograph by Louis Haghe after a drawing by David Roberts (1796–1864).

(John Madden),²² all of whom could be relied upon, if necessary, to help produce articles for the newspapers. The organization of the Jewish mission to the East had been widely reported in Europe as was their arrival in Egypt. ("Sir M. Montefiore and M. Crémieux," wrote an eyewitness to the *Times*, "arrived here [in Alexandria] on the 4th and were received with extraordinary pomp by all their co-religionists as well as by the consuls of Great Britain and Austria.")²³ This fact, in addition to Montefiore's Rothschild connections and Crémieux's fame, would have been enough to gain a serious hearing, at the very least, from the Egyptian viceroy and from the French consul-general.

However, such a negotiating strategy was never systematically developed, if only because the relationship between Montefiore and Crémieux had become extraordinarily strained long before they reached Egypt. The trouble

²² See, e.g.: Madden, *Travels*; Loewe had reported on his own tour of the Middle East (1838): "Briefe des Herrn Dr. Loewe aus dem Orient," *AZdesJ* (1839), pp. 100, 104, 112, 123–4, 143–4, 157–8, 186, 190, 202, 226, 238, 241–2, 253–4, 272, 288, 326–8. (During his stay in Safed in the summer of 1838, Loewe was beaten up and robbed of all his possessions, including valuable manuscripts, by the Druse rebels against the regime of Muhammed Ali.) (On Loewe's relationship with Montefiore: R. Loewe, "Louis Loewe.")

²³ "Private Correspondence: Alexandria, 7 August," *Times* (25 August), p. 4.

had started when the two men had dined with the Baron Anselm de Rothschild on Sunday, 12 July, in Paris. To his great chagrin, Crémieux had there found himself faced by the demand that Sir Moses be recognized formally as the head of the mission, with the right to have the last word in case of disagreement. After all, explained Rothschild, Montefiore, unlike his French colleague, had been “delegated by his government”²⁴ as well as by the Jews.

Under great pressure, Crémieux agreed to this arrangement on the condition that he, at least, would be in charge of the legal matters when, and if, the judicial case was reopened. “What was my astonishment,” he wrote in his diary, “when Sir Moses added: ‘As for the law case, I will take advice from Mr. Wire and from Mr. Crémieux as well.’” This was too much for the latter, who stated flatly that he “would make no more concessions.”²⁵

Crémieux, who had inspired the plans for the delegation and had personally recruited Montefiore, felt that he had been cavalierly brushed aside by the Rothschild family at the very last moment when – “unfortunately”²⁶ – it was too late for him to back out of the venture. For his part, Montefiore reporting to London described how the arrangements were formally and most satisfactorily ratified by the committee of seven on 13 July. “Mons. Crémieux was present and it was then agreed that as he did not represent his government he should act as my counsel in conjunction with Mr. Wire. The committee was very cordial and anxious to meet my wishes.”²⁷

The tensions between the wives of the two men – Amélie Crémieux and Judith Montefiore – that developed during the long voyage proved to be the source of still further irritation. At Marseilles, for example, Mrs. Crémieux reached the ship first and earmarked what turned out to be the best cabin – a *fait accompli* that the Montefiores at first accepted with apparent good grace. But on the second day, Loewe and Madden came to ask for a rearrangement on the grounds (according to Crémieux’s diary) that “if the better room were not given to Sir Moses, his health would not permit him to make the voyage.” The annoyance involved was rendered all the greater because Amélie Crémieux was at that moment the victim of a violently upset stomach, requiring a doctor’s call. However, jotted Crémieux, “the condition of my wife during her illness was of no interest to those people, and we resigned ourselves to yielding up our room.”²⁸ Similar problems, related to the use of the most desirable cabins, arose again when the party had to transfer to other ships during the long journey.

Montefiore and Crémieux proved to be temperamentally incompatible. Nathaniel Rothschild, it will be recalled, had hoped that the two men, given their different qualities, would make an excellent combination; that all would

²⁴ AC, p. 2. ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3. ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁷ Montefiore to correspondence committee (13 July) BofD, p. 278. ²⁸ AC, p. 6.

be well once the French advocate was "accompanied by some sober, steady Englishman who would moderate his zeal." They were after all, each leading figures in the Jewish world, eminently successful in their chosen walks of life, and still in their middle years (Montefiore, fifty-six; Crémieux, forty-four). But none of that helped. The fact that in many ways both men represented their respective national stereotypes almost to the point of caricature served to produce misunderstandings and anger. Crémieux was eloquent, voluble, hyperactive, an enthusiast, highly intelligent, and a man who set a very high value on intelligence – but also facile; Montefiore was slow, ponderous, extremely cautious, putting his trust in solid common sense and sheer persistence. He was thus something of a John Bull (although his hypochondria and overanxiety partially belied that image).

For his part, Crémieux saw in the persistent display of phlegmatic stolidity the marks of a downright fool. He poured scorn in his diary on the fact, for example, that during the voyage out, Montefiore remained the unflagging optimist, even though, under the conditions then prevailing, Palmerston's writ would obviously count for very little in Alexandria, while Cochelet would exert "immense influence" – but "I could not even begin to describe how little such ideas impinged on Sir Moses and his wife."²⁹

In actuality, Montefiore was by no means as stupid as all that, preferring doubtless to cross his bridges when he came to them. Moreover, aware of his own limitations, he had wisely recruited an effective team of advisers, with whom he was in constant consultation. Here was yet another aspect of his *modus operandi* that Crémieux found hard to accept, terming the Montefiores, Wire, Loewe, and Madden, scornfully, "the Council of Five."³⁰

The disparity between the self-made, hard-working lawyer who had had to negotiate for a large "honorarium" (forty thousand francs) in order to undertake the voyage, and his wealthy, extremely well-connected traveling companion did nothing to ease the situation. "By character," reads Crémieux's diary, "Sir Moses and his wife are good people, but the arrogance born of money, and the English vanity, of these two individuals surpasses anything that can be imagined."³¹

A parallel scorn was aroused in Montefiore by the Frenchman's determined nonobservance of Jewish tradition. Crémieux (as recorded by Sir Moses in his diary) had stated that "he intended to turn Jew as we were on our way to Beirut and continue so till we had visited Jerusalem. I said I hoped he would always be so; he replied it would not be convenient to submit to such an engagement."³² (This passage was omitted by Louis

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18. ³⁰ *Ibid.* ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³² Diary (entry for 7 August) in Barnett, "A Diary that Survived," p. 165. The manuscript original of Montefiore's diaries was almost entirely burned on the orders of his heir, Sir Joseph Sebag-Montefiore, but a fragment surviving from 1840 has made it possible to compare the original with the published text (*ibid.*, p. 149).

Loewe from the published version of the diary; Crémieux's record of the mission, replete with furious attacks on Montefiore, has remained in manuscript until today.)

On 5 August Colonel Hodges presented Montefiore ("dressed in uniform") and his entourage (in their "court or official costume")³³ to Muhammed Ali. Crémieux did not join them, as he was waiting to be introduced by Cochelet. As it worked out, however, he first met the viceroy two days later unaccompanied by the French consul-general. Any positive effect that might have been achieved by a show of unity on the part of the Jewish delegation was thus lost.

What Montefiore asked for in his petition to the Egyptian viceroy (and what Crémieux later likewise requested) was formal permission to cross-examine witnesses and collect evidence in Damascus on behalf of the Jewish prisoners. They did not even raise the much more desirable alternative of having the case transferred to Alexandria for a retrial, presumably on the grounds that such a request would have been rejected out of hand.

In the wording of the petition, a concerted effort was made to flatter the viceroy:

The eyes of all Europe are fixed on Your Highness and . . . by your granting our prayer the whole civilized world will be much gratified. . . . The great man, who has already such a glorious name, must love justice dearly. There cannot be a greater homage rendered to Your Highness's genius . . . than this mission sent to you by the Israelites of the whole world to appeal for justice.

And there was much more in the same vein. Montefiore read the entire document aloud in English, but when the time came to have the Turkish translation declaimed, the viceroy waved it aside, declaring it "too long."³⁴ He doggedly evaded all the attempts made to draw him into a discussion of the Damascus case, promising a reply within two days; but on the second day, he set out for Cairo, leaving the entire issue in limbo.

Anton Laurin, who had the chance to see Muhammed Ali before his departure up the Nile, was optimistic; the viceroy had spoken of a possible retrial in Damascus, with the Jewish delegation permitted to attend – although he had added, rather ominously, that if the "witnesses could not prove the innocence of the Jews, they must be considered as guilty."³⁵ Montefiore, however, was by now much less sanguine. Writing to the "correspondence committee" in London on 7 August he stated his opinion that "it will be desirable to prepare for an unfavourable reply." The committee members should, therefore,

³³ [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 224. ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

³⁵ Montefiore to correspondence committee (10 A.M., 7 August) BofD, p. 296.



FIG. 18. Muhammed Ali receiving guests. This lithograph, by Louis Haghe, is after a drawing by David Roberts, who was taken by the British consul-general to meet the viceroy in May 1839.

immediately see Lord Palmerston – inform him of the state of affairs, and not leave his Lordship until he promises to write to Monsieur Thiers, urging him to give instructions to his consul here to use all means to forward the object of the mission. . . . I feel that as much can be done in Paris, through Lord Palmerston's interference, as can be done at Alexandria, while the French interest is opposed to ours.³⁶

(Of course, it had been a long time since Palmerston had been in any position to ask favors from, or give advice to, Thiers; but nonetheless, a few weeks later Montefiore's hapless plea was, as requested, personally delivered to the foreign office.)³⁷

From the moment they arrived in Alexandria, Crémieux and Montefiore sought to develop their own separate diplomatic strategies and own lines of communication with Muhammed Ali. They kept each other minimally informed of what they were doing, but their activities were marked by an unmistakable element of competition. The fact that they were both ardent patriots, passionately devoted to the interests of their respective countries –

³⁶ *Ibid.* (5 A.M.), p. 294.

³⁷ Hananel de Castro, acting president of the Board of Deputies, presented Montefiore's request to Lord Leveson at the foreign office on 25 August (*ibid.*, p. 300).

at a time when France and England were locked in a dangerous battle of wills – could only encourage them to go their own ways.

For his part, Montefiore pinned his hopes on Samuel Briggs, the leading British businessman who had made a fortune (allegedly of no less than 1.5 million pounds)³⁸ during his many decades of residence in Alexandria, and who handled routine banking services for the Rothschilds in Egypt. Briggs had been in Syria in June and July, and had personally appealed to Sherif Pasha, albeit in vain, to reopen his investigations into the disappearance of Father Thomas and to insure humane treatment for the Jewish prisoners in Damascus. “Mr. Briggs, who returned last evening from Damascus and Syria,” wrote Montefiore to London on 7 August, “assures me that the pasha will do justice.”³⁹ Given his high standing and vast experience in the country, Briggs came to be seen by Montefiore and his team as the person best placed to advise them and to act as a conduit to the Egyptian viceroy.

In contrast, it was Crémieux’s conviction, formed long before reaching Alexandria, that before anything else, every effort had to be made somehow to win over Adrien-Louis Cochelet. On the day of his arrival in the city, he was already deeply involved in negotiations with the French consul-general. A detailed summary of their confrontation was recorded by Crémieux in his diary.

Not surprisingly, Cochelet insisted that the Jews in Damascus were certainly guilty of the dual murder, although he expressed disbelief in the blood accusation. Following the line laid down by Thiers in his despatch of 17 April (although, of course, this was not stated), the consul-general stated the view that the murders must have been committed to satisfy some “personal hatred.” But, responded Crémieux, “where are the proofs? Where the evidence? And why fifteen criminals?” “It would be enough,” came back the answer, “to have one or two fanatics . . . [who] could have worked up the others against a priest. The fanaticism of that country is enormous.”

The extensive and harsh argument that then ensued, however, was merely the preliminary sparring. What Crémieux wanted was an understanding reached discreetly with Cochelet that would provide the delegation with its minimal requirements and, in exchange, save the French and Egyptian governments from embarrassment:

Coming to Ratti-Menton, I contained my indignation as best I could; the thought that the name of a Frenchman could be soiled by one of its agents made the blood rise to my face, but I controlled myself. I promised that if there were well-founded accusations against him, I would know how to cover them up.

³⁸ [Loewe], *The Damascus Affair*, p. 131; on Briggs: Rodkey, “The Attempts of Briggs and Company to Guide British Policy.”

³⁹ BofD, p. 297.

At first, Cochelet remained totally adamant, declaring that "the pasha will never consent to have the case revised. . . . He is furious at such an idea which casts suspicion on the justice administered by his agents."⁴⁰ Besides, the final report of the Count des Meloizes had yet to be delivered.

In the end, though, he agreed to listen to the lines of thought tentatively developed by Crémieux, who presented two demands as non-negotiable. First, there had to be a declaration by the Egyptian government proclaiming the ritual-murder accusation to be false and libelous; second, the prisoners in Damascus had to be pronounced innocent and released. In exchange, the attempt to have the law case rejudged would be abandoned, at least for the time being. The implication, spelled out clearly enough, was that if it suited the French diplomats and Egyptian authorities to pin the blame for the dual murder on the Jews who had died under torture, then that would be a price which the delegation would have to pay: "As for the four dead men, let's leave it to time to unveil the truth; let the murder accusation weigh on those poor victims."⁴¹ In the last resort, Cochelet appeared ready to accept one of the conditions (the pronouncement against the blood accusation), but not the other (the declaration of innocence). Crémieux had failed in his initial attempt at compromise.

Muhammed Ali returned to Alexandria only to find that the crisis threatening his political survival had reached a new pitch. In his absence, two new emissaries had disembarked in the port city: the Ottoman representative, Rifaat Bey, carrying the ultimatum signed by the four European powers and Turkey on 15 July in London; and a special envoy, the Count Walewski, despatched by Thiers posthaste from Paris. The ultimatum was delivered by Rifaat Bey in person on 16 August. If the viceroy did not agree to the terms offered within ten days, he would forfeit all his territories except Egypt, and if he persisted in his defiance for a further ten-day period, he and his heirs would lose Egypt as well. Muhammed Ali rejected the treaty out of hand, telling Rifaat that "France is ready to come to my aid and more than once has offered its intervention."⁴² Thus began the three-week countdown toward out-and-out war.

Two days later, Walewski reported to Thiers that the Egyptian viceroy had formally requested the diplomatic intervention, the "protection and mediation,"⁴³ of France. The message that he brought with him in great secrecy (and presumably from the French premier) was that Muhammed Ali should pursue negotiations with the Porte as long as possible, but if war broke out he should launch an immediate invasion of Anatolia – on the principle that attack was the best form of defense.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ AC, inserted page (cf. p. 19). ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 19.

⁴² Enclosed report, Hodges to Ponsonby (16 August, no. 24) FO 78/405, p. 227.

⁴³ Walewski to Thiers (18 August) in Driault, *L'Égypte et l'Europe*, vol. 3, p. 135.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 137.

Thiers' choice of Count Walewski to go to Alexandria carried great symbolic resonance. As an (illegitimate) son of Napoleon, his mere presence was expected to convey the idea that France was in deadly earnest in its support for Muhammed Ali. And it could hardly go unnoticed in the world that the Napoleonic mystique had now become inextricably intertwined with the French involvement in the crisis. The Egyptian viceroy had been a victorious ally of Bonaparte; Cochelet, one of the emperor's loyal soldiers, had been selected by Napoleon for special assignments; Thiers, the historian of Napoleonic France, had just arranged to have Bonaparte's remains brought home for a grand reinterment in the Invalides; and Walewski, the emperor's offspring, was the diplomat chosen to go into the very eye of the storm.

The flurry of power politics threatened to leave Montefiore and Crémieux high and dry. Received in audience by the Egyptian viceroy on 17 August – he had, after all, promised them a prompt reply to their petition almost two weeks earlier – they were simply brushed aside. "I admit," apologized Muhammed Ali, "that I have not thought much about it; I have too many other matters on hand." Briggs, who was also present, sought to press home the point that the two men were "delegated not only by France and England, but also by the entire Jewish population of the world." But it was to no avail. The pasha did no more than assure them that the prisoners in Damascus were now being "treated humanely."⁴⁵

For his part, Crémieux, ignoring his initial failure, persisted in the hope that Cochelet could be won over to an arrangement more or less along the lines of his original proposition. In pursuit of this goal, he expounded at length at one of his meetings with the French consul-general on the age-old history of the blood accusation, describing "the massacres, the hectacombs in which [the] blood flowed without pity," and ending with a renewed account of the Damascus case. Mrs. Crémieux, who was present, and Cochelet both found themselves brought to tears, but (we read in the diary) "the moment passed; nothing remained." Crémieux guessed correctly at the truth – that Thiers had sent instructions implying that the guilt of the Jews had to be taken as a given – and he noted bitterly that even the death of the four prisoners, "those poor martyrs," under torture, "will not have led to any abatement of his policy."⁴⁶

In despair because the "mission was going up in smoke," he now offered Cochelet a further concession. The official declaration pronouncing the prisoners innocent and renouncing the blood accusation could specifically state in addition that "suspicion"⁴⁷ had come to rest on the two Jewish notables who had died during the interrogation (a reference, of course, to Joseph Harari and Joseph Leniado).

⁴⁵ AC, pp. 29–30. ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27. (This meeting took place on 15 August.)

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Montefiore made it clear from very early on that he saw any such agreement as totally unacceptable. ("I would rather die," he wrote in a private letter, "than consent to . . . cast a stain on the memory of the . . . men who so nobly endured their dreadful sufferings.")⁴⁸ But, nonetheless, on 18 August Crémieux insisted on putting the idea to the whole delegation, only to find himself in a minority of one, opposed even by his own wife and by Salomon Munk. In his diary, Loewe described the altercation that ensued as "a violent dispute";⁴⁹ and Montefiore reportedly stated that

he would never allow that any Jew committed the murder of Father Tommaso and his servant, either from vengeance or any other motive; were he base enough to admit such a thing, its effect would be most mischievous, for in every part of the world it would be said that the Jews were guilty, and the same awful charges would be brought against them over and over again.⁵⁰

Crémieux though, was still undeterred and as determined as ever to pursue his basic strategy – until he was brought to an abrupt halt by a particularly acrimonious meeting with Cochelet. Referring to the proposed declaration (or firman), the consul-general stated categorically: "You will never obtain it! Perhaps a pardon for the prisoners; that's possible if it can dampen down the entire affair, but nothing more."⁵¹ That was too much for Crémieux, who rejected out of hand the idea of a pardon, implying as it did that the prisoners were indeed guilty.

He now, for the first time, warned Cochelet that he was being forced to consider extreme alternatives; a return to Europe; the public exposure of Muhammed Ali's supposedly civilized judicial system; and the initiation of legal procedures in France:

In the name of the victims' families, I shall summon Mr. de Ratti-Menton before the Council of State. I shall take up the cause of all of them and in conjunction with Mr. Laurin, I shall conduct the case of Mr. Picciotto. Then nobody will be able to stop us from hearing the accused and the witnesses.⁵²

Convinced at last that there was nothing whatever to be gained from Cochelet, Crémieux fell back on the only alternative that still appeared open to him. He appealed for help to the two well-known doctors, Antoine Clot (or Clot-Bey) and Gaetani – the former, a Frenchman, the latter, Italian – who were in constant attendance on the aging viceroy and who had often

⁴⁸ Montefiore to Louis Cohen (14 August) in Roth, *Anglo-Jewish Letters*, p. 268.

⁴⁹ Loewe, *The Damascus Affair*, p. 27.

⁵⁰ [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 244. (Montefiore was under the – apparently erroneous – impression that Cochelet rather than Crémieux was the author of the proposed "compromise.")

⁵¹ AC, p. 38. ⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

shared the company of the brilliant advocate since his arrival in Alexandria. They certainly had the ear of the frequently ill viceroy and were ready to put in a good word for the Damascus Jews, but it was hardly conceivable that they could prevail against the hostility of Cochelet.

Montefiore's efforts to break the deadlock with the aid of Briggs proved no more successful. The two Englishmen decided that there was no choice but to abandon the demand for a new investigation, and to make do with an appeal to Muhammed Ali requesting him to sign a firman that would announce the innocence and release of the prisoners and state "his disbelief that the Israelites committed murder for the sake of blood in their ceremonies."⁵³

Once informed of this project, Crémieux dismissed it as based on sheer "illusions." ("What! A firman conceived on such lines! That would mean to condemn Sherif Pasha and Bahri Bey; that would be the most terrible accusation against Ratti-Menton. For his own sake and for that of Cochelet, the pasha will never sign such a declaration!")⁵⁴ Nevertheless, on 22 August a draft of the proposed firman was delivered to the palace in the hope that Muhammed Ali would agree to sign it – and, as Crémieux had predicted, it was summarily rejected. By now, Briggs had decided that with war looming on the horizon, the time had come for him to leave permanently for England, and Crémieux noted in his diary, not without a touch of *Schadenfreude*, that "in abandoning Egypt just at the moment when the pasha wants his friends round about him, he [the Englishman] was the last person to have obtained so resounding a statement from Muhammed [Ali]."⁵⁵ Briggs left Egypt on 27 August.

During this period, even the Jewish press in Europe began to predict that the mission to the East was almost bound to end in failure. Thus, for example, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* pointed out on 12 September that the delegation could not have reached Egypt at a worse moment, as the viceroy would hardly be willing to "put Thiers to shame" in the midst of the mounting international crisis:

It would be so . . . wonderful not only to prove with crystal clarity the falsehood of all the accusations, but also the evil-doing and intrigues of those who have been damning us with devilish lies. But must we not now much lower our hopes?⁵⁶

And two weeks later, the journal pointed out that in Alexandria it was "the French consul alone who enjoys influence, and the outbreak of hostilities is hourly awaited. Set off against this development, the Jewish affair will be pushed entirely into the background."⁵⁷

⁵³ Montefiore to correspondence committee (25 August) BofD, p. 319. ⁵⁴ AC, p. 32.

⁵⁵ Ibid. ⁵⁶ "Syrien," *AZdesJ* (12 September), p. 526.

⁵⁷ "Zeitungsnachrichten (Aegypten)," *ibid.* (26 September), p. 545.

Ironically, it was only in Damascus, as usual remote from accurate news, that the success of the delegation was widely considered probable. In a letter of 31 July to Hodges, who passed on a copy confidentially to Montefiore, Werry wrote:

I hope the pasha will determine at once to give a new trial . . . at Alexandria and remove the prisoners, witnesses and parties away from hence. The longer these elements remain here, the more embroiled and complicated will the affair become. . . . The prosecutors and defendants become more rancorous; fresh pretensions and complications daily occur without producing any benefit . . . to the Jew nation, but I hope we are on the eve of getting this celebrated cause removed to Alexandria.⁵⁸

Writing to London on Tuesday, 25 August, Montefiore described the tense atmosphere in the city as war loomed on the horizon:

Here, we are hourly expecting a command to embark. From all we can learn the pasha is determined not to give in. The English admiral [Robert Stopford] is already here with his fleet cruising off the port together with some Austrian ships of war. . . . We are on all sides surrounded by warlike preparations, and night and day are our ears assailed by drums and trumpets and the noise of troops performing their exercises before our door.⁵⁹

On the 26th, the first ten-day period expired and Muhammed Ali informed the Turkish envoy, who was accompanied by the consuls-general of the four European allies, that he had determined to reject the ultimatum: "Only God can judge the issue; and I am answerable only to Him."⁶⁰ And, he assured them, they could look forward to a similarly negative response at the end of the next period, on 5 September.

At the same time, word arrived that Commodore Charles Napier, commanding the British ships off the Lebanese coast, had intercepted a number of Egyptian vessels carrying supplies for the army in Syria. Ever eager to catch his opponents off balance, Palmerston had decided, with allied consent but unbeknown to the world at large, that there was no legal necessity to delay such hostile measures until the ultimatums had run their course. (When this news reached Paris, the rage in the press reached gale force; the talk was all of European war; and the share prices on the stock exchange fell at an alarming rate.)

With time thus running out fast, Crémieux and Montefiore, for once working together, decided to make a final attempt to salvage at least some-

⁵⁸ Werry to Hodges (31 July) BofD, pp. 318–19.

⁵⁹ Montefiore to correspondence committee (25 August) BofD, pp. 322–3.

⁶⁰ Enclosed report, Hodges to Palmerston (26 April, no. 91) FO 78/403, pp. 145–6.

thing from the impending wreck of their enterprise. They now drew up a final appeal to Muhammed Ali, asking simply for the liberation of the prisoners in Damascus. In his letter to London at the time, Montefiore felt compelled to explain this move in apologetic terms:

You will not fail to observe that the last mentioned proceeding, in demanding less than we ought, is dictated by the critical state of affairs here . . . and it was prompted solely by an anxious feeling to get the prisoners released ere hostilities commenced, being assured that after that event nothing could be done for them and that they might be left in prison exposed to sufferings . . . as great as their past tortures and as likely to end in their death when the protecting power of the consuls of England, Austria, Russia and Prussia was withdrawn.⁶¹

In order to lend added weight to the plea addressed to the viceroy, it was circulated among the European consuls, who were asked to sign it in support; as with Laurin's initiative in May, the majority of the diplomats assented. But even now there were those who refused. Loewe recorded in detail, for example, the conversation with the Neapolitan consul, who said that he saw no point in so futile an exercise:

I know the pasha will not grant you even that. Sherif Pasha is his adopted son. When he was four years old, his father was killed and the pasha took him in[to] his palace. . . . He places the greatest confidence in him, so how can you expect that he would do anything against him? Besides that, . . . tortures are allowed by Turkish law.⁶²

From all sides – from Clot and Gaetani; from the Prussian consul-general, Wagner – word came in that the attempt to bypass Cochelet and mobilize consular pressure on behalf of the Jewish delegation would only antagonize Muhammed Ali. At the last moment, it was decided to hold the document back. "The distress of Sir Moses" in the face of this development was stated to be "impossible to describe."⁶³

All else having failed, Crémieux now returned to personal diplomacy, gaining audiences with the viceroy on both the 26th and 27th of August. Much of the conversation involved the fact – which had made a deep impression on Muhammed Ali, or so he said – that the alleged bones of Father Thomas had been found at the exact spot earlier indicated by the prisoners. Crémieux pointed out that nothing could be easier than to stage such discoveries; the viceroy listened attentively, but conceded nothing. The exchange ended, leaving Crémieux "without hope";⁶⁴ he and his wife now

⁶¹ Montefiore to correspondence committee (25 August) BofD, pp. 321–2.

⁶² [Loewe], *The Damascus Affair*, p. 20 (entry for 24 August).

⁶³ [Montefiore] *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 249 (editorial insertion). ⁶⁴ AC, p. 40.

decided that, with no reason to remain in Alexandria, they should leave the next day, the 28th, to visit Cairo.

In retrospect, it is clear, although contemporaries could hardly have realized the fact, that behind the bravado, the volubility, and the declared fatalism, Muhammed Ali must at some point, presumably in mid-August, have begun an inner reassessment of his international position. When push came to shove, he doubtless was enough of a realist to understand that in strategic terms his situation was vulnerable in the extreme; that Mount Lebanon, the Hauran, and the Nablus region of Palestine were like so much dry tinder ready at the first spark to flare into revolt; that for all the rhetoric, France (even under Thiers) had never pledged itself to fight on his behalf; and that, in sum, if he persisted in gambling recklessly, he could well lose everything.

The first public sign that he had decided to try a radically new tack came on 27 August, when he announced to a large meeting of his advisers that he was willing to forego his claim to the hereditary rule of Syria.⁶⁵ On the following day, the great significance of this shift revealed itself when the Egyptian viceroy met with Rifaat Bey and the four allied consuls-general. He told them that he had changed his mind; that he now accepted the terms of the second ultimatum, which granted him the hereditary rule of Egypt while depriving him of all his other territories. At the same time, though, he reserved the right to address "a very humble plea"⁶⁶ to the Sultan requesting as an act of royal generosity to leave him in control of Syria and Crete during his lifetime.

There now ensued a most extraordinary and, in part comic, situation. Muhammed Ali asked Rifaat Bey to depart at once for Constantinople, carrying his submission; but it was the contention of the consuls that mere words were no longer sufficient and that only the evacuation of the Egyptian army from Syria (as well as the return of the Turkish fleet, which had defected in 1839) could suffice to head off the war. In fear lest Rifaat Bey should, nonetheless, decide that he was duty-bound to leave, the four consuls-general stayed firmly at his side throughout the long negotiations of the day, never letting him out of their sight. Now that the allies had finally agreed on decisive military action, the last thing that they wanted was for the viceroy to slip out of the net. (Or, as Ponsonby put it anxiously to Palmerston at the time, "Muhammed Ali the legal governor of Egypt is a very different person from Muhammed Ali . . . stripped of . . . all his legal authority.")⁶⁷

The sudden switch of direction was observed with confusion and consternation by Cochelet. On the one hand, here at last were the concessions to the Porte that France had been demanding in vain over an entire year; but,

⁶⁵ [Report from Alexandria, 6 September] *Times* (28 September), p. 5.

⁶⁶ Enclosed report, Hodges to Palmerston (30 August, no. 92) FO 78/406, p. 151.

⁶⁷ Ponsonby to Palmerston (8 September, no. 196) FO 78/396, p. 145.

ACTUALITES

N. 23



FIG. 19. "On the brink." *"Have patience, little fellow; we will lead you to Egypt, but it must be step by step; it's safer!"* This cartoon depicts the powers starting to use coercion to remove Egypt from Syria. (*La Caricature*, 1 November; original wording in italics)

over against that, the viceroy had made the move without consulting the French diplomat. In a despatch to Thiers sent on 30 August, the consul-general complained that he should have been the first to be involved in any change of policy, but he had in reality found himself momentarily excluded. Such was his indignation that when at last asked to come to the palace, he initially refused.

Eventually, Cochelet did go, and "I found him [Muhammed Ali] very low. His voice was feeble and broken."⁶⁸ And the effects of a minor operation (for boils) which he had undergone that same morning were all too apparent. "I can only explain this great concession made by Muhammed Ali as the result of a weakening of his morale and the fear of a bitter struggle in which he is afraid of going down to defeat."⁶⁹ (The sense that the viceroy was, perhaps, losing

⁶⁸ Cochelet to Thiers (30 August) in Driault, *L'Égypte et l'Europe*, vol. 3, p. 186.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 188.

his nerve was similarly conveyed in a despatch of the same day to Lord Ponsonby from a British diplomat in Alexandria, who reported the following remarks that he heard from "a common bedouin": "'Are the pasha's boils to trouble the peace of the world? As for the men, we are not deceived – and, as for the women, I don't believe they would credit the assertion of his sex, unless he were to marry them all.' This coarse joke, which was expressed in very different terms, has more effect than would have a fatwa of the ulema.")⁷⁰

Instead of Rifaat Bey, it was Walewski who left for Constantinople on 30 August, carrying Muhammed Ali's plea for a settlement – but also the message that his army was poised to invade Anatolia if his offer were rejected.

Cochelet termed Friday, the 28th, the "day of the concessions,"⁷¹ and that description proved to be no less apt in the Jewish affair than in the sphere of high politics. For Adolphe Crémieux, Sir Moses Montefiore, and their associates, it marked the turning point for which they had been hoping against hope. It provided them with very little of what they had originally set out to achieve, but with enough, nonetheless, for them to be able to pronounce the mission a triumphant success.

Detailed accounts of the developments over the weekend of 28–30 August are to be found in the diaries of Crémieux, Montefiore (as later edited by Louis Loewe), and Loewe as well as in letters written at the time. They recorded the sense of extreme excitement and tension that gripped them, as well as the intense rivalry between the two leaders, which now went beyond all bounds.

Adolphe and Amélie Crémieux (together, presumably with Salomon Munk) left Alexandria for Cairo at 7 A.M. on the crucial Friday, and it was an hour later, when they were already on the barge being carried on the Mahmud canal toward the Nile, that they saw a horse-drawn cab coming after them at the greatest possible speed. It contained the viceroy's doctors, Clot and Gaetani, who came on board and described to them how, as they had been working earlier that morning to remove a boil from the pasha's buttocks, the conversation had come around to the Damascus Jews. The doctors had once again argued that, with the international crisis reaching its climax, "the voice of six million Jews raised in your favor cannot but be of great importance." And during the discussion, Muhammed Ali had announced suddenly that "I am going to grant the prisoners their liberty and permit the return of the fugitives. I shall be giving the requisite orders."⁷² The French-

⁷⁰ Allison to Ponsonby (30 August) FO 78/396, p. 154.

⁷¹ Cochelet to Thiers (30 August) in Driault, *L'Égypte et l'Europe*, vol. 3, p. 189.

⁷² AC, p. 40. (In his book of 1840 on Egypt, Clot – probably writing in mid-summer – had insisted that the case would eventually find an "equitable solution" [Clot-Bey, *Aperçu Général*, vol. 2, pp. 141–2].)

men had set off as soon as they could to catch Crémieux and his companions, who promptly changed all their plans in order to return to the city.

What Crémieux now wanted was to leave it to his two friends to insure that Muhammed Ali kept his word, and to inform him whether, and when, the orders to liberate the prisoners in Damascus had been drawn up. He therefore decided not to go to the palace until all was completed and, in a note announcing the extraordinary news, he likewise asked Montefiore not to disturb the viceroy – “a visit could ruin everything”⁷³ – and to keep the matter, meanwhile, strictly confidential. Clearly, he was hoping that maximal credit for the new turn of events would thus accrue to him and to his two French intermediaries, leaving the British part of the delegation out in the cold.

There was no justification for him to claim any such monopoly. Muhammed Ali doubtless saw his act of goodwill toward the Jews as a logical extension of his decision to begin, however tentatively, to distance himself from France and to ascertain whether it was still possible to reach an accommodation with the other European powers. Over a period of a half year the perception had taken hold in Alexandria – thanks to the clash of Cochelet (backed by Thiers) with Laurin and Hodges (backed by Metternich and Palmerston respectively) – that the Damascus case constituted an integral factor in the great-power dispute. The release of the prisoners was a gesture to the Anglo-Austrian alliance, which had its warships cruising off the port of Alexandria. True, Montefiore and Crémieux had also made a contribution, secondary but necessary to the denouement. Although acting largely apart, they had between them been able to bring the case to the viceroy’s attention on an almost daily basis and to present it as an issue of importance to the entire world. In all probability, they constituted the straw that broke the camel’s back.

On receiving the note from Crémieux, Montefiore, in consultation with Lady Judith and his three advisers, decided simply to ignore the warning it contained. Perhaps if they had realized that Crémieux had returned to the city, they would have contacted him, but he had chosen not to let them know of his change in plans; as far as they were concerned, he was well on his way to Cairo. Thus, at 2 P.M. Montefiore presented himself at the palace and managed to gain access to the viceroy, who confirmed the truth of what Clot and Gaetani had reported on the barge earlier in the day.

Deciding to strike while the iron was hot, Montefiore told the pasha that it was still his “desire to have the guilty punished and requested therefore a ‘firman’ to go to Damascus.” When Muhammed Ali pointed out the obvious – that, given the crisis, any journey to Damascus was highly inadvisable –

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Montefiore nonetheless persisted, hoping (or so he said) to "proceed there as soon as things changed, and the pasha then promised to give it [the firman] to him."⁷⁴ The proposed document was to authorize the journey to Syria, not the right to reopen the investigation. (Indicative of the eagerness of the two Jewish leaders to deny each other credit is the fact that Montefiore's diary, at least in its published and only surviving form of 1890, makes no mention of Crémieux's note nor of the part played by Clot and Gaétany.)

It was only in the evening that Adolphe Crémieux discovered that his English colleague had done the opposite of what he had asked. Two leading members of the Jewish community in Alexandria (Moses Valensino and Isaac Morpurgo) arrived at his hotel and, to his astonishment, proceeded to congratulate him on the recent turn of events; they had been hastily invited a few hours earlier by the Anglo-Jewish leader, who had informed them of the news, albeit not of its source. "I admit that this conduct made me angry,"⁷⁵ reads the understated notation in the diary of Crémieux, who immediately set off at a run to the palace. During the ensuing pleasantries, the French advocate thanked the viceroy in the name of "the six million Jews scattered across the globe" and managed to work in a compliment of a kind not unusual in his conversations with Muhammed Ali: "Kléber said to Bonaparte: 'You are as great as the world.' You, sir, at this moment are as great as Napoleon."⁷⁶

That night Crémieux went to see Montefiore (the French and English parts of the delegation stayed at different hotels) and there was an unholy row. Each accused the other of irresponsible and selfish behavior; and each tried to take credit for the success that had been achieved (the one attributing great influence to the French doctors, the other to Briggs). Only Lady Judith Montefiore, whom Crémieux at first found alone, gave a realistic appraisal of the events, explaining Muhammed Ali's conduct as the result of "political exigencies, and nothing else." ("The conversation was taking . . . on a bitter note," recorded Crémieux, "and I did not want to pursue it with a woman.")⁷⁷

All the resentment that Crémieux had built up since mid-July now poured out in a rush of furious invective. He compared his leading role in the case since his article of early April in the *Gazette des Tribunaux* with the passivity of Montefiore, and cursed the day that he sought him out to go to the East: "You want to be the absolute master; your vanity knows no bounds." "You counted for nothing here," was Montefiore's counterthrust, "neither you nor your friends." "Write to Europe," came back Crémieux, "and say, if you

⁷⁴ [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 251. ⁷⁵ AC, p. 41. ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

like, that you and the English did everything. And as for me, I shall write too, describing all that has happened, and Europe will pronounce between you and me."⁷⁸ (Giving brief mention in a private letter to this clash, Montefiore described the Frenchman as "extremely angry," adding that "he gave me no reason for being so much displeased.")⁷⁹ In the end, though, both men decided that things had gone too far; Dr. Madden sought Crémieux out to pacify him; and the close of that long day found the two men and their wives seated at a reasonably polite dinner.

Even then, however, the drama of that weekend was still not complete. On the next day, Saturday, copies of the official documents pronouncing in favor of the Damascus prisoners and fugitives were collected by members of the Jewish delegation. Somebody then discovered to his horror that the viceroy's firman contained the unacceptable term, "pardon," with its connotations of guilt. Even today, with so many diaries and letters available, it is impossible to tell who it was that first noted the offending formula and pointed it out to the others. Incredible as it may seem, Munk, Loewe, and Crémieux all claimed credit for the original discovery (Crémieux, having obtained a French translation; Munk, an Arabic version; and Loewe, the original Turkish).

Be that as it may, it was certainly Crémieux who went to see Muhammed Ali – once again at a run, this time "under the blazing sun"⁸⁰ – to explain that the delegation would have no choice but to protest publicly unless the offending word (*afu*) were replaced. The argument went on for a good hour, but the viceroy eventually ceded the point, substituting a neutral term, translatable into English as to "set at liberty" (*itlaq* in Arabic, *itlaq ve tervih* in Turkish).⁸¹ Montefiore was about to leave for the palace on the same errand when (as Loewe recorded it) "Mr. Crémieux rushed in, praising and congratulating himself on his own successful work."⁸²

The rivalry did not end there, though. The Jewish community in Damascus had still to be informed of the breakthrough; and, once again, each of the leaders sought to outdo the other. According to Crémieux, it had been agreed that a joint letter should be composed once the Sabbath was over, but he then discovered that Montefiore had in reality drawn up his own despatch – so that "my name should not be joined to his in announcing the important news." Not to be outwitted, he hastily wrote his own letter that night, sending it off with the government courier. (Thus, "mine got a twenty-four hour start – my just recompense and his just deserts.")⁸³

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 43–4.

⁷⁹ Montefiore to Louis Cohen (27 September) in Roth, *Anglo-Jewish Letters*, p. 274.

⁸⁰ AC, p. 46.

⁸¹ Munk to Albert Cohen (4 September) in A. Cohen, "Rückblick," *MGWdzJ* (1866), p. 211; cf. [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 252.

⁸² Loewe, *The Damascus Affair*, p. 27. ⁸³ AC, p. 48.

For all the exhausting diplomatic maneuvers of those days, the French consul-general found the time to send two reports to Thiers on the new turn in the Jewish affair. In the first, of 30 August, he was still under the impression that the viceroy had "pardoned" the Jewish prisoners, and he described this way out of the entanglement as acceptable. Muhammed Ali, he maintained, had long been inclined to release the prisoners, and had now concluded that – with "nearly all the consuls" about to petition for such a move – the time had come to do so. Cochelet had therefore advised him to act fast in order

to gain the credit, without giving the impression that he was yielding to the consuls. That is what he did, by taking the initiative. As there has been constant bad faith in this case, people will not fail to say, and this is already being spread about, that the pardon for the Jews is a triumph obtained over France and her agents. It would, however, have been very easy to prevent what was granted, but I thought that we should continue to play the positive role in this affair.⁸⁴

Cochelet was possibly correct in asserting that he could have upheld his veto if he had really tried; but such an adamant stance might well have irritated Muhammed Ali at a moment when he was reassessing his relationship with France.

In order to save face, the French consul-general asserted in his despatch that the Count des Meloizes had at last completed his inquiry, thus removing the stumbling block that had prevented any movement in the case since May. This statement, though, was disingenuous because des Meloizes had been transferred to Beirut before drawing up his final report; and, besides, his preliminary findings could hardly be said to have served as a justification for releasing the prisoners.

By the time of his second despatch a week later, Cochelet had learned of the last-minute change in the text of the firman, and he sounded less confident with regard to his own standing:

The Messrs. Crémieux and Montefiore did not neglect any means in their effort to win over to their interests those people who were drawing up the firman at a time when Muhammed Ali was ill. . . . You will see that the word pardon [*grace*] has been omitted. People are saying that the Jews want the firman to be understood as a decision for dismissal; and that they are considering the publication of polemics in the newspapers which they have bought. I think that it would be more in the interests of the Jewish people to remain silent. Time which dulls everything will also dull this affair, while if it is raised again there will be no choice, but to

⁸⁴ Cochelet to Thiers (30 August) in Driault, *L'Égypte et l'Europe*, vol. 3, p. 189.

publish the official documents and thus leave many doubts in people's minds.⁸⁵

With their days in Alexandria clearly numbered, Crémieux and Montefiore were both eager to use what little time remained to advance the goals of their mission still further. To gain the release of the prisoners, after all, had never been their primary aim. They now had renewed hope that Muhammed Ali could still be induced to issue a formal statement declaring the ritual-murder charge raised against the Jewish religion to be libelous and without foundation.

Following what had become the usual pattern of mutual concealment, Crémieux went alone, behind the back of his British colleague, to argue the case with the viceroy on 7 September. Their exchange of views in which Crémieux spoke as a French patriot (he had just despatched a pro-Egyptian article to the *Courrier Français*) centered largely on the international crisis. Both men backed each other up in the assessment that the Anglo-Turkish forces despatched to the area were far too small to mount an invasion of Syria; that there would, therefore, be no more than a blockade of the Lebanese coast over the winter; and that the ultimate outcome would depend on the degree of determination displayed by France in support of Egypt. With the chance of avoiding full-scale war ever more remote, Muhammed Ali had no reason at that time to pursue his recent flirtation with the four European powers, and had little choice but to look to Paris once again for salvation.

Naturally, he did not hesitate to turn down Crémieux's appeal for a formal declaration against the blood libel. He was ready to state his disbelief in the ritual-murder charge, "but why should I put it in writing? Do not mix me up in this. I do not want to involve myself in religious issues."⁸⁶ The same negative answer, of course, was given to Montefiore when he, too, came to the palace (together with Crémieux) on the next day. Always with one eye on public opinion in the West, Sir Moses had insured that their joint petition also included an appeal for an end to the use of torture in the viceroy's territories – a proposal likewise refused. Indeed, as Loewe reported it, when the secretary who was reading the Turkish translation of the petition aloud "came to the lines containing the request [regarding] . . . torture, [he] lowered his voice till he could hardly be heard. The pasha did not utter a single word."⁸⁷

Having finally received official permission to go to Syria, the Jewish emissaries now frequently raised the question among themselves whether they

⁸⁵ Ibid., (6 September), pp. 224–5. ⁸⁶ AC, p. 60. ⁸⁷ Loewe, *The Damascus Affair*, p. 31.

were not duty-bound to proceed at once to Damascus. That, after all, had always constituted a basic commitment of the mission. However, given the approach of war, and very possibly of an armed revolt in Syria, such talk was hardly meant seriously. In part, it resulted from the tensions between the two halves of the delegation, with each side trying to show itself the more courageous and the other the more cowardly. (The entry for 7 September in Loewe's diary, for example, notes that when Crémieux said "that it was most desirable to go to Damascus . . . I seized on his first expression and said, 'Well, say one word to Sir M. and the next day we'll start.' He immediately dropped the conversation.")⁸⁸

But there was also some method in all this talk, at least on the part of Montefiore, who said specifically to Crémieux at one point that they should "publicize everywhere that we want to go to Damascus and put up a resistance against everybody who pleads with us not to endanger ourselves. Then we'll be able to say that people didn't want to let us go." The French lawyer dismissed such suggestions as hopeless hypocrisy ("What kind of a rogue is this I am chained to?").⁸⁹ But, given the fact that the mission was engaged throughout in a bitter struggle for the support of public opinion in Europe, there was much logic in Montefiore's dissimulations. And Crémieux's remark again suggests that he was simply incapable of appreciating the stratum of solid common sense concealed beneath the obtuse exterior of the Jewish leader from England. (In one comment to the correspondence committee, Montefiore wrote specifically on "the propriety of feeding the public mind . . . — for, after all, it is London that must act upon the world, and through its press leave the imprint of its civilization, its liberal feeling and humanity upon the East.")⁹⁰

For his part, the Paris advocate was already thinking ahead to ways in which he could force a retrial of the case even without a prior government initiative. During their stay in Alexandria, the two Jewish leaders had held frequent consultations with Anton Laurin who, throughout, had sought alternative legal channels in order to see justice done. And the idea of joint action with the Austrian consul-general appealed to the French lawyer's sense of the dramatic. Thus, in a letter to Caspar Merlato in Damascus written on 31 August, Crémieux could ask him to insure that Isaac Picciotto, now at last to be liberated from the Austrian consulate, draw up an official complaint against the false charges to which he had been subjected and reserve the right to sue for compensation. So doing, Picciotto would pave the way for Laurin to reopen the case "at an opportune moment."⁹¹ An alternative and more extreme idea considered by Crémieux was to have Picciotto (as

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 30. ⁸⁹ AC, p. 55.

⁹⁰ Montefiore to correspondence committee (25 August) BofD, p. 326.

⁹¹ AC, p. 49.

an Austrian citizen) and Aaron Stambuli (a Tuscan subject) rearrested on Laurin's initiative and tried for murder.⁹²

But any such move would clearly have to await the results of the war then so close. A small contingent of Turkish soldiers and British marines went ashore on 10 September near Djunia on the Lebanese coast, and Beirut was simultaneously bombarded from the sea.⁹³ With their final appeal for further concessions so firmly rejected on 8 September, the members of the Jewish mission were left to concentrate on their personal plans. In fact, Madden had already started on his return journey to England the day before. He had maintained correct relations with Sir Moses Montefiore, but had a measure of sympathy for Crémieux and had pointed out to him that once the crucial interview with the viceroy was out of the way, the delegation would be free to split up – "everything between you will then be finished." (Noting their final conversation in his diary, Crémieux wrote apropos Montefiore and Loewe: "I saw well that Madden has a good understanding of the man and the valet who is with him as his interpreter.")⁹⁴

As British subjects, the Montefiores could hardly stay on longer than the consul-general, who was about to make his demonstrative departure; and they (together with Wire and Loewe) finally sailed out of Alexandria on 17 September. Crémieux, with Amélie and Munk, as French citizens, were under no such constraints and they left for their stay in Cairo a day earlier.

For all their highly strained relations, the two leaders did succeed, before they parted ways, in drawing up a joint report on their mission and in addressing a letter of thanks, co-signed, to Muhammed Ali. They there put into his mouth the words and sentiments that he had absolutely refused to have put into writing in his own name:

Your Highness has shown to the world that you throw back with contempt the infamous calumny that our enemies wished to lay on the Jewish religion that it . . . consecrates so odious a principle as the shedding of human blood to mix with the unleavened bread – an accusation which would make our ancient and pure religion barbarous and sanguinary.

. . . The act that Your Highness has done will take its place in history by the side of the two firmans given by Suleiman II, and Amurath [al-Murad] who nobly vindicated the Jewish religion from the same accusation. . . . Christian princes and even popes [have done likewise].⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid., pp. 64–5.

⁹³ On the course of the war, see the accounts of two of the commanding officers: Jochmus, *Die syrische Krieg* and Napier, *The War in Syria*.

⁹⁴ AC, p. 55.

⁹⁵ "Persecution of the Jews in the East," *Times* (10 October), p. 6. (On the Ottoman regime and its attitude to ritual-murder charges against the Jews in the early modern period: Heyd, "Alilot-dam beTurkiyah.")

Clearly, this letter was in reality addressed not to the viceroy, but to the newspaper-reading public in the West.

Just before leaving Alexandria, the delegation had received reports from Damascus describing the events of 6 September, the day on which the viceroy's order regarding the prisoners and fugitives reached the city. For example, in a letter to Crémieux (translated into English at the time) Caspar Merlato wrote:

Yesterday was the happiest day of my life. All the prisoners . . . were set at liberty and sent to their homes. . . . The joyful liberated men before returning to the homes of their enraptured families proceeded to the temple where in unison with an immense multitude they prostrated themselves on the earth and prayed for peace and every blessing upon Muhammed Ali and all their other powerful benefactors.

The Musselmans of this city approved and rejoiced in this memorable triumph, but the Christians – alas! the Christians forgetting the . . . most sacred precepts of their religion, remained silent and were even astounded. . . . However, the most influential among them did not omit afterwards to offer their congratulations to the principal prisoners. . . . Would to God they had been sincere.⁹⁶

And in a letter to Moses Valensino from Isaac Loria we read:

I have not language adequate to describe the moving scene which was witnessed yesterday morning throughout the whole Hebrew quarter of this city when all their hopes were realized as by a miracle and the liberated captives returned to their homes. They were unable to account for this happy issue. . . . The names of Montefiore, Crémieux and others . . . are repeated by them with all [possible] warmth. . . . That of Valensino my dear friend is no less revered and deservedly so . . . [for your] honorable share in this sacred cause.⁹⁷

Nobody was more astonished by this sudden turn of events than the Count de Ratti-Menton, whose bitterness poured forth undisguised in a series of private letters to des Meloizes ("My dear neighbor and good friend") in Beirut. "It is hard," he wrote on the 6th, "to describe the impression . . . made on the Muslim and Christian population. All day the Christians and many Muslims have been coming to the consulate to find out what would have motivated this action which to them is incomprehensible."⁹⁸ A few days later he reported on a "great celebration" in the Jewish quarter, where "el-Telli, Father Thomas and I all figured in a puppet show." Sherif

⁹⁶ Merlato to Crémieux (7 September) *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Loria to Valensino (7 September) BofD (October–), pp. 23–4.

⁹⁸ Ratti-Menton to des Meloizes (6 September) MREA:N (Beyrout: Consulat, 1840, File no. 25).

Pasha's cautious attempts to halt the demonstration had proved unavailing and there had been shouts of "Up with Austria! Down with France! . . . Hurrah for the Ottomans! Down with the Cross!"⁹⁹ Yet another letter described a garden party held by Merlato and attended by "all the innocent Jews as well as by Mrs. [Rebecca] Picciotto and several [other] Jewesses."¹⁰⁰ Even more galling, perhaps: Loria had been saying that the liberation of the prisoners was not enough and that he would be demanding "full and complete satisfaction from me for the injury done to the honor of the Jewish nation!"¹⁰¹

Most shocking of all, he wrote, was the fact that Muhammed Ali, "without waiting for a French initiative . . . had sent home people condemned . . . for the murder of a French protégé."¹⁰² France had suffered a real blow – "our nascent influence is flat on its face."¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Ibid. (12 September).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. (17 September).

¹⁰¹ Ibid. (12 September).

¹⁰² Ibid. (6 September).

¹⁰³ Ibid. (12 September).

The final lap: Crémieux, Montefiore, and public opinion in Europe

When Dr. Madden left Egypt he returned directly to England, but neither Adolphe Crémieux nor Sir Moses Montefiore chose to follow his example. Once going their separate ways in mid-September, each was eager to mark up some additional, and unshared, achievement before heading for home. The angry competitiveness that had embittered their relationship was doubtless one motivating factor.

But they were also very much aware of the fact that their joint mission had failed to achieve all but one of its widely publicized ends. The prisoners and fugitives had been spared, but there had been no new investigation, no retrial, no discovery of the true murderers (if murder it was), no proof positive that the Jews involved were innocent, no government denunciation of the ritual-murder charge as a baseless libel never again to be countenanced – and, finally, no decision by Muhammed Ali to abolish torture in his domains. Cut off by the huge time gap, they could have no idea how the final outcome of their long, drawn-out negotiations with the Egyptian viceroy would be received in Europe. Nonetheless, they had every reason to fear for the worst and to try to head it off by further initiatives.

In reality, however, the mission to the East was not subjected by the European press to the in-depth and wide-ranging scrutiny that might have been expected. The interest in the Jewish affair that had been so great from April until July was almost totally eliminated by the approach and outbreak of the war. Day by day, detailed reports, first of military preparations, and then of the actual battles in Lebanon, filled the foreign news columns.

And as it became clear that the colossal gamble of Palmerston and Ponsonby had paid off; that Ibrahim Pasha faced total defeat at the hands of the small, but boldly led, Anglo-Turkish forces backed up by a Maronite and Druse rebellion – so more and more space was given over, too, to anxious speculation about how, exactly, the French were going to react. Would the workers' riots of September in Paris turn into a full-fledged popular insurrection? Did the decision to increase the effective size of her armed forces by at least one hundred fifty thousand men mean that France was ready to unleash a war in Europe, raising once again the revolutionary standard of

was the almost unlimited space set aside by the press all over Europe for the trial of Madame Marie Laffarge, a woman high up in French society accused of preparing cakes laced with arsenic for her husband.)²

Thus, relatively little about the Damascus case and Jewish affairs found its way into the press from October to December. And the reports written or inspired by Montefiore and Crémieux accounted for a considerable proportion of what did appear. In this respect, the situation was almost the exact opposite of that which had prevailed at the start of the case in late March and early April, when the Count de Ratti-Menton and Jean-Baptiste Beaudin had been able to monopolize the news. Now both of them, together with the Count des Meloizes, had much more urgent business on their hands as they raced from place to place trying to convince the Maronites not to rise up in revolt against Muhammed Ali. Even Cochelet, who remained at his post in Alexandria, chose not to involve himself in yet another high-profile newspaper campaign, hoping perhaps, as he had written to Thiers, that everybody would finally allow time to "dull this affair."

But as the French consul-general had anxiously anticipated, the two leaders of the Jewish delegation as well as their backup committees had no intention of allowing complete silence to envelop the case. They were determined to seize the initiative, presenting the outcome of the negotiations in Alexandria as a total vindication of their stand.

First in the field was the *Journal des Débats*, the one Paris newspaper that (as already noted) had consistently defended the Jewish cause. As a journal identified with the moderately conservative opposition led by the Count Louis Molé, it was ready enough to exploit the growing discomfort, desperation even, of Thiers and it did not hesitate to launch a frontal attack on the premier. Thus, on 22 September it accused him of having ordered the progovernment press to make no reference to Muhammed Ali's decision in favor of the Damascus Jews. Reproducing with approval the despatches of the American secretary of state, John Forsyth, in relation to the affair, it added:

We cannot but state, for the time has come to do so, that of all the governments ours alone has refused to intervene in support of the demand to reopen a judicial process which was based on torture. The president of the French council of ministers [Thiers] alone has consistently refused his cooperation.³

² The Laffarge case was frequently reported throughout 1840 (from the initial reports until the rejection of her appeal in December), with the actual trial in September filling pages of print (e.g.: "The Case of Madame Laffarge Accused of Poisoning Her Husband," *Times* [8 September], p. 6). The prosecutor in the case complained that "the abuses of the public press in the affair have notoriously been pursued to the greatest extremes" (ibid. [14 December], p. 3).

³ "France," *JdesD* (22 September).

(In all probability, the insertion of Forsyth's despatches was arranged by James de Rothschild.)

Some two weeks later, a report from Trieste in the paper noted a rumor originating in Alexandria that the Egyptian viceroy had, after all, "been moved solely by the wish to provide the Jews with a pardon – even though he had not the slightest evidence of their innocence." But, insisted the correspondent, such interpretations had been "peremptorily negated" by no less a person than Muhammed Ali's private secretary who, in a note to Crémieux and Montefiore, had written that the viceroy's decision was "an act not of pardon but of justice based on accurate information obtained on the spot."⁴

And on 7 October the *Journal des Débats* published a long letter penned by Adolphe Crémieux on the eve of his departure for Cairo. Employing heavy irony, he there made ample use of the news just received from Caspar Merlato. The Muslims of Damascus, he wrote, had been described in "false reports . . . to Europe as enraged men ready to destroy the Jewish quarter," but they had now greeted the prisoners,

these great criminals, [finally] set at liberty, with unanimous applause. . . . These monsters who had torn two defenseless men to pieces . . . were enveloped by waves of people, following them as on a day of triumph. . . . They are all free today surrounded by their wives, their children, their brothers who had so much to weep for over the last six months. At least, following the verdict at Rhodes and the deliverance of the Jews at Damascus, the absurd and barbarous blood libel will no longer be raised against the Jews.⁵

In England, materials sent by Montefiore to the correspondence committee were prepared by Hananel de Castro, the acting president of the Board of Deputies, for publication in the *Times*, the *Courier*, and several other papers. Clearly, no little thought had gone into the question of what to include and what to omit. Thus, for example, the section of Merlato's letter praising the Muslims was in; the part attacking the Damascus Christians was left out. The letter of thanks to Muhammed Ali which, inter alia, linked him, against his express wish, to the sixteenth-century Sultans Suleiman II and el-Murad was reproduced in full, together with Montefiore's long despatch of 17 September explaining that the discharge of all the prisoners was not an "act of grace . . . but a matter of right,"⁶ and that only the mounting turmoil in the region had foiled their determination to go to Damascus. But the text of Muhammed Ali's firman was missing; indeed, it seems that Montefiore had chosen not to send it – perhaps because in that document the Egyptian

⁴ Ibid., (5 October). (The secretary here mentioned was probably Negib Effendi, with whom the Jewish delegates had frequent dealings: e.g.: [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 252.)

⁵ Crémieux to Paris (15 September), *JdesD* (7 October).

⁶ Montefiore to correspondence committee (17 September), *Times* (10 October), p. 6.

viceroys nowhere pronounced the innocence of the accused men, justifying his decision, rather, simply as a gesture to Montefiore and Crémieux, who represented "a population so large that it would not have been appropriate to refuse their request."⁷

Even the *Allgemeine Zeitung* of Augsburg, which had carried so many reports from Alexandria hostile to the Jews in the spring and summer, now published an article in the opposite spirit sent from that city on 6 September. Describing the efforts of Cochelet and Thiers ("who is afraid of the truth") to insure the failure of the Jewish mission, the correspondent spoke in praise of Muhammed Ali, who had refused to "sacrifice the lives of the accused to the likes of Ratti-Menton."⁸ (Had the intensifying hostility between the German confederation and France, one wonders, made possible the publication of such a piece?)

However, just as in April it had not taken long for Jewish spokesmen to respond to the ritual-murder charge, so now the opposing school of thought was hardly ready to allow its case to go by default. True, for the most part, the ministerial press in France continued its policy of studied silence, but the ultra-Catholic journals were by no means ready to exercise restraint. As early as 24 September, for instance, the *Gazette de Languedoc* published an article that insisted that

in reality the Jews of Damascus have not been recognized as innocent. The sentence passed by Sherif Pasha has not been reversed. . . . It [the viceroy's firman] is simply an arbitrary act of will. . . . Muhammed Ali judges it as worthy of himself to accede to the hopes of the Messrs. Crémieux and Montefiore or, rather – on the verge of war – to conciliate the many Jews of Palestine and Syria. Do the Jewish advocates . . . [really] want to return to Europe without having attained a reversal of the judicial process?⁹

And the *Quotidienne* carried a report from Alexandria dated 17 September which noted that when the Jewish delegates had sought to have all such blood accusations pronounced in advance to be absurd and nonjudicable, "the pasha, indignant, had declared proudly that they should be satisfied with what they had obtained and promise to remain silent regarding the affair, because otherwise he too would speak."¹⁰

Predictably, though, it was the *Univers* with its special synthesis of Catholic enthusiasm, extreme French nationalism, and support for the government of Thiers that now poured forth a veritable stream of furious invective. In the

⁷ Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, p. 254.

⁸ "Die Juden in Damaskus," *AZ* (20 September), p. 2203.

⁹ "Nouvelles de Levant," *GdeL* (24 September); this article was republished from the *Gazette du Midi*.

¹⁰ "Nouvelles d'Orient," *Quotidienne* (7 October).

Damascus affair, stated an article of 8 October, the *Journal des Débats*, "with its doubly perfidious system of alternating silence and publicity, had outraged both Christian honor in the person of the victims and national honor in the person of the French consul; it has become (who knows on what conditions) the official organ of Judaism."

Returning to one of its key themes, the *Univers* argued that in its ability to mount so effective a campaign "Judaism has reappeared as a power, as a nationality, thus justifying the Prophecies which rendered it imperishable and giving the lie to those philanthropic theories which in recent years sought to efface it within the uniformity of modern civilization – and, as such, it has held all of Christianity in check." Of course, the Jews had been able to rely, as so often in the past, on "intrigue and gold"; and "who can now say how far their aspirations will extend?" Was not a semiofficial paper in England already talking about "the reestablishment of a Hebrew kingdom on the soil [sanctified by] the Crusades and in the shadow of Christ's tomb?"¹¹

From there, the paper moved on to the Rothschild family: "On David's throne, once it is restored, there will sit that financial dynasty which all Europe recognizes and to which all of Europe submits; its inauguration will surely provide a scene . . . most worthy of the venal century in which we are living." Much that was otherwise inexplicable surely had its true source in the power of the "Hebrew bankers in Vienna, London and Paris." Who else but that coterie was providing England and Russia, both in desperate financial straits, with the funds required to underwrite their current adventure in the Middle East? Could not such a hypothesis throw "new light on the mysterious causes which made possible the treaty . . . [of 15 July]; and in this act of high treason by France's allies does one not find something reminiscent of Judas's thirty pieces of silver?"

Ultimately, the issue was very simple. The Jews, whatever their various beliefs and places of birth, remained "aliens everywhere, the enemies of the Christians. The ineradicable stamp of deicide will forever mark their brows as they bow down to the tablets of the Law or . . . to the golden calf."¹²

However, it was only two days later, with the publication of a very long article entitled "Jewish Doctrines on Hatred for the Christians," that the full extent of the fury reigning in the offices of the *Univers* became apparent. Muhammed Ali, stated the anonymous author, had refused to declare the Jews innocent, because he was unwilling to flout public sentiment in the Middle East, where "the fact that it was the Jews who murdered Father Thomas is held as certain – there, this conviction is universally held."

In Europe, opinions were divided, but if only the public were to familiarize

¹¹ "Affaire de Damas," *Univers* (8 October). ¹² Ibid.

itself with the teachings of Judaism, doubts could hardly remain. The Jews might well behave externally much like everybody else in the West, and yet "profess a secret religion and believe in impenetrable mysteries." There followed long extracts from a well-known and very hostile analysis of the Talmud first published in Poland in 1830 and authored by the abbé Luigi Chiarini (an Italian priest and professor at the University of Warsaw).¹³ On the basis of the material gathered by Chiarini – which was of the kind discussed above in chapter 10 – the article in the *Univers* concluded:

These positive facts, in our view, lend a fatal verisimilitude to the Damascus accusation. How is it possible not to believe it, indeed, when to the proofs brought together by the judicial inquiries are added the terrible inductions resulting from this exposé of Jewish doctrines?¹⁴

The response of the *Univers* was surprising, perhaps, only in its extreme vehemence; but the same could not be said of a short item that appeared in the *Constitutionnel* on 12 October. That journal, generally regarded as an all but official organ of the Thiers government, had on instructions from above avoided mention of the Damascus affair for months. How great was the sensation, then, when it broke its silence in order to launch an angry attack on the Baron James de Rothschild. If the *Univers* suspected the Rothschilds of financing the anti-French alliance and hence the war in Syria, the *Constitutionnel* attacked them for doing everything in their power to maintain peace in Europe, however shameful the results for France.

With his continued tenure in office threatened by the crisis in the Middle East, Thiers was seeking – or, perhaps, pretending – to play the war card. His proposals to send the fleet to stand off Alexandria and to double the size of the army were subjects of deep dispute in his own cabinet from the first days of October;¹⁵ and King Louis-Philippe was gingerly looking for ways to replace his turbulent prime minister with a leader drawn from the conservative opposition – a prospect most welcome to the Rothschilds who, in reality, feared the consequences of war both in Syria and in Europe.

Rumor had it, stated the *Constitutionnel*, that

Mr. Rothschild and other rich bankers have threatened to stir up a formidable opposition if the government opts for war. . . . Nothing could be more simple. Mr. Rothschild is an Austrian citizen and Austrian consul-general in Paris; as such, he is very little concerned with what affects the honor and interests of France. . . . But, then, what has [he] . . . , a man of the stock-exchange got to do with our parliamentary chamber and with the majority therein? By what right . . . does this king

¹³ Chiarini, *Théorie du Judaïsme*, particularly vol. 1, pp. 261–302. (Cf. idem, *Le Talmud de Babylone*.)

¹⁴ "Doctrines des Juifs sur la Haine des Chrétiens," *ibid.* (10 October).

¹⁵ E.g.: Rémusat, *Mémoires*, vol. 3, pp. 471–9.

of finance interfere in our affairs? . . . Is he a judge of our honor? Should his pecuniary interests prevail over our national interests? . . .

However, financial grievances are not all that the Jewish banker has against the cabinet of 1 March; he is also moved by the rancors of an injured pride. Mr. Rothschild promised his co-religionists to bring about the dismissal of our consul in Damascus because of the part he played in the trial of the Jews in that city. Thanks to the steadfastness of the president of the council [Thiers], these insistent demands of the powerful banker were resisted and Mr. Ratti-Menton upheld – hence the irritation with which Mr. Rothschild has thrown himself into intrigues where he does not belong.¹⁶

This comment, clearly inspired and possibly written by Thiers, was widely reproduced in the French press, most conspicuously in progovernment and left-wing newspapers. A reply from Rothschild was published the next day. (“I have never wished to play a political role. I am, as you say, a financier; if I want peace, I wish it to be one honorable for France and for all Europe. . . . If France is not my land of birth, it is that of my children; I have lived here for thirty years and have here my family, my affections, all my interests.”)¹⁷

In England, likewise, the initial advantage gained by the speedy arrival of the despatches from the Jewish mission to the East did not go unchallenged for long. Here, again, the prime mover was that correspondent from Oxford, TJC, whose comments on Jewish beliefs and practice have already been described. It was most regrettable, he stated in the *Times* of 20 October, that Montefiore and Crémieux had cancelled their journey to Syria, thus “re-nounc[ing] an investigation so urgently called for by public opinion.” If the Muslims there had now, as claimed, openly identified with the Jews, what could the two emissaries have had to fear in Damascus?

It is still more unfortunate that Messrs. de Castro and Montefiore should boast of the innocence of their rescued co-religionists, while all letters from Syria recently published unanimously concur in considering the guilt of the Jews fully proven. Even . . . “An Impartial Observer” [George Stephens] . . . whose clear, candid and unbiased statements entitle him to every attention, reluctantly adopts the conclusion that the accused are guilty. . . . [Were not] Messrs. Montefiore and Crémieux at all influenced by the reflection that an inquiry undertaken at the scene of the crime, while first impressions remained in full force and M. de Ratti-Menton was present . . . to vindicate his conduct, might lead to results fatal to their cause? . . . The civilized world is disappointed. The investigation so loudly called for, so anxiously expected is abandoned

¹⁶ “Extraits des Journaux Anglais,” *Constitutionnel* (12 October).

¹⁷ *Constitutionnel* (13 October).

and the Jews, if innocent, continue under a load of unmerited suspicion and obloquy, and, if guilty, persevere in . . . a highly criminal practice.¹⁸

This letter was soon followed by another, this time from a Cambridge man ("Cantab."), who concurred that

by accepting freedom without trial, Sir Moses has done his cause more harm than good. It would have shown magnanimity on the part of himself and the accused to have refused it on any terms but one . . . — the proof and publication of their innocence, and the absolution of every Jew in the world from the stigma that had become attached to their name.¹⁹

Far more serious from the Jewish point of view was the fact that in a leading article, the *Times* expressed its agreement with this contention: "The evasion of the whole matter by the deputation from England, and the acceptance of a free pardon, instead of an order for [an] impartial inquiry is anything but satisfactory to the world at large."²⁰

Of course, Hananel de Castro replied, recalling Merlato's vehement rejection of the case against the Damascus Jews and quoting yet another letter from Montefiore, who repeated his determination to proceed to Syria when the time was propitious;²¹ but it was impossible to escape the fact that, given the stand of the *Times*, the case could hardly be considered closed.

While the results of their joint mission in Alexandria were thus being received and appraised in Europe, Adolphe Crémieux and Sir Moses Montefiore went their separate ways. For his part, Crémieux made up his mind that he would devote much of the time remaining to him in Egypt (he stayed for another month) to establish a new elementary school system for the Jewish communities of Alexandria and Cairo.

At one level, this decision resulted from sudden impulse. In his diary, Crémieux described the picture that met him when he went to see what kind of education the young Jewish boys were receiving. "The crass ignorance," he wrote,

in which Jewish children are educated here would be unthinkable in Europe: a little Hebrew, a little Arabic, that is all that they acquire. . . . The children squatted on mats or on the bare soil, and rocking themselves, repeat verses from the Pentateuch like parrots and translate them into Arabic, all the time making the same motions.²²

He was genuinely shocked and anxious to do what he could to improve such conditions of schooling.

¹⁸ "The Jews (From TJC)," *Times* (20 October), p. 3.

¹⁹ "The Jews (From 'Cantab.')." *ibid.* (31 October), p. 5. ²⁰ *Times* (20 October), p. 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, (22 October), p. 3. ²² AC, p. 86.

There can be no doubt, though, that on another level, Crémieux was also eager to play a role – small enough in itself, but symbolically significant – in the prestigious effort to introduce European civilization into the Middle East. The Egypt of Muhammed Ali had, after all, long attracted a stream of Western experts, entrepreneurs, and adventurers armed with plans for large-scale factories, up-to-date technology, canals, dams, and educational institutions. The French, several veterans of the Saint-Simonian movement among them, were at the forefront of this group, and Crémieux's new friend, Antoine Clot, had done more than any other single individual associated with it to win the respect of the local population. In the country since 1825, Clot had established a medical school; initiated many schemes to improve public health; and displayed real heroism in the fight against the frequent outbreaks of plague.²³ To create a modern school system thus attracted Crémieux as both Frenchman and Jew.

In Alexandria and Cairo alike, he initiated a series of meetings with the leaders of the Jewish communities, including the chief rabbis, in order to recruit their support for his scheme; and surprisingly, perhaps, he met with little overt opposition. What he had in mind were separate schools not only for the boys, but also for the girls, with much emphasis to be put on clean and hygienic buildings; adequate clothing for the children; and one nourishing meal a day to be provided on the premises.²⁴ Crémieux insisted that the schools should take in children from both the European ("Frank") and Eastern ("Arab") Jewish communities, and here, too, he was under the impression that he had won his point. Even he, though, for all the immense prestige that he had acquired, could not gain agreement to allow entry to Karaite pupils.²⁵

It was estimated that the annual cost of the two schools in Alexandria alone would be at least fifteen thousand francs, and Crémieux proposed that some half of that sum should be provided for at least three years by the Jews in Western Europe, with the rest to be found locally.²⁶ At every stage in the negotiations and planning, Salomon Munk played a key role. According to the proposed curriculum, languages (Arabic, Hebrew, French, and Italian) would be taught to all the children, but while the boys would also learn some arithmetic and geography, the girls were to acquire such domestic skills as needlework.

A number of prominent Frenchmen resident in Cairo agreed to advise the

²³ See, e.g.: Clot-Bey, *Aperçu Général*; and idem, *Mémoires*.

²⁴ On the schools in Cairo and Alexandria, e.g.: AC, pp. 67–9, 71, 78–9, 86, 97, 103–4, 109–11; the unsigned letter from Cairo, *JdesD* (16 November); and Crémieux's appeal (20 March 1841), "Aux Juifs de l'Occident," *AI* (1841), pp. 181–5; on their place in the history of modern Jewish education in the Middle East: Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, pp. 1–17.

²⁵ AC, pp. 103–4. ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

management, and Clot Bey accepted appointment as the medical inspector for the schools. In a talk (translated into both Hebrew and Arabic by Munk) to the Cairo community, most of whom were very poor, Crémieux argued that study in a modern school could only strengthen the children's faith in Judaism and that "it is to education that the Jews in the West owed that civil equality which they enjoy in the most civilized countries of Europe."²⁷

As was only to be expected, Montefiore refused to have any part in the scheme, insisting that all his philanthropic efforts should concentrate on "the Jews in the Holy Land who require help, for they are living in deep distress."²⁸ And in the end (apparently to Munk's irritation) the schools in Cairo were named after his superior, who noted in his diary entry of 1 October (after embarking on the voyage down the Nile) that

I left happy in the thought that the Crémieux schools would prosper in the East, that those in Cairo would serve as a stimulus for the schools that I am considering setting up in Alexandria, Damascus, Jerusalem and Aleppo, that my name henceforth will be linked to a truly useful enterprise of immense significance.²⁹

Adolphe Crémieux, with Amélie and her maid, sailed out of Alexandria on 7 October on the start of their return journey to Paris. Munk had remained in Cairo to oversee the organization of the new schools as well as to pursue his own particular interest – the acquisition of rare Jewish and Karaite manuscripts and books for the Bibliothèque Nationale. His reports on the valuable works obtained found their way into many European newspapers. Like Crémieux, Munk was thus able to benefit from the mystique of the East so central to the French self-image at the time.³⁰

Toward the end of his stay in Egypt, Crémieux made payments of ten thousand francs each to Clot and Gaetani for services rendered³¹ in putting the case for the Damascus Jews to Muhammed Ali. To have won more from the viceroy, Clot reportedly said in confidence, would have required the delegation to have "expended at least five hundred thousand francs in presents and to have remained here at least six months. Sir Moses's great haste spoiled everything."³²

The journey home took Adolphe and Amélie Crémieux over two months as they made their way slowly through Syria (where they were held in quarantine), Athens, Corfu, Trieste (where they were again quarantined), Venice, Vienna, Frankfurt-am-Main, and Mainz. At every place where there was a

²⁷ [Letter from Cairo], *JdesD* (16 November).

²⁸ AC, p. 69. (Montefiore complained bitterly about the tightfistedness of the English Jews when it came to financial support for the Jews in Palestine: "Hardly a single one of my friends promised me [even] fifty pounds.")

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 98. ³⁰ E.g.: Munk to Champollion-Figeac (October) *JdesD* (15 November).

³¹ AC, pp. 101, 109. ³² *Ibid.* p. 73.

Jewish community, they were treated as hardly less than visiting royalty, for among the Jews in Europe the outcome of the mission to the East – the liberation of the prisoners – was being interpreted, at least outwardly, as an unmitigated triumph. Typical enough in this context were the words of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* from 17 October, penned doubtless by Ludwig Philippson, who only a couple of weeks earlier had been in the darkest despair.

Seldom does Jewish history . . . permit a joyous cry of gratification. . . . How seldom it is that, as circumstances unfold, the sense of justification felt by the oppressed . . . is not off-set by bitterness and by uncertainty about the future. . . . But the turn now taken by the Damascus affair – a case of concern to all Jewry in that all of Judaism stood accused – justifies, indeed stirs us, to feelings of the highest, the purest joy . . . This event granted the majority of mankind . . . the opportunity to provide Jewry with complete and shining justice, and thus to draw a line under the past. . . . The reign of deceit and darkness is coming to its end, [and] . . . despite all the . . . intrigues of Thiers, of a great power, the truth has now found its way out. . . .

It is good to see the love which we [Jews] have been able to demonstrate for each other as a *collectivity*. Smashed apart as a state and as a people, we are still tied by bonds of faith. We ourselves have done the most to cast light on this [affair].³³

And in a letter to his nephew, Lionel, in London, Amschel Mayer Rothschild wrote (in Yiddish – or, more exactly, in Judeo-German) to describe the recent Yom Kippur service: “You should have heard the blessing . . . and the honors which our Moses [Montefiore] received from the rabbi of Frankfurt. You cannot imagine how all the people in the synagogue wept. Tell him this.”³⁴

The triumphal progress of Crémieux and his wife across Europe could have had no precedent in modern Jewish history. Everywhere they were wined, dined; lauded in formal speeches, in poetry, and even in song; showered with gifts. The synagogues were filled to overflowing when they appeared; a long convoy of carriages accompanied them out of Trieste as they left on the overland route to Venice. And in Vienna, Crémieux held a long conversation with Metternich, who pressed him for his firsthand impressions of the Middle East crisis and listened patiently to the praise heaped by his visitor on Anton Laurin.³⁵

³³ “Tages-Kontrolle,” *AZdesJ* (17 October), p. 605.

³⁴ A. to L. Rothschild (n.d.) NMRA:XI/101/3 (letter 8).

³⁵ AC (*bis* section), pp. 18–19. (Laurin was knighted in 1842, but a request from the Rothschilds in the same year to have Merlato promoted was turned down [Erb, “The ‘Damascus Affair,’” pp. 111–12, nn. 13 and 22].)

True, behind the demonstration of solidarity there were serious doubts regarding the degree of outward show that was desirable and, given the interethnic tensions, safe. Crémieux found that the community in Trieste was divided between the younger generation, who wanted to illuminate the synagogue and stage a public reception, and the older leadership, which vetoed such proposals. (The former, noted Crémieux in his diary, "claim that the pusillanimity of their elders constitutes an obstacle to their emancipation; [that] . . . the Jews suffer from the lack of respect that such submission brings with it.")³⁶ And Anselm Rothschild wrote from Frankfurt on 24 November to his cousins in London that Crémieux was expected soon: "The little man has a great dose of vanity. Here they want to give him public dinners, but I am decidedly against any public demonstration."³⁷

But overall, very little heed was paid to such reservations. The extraordinary passage of the French advocate across Europe was summed up neatly by *Archives Israélites* at the end of the year:

One can have no idea of the enthusiasm with which Mr. Crémieux has been received [everywhere]. . . . We have in front of us the Jewish journals from Germany and also communications sent to us [repeating the news], and have seen the enormous quantity of letters; formal speeches; testimonials on paper, on parchment, and even on silk; . . . the gifts of every kind (boxes, candle-sticks, vases – all inscribed). From Prague and Nikolsburg he was sent the title of "Morenu"* and he was awarded the same honor in Vienna. He was banqueted and serenaded in Vienna and Frankfurt. . . . The box presented to Mr. Crémieux in Vienna . . . is of fine work, cylindrical, in solid gold . . . and bearing the inscription: "To the worthy champion of his persecuted brethren . . ." It is encircled with diamonds and valued at 14,000 florins (about 30,000 francs).³⁸

At nearly every major stop along the way, Crémieux took the opportunity to do what he did best: delivering speeches, examples of the high oratorical art, in which he felt free (with no little self-aggrandizement) to declare his personal credo and interpretation of the Damascus affair. "Our mission," he insisted in Vienna (where he was eulogized by the famous rabbi, Isak Noa Mannheimer), "was crowned with success; the chains fell away; the prisons opened to release the victims of torture."³⁹ Now, with the foundation of the Jewish schools in Egypt, the Western Jews had the chance to strengthen their ties to their brothers in the East, advancing "the cause of civilization and progress in the lands of fanaticism and ignorance."

To those obscurantists in Europe who preached their "violent hatred," no hope remained. "Who in our century of philosophy and enlightenment is

* Morenu – literally: "Our Teacher," an honorary title traditionally awarded to distinguished rabbis and scholars.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 7. ³⁷ Anselm Rothschild to London (24 November) NMRA: XI/104/o.

³⁸ "Nouvelles," *AI* (1841), pp. 38–9. ³⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

going to recall the miserable slanders of the Middle Ages and the ridiculous superstition of a barbarous age?" The magnificent solidarity displayed by the Jews during the affair – speeding like "an electric current to all points of the globe" – had demonstrated as nothing else could that they had the public spirit to qualify them for civil equality.

In France, the Jews were already full citizens and were passionately devoted to their country, for "a fatherland means the equality of rights and the equality of duties." But the Jewish community in Austria, too, was absolutely loyal; and the magnificent stand taken by Metternich, Laurin, and Merlato in the Damascus affair proved that the day of emancipation could not be far off there, either. "You gentlemen, you too shall have a fatherland to cherish – that life within a life!"⁴⁰

While Crémieux was still in Egypt, Montefiore and his somewhat diminished party were headed for Constantinople, arriving there on 5 October. The idea of leaving for the Ottoman capital had begun to attract Montefiore, frustrated by Muhammed Ali's endless evasions, after a couple of weeks in Alexandria; and Crémieux claimed credit for having persuaded him to cancel his departure, planned for 26 August on board the British warship, the *Cyclops*.⁴¹ With England formally allied to Turkey in opposition to Egypt, Constantinople obviously promised to offer Montefiore a far more congenial setting than Alexandria. In a letter of 17 September to London, he explained that they expected "to wait for a short time" in the Turkish capital in order to observe the unfolding "state of politics and war" – for "it may be that Damascus will speedily own the Sultan for its lord; if so, we have a special firman from him to proceed thither with ample power and protection."⁴²

In Constantinople, Montefiore's party took up residence in the Galata district as guests of Abraham Camondo, the prominent Jewish financier,⁴³ who put one of his homes at their disposal. Not surprisingly, they were the center of great attention from the local Jewish communities, and Montefiore reported that he "had to receive between fifty and sixty persons every morning."⁴⁴ Among the visitors were Haim Nisim Abu el-Afieh (Moses' father) and Isaac Picciotto, who arrived from Damascus in late October, stating it as his intention to proceed to Paris "in order to go to law against Rattimenton."⁴⁵

Very much in the manner of Crémieux and Munk, so Montefiore and Loewe, too, sought to spread the message that the Jewish communities in the

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 41–2. ⁴¹ AC, pp. 40, 45.

⁴² Montefiore to correspondence committee (17 September) BofD (October–), pp. 18–19.

⁴³ On Camondo: Rodrigue, "Abraham de Camondo."

⁴⁴ Montefiore to correspondence committee (15 October) BofD (October–), p. 88.

⁴⁵ Loewe, *The Damascus Affair*, p. 58.

East had to modernize their educational curriculum. Thus, Loewe took as his theme the value of "a liberal education" for a sermon that he delivered in one of the large Galata synagogues – a renowned linguist, he spoke for some three hours in no less than four languages (Hebrew, Italian, Spanish, and German).⁴⁶

Subsequently, they were able to persuade the Hacham Bashi, or chief rabbi, Moses Fresco, to promulgate a directive ordering the Jewish communities in the Ottoman empire to insure that the Turkish language, hitherto neglected, be introduced in the schools.⁴⁷ In so doing, they gave expression to the general belief that the advance of progress could not bypass the Middle East and that the Jews had to prepare themselves in advance for active citizenship in the new, and "civilized," order of things. However fatuous, the idea was not uncommon at the time, albeit not stated by either Montefiore or Crémieux, that if only the Syrian Jews had been educated in modern ways, they would not have needed the Western Jews to defend them.⁴⁸

It is not known when Montefiore hit on the idea that it might be possible, and important, to obtain from the Sultan what had been so firmly refused by Muhammed Ali – a formal denunciation of the blood charge. But he first put the suggestion to Lord Ponsonby when they met on 15 October. By then, of course, the British ambassador was very much aware of the explicit interest expressed by Palmerston in the welfare of the Jews in the Middle East and he had no hesitation in trying to arrange for Montefiore to meet Reshid Pasha, "who would perhaps be able to forward his wishes."⁴⁹ Certainly, Reshid was then at the height of his prestige and power. The architect of the British alliance, he reaped the benefits day by day, as news arrived of lightning victories over Ibrahim Pasha in Lebanon.

Within a week the meeting had been arranged and Montefiore suggested to Reshid that an apt precedent had been set by Suleiman II, whose hattı sherif of the sixteenth century had denounced the ritual-murder charge. Sir Moses had brought with him a draft text that was read aloud to Reshid in a French version by the dragoman of the British embassy, Frederick Pisani; and the foreign minister responded encouragingly. During the course of the conversation, the Turkish statesman touched on the question of international loans to, and of a proposed national bank in, the Ottoman empire. He had already recruited Metternich in the effort to win over the Rothschilds,⁵⁰ and Montefiore's ties to the family were, of course, well known to him – but the

⁴⁶ [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 269; Loewe, *The Damascus Affair*, p. 49.

⁴⁷ [Montefiore], *[Diaries]*, vol. 1, p. 270; Loewe, *The Damascus Affair*, p. 52.

⁴⁸ E.g.: "Leipzig," *Orient* (19 December), p. 397; "London," *ibid.* (28 August 1841), p. 236.

⁴⁹ [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 268.

⁵⁰ E.g.: Stürmer to Metternich (10 June, no. 407/A) HHS, Türkei: Berichte VI/74.

latter had no mandate to conduct financial negotiations and he admitted that he "could not say anything until he returned to England."⁵¹

Nonetheless, even though Ramadan had begun, the audience with the young Sultan took place late in the evening on Wednesday, 28 October. In his diary, Montefiore described in some detail the progress of his party to the palace, with all the accompanying pomp (which, with his habitual sense of the dramatic, he must have arranged himself):

Our cavalcade consisted of one carriage with four horses and one with two horses; six kavasses . . . ; eight men carrying large wax torches; two horsemen with each coach; a sedan with each coach; and three men to close the procession. As the carriages could not drive up to our door, I was carried in a sedan chair to the foot of the hill; the other gentlemen walked, and I [then] went in the first carriage with Mr. Pisani . . . ; George Samuel, Mr. Wire and Dr. Loewe in the second. I wore my full uniform. The streets were crowded; many of the Jews had illuminated their houses.⁵²

During the audience, Montefiore read aloud a formal address (translated into Turkish by Pisani) in which he thanked the Sultan for the stand of his government in the Rhodes case and explained that the Jews "dispersed among the nations of the earth . . . are numbered with the most peaceful and loyal subjects, and by their industry have augmented the . . . prosperity of the countries in which they live."⁵³ In turn, the Sultan assured his guests that their request would be granted.

The firman, "beautifully written on thick parchment,"⁵⁴ was delivered to Montefiore ten days later for his perusal, and copies were subsequently provided to him and the Hacham Bashi. Citing the judgment on Rhodes, the document declared that a careful examination of Jewish beliefs and "religious books" had demonstrated that

the charges made 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.⁵⁵

There is no doubt that in this instance, Montefiore, through sheer persistence and with an eye for the possible, had seized on fortuitous diplomatic circumstances to carry off a remarkable coup. ("It is indeed," he wrote to London, "the Magna Carta for the Jews in the Turkish dominions.")⁵⁶ He had every reason for satisfaction as he sailed out of Constantinople on the

⁵¹ [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 269. ⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 270–1. ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 278. ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁵⁶ Montefiore to correspondence committee (14 November) BofD (October–), p. 112.

night of 7 November. "When we stepped into the boat," noted Loewe in his diary, "we looked around and hundreds of people saluted us."⁵⁷

Montefiore's oft-repeated statements that Damascus might well be his next destination were not meant seriously once war broke out in Lebanon; they were, as already noted, intended strictly for public consumption. Now, armed with the Sultan's firman of 6 November, as well as with the knowledge that the prisoners were at liberty, he hoped that the mission could convincingly be said to have won the day. But he was well aware of the fact that he and his colleagues might still be accused of acting in bad faith and of downright failure. Thus while in Constantinople and still awaiting the outcome of his overtures at the Porte, Montefiore had already appealed to the correspondence committee in London to insure that a favorable image of the mission – and of its English leader – be conveyed to the press:

I feel satisfied that you will not let the French run away with the honour due to our country and fellow citizens, nor allow the *Times* to give the world reports ex parte to implicate the Jews, or to show they were pardoned only, or that there was a spontaneous act of the pasha done without the urgent solicitation or without the necessity of the mission.⁵⁸

For his part, Montefiore insured that the Sultan's firman, as well as the letter of the London chief rabbis against the ritual-murder myth, were distributed in numerous copies (translated into Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew) at his ports of call en route to Italy. Eventually, though, word reached him that accusations made in the *Times* charged the mission with the grossest breach of public confidence. In a letter of 7 December, he admitted that he had been severely shaken by the reaction of the *Times* and by the consequent discomfiture of the English Jews, news of which had just reached him. "On the first moment of reading your despatches and the letter of TJC . . .," he wrote, "I felt determined to remain out." But he had been persuaded by senior officers in the British navy that to proceed to Syria then, and for many months to come, "would be madness." However, "I shall be at all times ready to retrace my steps if deemed practicable." ("In more tranquil times," he added, "we hope the whole plot will be discovered.")⁵⁹

From a letter written in Naples a few days later, it emerges that the correspondence committee under the chairmanship of Hananel de Castro had actually declared "the necessity of my proceeding to Damascus."

The reading of these documents actually determined me if possible to go to that city, although my health was not the best⁶⁰ – . . . not that I

⁵⁷ Loewe, *The Damascus Affair*, p. 62.

⁵⁸ Montefiore to correspondence committee (15 October) BofD (October–), p. 90.

⁵⁹ Ibid. (7 December), pp. 151–2. ⁶⁰ Ibid. (11 December), p. 167.

ever entertained nor do I think the public now entertain[s] the slightest doubt as to the innocence of the accused.⁶¹

Criticism of Montefiore even found its way into the Jewish press. "It is certainly to be regretted," declared the *Orient* on 9 January 1841, "that just now when Syria has been pacified, he has taken his departure – the mystery which still befores the crime in Damascus and the leaderless situation of the Jewish communities [in the East] require the influence of the European Jews more than ever."⁶²

Be all that as it may, though, Montefiore and his party were headed north not east. And it was doubtless a sense of discomfiture, of unfinished business, which now prompted Montefiore to seek yet a third political achievement before actually returning to London. While quarantined in Malta, he and his party had learned that the tomb erected in the Capuchin church in Damascus was inscribed with the epitaph: "Here rest the remains of Father Thomas of Sardinia, apostolic Capuchin missionary, murdered by the Jews on 5 February 1840."⁶³ To obtain from Gregory XVI an order to remove that inscription, and perhaps even a formal statement against the blood accusation was thus the next goal Montefiore set for himself.

In pursuit of some agreement with the Holy See, he stayed in Rome for weeks, from 22 December until 11 January. Given the utter failure of the Austrian nuncio to gain a sympathetic hearing from the papal secretary of state, Luigi Lambruschini, it is surprising that Karl von Rothschild did not advise Montefiore against any attempt to pursue the issue. But the Rothschilds clearly tended to exaggerate their political influence in Rome and to underestimate that of Cardinal Franson, who was fully committed to the ritual-murder charge. Knowledge of the Bulls issued by the medieval popes casting doubt on the blood accusation must have likewise encouraged false expectations.

From Montefiore's frequent letters to Naples, it becomes clear that even though he had many highly placed contacts both among the local dignitaries (the Prince Alexander de Torlonia, Monsignor C. de Kolb, Monsignor Bruti) and among the resident Austrian and British diplomats, he was simply sent stumbling from pillar to post in an endless and futile round of visits. In these meetings, he avoided specific mention of the tomb in Damascus, because, as he explained to Karl Rothschild on 25 December, "I wish first to obtain the certainty of being presented to the pope. . . . [The] inscription is only at present known to a few travellers . . . [and] I am most anxious to prevent it being talked of before I have secured its removal."⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 171. ⁶² "Syrien," *Orient* (9 January 1841), p. 9.

⁶³ *Aceldama*, p. 18. (Cf. [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 283.)

⁶⁴ Montefiore to K. Rothschild (25 December) NMRA:XI/104/0, no. 23.



FIG. 21. Tomb (allegedly) housing Father Thomas's remains. The tomb has been in the Terra Sancta Church since 1866; it was previously in the Capuchin monastery.

By 29 December, though, the British representative in Rome had thrown up his hands in despair, telling Montefiore that "all the people about the pope were persuaded that the Jews had murdered Father Tommaso and even if all the witnesses in the world were brought before the pope to prove the contrary, neither he nor his people would be convinced."⁶⁵ And writing to Naples on 5 January, Montefiore admitted that while "I had hoped to have gained my point by applying at once to the Head, . . . I am now endeavouring to work my way from the bottom up."⁶⁶ After three weeks of intense lobby-

⁶⁵ [Idem], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 287.

⁶⁶ Idem to K. Rothschild (5 January 1841) NMRA:XI/104/0, no. 25.

ing, however, he found it impossible to have even a written petition delivered to the pope – Cardinal Lambruschini returned it with a message (transmitted by one of his servants to Dr. Loewe) that he “had read the papers, but he had nothing to do with them.”⁶⁷

The most that Montefiore was able to obtain were two interviews with the Cardinal Protector of the Capuchin order, Agostino Rivarola, at which each succeeded in irritating the other. When the Sultan’s firman was mentioned, for example, Rivarola granted that it was a most important document “even if it cost Rothschild’s fortune.” “I instantly answered him,” reported Montefiore to Naples, “that I had not given a sudi to any person . . . ; that I felt indignant at the supposition . . . ; that the high and important office I filled in my community was a sufficient guarantee of my character.” Again, when Montefiore said that there was no evidence that Father Thomas had been murdered by a Jew, Rivarola “did not seem to credit my assurance”; and the cardinal laughed outright at the suggestion that “the padre might still be living in one of the monasteries of Lebanon.”⁶⁸

Nevertheless, Rivarola did leave Montefiore with the impression that he would act to have the epitaph in Damascus removed, although he was careful to hedge his promise: “He informed me that he could not order the removal of the stone, but would advise it, . . . [adding] that the convent was under the protection of French authority.”⁶⁹ Of this assurance, Montefiore wrote to Karl Rothschild, with more optimism than realism, that “this was all I wished, for I know that the advice of a cardinal is equal to a command.”⁷⁰

Leaving Rome, the Montefiores planned to travel home overland, but near Genoa their carriage overturned, delaying their journey by another two weeks as they waited for the recovery of a servant injured in the accident. On 18 February they reached Paris, where the British ambassador, Lord Granville, arranged for Montefiore to be received by the king. Judging by Montefiore’s account, it is not unreasonable to suspect a certain irony (entirely lost on his interlocutor) in the king’s remarks. Handed a copy of the Sultan’s firman, for example, Louis-Philippe “said he was happy to receive it and enquired if I had been at Damascus,” thus leaving it to Montefiore to explain why he had failed to reach that city. Told that the Sultan regarded the accusations against the Damascus Jews as sheer calumny, the king simply replied that “he was happy it is so.” The king added that he had arranged the meeting at very short notice lest he “detain . . . me in Paris longer than I wished.” (While at the palace, Montefiore found himself engaged in conversation by an unnamed politician who “began to rail against Monsieur Thiers,

⁶⁷ [Idem], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 291.

⁶⁸ Idem to K. Rothschild (7 January 1841) NMRA:XI/104/0, no. 26.

⁶⁹ [Idem], *Diaries*, vol. 1, pp. 291–2.

⁷⁰ Idem to K. Rothschild (7 January 1841) NMRA:XI 104/0, no. 26.

but I stopped him, saying the result of my mission had been so completely successful, I was desirous of having everything of an unpleasant nature forgotten.”⁷¹

An audience was also arranged with Guizot, who had become the premier following Thiers’ humiliating downfall in late October. On the eve of the meeting, Montefiore wrote to the correspondence committee in London that “I am not without hope that Mons. Ratti-Menton will be relieved from the trouble of his office at Damascus.”⁷² But Guizot must have proved to be, if anything, even less forthcoming than Cardinal Rivarola; no mention of the request, let alone the response, is noted in the extant version of Montefiore’s diary.

Sir Moses and Lady Judith, accompanied by Dr. Loewe, arrived in London on 28 February 1841. (David Wire had gone ahead at Genoa.) Since December, the Board of Deputies and the London synagogues had been trying to insure that fitting honors be heaped on Sir Moses in thanks for his role in the Damascus mission, but as it turned out the results were somewhat anticlimactic. It was three months since the publication in the British press of the Sultan’s firman, and the passage of time had done much to blunt the excitement and heal the pain initially produced by the ritual-murder affair.

In December, the idea had been raised by Jacob Franklin that the most suitable gift the community could bestow would be the establishment of a “seminary or college for the training of a Jewish ministry.” He put out an appeal in print, stating scathingly that it was most doubtful “whether the English congregations can be said to have a ministering clergy properly so called . . . – [mostly] the gentlemen styled ‘revered’ by courtesy, are selected rather for their vocal capacities.”⁷³ The Anglo-Jewish leadership, though, was hardly ready for such an ambitious project, and the decision was made to prepare a formal address of thanks to, as well as a commemorative artwork in silver for, Sir Moses.⁷⁴ Furthermore, on 9 March, the second day of Purim,

⁷¹ [Idem], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 297.

⁷² Idem to correspondence committee (21 February 1841) BofD (October–), p. 199.

⁷³ “On the Establishment of a Seminary or College for the Training of a Jewish Ministry,” *Voff* (10 December), p. 43.

⁷⁴ The inscription on the centerpiece reads: “The testimonial of respect and gratitude is presented to Sir Moses Montefiore, FRS, by a large number of his Jewish brethren in the United Kingdom, Jamaica, Barbados, and Gibraltar. In commemoration of the many personal sacrifices endured and the philanthropy displayed by him, and Lady Montefiore, during his mission to the East. Anno Mundi 5600–1840. The mission was undertaken by Sir Moses Montefiore in defence of the Jews of Damascus and Rhodes from the false accusations that had been made against them and in consequence of which they had suffered unexampled persecutions and some of them had died under torture. His exertions were eminently successful; such of the accused as had been imprisoned were restored to liberty, others who had sought safety in flight were permitted to return to their homes in peace, and he obtained a firman from his Imperial Majesty the Sultan Abd-ul Medjid proclaiming the innocence of the accused, the falsehood of the aspersions cast upon the Jewish religion and also declaring



FIG. 22. Silver centerpiece presented to Montefiore. The centerpiece stands $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet tall and weighs 1,319 ounces. The top depicts David rescuing a lamb from a lion (based on the Old Testament text, 1 Samuel 17:34–35); the center, the public thanksgiving on the Montefiores' return to London.

a special service in honor of Montefiore was held in the Portuguese synagogue. Attendance was by special invitation only and the eight hundred ticket holders, men and women alike, came dressed in their most splendid attire.

This long, drawn-out attempt to honor Montefiore was reported in ironical terms by the young correspondents of the *Orient* in England. Of the subscription to pay for the centerpiece in silver, they declared that the minimal sum considered acceptable was about five guineas in London; ten

that the Jewish people throughout the Turkish dominions shall enjoy the same privileges as all other nations subject to the Ottoman rule."

thalers in Hamburg; and ten groschen in Magdeburg. "How far down will the subscription go as it wanders past Posen, Pinchov and as far as the Caucasus?"⁷⁵ The oratory displayed as Montefiore made the round of the London synagogues was said (with the exception of David de Sola's address on the 9th) to have been marked by banalities and even inaudibility. But as reported in the *Orient*, there was one genuinely spontaneous and moving episode:

When Sir Moses Montefiore left the Portuguese synagogue, he found an occasion for satisfaction which far surpassed what had gone before in its simplicity and sincerity. A few hundred of the poor people surrounded his carriage and provided a wonderful "guard," as though he were a victor accompanied by chained prisoners. The shouts of jubilation as he went through many streets were earth-shattering.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ "Personalchronik und Miscellan," *Orient* (6 March 1841), p. 80. (Officially at least – cf. n.

74 – the centerpiece was paid for only by Jews in Britain and the British colonies.)

⁷⁶ "Grossbritannien," *ibid.* (15 May 1841), p. 154.

*In the wake of the war:
the return to routine*

With the celebrations marking Sir Moses Montefiore's return to London, the Damascus affair in its narrow sense, the immediate public and political conflict over the ritual-murder charge, can be said to have run its course. Certainly both the men who had headed the mission to the East were anxious to see the case closed. In his Vienna speech, Crémieux had stated flatly that the "murders caused by Egyptian torture will prove to be the last of the judicial crimes; and the Damascus dead, the last of our martyrs."¹ And referring to papers sent by Anton Laurin – who apparently (with Isaac Picciotto) still hoped to launch a lawsuit based on the Damascus case – Montefiore wrote to Karl Rothschild on 8 March 1841:

I will lose no time in laying them before the committee, but it is my decided opinion that it would be neither wise nor prudent to agitate the subject again. We have obtained all that is desirable, security for the future, and though it may be the interest of some individuals to renew the agitation, I am sure the Jews will suffer by it.²

But the Damascus affair had, throughout, developed under the shadow of the upheaval in the Middle East. Muhammed Ali's conquest of greater Syria in 1832; his victory at Nezib; the hattı sherif of Gulhané issued by the Ottoman government in November 1839; and the ever-increasing involvement of the European powers in the region had combined to excite extreme expectations, hopes, fears, and hatreds in both the East and the West. It was in that atmosphere that the ritual-murder accusations had sprung up in Damascus, Rhodes, Smyrna, and Constantinople. Moreover, as already described (chaps. 11–12), the approach and outbreak of war had served to bring forth a great variety of projects and plans for the future of the area in general and of the Holy Land in particular.

Thus, no description of 1840 as a year of crisis in modern Jewish history can fail to make at least minimal reference to the immediate postwar period. It took some time until the various schemes and projects, brought forth by the upheaval, either took root or, as was far more usual, faded away. In the

¹ "Nouvelles," *AI* (1841), p. 43.

² Montefiore to K. Rothschild (8 March 1841) NMRA:XI/104/0 no. 31.

interim there was still much uncertainty as to how the Jews and Jewish interests would fare following the Ottoman victory.

On 29 December 1840 Ibrahim Pasha led his army, reduced to a mere twenty thousand men, out of Damascus on the start of his long retreat back to Egypt via the Jordan Valley, Gaza, and El-Arish. (With the forces was Sherif Pasha, under arrest and dire threat of execution for treasonous negotiations with the British, although he would soon be returned to favor by Muhammed Ali.)³ Two days later, the new Ottoman governor arrived in the city. During the brief interval, many of the local officials were lynched by angry mobs, but it did not take long to restore order.⁴

What form the complex triangular relationship among Muslims, Christians, and Jews would take, though, initially remained unclear. Ratti-Menton reported, for example, that only the firmness of the Turkish governor had frustrated Muslim attempts both to have the Greek-Catholic church demolished (it had been built during the Egyptian period), and also to force the Christians and Jews back into a demonstrably inferior status – forbidding them, for example, to wear white headdresses.⁵

It quickly became evident, however, that the decline of Jewish influence characteristic of the previous decade was to be halted. Raphael Farhi, who had spent some three months in prison during the early stages of the affair, was reappointed in January to the *madjlis al-shura* (the city council). As Bahri Bey, the most prominent Christian official to serve in Syria under Muhammed Ali, had fled to Egypt, it seemed possible that there might be a total reversal, with the Jews regaining a dominant role in state banking and in the financial administration. In a private letter to John Bidwell, Werry complained, for example, that Raphael Farhi, “the old Jew banker,” had become the “mainspring” in the city council which, until the consul’s intervention with the governor, had “shown a strong fanatical spirit . . . against the Christians.”⁶ According to Farhi’s account of this same episode, Werry had, in fact, demanded his dismissal, which had been refused, as his appointment had been ordered from Constantinople. But Farhi also reported that the British consul’s influence had proved quite sufficient to prevent Jews from

³ On Sherif Pasha’s offer of defection: Werry to Palmerston (5 November, no. 1) FO 78/410, pp. 290–1; Ratti-Menton to Guizot (22 December, no. 51) MREA: Turquie (Consulats Divers vols. 11–12) (microfilm: P2–52), p. 281; on his appointment in July 1841 as Muhammed Ali’s aide-de-camp and president of the privy council: Rohan-Chabot to Guizot (26 July 1841) in Driault, *L’Égypte et l’Europe*, vol. 5, p. 208.

⁴ For reports on the retreat of the Egyptian, and entry of the Turkish, army: Ratti-Menton to Guizot (29 December, no. 52) MREA: Turquie (Consulats Divers vols. 11–12) (microfilm: P2–52), p. 297; Cochelet to Guizot (25 January 1841) in Driault, *L’Égypte et l’Europe*, vol. 5, pp. 214–15.

⁵ Ibid. ⁶ Werry to Bidwell (17 January 1841) FO 78/447, p. 15.

being restored to "the official situations which they occupied previously to the arrival of the Egyptian pashas [in 1832]."⁷ (By this time, though, Werry's days in Damascus were numbered – in May, Palmerston ordered his transfer to Beirut on the grounds that he had overstepped the mark in the ritual-murder affair.)⁸

In the spring of 1841 a letter appeared in the British press accusing the Damascus Jews of "deadly animosity against the Christians and even of persecutions."⁹ And Raphael Farhi's response to such charges followed soon after. It was true, he wrote, that both Muslims and Jews from "the lower orders of people . . . have frequently made great acclamations" to welcome the new, and the fall of the old, regime – just as Christian crowds had been wont to do in the days of Hanna Bahri's ascendancy. All this, however, amounted to no more than a minor irritant. Moreover, still largely excluded from government patronage, the middle-class Jews "are now very poor and sadly in want of some employment . . . to maintain their families."¹⁰

Meanwhile, the ritual-murder issue had by no means been forgotten. Thus a letter to Montefiore, of May 1841, from the Harari brothers (David, Isaac, and Aaron) mentioned a very recent case in which an eleven-year old girl had disappeared for a few hours and, as a result, "our houses were besieged by an immense concourse of people, and we experienced the inconvenience of the most searching domiciliary visit."¹¹ (The Hararis, at the same time, put forward a claim to British citizenship – an appeal that was subsequently supported by the Anglo-Jewish leadership and granted by Lord Palmerston).¹²

For his part, Raphael Farhi had to expend much effort in persuading the Ottoman pasha that the blood accusation leveled against the Jewish religion was nothing but a "foul report . . . , utter[ly] groundless."¹³ More ambitious, the chief of police, Ali Agha, hoping initially to turn the tables completely, prepared for a renewed investigation – this time, to be slanted in favor of the Jews – even trying to recruit the ubiquitous Muhammed el-Telli to find new (Christian) suspects. There was actually a suggestion that it might be pos-

⁷ "The Jews at Damascus," *Jl* (1841), pp. 260–1.

⁸ Bidwell to Werry (18 May 1841) FO 78/447, p. 11. ("The course which you took in the affair regarding the persecution of the Jews at Damascus renders it inexpedient in his Lordship's opinion that you should continue in that city. . . . [He] trusts that the frequent opportunities which you will have of mixing with British subjects at the port [Beirut] will enable you to form opinions less biased by prejudice.")

⁹ The letter was dated 2 May ("The Jews at Damascus," *Jl* [1841], p. 260).

¹⁰ Farhi to Montefiore (4 June 1841) *ibid*.

¹¹ The Hararis to Montefiore (24 May 1841) BofD (May 1841–March 1844), p. 47.

¹² Meeting (4 August 1841) *ibid*., p. 52; the Hararis to Montefiore (5 October 1841) *ibid*., p. 71.

¹³ Farhi to Montefiore (4 June) *Jl* (1841), p. 261.

sible to frame the brother of Ibrahim Amara, Father Thomas's servant.¹⁴ Not long into 1841, however, el-Telli left for Egypt, forced out, according to Ratti-Menton, "by the hatred of the Jews."¹⁵

In the eyes of the French diplomats in Syria and Egypt, the outcome of the ritual-murder affair was now seen as deplorable. Writing to Guizot early in 1841, Cochelet complained that the Christian population of Damascus was inclined to

abandon our protection and to accept that of England, or even Austria all of whose intrigues in the East tend to dispossessing us of our ancient privileges. The outcome of the affair of the Damascus Jews – from whom, because of our humane sentiments . . . , we do not want to exact punishment – has been taken for weakness and impotence in a country where one has to hit hard to be feared and respected.¹⁶

The net result of the war and the Jewish affair had been to undermine French prestige and to produce an "exaggerated idea of the supremacy of the other powers."

In May 1841, after a nine-month delay, the Count Maxime des Meloizes finally wrote to Guizot to sum up the results of his investigation into the Damascus affair. Much of his report was based on the rule that attack is the best form of defense. Merlato, he wrote, had changed his tune in March 1840 simply because ordered to do so by the Austrian consuls-general in Aleppo and Alexandria; and anyway, he was being paid off. As for Laurin, he had already quarreled with Ratti-Menton in their Palermo days and was doubtless motivated by "personal hostility."¹⁷ And Pieritz had spent a mere eight days in Damascus examining the case "only among the relatives and friends of the accused . . . , [with] the object less a presentation of the facts than an attempt to distort all the circumstances."¹⁸

The Jewish prisoners, he pointed out, had never denied that the protocols recorded accurately what they had said early in the case; and there was no particular reason to believe their later retractions. True, in accord with local usage, torture had been employed, but it was such coercion alone that had "led to the discovery of Father Thomas's remains."¹⁹

In sum, sir, the circumstances in which Father Thomas and his servant were murdered – as reported in the Egyptian protocols – appear to be all too real, and everything joins to demonstrate that this double murder can be explained as an act not of enmity or vengeance but of fanaticism.²⁰

¹⁴ Testimony of el-Telli (13 January 1841) in Laurent, *Relation Historique*, vol. 2, pp. 258–9.

¹⁵ Editorial note, *ibid.*, p. 258.

¹⁶ Cochelet to Guizot (25 January 1841) in Driault, *L'Égypte et l'Europe*, vol. 4, p. 215.

¹⁷ Des Meloizes to Guizot (20 May 1841, no. 9) MREA:TAD, pp. 186–7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188. ¹⁹ *Ibid.* (27 May 1841, no. 10), p. 166. ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

To explain the behavior of the Austrian and British agents in the case, it was essential to seek out the underlying political motives. From Werry, for example, it had been learned in the strictest confidence that Lord Palmerston had ordered the British agents in the region to "work in favor of the Jews."²¹ The failure to see the dual murder case through to its logical conclusion had proved disastrous:

Those condemned at Damascus – they and their co-religionists – are nowadays bragging insolently of the impunity which they enjoy. They did not want to see in the pardon granted them by Muhammed Ali an act of . . . grace. Meanwhile the Sultan has confirmed their interpretation, granting them for the future, by a solemn firman, that innocence and impunity which were already granted them for the past. . . . It is to this that the grave disorders caused by the Jews at Damascus following the retreat of Ibrahim Pasha have to be attributed. And the arrogance of their present conduct to the Christians reaches as far as the French consulate. The denouement of the Damascus affair, sir, if it is final, will be regrettable from the point of view not only of our position but also of justice. . . . The case, . . . although it has not bestowed honor on those [Ratti-Menton et al.] held responsible by public opinion, nonetheless testifies to their superior credit in taking the action required.²²

(However, lest anyone assume that the events of 1840 necessarily guaranteed security to the Jews living under Ottoman rule, mention has to be made of the fact that the Rhodes community continued to complain – for all the termination of the ritual-murder case, the change of governors and the British vice-consul's newfound caution – of arbitrary arrests and of the most brutal interrogations. And before leaving Constantinople, Montefiore had felt compelled to make yet another call for help in this regard to Lord Ponsonby.)²³

In the summer of 1841 the Count de Ratti-Menton took leave of his post in Syria, returning to France for "family reasons."²⁴ Expressing fear lest his absence prove permanent, the leading figures in the Catholic community in Damascus appealed to Guizot to insure the speedy return of the consul²⁵ (who in March 1841 had been awarded the title of Chevalier of the Order of St. Maurice and St. Lazare by the Lazarist order in France). Despite the initial assurances to the contrary from Paris, Ratti-Menton was in reality not

²¹ Ibid. (20 May 1841, no. 9), p. 190. ²² Ibid. (27 May 1841, no. 10), pp. 168–9.

²³ Montefiore to correspondence committee (4 November) BofD (October–), p. 107; [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, pp. 277, 280. (Reshid Pasha assured Montefiore that he had sent renewed orders to Rhodes on behalf of the island's Jewish community.)

²⁴ Exchange of letters between Countess Lostanges and ministry of foreign affairs (22 June 1841) in MREA:Ratti-Menton, le Comte de/Personnel, Série 1.

²⁵ Valentino Galvez (of the Terra Sancta/Terre Sainte monastery) et al. to Guizot (6 August 1841) *ibid.*

sent back to Syria, but appointed in 1842 to the post of consul in Canton with an annual salary of forty thousand francs.

At that point, though, questions were raised about his fitness for continued employment in the foreign service, given his conduct during the Damascus affair. Thus, in a letter of October 1842, one of Ratti-Menton's highly placed cousins, the Viscountess Vadesse de Sur, felt obliged to ask the Baron James de Rothschild not to stand in the way of the new posting. In the ritual-murder affair, she wrote, her relative had only sought to do his duty, trying as best he could to dissuade Sherif Pasha from "those terrible formalities which are part and parcel of the Mohammedan system of justice." What more, she asked,

could Mr. Ratti-Menton have done, and how could he have foreseen that what was only the result of . . . a strict sense of duty would be interpreted as falsehood and hatred? Do you not feel in the bottom of your heart, Baron, that you would have behaved in the same way as my cousin and that you, too, would have wanted to find the perpetrator of this terrible and unimaginable crime?²⁶

In reply, Rothschild demurred in no uncertain, albeit carefully chosen, terms, stating that "to observe such tortures without branding them by means of an official and public complaint is to miscomprehend the most sacred laws of humanity." But, he added, he would not stand in the way of Ratti-Menton's prospects. ("My sentiments never permit me to hit a man when he's down.")²⁷ Guizot backed the Canton appointment strongly, writing to King Louis-Philippe that he wanted to reward the French consul's "firm probity at Damascus";²⁸ in 1843 Ratti-Menton left for China.

Guizot's stand apropos the ritual-murder affair, as revealed in this episode, was hardly surprising. Even though he had been called in to head a conservative government and to repudiate Thiers' bellicose brinkmanship, he did not intend to abandon the active advancement of French interests in the Middle East. Thus, under his direction, France continued to insist that the formal deposition of Muhammed Ali as viceroy of Egypt, declared by the Porte in mid-September, had to be reversed; and it was that principle – albeit vigorously opposed by Lord Ponsonby – which formed the basis of the postwar settlement. As the result of long, drawn-out, and many-sided diplo-

²⁶ In [Albert Cohn], "Rückblick auf Zustände," *MGWdJ* (1866), p. 213.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 215–16.

²⁸ For a summary of Guizot's warm recommendation to Louis-Philippe: "L'Affaire Ratti-Menton/Juillet 1862," MREA:Ratti-Menton, le Comte de/Personnel, Série 1. Even Pontois, who had been critical of Ratti-Menton in April 1840, later reversed himself: "I approve of the way you conducted yourself in the Jewish affair. You should always in analogous situations, lend your most effective support to the Christians, particularly to those under our protection" (Pontois to Ratti-Menton, 1 March 1841, no. 614, MREA:N[Damas: Consulat, File no. 66]).

matic exchanges, lasting from November 1840 until June 1841, Muhammed Ali was confirmed as the (nominally Ottoman) viceroy in hereditary control of Egypt.

The premier felt likewise that, despite his country's recent diplomatic humiliation, he was still in a position to join in the exchange of views between the great powers about the future of greater Syria in general and Palestine in particular. He made it clear on a number of occasions that apart from international guarantees for the Maronite community of Lebanon, he also favored a special status for the Holy City – "the period of the Crusades is over, but Jerusalem is always there. . . . If the peaceful intervention of the Christian governments can gain something for the security and dignity of Jerusalem, they must attempt it."²⁹

Similar ideas but in more detailed form were put forward by Prussia in late 1840. Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth, according to the Prussian proposal, would be placed under the control of the European powers, which would each keep their own body of guards there to lend weight to this special status. And the Protestants would win the right to conduct services in the churches of the Nativity and the Holy Sepulchre.

In fact, nothing came of these ambitious plans. The division among Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox, not to talk of the great-power rivalries, ran too deep to permit cooperation in such far-reaching schemes. Metternich was skeptical of anything smacking of radical innovation; Nicholas I and Nesselrode wished to maintain the advantages long enjoyed by the Orthodox Church in the Holy Land; and Palmerston was pledged to the reestablishment of unfettered Ottoman sovereignty in the territories evacuated by Muhammed Ali.³⁰

Nonetheless, one group – the millennialist and Evangelical Protestants – did come out of the postwar period with a significant achievement to their name: the establishment of the Anglican (or, more exactly, Anglo-Prussian) bishopric in Jerusalem. The idea itself apparently originated in Berlin, where the new king, Frederick William IV, was paradoxically both a militant anti-Catholic and a romantic who idealized the Middle Ages. But the concept only became reality in the summer of 1841, when the prominent Prussian diplomat, Christian Karl Bunsen (an ardent Evangelical and "restorationist"), mobilized the support of Lord Ashley and, through him, of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews.³¹

²⁹ Guizot to Brugière de Barante (31 December) in M. Vereté, "Tokhnit levinum yerushalayim," p. 22.

³⁰ On these negotiations e.g.: Vereté, *ibid*; Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. 2, pp. 759–65; Gelber, *Vorgeschichte des Zionismus*, pp. 151–65.

³¹ On the establishment of the Anglo-Prussian bishopric in Jerusalem, e.g.: Greaves, "The Jerusalem Bishopric"; Hechler, *The Jerusalem Bishopric*; Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, vol. 1, pp. 370–410; Ranke, *Aus dem Briefwechsel*, pp. 52–65.

The Anglo-Prussian project proved attractive to Palmerston. No direct infringement of sovereign Turkish rights was involved, but the British presence, both symbolic and real, in the Holy Land would be enhanced, nonetheless. Besides, such an enterprise was bound to be greeted with immense enthusiasm by the Evangelical strata of the Anglican Church whom Palmerston favored (while causing irritation in certain high-church circles, where it was rightly seen as part of an attempt to create an international Protestant alliance against the "papists").

With the backing of Palmerston and the Archbishop of Canterbury assured, the project moved ahead with astonishing speed. The church that the London Society had begun to build on Mount Zion would now become the seat of an Anglican bishop. Writing in his diary in July 1841, Bunsen described the candidate selected for the new post – Michael Solomon Alexander, who had had a traditional Jewish education before his conversion to Christianity at the age of twenty-six:

This is a great day. I am just returned from Lord Palmerston. The principle is admitted. . . . The successor of St. James will embark in October. He is by race an Israelite; born a Prussian in Breslau, in confession belonging to the Church of England . . . , Professor of Hebrew and Arabic in England. . . . So the beginning is made, please God, for the restoration of Israel.³²

Alexander was consecrated bishop in Westminster Abbey by the Archbishop of Canterbury in November, and later in the month he left for Palestine, arriving in Jaffa aboard a ship of the Royal Navy specially put at his disposal.

Before his departure, he preached a sermon at the chapel of the London Society in Bethnal Green, and Ashley, who was present, noted his thoughts:

The music went to one's very soul. The beautiful voices of the Hebrew children, singing . . . praises to the Messiah, seemed like the song of the redeemed in heaven. . . .

We have many enemies. . . . They cannot stomach the notion of a *Jew* elevated to the Episcopate. . . . [But] the Jew[']s future dignity shall be commensurate with his past degradation. Be it so! I can rejoice in Zion for a capital; in Jerusalem for a church; and in a Hebrew for a king.³³

Here, then, was a significant advance in Alexander M. McCaul's grand strategy for a major church in the Holy City – Protestant in content, Hebrew in form – to act as a magnet on the Jewish people.

In marked contrast, the various plans and fantasies involving organized Jewish settlement, or even a state, in Palestine ended up with no concrete

³² As reported in Ashley's diary (19 July 1841) qu. in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, vol. 1, p. 371. (On Alexander: *DNB*, vol. 1, pp. 273–5.)

³³ Ashley's diary (18 November 1841) qu. in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, pp. 379–80.

results whatsoever. During the war itself, rumors continued to circulate about a British commitment to such projects. The commander of a French warship off the Lebanese coast, for example, reported on 9 November that the English servicemen were talking freely about a promise to restore "a kingdom of Israel"³⁴ in the Holy Land.

As already noted, though, Lord Palmerston in his official capacity, despite the stories that he had planted in the *Globe*, had no such intentions. And he quickly reconciled himself to the fact that the Ottoman regime, immensely strengthened by military victory, would hardly agree to issue an edict aimed to encourage Jewish settlement in Palestine. It had to reckon with enough potential movements for national independence without creating a new one. The foreign secretary, however, did persist in his attempt to win Ottoman consent to an arrangement permitting Jewish communities to forward complaints against the local authorities through British consular channels. And, he urged Ponsonby at one point, such a policy should at the very least be applied in the Holy Land, even if it could not be implemented in the empire as a whole. (In a despatch of February 1841, it should be noted, he returned to a by now familiar theme, insisting that "it would be highly advantageous to the Sultan that the Jews . . . scattered . . . in Europe and Asia . . . be induced to go and settle in Palestine.")³⁵

The negotiations on the security of the Ottoman Jews, conducted primarily between Reshid Pasha and Frederick Pisani, the dragoman of the British embassy, were typically serpentine. Any special privileges granted the Jews, argued Reshid, would provoke similar demands from other powers in favor of Christian communities. "To give the Jews," he added, "the right to forward complaints to the Porte via the . . . English authorities amounts to placing them under English protection and means to strike a blow at the independence of the Porte."³⁶ When pressed further, though, the Ottomans were ready to grant that they would always be ready to hear reasonable complaints reaching them via the British embassy from any subject of the empire, regardless of religion or status.

With characteristic willfulness, Palmerston chose to interpret this highly generalized statement of principle in a most concrete manner. In a circular of 21 April 1841 to the British consuls and consular agents stationed in the Ottoman territories, he summed up the negotiations:

Her Majesty's Government have recently brought under the consideration of the Porte, the situation of the Jews who are settled, or who may

³⁴ Valmont (captain of the *Euphrate*) to Cochelet (9 November) in Driault, *L'Égypte et l'Europe*, vol. 4, p. 40.

³⁵ Palmerston to Ponsonby (17 February 1841, no. 33) FO 78/427 in Hyamson, *The British Consulate in Jerusalem*, vol. 1, p. 38.

³⁶ Pisani to Ponsonby (21 January 1841) *ibid.*, p. 36.

hereafter settle, in various parts of the Turkish empire, and especially in Palestine. . . . The Porte has declared its determination that the Jews shall have the full benefit of the protection which the law affords them, and as a proof of that determination, the Porte has assured [us] . . . that it will attend to any representation . . . made to it by Her Majesty's embassy, of any instance of oppression against the Jews. . . . Accordingly . . . whenever . . . Jews resident within your district shall have been subject to . . . injustice . . . you will make diligent enquiry into the case and . . . report fully thereupon to Her Majesty's ambassador at Constantinople. . . . You are not authorized to interfere officially with the local authorities . . . but you will upon any suitable occasion make known to [them] . . . that the British government feels an interest in the welfare of the Jews . . . and is anxious that they be protected . . . ; and that the Porte . . . will certainly attend to any representation which . . . [the] ambassador may make to it on these matters.³⁷

Not everybody, however, was as ready as Palmerston to lower their sights to such relatively modest, albeit realistic, targets. The monthly of the London Society, the *Jewish Intelligence*, for instance, continued in the wake of the war to seek out the true meaning concealed in the recent crisis, insisting that "assuredly the time is approaching when Jerusalem shall cease to be trodden down of the Gentiles."³⁸ And it reproduced a letter first published in the *Times* that urged the Quadruple Alliance to issue "a manifesto for the restoration and independence of the Hebrew tribes."³⁹

By far the most dramatic display of such restorationist sentiments took place in the city of Damascus itself. On 1 March Raphael Farhi organized a magnificent reception and feast in his palatial home, with its inner courtyard specially illuminated for the occasion, in order to honor the officers, led by General Jochmus, of the Anglo-Turkish forces. Seventy men were invited. Toasts were drunk, inter alia, to Queen Victoria, to the emperor of Austria, and to Sir Moses Montefiore (although not apparently to Crémieux). After dinner, the guests were entertained in the divan with Oriental music.

The main speech was given by a young English officer, Major Charles Henry Churchill (who had in all probability already developed that profound contempt, hatred even, for the Ottoman regime that would characterize his later books on the region).⁴⁰ British aid to the Jews of Damascus during the ritual-murder affair, he declared, presaged support for the restorationist project. "In the hour of your darkest trial," he said,

³⁷ Palmerston to Ponsonby (21 April 1841, no. 95; enclosure) FO 195/181 in Hyamson, *The British Consulate in Jerusalem*, vol. 1, pp. 39–40.

³⁸ "Affairs in the East," *Jl* (1841), p. 34. ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴⁰ A British journalist by the name of Churchill – presumably Charles Henry – had been severely harassed by the Turkish authorities in 1836 (Bourne, *Palmerston*, p. 563). For his books on the region: *Mount Lebanon* and *The Druzes and the Maronites*. On Churchill: Kobler, "Charles Henry Churchill."

... England hastened to extend to you the protection of her ... triumphant aegis. ... May this happy meeting be looked upon as ... a forecast ... of [an] alliance between the English and the Jewish people as shall be honourable and advantageous to both. Yes, my friends, there was once a Jewish people famous in art and renowned in war. ... May the hour of Israel's deliverance be near at hand. ... May the Jewish nation once more claim her rank among the powers of the world! The descendants of the Maccabees will yet prove themselves worthy of their illustrious ancestors.⁴¹

This message, which stood in direct contradiction to British pro-Ottoman policy, was greeted by the assembled company with loud shouts of "In-shallah!"*

At the island of Malta in December 1840, Churchill (belatedly) on his way to the battlefield had met Sir Moses, who had given him a copy of the Sultan's firman to deliver to the Jewish community in Damascus. Over the next two years, he made at least two attempts to win Montefiore's active support for his ideas. Writing from Damascus in June 1841, he spelled out a detailed project. The attempt, he insisted,

to prop up the Turkish empire as at present constituted is a miserable failure. ... Syria and Palestine ... must be under European protection. ... What a great advantage it would [then] be for the Jews to be ready and prepared to say: "Behold, we are all waiting. ... Already we feel ourselves a people. The sentiment has gone forth amongst us and has been agitated." ... I say, it is for the Jews to be ready in such a crisis.

In a postscript, he added that

such an enterprise will require "patriotism" in the fullest sense of the word, energy and great perseverance. ... To reflect calmly before commencing ... and, once begun, to carry it through, vanquishing, surmounting, triumphing over every obstacle – this is worthy of men's existence. ... [This] is a subject which no doubt has already occupied your thought. ... The only question is *when* and *how*.⁴²

This letter, or memorandum, was laid by Montefiore before the Board of Deputies, entered in its minute book, and hence preserved for posterity; but there is no record of any discussion or comment. A year later, Churchill, who was still in Syria (and, in fact, remained in the area until his death in 1869), again wrote to Montefiore, this time with a more modest proposal – that the Porte be induced to grant the Jews of Europe permission to appoint

* "May God will it!"

⁴¹ "Syria," *Morning Chronicle* (26 April 1841), qu. in *ibid.*, p. 13. (A report on the dinner in the *Times* [27 April] omitted Churchill's speech.)

⁴² Churchill to Montefiore (14 June 1841) BofD (May 1841–March 1844), pp. 50–2; (published in Kobler, *ibid.*, pp. 23–6).

an official "to reside in Syria for the sole . . . purpose of . . . watching over the interests of the Jews residing in that country."⁴³ (Was he, one wonders, hoping to fill such a post himself?) On this occasion, a response, albeit most laconic, was recorded in the minutes of the Board. Churchill was sent a letter of thanks, stating simply that the issue was of such "great importance [that] the Board had determined to defer it for further deliberation."⁴⁴ Colonel Churchill's projects found no further mention in that body's records.

This episode probably provides us with an accurate reflection of Montefiore's attitude in the years after 1840 toward plans for the mass resettlement of Jews in Palestine. Now far more cautious than before the crisis, he was still ready to let bolder voices than his make themselves heard. He had been under no obligation, after all, to have Churchill's proposals put to the Board of Deputies and copied into the minutes.

Similarly, it was at Montefiore's home in Park Lane that Abraham Benisch was able, in December 1841, to present the protonationalist program of the Vienna student group to W. T. Young, the British vice-consul in Jerusalem (then on leave). In the memorandum subsequently submitted by Benisch to the vice-consul, the emphasis was on sober practicality. It spoke, not of a Jewish state or of large-scale immigration, but of "the establishment of a colony in some well-situated part of Palestine . . . [based on] agriculture and commerce for the benefit of such Jews, subjects of the Porte, who may be desirous of settling there."⁴⁵ A primary condition for the success of the project, stated the document, was the support of the British government which, through its implementation, would be able to enhance the Ottoman economy; advance "civilization" in the region; and "extend its benevolence towards a nation . . . which, according to the sacred Book, . . . will once again act a high part."⁴⁶ Young wasted no time in submitting the memorandum, with a friendly cover note that made mention of Montefiore, to the new foreign secretary, Lord Aberdeen. In this instance, too, it appears that no further action was taken.

The truth is that as the crisis faded into the past, so even would-be visionaries like Churchill and Benisch felt compelled to reduce the scope of their proposals. With the reassertion of everyday routines, insurmountable obstacles were seen looming in the path of schemes that earlier had appeared to be within reach.

⁴³ Churchill to Montefiore (15 August 1842) BofD, *ibid.*, pp. 148–9; (in Kobler, *ibid.*, p. 66).

⁴⁴ BofD, *ibid.*, p. 149.

⁴⁵ Baron, "Abraham Benisch's Project," p. 79. (Benisch memorandum and Young's accompanying letter are also in Hyamson, *The British Consulate*, vol. 1, pp. 41–6).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

By the late spring of 1841, to take one minor example, Crémieux was already writing to Alexandria with complaints about the schools founded in his name – only children from the European (Frank) community were attending; the schools had been closed for months for fear of the plague; the chief rabbi had been excluded from the governing board.⁴⁷ In the long run, as it turned out, the enterprise could not be sustained.

As for Montefiore, it was his considered and determined opinion that the time had come to let passions subside and forgetfulness set in. The epitaph on Father Thomas's (alleged) tomb was not removed, and Sir Moses gradually brought himself to admit that Cardinal Rivarola's assurances had proved valueless. The inquiry into the murders was not reopened, even when Ottoman rule was firmly reestablished in Damascus – thus leaving the quarrel between Father Thomas and the muledrivers in the Assad Pasha square as the most plausible, but far from proven, explanation of the crime.

The changing mood likewise made itself felt in the correspondence of the fiercely Orthodox leader in Amsterdam, Hirsch Lehren. In 1840 he had appealed for Jewish unity at all costs and called on Crémieux to take the lead. But now, for example, in a letter of June 1841 to Moses de Picciotto in Aleppo he pointed out sourly that, for all the claims to the contrary, Montefiore and Crémieux had failed to demonstrate adequately "the falsity of the accusations levelled against our innocent co-religionists." And (without mentioning Crémieux by name), he bitterly criticized the plans to introduce modern education among the Jews of the Middle East – "our religion will be ruined entirely by this measure . . . which involves more harm than did the attack on our co-religionists in Damascus . . . That only involved bodily pain for the Jew . . . while this involves the ruin . . . of the religion in the present, as in future generations."⁴⁸ Similarly, in a letter to Montefiore he called for a "holy war"⁴⁹ against the religious reform movement then emerging in London.

The gingerly treatment of schemes for Jewish colonization in Palestine – whether by Palmerston or Montefiore – was, then, characteristic of the postwar climate. Typically, Montefiore's diaries (at least in their published form) made no mention of the memoranda submitted by Churchill and Benisch, whereas they devoted much space to the audience on 24 March 1841 granted by Queen Victoria to Montefiore, who presented her with a facsimile of the Sultan's firman. No little attention was paid in the diaries, too, to the fact that Sir Moses was subsequently granted permission "to add supporters to his armorial bearings." In explanation of this honor, the docu-

⁴⁷ Crémieux to Valensino (26 May, 1841), *AI* (1841), p. 524.

⁴⁸ Lehren to Moïse de Picciotto (1 June 1841, no. 335) *PvA* (1841).

⁴⁹ Lehren to Montefiore (9 September 1841, no. 443) *ibid*.

ment issued in the queen's name referred to Montefiore's "unceasing exertions on behalf of his persecuted and injured brethren in the East, and the Jewish nation at large." The grant described the form that the supporters were to take:

On the dexter side, lion guardant and on the sinister side, a stag, each supporting a flag-staff therefrom flowing a banner to the dexter inscribed "Jerusalem" in Hebrew characters.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, pp. 299-300.

PART V

In retrospect

Between historiography and myth: the two primary versions of the affair

Over the more than a century and a half since 1840, the Damascus affair and the related crises have rarely fallen into complete obscurity; there has been no extended period that did not produce a new crop of articles, chapters, subchapters, and booklets on one aspect or another of the subject. Historians of the Jewish people have contributed their part to this output, casting light on themes earlier neglected; publishing evidence long buried in archives; raising hypotheses about its ultimate significance.

At the same time, though, the Damascus affair was long kept alive in collective memories less by scholarship than by myths possessed of a clear and popular appeal. Indeed, the scholarly historiography itself became inextricably intertwined at an early stage with mythology. This fact, in turn, encouraged the perception that the essential story of 1840 was all too familiar and, like some favorite garden, needed no more than a little tidying-up or widening at the edges. Thus, actual historical research on 1840 and the Jews has remained relatively limited. There can be no comparison in this respect with the Dreyfus affair or the crisis of 1881, and even the Beilis and Tisza-Eszlar cases have between them produced a number of books (as well as films).¹

Within a few years of 1840, two myths had begun to take clear shape, shorn of complexities and powerful enough to impose themselves – each in its own sphere and totally opposed to the other – as the authoritative version of events. On the one hand, there was the image of the affair that came to predominate in the Jewish world; it saw the release of the Damascus prisoners as the “happy end” to a story that had pitted truth against falsehood; as the triumph of the Jews (assisted by well-disposed Christians) against their enemies. This theme provided the great Jewish historian, Heinrich Graetz, with the framework for his description of 1840, a work of art that through its sheer dramatic force established itself as the definitive statement on the subject.

¹ E.g.: Tager, *The Decay of Tsarism: The Beiliss Trial*; Handler, *Blood Libel at Tiszaeszlár*. Bernard Malamud's novel, *The Fixer*, inspired by the Beilis case, provided the basis for a film (1968); another full-length feature film, *The Raftsmen*, made in Hungary in 1990, described the Tisza-Eszlar affair. (For a recent article on the Beilis affair: Katsis, “‘Delo Beilisa.’”)

On the other hand, there was the countermyth that was given its essentially final shape by extreme anti-Jewish circles in France. As spelled out there, the Damascus case had at long last provided the conclusive evidence needed to prove that ritual murder and human sacrifice did indeed play an essential role in the religious practice of, if not perhaps all Jews, then at least of a sect hidden within the Jewish people. In this case, too, the sheer simplicity of the fable proved to be its strength.

The conversion of the tangled and multifarious facts of 1840 into a structured and "usable" past took time. Well into the 1840s, the attempts to sum up the Damascus affair followed a great variety of directions, and it was not uncommon for even partisan writers to qualify their judgments.

Within the Jewish world, the most significant attempt at the time to record and analyze the crisis-year was that undertaken by Lipmann Hirsch Löwenstein, an Orthodox Bible scholar. His *Damascia*, published first in 1840 and then in a second edition a few months later, was by far the longest of the more than half dozen books on the affair brought out even before it had run its full course.² (The "instant" publication of newsworthy books is, of course, by no means a twentieth-century invention; it was a phenomenon encouraged in 1840 by the widely diffused romanticism and historical consciousness of the age – that the Damascus case would certainly be seen by posterity as an epoch-making event was an oft-stated belief.)

In his book, which ran to over four hundred pages and included close to thirty documents translated into German, Löwenstein spoke with great freedom. No later work provides the reader with so immediate a sense of the anguish felt by much of the German Jewish intelligentsia in mid-1840. A remarkable work, *Damascia* sustained an impassioned and unrestrained attack on those who, as Löwenstein saw it, had betrayed the most sacred principles to which they were solemnly pledged.

One target (as already described) was the overlapping community of scholars and ecclesiastics in Germany, which with a mere handful of exceptions had left it to the Jews to fight off the allegedly well-documented charge that the Talmud sanctioned murder. But Löwenstein devoted almost as much space to Adolphe Thiers who, even though the premier of what was theoretically the most liberal country in Europe, had, at least by implication, provided the anti-Jewish accusations with official French backing. Fifty years after the Declaration of the Rights of Man; thirty years after the Napoleonic code of law; and ten years after the expulsion of the Bourbons,

² Alby, *Des Persécutions contre les Juifs*; Auerbach, *Israel's jüngste Heimsuchung* (originally a sermon); Corvé, *Über den Ursprung*; McCaul, *Reasons for Believing*; Raphall, *Judaism Defended*; Roche, *Persécutions contre les Juifs*; Salomons, *An Account of the Recent Persecution*; *Verzameling van Stukken*; Yonah, *Der grosse Prozess*.

Thiers had presented France to the world as the champion of liberty, equality, and – torture! The French premier, insisted Löwenstein, had shown himself to be an apt “pupil of Talleyrand,”³ ready to sacrifice every scruple to momentary *Realpolitik*. At least in the Middle Ages, people had actually believed in what they said and did against the Jews; the nineteenth century was proving to be an era not of enlightenment, but of cynicism and hypocrisy, “a century of slander and a century of impudence.”⁴

Löwenstein did not attempt to extrapolate any political program from these darkly pessimistic observations. He had originally planned to publish a second volume, but abandoned that project when it became apparent that Montefiore and Crémieux had failed to obtain a new judicial investigation. The one thing for the Jews to do, he clearly felt, was to put up a stout verbal defense, complete with vigorous counterattacks where necessary, in the hope that public opinion was not impervious to rational argument. After all, the conduct of Caspar Merlato in Damascus, as well as of the Parliament and the City of London, had demonstrated that all was not lost. In 1843 he followed up *Damascia* with a new publication, a short book in which he included statements against the blood accusation solicited from two leading German churchmen. However ridiculous it might seem to pay attention to such absurdities, he concluded, one could never be sure – especially given the rash of ritual-murder cases that had cropped up in Central Europe during 1840 – just “how far fanaticism and nonsense might go.”⁵

Damascia received a mixed reception in a long book review by Isaac Marcus Jost. The fast pace and vigorous style of Löwenstein’s book, he wrote, riveted the attention of the reader; but

we cannot deny that at times the flow of words becomes too strong. . . . [His] feelings of irritation often lead him to use irony in attacks on personalities (such as Thiers, for example) whose role in the affair was a momentary matter of chance . . . ;⁶ the long-departed Thiers government did not, in our opinion, have special significance for the over-all structure of events or for history.⁷

Jost, in summing up the dramatic events of the year, preferred to put the emphasis on Crémieux’s establishment of the new schools in Egypt, a first step toward the integration of the Eastern Jews into the modern world. “A new epoch,” he declared, “is beginning for the Jews of the Orient. . . . The year 1840 (and the year . . . [5]600) will remain memorable in the history of civilization.”⁸

³ Löwenstein, *Damascia*, p. 147. ⁴ Ibid., p. 157.

⁵ Löwenstein, *Stimmen berühmter Christen*, p. 3.

⁶ [Jost], “Literatur,” *IA* (5 February 1841), p. 48. ⁷ Ibid. (12 February 1841), p. 56.

⁸ [Jost], “Crémieux in Cahiren: Errichtung der israelitischen Schulen,” *ibid.* (24 December 1840), p. 434.

Even though Jost, in contrast to Löwenstein, thus preferred to seek out the light in the affair, his own description of the Damascus case published in 1847 (as a chapter in his multivolume history) did not hew entirely to a single line. In a rambling account, he did certainly put the emphasis on the ultimate victory of enlightenment values. Describing the efforts made within the Jewish world to mobilize for self-defense, he stressed both the leading role played in the early months by Crémieux and also the many protest meetings held in the United States. The campaign, he insisted, had exerted a positive "impact on the thinking part of Europe" (meaning, of course, the Central and West European states), but not unfortunately on Galicia and Congress Poland. The European powers had taken up the cause "with a noble sense of humanity"⁹ – except, obviously, for France, so gravely misled by its consul in Syria.

But, at the same time, Jost was ready to shift the spotlight occasionally onto aspects of the affair that fell outside the range of Eurocentric liberalism and triumphalism. Thus, for example, he noted the ferocious conduct of the Western consuls in Rhodes; the significant role initially played in the events by the chief rabbis of Constantinople and Smyrna; the shock caused at the end of the year by the venomous material in the *Times*; and the widespread dissemination of the idea that the Jewish people might return to Palestine. He, likewise, assigned space to two subsequent ritual-murder cases (both instigated by Greeks): one on the island of Marmora in 1843 and one in Alexandria in 1844. The crisis of 1840, he concluded, had to be understood not in isolation, but as a major link in the process then thirty years old, leading to "the entry of the Jews hitherto isolated, into World History, and into the life of the nations."¹⁰

While Jost's ultimately optimistic summing-up represented, in all probability, the predominant opinion among the modernizing Jewish intelligentsia in the West, Lipmann Hirsch Löwenstein was by no means alone in seeing the Damascus affair as a warning that called for an active, albeit only verbal, response. As the historian, Baruch Mevorah, pointed out in a groundbreaking article of 1958, the total number of Jewish periodicals published in the various countries of the world more than doubled in the 1841–6 period as compared to 1835–40. Of course, this increase was caused in part by the relative success of the journals early into the field and by the realization that there was a market for such ventures. But Mevorah was undoubtedly right to see the shock of the Damascus affair also at work here; he noted, for example, that the subscription list of the *Archives Israélites* doubled in the latter half of 1840.¹¹

⁹ Jost, *Geschichte*, vol. 10, pt. 2, p. 355. ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

¹¹ Mevorah, "Ikvoteha shel 'alilat Damesek."

A glance at the *Voice of Jacob*, the first Jewish paper in England (soon followed by the *Jewish Chronicle*), is enough to confirm Mevorah's hypothesis that the proprietor, Jacob Franklin, had the Damascus scare very much in mind when deciding on its establishment in 1841. The opening issue, for instance, contained one article satirizing the ritual-murder accusation as raised by TJC in the *Times* ("Seven Questions about Blood"); a review of Isaac Ber Levinsohn's book on the murder question, *Efes Damim*, then just out in English translation; a third piece that prophesied that the British Jews would have many more opportunities to act as "the champions for the rights of their brethren everywhere, and thus to show themselves worthy to be citizens of a state which struck off the fetters of its black children";¹² and, finally, a statement from the editor, who explained the need for his new journal partly by reference to the stance of the *Times* in 1840:

As regards the defence of our institutions, it will be enough to remind our readers that a most formidable attack upon them, through the press, was spread far and wide, and remained for a long period unanswered; during this interval the unlearned of our body suffered many tribulations; and it was left to chance, and to the Jewish spirit of a private gentleman [Thepdores] . . . [to] annihilate . . . this calumny. Is it fitting that such a duty should devolve upon private individuals or be dependent upon the caprice of, perhaps, an inimical journalist?¹³

Later in the year, the *Voice of Jacob* argued that the mission of Montefiore and Crémieux to the East had not brought about sufficient change to prevent the possible repetition of such cases in the region – "the symptoms have been battled [but] the disease remains uncured, and until it be entirely removed there is no security against the re-enactment of the Damascus tragedy." The best way to insure safety for the Jews of greater Syria was to acquire land there and help them concentrate, living off both agriculture and industry, in "settlements similar to those which have proved so successful in the Crimea."¹⁴ (Here was a detailed summary, although not explicitly acknowledged, of the memorandum soon to be submitted by Abraham Benisch to William T. Young and by the latter to Lord Aberdeen).

However, the depiction of the crisis as symptomatic of a deep-rooted threat, whether in the East or in Europe or in both, did not match the prevailing sense of Jewish opinion. Crémieux and Montefiore (as already noted) made every effort to describe the Damascus affair as a decisive victory to be much celebrated and then assigned to the past. Of course, such an

¹² "What Are the British Jews and What May they Become?" *Voff* (16 September 1841), p. 3.

¹³ "Address," *ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁴ *Voff* (12 November 1841), p. 29. (The mention of the Crimea refers to the Jewish agricultural settlements in New Russia, particularly the Kherson region, initiated by the tsarist government under both Alexander I and Nicholas I.)

estimate, if accepted, could only enhance their public stature; but other considerations were, doubtless, also involved. For Crémieux, the political radical, there could be no doubting the imminent triumph of enlightenment across the world. Montefiore, cautiously conservative by temperament, was much more skeptical, but for precisely that reason he considered it safer for the Jews to declare the case won and then escape the glare of publicity.

The tendency to describe the Damascus affair in such simplified terms was clearly apparent, too, in the books on the ritual-murder issue published in London by David Salomons and Louis Loewe in 1840 and 1841 respectively. Salomons, adding an afterword to his publication of Pieritz's report, gave forceful expression to the view that the accusations against the Jews had to be explained by the backwardness of the East and that there, too, as in Europe, they would lose all credibility with the spread of civilization. ("The exhibition of this rife outbreak of credulity and prejudice forcibly carries us back to the period when, in all countries, similar scenes were enacted at a time when like causes were in operation.")¹⁵ And Loewe, in his introduction to *Efes Damim*, developed the same line of thought.

Both men skirted quickly round the fact that the ritual-murder charge had enjoyed unanimous consular support in Rhodes and, initially, even in Damascus; and they narrowed the issue to Ratti-Menton, whose behavior was explained as an aberrant deviation from Western norms. Although, wrote Loewe, Ratti-Menton represented "one of the most enlightened nations of Europe . . . [he had] enacted the part of a fanatic of the Middle Ages; but it cannot be supposed that his conduct was authorized or approved by the French court or the French people."¹⁶ The two books studiously avoided all mention of Thiers and, indeed, of the European press.

To visualize the Damascus affair as neatly self-contained had a particular appeal, then, to men like Crémieux and Salomons, imbued with an impassioned faith in the rise of rationality; but the urge for simplicity was also to be observed at the other end of the spectrum, in the traditional sectors of the Jewish world. In the face of crisis, Jewish communities had over many centuries, or even millennia developed set patterns of response to danger, some of which reemerged during 1840 – the fast-days, for example, set aside here and there in the tsarist empire to appeal for divine help in the hour of need. If the Damascus affair had ended as catastrophically as it had begun, it would have been widely understood in age-old terms as a cause for mourning and repentance, a mysterious sign of divine punishment, and hence linked by association with the 9th of Av (the central day of lamentation in the Jewish calendar). Even the *Orient*, motivated more by nostalgia than

¹⁵ Salomons, *An Account of the Recent Persecution*, p. 83.

¹⁶ Loewe, "Preface" in Levinsohn, *Efes Damim*, p. xii.

Orthodoxy, had in mid-1840 called on the synagogues in East and West to set aside an annual memorial day with "the prayer 'El Male Rahamim'* to be recited as our forefathers always have . . . when blood has been shed."¹⁷

Given the subsequent turn of events – the release of the prisoners, the Sultan's firman – it was only natural to reinterpret the episode, again in accord with primordial usage, as a case of God's last-minute reprieve and as cause for thanksgiving. The famous rabbi of Vienna, Isak Noa Mannheimer, for instance, took the Exodus from Egypt, celebrated annually at Passover, as the theme for his public address in honor of Crémieux. "You," he said to the French Jewish leader, "like Moses standing before Pharaoh spoke out for your people and for your faith, saying: 'Let the prisoners from among My people go that they might serve Me.'"¹⁸

But the closest analogy to the drama of Rhodes and Damascus was clearly provided by the Book of Esther ("Megilat Ester"); and Montefiore's decision to celebrate the end of his mission on Purim was seen as logical enough. Similarly, there was nothing surprising in the fact that somebody in the small Württemberg community of Oberdorf bei Bopfingen should have taken it upon himself in 1841 to compose a Hebrew account of the recent crisis in the form of a "megillah," a scroll. (A copy of this composition, transcribed on to the end-pages of a Bible, was discovered in the 1930s in the rare book room of Yeshivah University in New York.) Such records of last-minute deliverance from potential massacre, as well as the establishment of special local thanksgiving days, "Purims," had become a common phenomenon over many centuries.¹⁹

The Oberdorf megillah actually combined themes taken from both the Exodus and Esther narratives. Taking Haman's words from the Bible, "there is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples . . . and their laws are diverse from all people,"²⁰ the author described the incitement against the Damascus Jews in dramatic terms. Since the massacres of the First Crusade, he stated, there had been nothing comparable to the recent arrests, tortures, and murders in Syria. The roles of Haman and Mordecai were assigned, by implication, to the French and Austrian consuls respectively. ("And God stirred up the spirit of the man, Merlato, may his name be remembered for his goodness.")²¹

* "God, full of Mercy."

¹⁷ "Damaskus," *Orient* (6 June), p. 178.

¹⁸ "Oesterreich," *AZdes* (19 December), p. 736 (The reference, not an exact quotation, is to Exodus, e.g.: 7:16): See, too, the memorialization of the Damascus dead in the Haguenua *Memorbukh* (HM2/5010, CAHJP; cf. Hyman, *The Emancipation*, pp. 71–2).

¹⁹ On local and other adaptations of Purim to contemporary events, e.g.: Danon, "Quelques Pourim"; Roth, "Some Revolutionary Purims." (Cf. Horowitz, "Venahafokh hu.")

²⁰ Helphand, "A Megillah," p. 181 (the reference is to Esther 3:8).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 182 (the wording is a variation on the reference to Cyrus in Ezra 1:1).

When it came to the description of the mission to the East, though, the megillah drew on Exodus, stating that in answer to the prayers of the Jews calling for a "savior" (*moshi'a*), "God sent them Moses and Aharon— that is, Moses Montefiore . . . and Aharon Crémieux."²² (In reality, Crémieux's Hebrew name was Isaac.) Granting the two emissaries their request, "the king of Egypt proclaimed liberty to the captives."²³ The author concluded with the (erroneous) assertion that Sherif Pasha had meanwhile been executed and with the confident prediction that Ratti-Menton, too, would receive his just deserts.

While the Oberdorf megillah belonged to a strictly conventional genre, the same cannot be said of another, and today much better known, response to 1840 emanating from the traditional world — Yehuda Alkalai's book published in 1843, likewise written in Hebrew, *Minhat Yehudah* ("Judah's Offering"). Alkalai there, on the basis of various Talmudic, rabbinic and kabbalistic texts, developed his idea that even though the year 5600 (TaR) — 1839–40 — had not seen the actual arrival of the messiah, it had marked the start of a messianic process.

In justifying this highly controversial, perhaps heterodox, assertion, Alkalai placed crucial emphasis on the role played by Crémieux, Montefiore, and the Rothschild family during the Damascus crisis. The fact that the Jewish leaders had then been able to recruit the support of powerful rulers (or, in his words, *malkhei ha'amim*, "the Gentile kings")²⁴ had to be seen as a key element in the providential plan. In the light of their amazing success, nothing could be more erroneous than to continue to wait passively for the messiah. If only a somewhat broader leadership could be organized, it would certainly be able to win the international backing needed for the gradual return of the Jewish people to its own land. The formation of such an assembly of notables (*haasefah hanivheret*)²⁵ was of such central importance in Alkalai's eyes that he envisaged it as the first stage in the unfolding messianic drama — it would, in itself, actually constitute nothing less than the Messiah ben Yosef (the Messiah, son of Joseph). Only later, with the reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, would this step-by-step development reach its climax, culminating in the arrival of the ultimate messiah: the Messiah, son of David.

Crémieux and Montefiore had already begun to attain legendary status in the Jewish world by the time of their return from Damascus, but nobody else

²² Ibid., p. 183 (a partial reference, e.g., to Exodus 3:10).

²³ Ibid. (a variation on Isaiah 61:1).

²⁴ Alkalai, "Minhat yehuda," *Kitvei harav Yehuda Alkalai*, vol. 1, p. 206.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 227 (Alkalai also used the terms that he treated as synonymous: *haasefah hameusheret* and *asefat hasekenim*). For a discussion of "activist" as against "passive" messianism in the modern period: Myers, "The Messianic Idea."

had gone so far as this, representing them, with the Rothschilds, as the nucleus around which was to coalesce a great messianic force – indeed, nothing less than a collective messiah. Alkalai would go on to play an active role in the prehistory of what would eventually become the messianic wing of religious Zionism, and so his extraordinary theories have to be seen as more than a mere passing curiosity.

Alkalai (not to speak of the Oberdorf author) could not have expected to reach beyond a narrow circle of readers, but there were other writers convinced that a wider audience was available for a Hebrew-language version of the Damascus story. Such a subject, if described in a broadly traditional idiom, replete with biblical and rabbinical references and devoid of overtly subversive ideas, had the potential to attract not only enlightened (“maskilic”) but also Orthodox Jews – especially in Galicia, Congress Poland and the Pale of Settlement, where Hebrew remained a basic language of written communication. So great, though, was the stranglehold imposed by the regime on cultural life in the Russian empire that it was only after the death of Nicholas I in 1855 that Hebrew books dealing with the Damascus affair, even when written earlier, began to be published.

Thus, ironically enough, the only material on the crisis to appear in Hebrew during the early 1840s came out in Frankfurt-am-Main: some minor, mainly hagiographic, items in *Zion*,²⁶ a new journal edited by Jost and M. Creizenach. The well-known Galician satirist, Isaac Erter, did begin to compose an account of the murder case (“Megilat Damesek”), but only a fragment was found among his papers after his death in 1851.²⁷ In contrast, the leading Vilna maskil, Mordechai Aaron Gintsburg, was able to complete a manuscript on the subject, *Sefer Hamat Damesek*²⁸ (“The Damascus Fury”), and shortly before his death he personally delivered a handwritten copy to Sir Moses Montefiore, who spent some days in Vilna in 1846.²⁹

Not until the great political thaw, initiated by Alexander II, though, did it become practicable to publish Gintsburg’s work, which finally appeared in 1860. Copies of the manuscript must have been in circulation for some time before that, because his account was included almost word for word – and without any acknowledgment – in a book published a year earlier, in Breslau, by another (less well-known and more Orthodox) Russian Jewish author, Nathan Friedland.³⁰ Still a third work, again entitled *Megilat Damesek*³¹

²⁶ E.g.: “Shir yedidot leish hamudot,” (dedicated to Crémieux), *Zion* (1840–1), pp. 62–3.

²⁷ Erter, “Megilat Damesek,” in *Hazofeh leveit yisrael* (ed. M. Letteris) (Vienna: 1858), pp. 106–7 (also entitled *Dr. Isaak Erter's Literarische Nachlass*).

²⁸ *Hamat Damesek*: an elliptical reference to Jeremiah 49:23.

²⁹ Werses, “Gilgulo shel hasefer ‘Hamat Damesek,’” p. 120. (Cf. Gintsburg, *Devir*, vol. 2, pp. 106–7.)

³⁰ Friedland, *Sefer kos yeshu'ah unehamah*. ³¹ Goldstoffs, *Megilat Damesek*.



FIG. 23. "One of the Jewish prisoners." The illustration is from a Jewish source, date unknown (probably 1840 or 1841).

(published in Vienna in 1865), likewise turns out on examination not to be original, but rather a somewhat embellished translation of the relevant chapter in Jost's history (a fact that in this instance was at least obliquely admitted). However, the Damascus story probably achieved its greatest circulation in the Hebrew language through the short narrative written in 1846 by Menahem Mendel Mohr in Lvov and then tacked on to a very popular history of the Jewish people, *Sheerit Yisrael* ("The Remnant of Israel"), frequently reproduced since its first appearance in the eighteenth century. This work complete with the addendum ran into more than a half dozen editions, most in the 1870s, and it also appeared in modern Yiddish editions.³²

³² [Amlander], *Sefer sheerit yisrael: hu helek sheni misefer yosipon*; for the publishing history of this work: Hominer, *Sefer sheerit yisrael hashalem*. It was originally written in Yiddish or Judeo-German but was most frequently published in Hebrew versions. (For a Yiddish edition complete with Mohr's addendum: e.g., *Sheerit Yisrael* [Warsaw: 1904]). A new and popular history of the Damascus affair was published in Yiddish during the 1930s, likewise in Warsaw. Written from a Jewish nationalist and socialist viewpoint, it was critical of the "West European Jews [who] . . . were highly assimilated and [previously] had been little interested in the fate of the Eastern Jews" (p. 46). The author put the number of Jews who lost their lives in the affair at three hundred, apart from twenty-four tortured to death and the children who died from starvation in prison (p. 63). He must have felt that the true figures would have left his mid-twentieth-century readers utterly unmoved (Nekhemyezon, *Der blut-bilbel*).

As recounted in these various Hebrew-language publications, the Damascus affair tended to follow a set narrative structure. Blame for the affair was placed on Ratti-Menton ('*olel leres'h'a*, the "evildoer")³³ and a few associates; a central place was assigned to descriptions of the torture (with the stress in *Sheerit Yisrael* on Isaac Yavo's reportedly last words, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord Our God, the Lord is One");³⁴ the credit for the turn of the tide was assigned primarily to public opinion in England; and the ultimate triumph was reserved for the mission to the East which, with divine aid, brought liberty to the enchained. (A strong plea of 1841 sent in to *Zion* from Brody, a Galician and hence Habsburg town, to place Merlato on an equal footing with Montefiore and Crémieux failed to take hold.)³⁵

The epic idiom employed (even Jost's relatively sober chapter was raised by the translator to a higher level of pathos) reached its apogee in Mordecai Aaron Gintsburg's *Hamat Damesek*. Reworking material drawn from Löwenstein's *Damascia*, which did not even reach him until 1845, he led the reader in dramatic fashion from one rescue attempt to another: the petition of Alexandria's Jews to Muhammed Ali; Crémieux's newspaper campaign; the interpolations in the French Parliament; the various moves made, and measures adopted, in Britain – all necessary, but none sufficient, until finally the Jewish mission to the East achieved what nobody else had been able to do. "Who," asked Gintsburg rhetorically, referring to Montefiore and Crémieux, "can measure what they feel when they remember that God placed the salvation of His people in their hands? . . . One hour of such satisfaction must be worth more than all of eternity."³⁶

If the Jewish attempts to sum up the Damascus affair demonstrated such variety in the early and mid-1840s, the same was also true to a considerable extent of the works hostile to, or suspicious of, the Jewish people. Thus, for example, the author of *The Great Trial Against the Jews in Damascus*, published in Bavaria in 1841, while clearly eager to confirm the ritual-murder charge, still sought to lend his work a show of objectivity. Among the many documents there reproduced were Merlato's despatches. The author condemned the torture employed during the interrogations as an outrage, complaining that the reports against the Jews sent from Damascus had not "included one human word against these inhuman acts."³⁷ Explaining his goal, he wrote that "we hope to throw sufficient light on the matter to enable the reader to reach his own conclusion more easily – a conclusion, however, which can hardly be favorable to the Jews."³⁸

³³ Helphand, "A Megillah," p. 184.

³⁴ *Sefer sheerit yisrael*, p. 141. (also quoted in the Oberdorf "megillah": Helphand, p. 181).

³⁵ "'Al dvar ahenu bnei yisrael beDamesek," *Zion* (1840–1), pp. 102–4.

³⁶ Gintsburg, *Sefer hamat Damesek*, p. 96. ³⁷ Yonah (pseud.), *Der grosse Prozess*, p. 18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

A somewhat less half-hearted show of objectivity marked the work of two German jurists (J. Hitzig and W. Häring), who were making a name for themselves by publishing popular accounts of “interesting criminal cases drawn from all countries.”³⁹ In their analysis of the Damascus affair, which came out in 1842, they admitted that no weight could be attached to evidence exacted by torture, but still declared the ritual-murder question open. The “national zeal” of the European Jews, they wrote, had gone “too far”⁴⁰ when they argued for the certain innocence of their brethren in Syria. “We do not know whether Count Ratti-Menton or Mr. Merlato knows the Jews the better.” It was, after all, not inconceivable that the wealth of the accused had served to “nourish their gloomy bigotry and superstition”⁴¹ – and that they had, after all, committed the murders out of a blood lust “so long denied.”⁴²

Primarily concerned to produce best-selling crime stories, the two jurists felt no particular commitment to one side or the other in the affair (although, in the last resort, they were inclined to give the Jews the benefit of the doubt). But just the opposite was true of the Nuremberg theologians, F. W. Ghillany and G. F. Daumer, who saw in the Damascus case *prima facie* evidence in support of their thesis that the rite of human sacrifice had stubbornly survived in the midst of the Jewish people for some three thousand years. They now redoubled their efforts to prove that Jehovah and Moloch were simply two names for one and the same, insatiably bloodthirsty, Old Testament god. The reformist movement launched in the period of the Minor Prophets had never, they argued, been able to purge Judaism entirely of this primitive cult, or so at least much circumstantial evidence suggested.

With the Damascus affair still fresh in people’s minds they hastened to bring out large books on the subject. Their close reading of the Bible was reinforced with material drawn from the classical world as well as from contemporary anthropological studies. The year 1842 saw the publication of Daumer’s *The Fire and Moloch Worship of the Ancient Hebrews as the Original, the Legal and the Orthodox Cult of the Nation (Historically and Critically Proved)* as well as of Ghillany’s *Human Sacrifice and the Ancient Hebrews: An Historical Investigation*; and the latter followed that up two years later with his *Judaism and Criticism, Or the Survival of Human Sacrifice Among the Hebrews, and the Necessity for a Timely Reform of Judaism*.

³⁹ I.e., Hitzig and Häring, *Der neue Pitaval: Eine Sammlung der interessanten Kriminalgeschichten aller Länder*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 232. (Hitzig and Häring considered it very possible that editions of the Talmud published outside Europe included “the more dreadful dogmas and prescriptions” excised from the European versions.)

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 238. (The preface to the second edition, published in 1857, stated that by that time “nobody would venture to defend that lamentable tragedy” [p. xx].)

Even though these works concentrated on the biblical period, both authors stressed that their search was of urgent contemporary relevance. Or, as Ghillany put it,

No sooner had modern-day humanity dismissed the thousand-year old accusation against the Jews as a disgusting medieval fable than the murder of Father Thomas once again focused interest on the issue. . . .⁴³ Our age sincerely seeks the truth. . . . It no longer persecutes the people who suffer from a dangerous madness, but it seeks rather to root out the madness itself and the first step is to bring it relentlessly into the light of day.⁴⁴

Ghillany actually undertook his own investigation in an attempt to corroborate the truth of an alleged ritual-murder attempt reported some forty years earlier from a nearby Bavarian village (Gräfenberg). As he saw it, the charge of human sacrifice hanging over the Jews was just one more reason to deny them equal rights in Germany, at least until their religion had been totally shorn of all its anachronisms. ("Would you believe that to this day, in the midst of the civilized countries of Europe, the Jew prays for the renewal of bloody sacrifices . . . [and] thanks God that he was made a man and not a woman? . . . Does one not see oneself back in the times of ancient human sacrifice when in the [circumcision] ceremony the rabbi fills his mouth with warm human blood from the wound?")⁴⁵

The fact that the two Nuremberg scholars made the Bible the focus of their research placed them, following the most extreme Voltairean traditions, in violent opposition not only to Judaism, but also to the established churches and schools of Christian theology in Germany. In 1847, in his *The Mysteries of Early Christianity*, Daumer actually went so far as to identify Jesus together with his disciples (Judas excepted) as followers of the Moloch cult and the last supper as a cannibalistic rite – a hypothesis that won the enthusiastic approval of Karl Marx at the time.⁴⁶

In the Left Hegelian and radical circles that were seeking to replace a theocentric with an anthropocentric and atheistic world, the root-and-branch iconoclasm of Ghillany and Daumer was readily assimilated. Not all

⁴³ Ghillany, *Die Menschenopfer*, p. iii–iv. ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. vi.

⁴⁵ Ghillany, *Das Judentum und die Kritik*, pp. xvii–xviii. (On the sucking of blood during the circumcision ceremony and the division of rabbinical opinion on the issue in the nineteenth century: Katz, "Pulmus hamezizah.")

⁴⁶ Daumer, *Geheimnisse des christlichen Altertums*. The 1923 edition included a speech delivered on 30 November 1847 by Karl Marx who said, inter alia: "We know that human sacrifice holds the highest place in Christianity. Daumer demonstrated that the Christians in actual reality slaughtered human beings, they consumed human flesh and human blood in the Eucharist" (p. v). (On Daumer: Kühne, *Der Religionsphilosoph Georg Friedrich Daumer*; see, too: Rose, *German Question*, pp. 47–8, 251–62 [chap. 14: "Judaism as Molochism"]; and Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, vol. 3, pp. 409–14. Cf. Ettinger, "Bikoret hadat hayehudit"; and Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, pp. 159–74).

their ideas were generally accepted there, of course. Bruno Bauer shared their total opposition to Jewish emancipation; Karl Marx and Moses Hess did not. And Karl Gutzkow had no time for their attempts to pin the ritual-murder charge on the Jews of the modern age. But the pathological picture that they painted of biblical religion had a strong appeal.

Hess, in particular, came to see Moloch, albeit passing through various mutations over time, as situated at the very core of Judeo-Christian history: the savage force ever again re-created by humanity out of its own imagination and always there to justify the sacrifice of man to man. "The Christian God," wrote Hess in 1843, for example,

is an imitation of the Jewish Moloch-Jehovah to whom the first-born was sacrificed in order to "appease" him. . . . Later, money replaced the first-born who was "redeemed" and cattle were sacrificed in place of men. The original sacrifice was everywhere man. . . . And so in a figurative sense he has remained . . . so long as religion and politics maintain themselves.⁴⁷

And in his famous essay of 1845, "On the Nature of Money," he described the market economy in the same terms: "In ancient Judaism, the blood cult was a prototype; in medieval Christianity, it was developed theoretically, idealistically, logically – i.e. man really consumed the alienated blood of mankind, but only in imagination, the blood of the God Man. In the modern Jewish shop-keeping world, this impulse appears not symbolically or mystically, but most prosaically."⁴⁸

Here, then, was a remarkable example of the turmoil created within the German Jewish intelligentsia in the wake of the Damascus affair. Moses Hess, who initially had reacted to the case with a move toward an embryonic Jewish nationalism, was now – in pursuit of a universalist and socialist liberation of humankind – eager to identify Jehovah with Moloch, thus lending a measure of legitimacy to the wild speculations of Ghillany and Daumer. It was, then, natural enough that Hess, when making yet another volte-face with his proto-Zionist book of 1862, *Rome and Jerusalem*, should have turned back to 1840 in order to recall the dramatic impact made upon him at the time by the ritual-murder crisis. (It is also worthy of note that Hess's book had been preceded in 1860 by another quasi-messianic work, *Paris, Rome and Jerusalem*, in which the well-known French intellectual and Judeophile, Jacob Salvador, had argued that a new era in world history had

⁴⁷ Hess, "Philosophie der Tat," in G. Herwegh (ed.), *Einundzwanzig Bogen aus der Schweiz* (Zurich: 1843), p. 316. (On the Moloch theme in Hess's writings during the mid-1840s: Rose, *German Question*, pp. 48–50, 313–17, 335–6; Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, pp. 13–20.)

⁴⁸ Hess, "Über das Geldwesen," *Rheinische Jahrbücher zur gesellschaftlichen Reform*, vol. 1 (1845), p. 30.

opened in 1840 not only because of the Eastern crisis at large, but also, more specifically, because of the Damascus affair – an event of such importance in his eyes that it had to be placed on a “very high rung in the general and moral history of our century.”⁴⁹

Neither the two German jurists nor the two Nuremberg theologians (or, more exactly, atheist anthropologists) could be regarded as a major threat to the standing of German Jewry. In their different ways they were too marginal, although Löwenstein still felt it necessary to polemicize with Hitzig and Häring, and Jost to make mention of Ghillany and Daumer in his history. It was in France, not in Germany, that the Damascus affair was now to be presented in a form plausible enough to transform it from a curious episode in a fast receding past into an ever renewable anti-Jewish myth.

During the crisis of 1840 Cochelet had threatened that if the Jews persisted in their anti-French campaign regarding the affair, no choice would remain but to remove the veil of diplomatic secrecy and publish the protocols of the interrogation. In reality, Guizot refrained from so drastic a step but starting from 14 April 1843, the *Univers* took the initiative, publishing a copy of the documents that had come into its hands. The cowardly failure of the government to act, explained the editors, had provided the Jews with unwarranted protection, leaving the paper no choice but to put the written evidence before the public.⁵⁰

Later in the year, a German translation of the protocols (taken from the *Univers*) was published in book form in Nuremberg, probably on Ghillany's initiative.⁵¹ And this was followed in 1846 by a far more impressive Paris edition, which appeared together with a vast amount of supplementary material, as the second volume of a work entitled *Relation Historique des Affaires de Syrie depuis 1840 jusqu'au 1842*. Some four hundred pages long, this volume contained almost every document, scrap of evidence, and argument put together in Damascus during the affair to prove the guilt of the Jews. In addition to the protocols, there were the detailed notes then added by Rattimenton; despatches describing attempts by Isaac Loria and others to bribe potential witnesses; a list of the unpaid business debts of the accused (compiled as proof of their criminal tendencies); detailed accounts of other suspected ritual-murder cases in the region; long extracts drawn from scholarly

⁴⁹ Salvador, *Paris, Rome, Jérusalem*, vol. 2, p. 190. (On Salvador's complex influence on, and links with, the Jewish intelligentsia especially in France, e.g.: Reinhold, “Yosef Salvador”; Hyman, “Joseph Salvador”; Graetz, “Mekomo shel Yosef Salvador.”)

⁵⁰ “Feuilleton: Assassinat du Père Thomas (Extraits des Procès-verbeaux Relatifs à l'Assassinat du R. Père Thomas, Capucin, et de son Domestique, Ibrahim Amara),” *Univers* (14, 15, 19, 20, 21 April 1843). Abu el-Afieh's translations from the Talmud were among the materials published.

⁵¹ I.e.: *Die arabischen Aktenstücke über die Ermordung des P. Thomas*. The book covers displayed, inter alia, advertisements for Ghillany's works (*Die Judenfrage* and *Die Menschenopfer*).

tomes old and new on the hatred, evidently homicidal, of rabbinic Judaism for the Christians; and – most deadly of all, perhaps – carefully argued letters of support for the murder charges from prominent Europeans then in the East (John Barker, a former British consul in Aleppo, for example, and Baron von Kalte, an officer in the Prussian army).

The author of the two-volume book was Achille Laurent, an otherwise obscure figure. There has been occasional speculation that hiding behind the person of Laurent was none other than Ratti-Menton who, despite his appointment to Canton, actually spent most of the period from mid-1841 until 1846 in France. What is beyond question, though, is the fact that the great bulk of the second volume consisted of material collected and put into shape by Jean-Baptiste Beaudin, Sibli Ayub, and Ratti-Menton during the period prior to the latter's departure from Syria.⁵²

With the publication of the protocols, the Damascus affair was given a new lease on life. Here, after all, for the entire world to see was an account of human sacrifice not in the Middle Ages, but in the present day, authenticated by the representatives of a modern European state and "volunteered" down to the most horrifying detail by the self-confessed murderers themselves. And here, too, were the statements and translations from the Talmud by a trained rabbi, Moses Abu el-Afieh. (The torture barely made an appearance in the book.) Even though there had been any number of ritual-murder cases since the twelfth century, it was very rare to have available such well-documented interrogations. And the Damascus case would now take its place alongside that of St. Simon of Trent in 1475 as a rich seam to be mined in support of the blood accusation.

The judicial protocols were republished in various countries and languages. An Italian version of Laurent's volume appeared in Marseilles in 1850 and ran into at least three printings.⁵³ In 1896 it was reissued in Sardinia together with a note supporting the demand, already popular in the Capuchin order, that Father Thomas be canonized by the Catholic Church as one of "the martyrs who, with the approach of the Jewish festival [of Passover], fell victim to the Talmudic knife."⁵⁴ And three years later, an edition of the protocols appeared in Cairo, put back into Arabic from the French.⁵⁵ In 1913, at the time of the Beilis case in Kiev, a Russian version

⁵² The first volume of Laurent's work describes the politics of greater Syria up until 1842 – a fact which, *ceteris paribus*, suggests Beaudin as a more likely substitute author than Ratti-Menton, who left the Middle East in 1841 and was anyway much less familiar with regional affairs.

⁵³ I.e., [Mondovi], *Relazione Istorica*.

⁵⁴ *Aceldama*, p. 5. (For a later Capuchin description of the Damascus affair – 1931 – similarly taking the guilt of the Jews as a fact: Santa Giusta, *Missionari Sardi*, pp. 68–77.)

⁵⁵ I.e. Nasr Allah, *al-Kanz al-Maršūd*. (In his introduction, Nasr Allah acknowledged his debt to Faris's *Sirākh al-Bāri*, which had sought primarily to prove a ritual-murder charge brought against the Damascus Jews in 1890, but also included much material on the affair of 1840: pp. 147–74.)



FIG. 24. "Sacrificing to Moloch." This illustration was published in Cairo in 1891 by Habib Faris in his book on the Damascus ritual murder affair of 1890.

appeared in Kharkov.⁵⁶ And, reflecting the bitterness of today's Middle East conflict, the Arabic translation was reissued with new introductions in both Beirut and Damascus (in 1968 and 1986 respectively) – in the latter case edited by no less a person than Mustafa Talas, the Syrian minister of defense.⁵⁷ (Meanwhile, the original version of the interrogation, as recorded in Arabic in 1840, had been published for the first time in 1940 as part of a scholarly edition of documents drawn from the Egyptian archives.)⁵⁸ On at least two occasions in recent years, Arab delegates addressing UN forums have drawn on these new editions in order to declare the Jewish cult of ritual murder to be proven fact.⁵⁹

Indeed, it is as a (supposedly) authoritative source to be quoted or cited that the protocols have exerted their greatest impact. And following a pattern already discernible at the time of the crisis, it was primarily in France and the German-speaking states that the memory of the Damascus affair was employed time and again in anti-Jewish agitation. It would be beyond the scope of this book to attempt to track down all the works that made extensive use of the Damascus protocols; mention will be made of just a few outstanding examples.

In his *Der Talmud in der Theorie und in der Praxis* of 1866, Konstantin de Cholewa Pawlikowski assigned some thirty pages to the murder of Father Thomas; and, similarly, *Le Juif, le Judaïsme et la Judaisation des Peuples Chrétiens* of 1869 by Gougenot des Mousseaux included a chapter on “sacred cannibalism” in which he, too made ample use of the material first collected

⁵⁶ *Damasskoe ritualnoe ubiistvo*.

⁵⁷ Introducing the 1968 edition, Mustafa al-Zarqa insisted that he had always regarded the ritual-murder accusation as nothing but an old wives' tale until he discovered Nasr Allah's translation of 1899 in the library of the famous Damascus Islamicist, Nasir al-Din al-Albani: pp. 3–6. (The 1986 edition, *Faṭīr Ṣiḥyawn*, includes a number of thereto unpublished documents – in the original and in Arabic translation – from the archives of the French consulate-general in Alexandria. My attention was drawn to this book by the recent work, novelistic in character but based on original sources, by Elioz Hefer, *Khronologiyah shel 'alilat dam*.)

⁵⁸ Rustum, *Al-Uṣūl al-'Arabīyya*, vol. 5, pp. 1–41. (A comparison between the original Arabic and the French translation of 1840 does not reveal major distortions in the latter.)

⁵⁹ The protocols as published by Rustum were taken as authoritative by a high Saudi official who, at a conference under UN auspices, described the death of Father Thomas as a typical ritual murder: “The Talmud says that, ‘If a Jew does not drink every year the blood of a non-Jewish man, he will be damned for eternity’” (Maarouf al-Dawilbi at the Seminar for the Encouragement of Understanding, Tolerance and Respect Relating to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Geneva, 5 December 1984). At a meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission in 1992 the Syrian delegate – who “waved [Talas's] book” – argued along the same lines (Morris B. Abraham, “Anti-Semitism in the UN: Religious, Racial or Political?” *Justice* 4 [January 1995], p. 14). In an interview of 1995, Talas attacked the Israeli people for believing “that God only created Jews and the rest of mankind are animals.” (*Ruz al-Yusuf* 24 December.) For some recent books in Arabic paying much attention to Jewish ritual murder: Arif, *Ariha*; al-Bar, *al-Masih*; Qutb, *Ru'ya Islamiyya*).

in Ratti-Menton's consulate. The book of Gougenot des Mousseaux was re-published not only in France, but also (in 1876) in both Austria and Romania; a new translation by Alfred Rosenberg, the future Nazi ideologist and leader, went through many printings in the years of the Weimar republic.⁶⁰

Of the numerous publications which, following Eisenmenger's work of the early eighteenth century, depicted the rabbinical texts as an inexhaustible source of criminal hatred toward the Christian world, probably none achieved the popular success of August Rohling's *Talmudjude*. First brought out in Munster in 1871, it ran through innumerable editions, among them French, Polish, Hungarian, and Arabic translations, as well as frequent republications in Germany in the 1920s. In contrast to the more tentative and infinitely more knowledgeable Eisenmenger, Rohling was fully committed to the ritual-murder accusation and included an account of the Damascus affair (based on Laurent) in his book.⁶¹ Even though Rohling ignominiously failed to sustain his charges in a famous libel case of the 1880s against the Austrian Jewish leader, Joseph S. Bloch,⁶² *Talmudjude* lost little or none of its popularity.

It is a striking fact that so much literature in support of the blood accusation was produced in the 1860s and early 1870s, a period in which the liberal creed was probably at the height of its prestige in Europe. This apparently paradoxical fact is, of course, not hard to explain. Faced by a mounting wave of subversive doctrine – Darwinism, liberalism, socialism, Italian nationalism (which by 1870 had deprived the papacy of its territorial possessions) – significant sections within the Catholic Church looked to primordial beliefs, mysticism, and hatred to rally support. The *Univers*, which had been of such key importance in 1840, continued over the following years and decades (under the editorship of Louis Veuillot) to spearhead the most vituperative attacks on the Jewish people. Rohling's book was actually distributed free in Westphalia by a Catholic organization, the Bonifatius Verein.⁶³

From the years 1881–2, though, this phenomenon attained a still greater intensity. It was then that the most influential Catholic journal in Italy, the *Civiltà Cattolica*, published in Rome under the auspices of the Jesuit order, began nothing less than a sustained campaign to reinforce the ritual-murder charge. At the core of this effort was the publication of the documents compiled during the case of Simon of Trent in 1475, but the journal (draw-

⁶⁰ E.g.: Gougenot des Mousseaux, *Der Jude, das Judentum und die Verjudung der christlichen Welt (Aus dem Französischen von Alfred Rosenberg)* (Munich: 1921).

⁶¹ Rohling, *Talmudjude*, pp. 114–17.

⁶² See, e.g., Bloch: *Erinnerungen*, vol. 1, pp. 59–76, 81–141; Kopp, *Zur Judenfrage*.

⁶³ The Bonifatius Verein apparently distributed no less than 38,000 copies of the sixth edition of *Talmudjude* (Bloch, *Erinnerungen*, vol. 1, p. 29; cf. Pulzer, *Jews and the German State*, p. 140).



FIG. 25. "Ritual murder" in Damascus, 1890. The book is labeled "the Talmud." (From the book of Habib Faris).

ing heavily on Laurent) did not neglect the Damascus affair which, it declared, had "demonstrated that at certain times of the year, the Jews make use of Christian blood for their religious rites. It is in vain that the Jews seek to slough off the weight of argument against them; the mystery has become known to all."⁶⁴ The *Civiltà Cattolica* put an interpretation on the case that had been neglected in 1840, arguing that the murder of Father Thomas had been perpetrated in anticipation not of Passover, which required the blood specifically of young boys, but of Purim, a festival (allegedly) of planned and systematic vengeance against the enemies of Judaism.⁶⁵

The years 1878–82 witnessed the emergence in various European countries of what came to be termed the anti-Semitic movement, bringing with it an emphasis on racial or biological criteria not easily reconcilable with Christian doctrine. But, as the furious controversy over the Tisza-Eszlar affair of 1882–3 in Hungary demonstrated, the ritual-murder phobia pro-

⁶⁴ "Cronaca Contemporanea," *Civiltà Cattolica* 10 (1882), p. 599. (On the campaign of *Civiltà Cattolica* with regard to Simon of Trent and the ritual-murder charge: Klein, "Damascus to Kiev"; and Hsia, *Trent* 1475, pp. 133–4.)

⁶⁵ *Civiltà Cattolica* 10, pp. 214–20.



FIG. 26. "The murder of Father Thomas." This is the cover picture of Mustafa Talas's book of 1986 on the Damascus case.

vided a common cause that could unite believing Christians, Protestants as well as Catholics, with racial determinists. That the Jews were guilty in Tisza-Eszlar was an article of faith for Adolf Stöcker, the Protestant court preacher in Berlin, for the *Civiltà Cattolica*, and for the first international anti-Semitic congress⁶⁶ held in Dresden in 1882.

Of course, not all the organized forces associated in one way or another with Catholicism were ready to identify themselves with such extremism. Where the Catholic population was itself not in the majority, it often tended, as was the case in 1840, to demonstrate greater understanding for the Jews, the archetypal minority. The Catholic Center Party, for example, in the face of the hostile German regime created by Bismarck in 1871, would prove reluctant in the long run to play the anti-Jewish card.⁶⁷

With the gradual emergence of mass politics, though, there was nothing more natural in France (as in Austria) than to woo support with an amalgam of extreme nationalism, Catholicism, and anti-Semitism. This fact was fully illustrated by the publishing history of Edouard Drumont's *La France Juive* which, first issued in 1886, became a remarkable and much translated best-seller. Drumont showed himself a fervent advocate of the ritual-murder charge, and he treated the Damascus affair as of crucial importance because, as he put it, the guilt of the Jews was then revealed "in the most minute detail – evidence which cannot possibly be denied as the event took place right in the middle of the nineteenth century."⁶⁸

It was Drumont who wrote the introductions both to the French translation of Rohling's *Talmudjude*, published in 1889, and to Henri Desportes' book of the same year, *Le Mystère du Sang chez les Juifs de tous les Temps*. For hundreds of pages, Desportes there reproduced in the most lurid colors innumerable ghastly – and sadistic – tales of torture and murder, particularly of pubescent boys, as recorded over the previous seven centuries; his chronological list was carried right up to the present. He, too, though, dwelt at especial length on the affair of 1840 and on Abu el-Afiéh's translations from the Talmud which, he wrote, "had been completely authenticated by the chief rabbi of Damascus."⁶⁹ Henceforward, Desportes' book would

⁶⁶ The meeting was usually termed the "anti-Semitic congress" at the time, although its official title was "anti-Jewish" (see Tal, *Christians and Jews*, pp. 247–8).

⁶⁷ Cf. Pulzer, *Jews and the German State*, pp. 140–1. (Pulzer notes, however, that the Center Party's major journal, *Germania*, was frequently very hostile to the Jews, especially "when ever tempers were heated by ritual murder accusations, as at Tisza-Eszlar, Xanten and Konitz." Following the acquittal in the Konitz case, the paper asked angrily whether "we . . . [can] still have confidence that murders of Christian children will be punished and expiated?" [ibid., p. 141].) On the churches and the Jewish question in the German Empire, e.g.: Hellwing, *Der konfessionelle Antisemitismus*; Lehr, *Antisemitismus – religiöse Motive*; Tal, *Christians and Jews*.

⁶⁸ Drumont, *La France Juive*, vol. 2, p. 409. ⁶⁹ Desportes, *Le Mystère du Sang*, p. 17.

serve as a readily accessible source for everybody and anybody eager to prove the validity of the murder accusation. With mass propaganda now the order of the day, political publishing houses like the Verlag des Reichs-Herold in Marburg, the Germanikus Verlag in Leipzig, and the Librairie Antisémitique in Paris, and their stable of writers, had to do no more than draw on Desportes, Laurent, and perhaps one or two other similar compilations in order to assemble such incendiary booklets as, respectively, *Der Mord zu Damaskus oder wie ein christlicher Priester von Juden geschächet wurde* of 1888; *Die Juden und das Christenblut: Geschichtliche Beiträge zur Frage des jüdischen Blutrituals* of 1892; and *L'Assassinat Maçonique, le Crime Rituel, La Trahison Juive* of 1905.

In the overheated atmosphere then prevailing of ultranationalism, inter-ethnic tension, and demagogic agitation, it was hardly surprising that during the 1890s alone no fewer than fourteen ritual-murder cases were recorded.⁷⁰ The twenty-five years leading up to the First World War saw not only many preliminary investigations in response to local pressures, but also a number of major trials – Tisza-Eszlar (1882–3); Xanten (in the Rhineland, 1891–2); Polna (in Bohemia, 1899); Konitz (in West Prussia, 1900);⁷¹ the Beilis case (in Kiev, 1913) – which all produced widespread international publicity, angry parliamentary debates in Berlin, Vienna, and St. Petersburg, and, of course, much disquiet among the Jewish population.⁷² (In this context, however, it should also be stressed that for all the intense agitation, France remained essentially free of such affairs, perhaps because the medieval expulsion of the Jews had acted to sever, or at least attenuate, the roots of a continuous popular tradition. Anti-Jewish rage found its outlet there in the modern form of a treason trial: the Dreyfus case.)

No discussion of the blood myth in this period can fail to mention the Russian empire, which (with Romania) was generally considered at the time to be the European state most hostile to the Jews. With regard to public opinion that view was probably misleading; apart from anything else, the strict censorship in force until 1855 had acted as a brake on incitement against national minorities. By the end of the century, the intelligentsia tended in large part to reject anti-Semitism, at least in its more crass forms,

⁷⁰ Liutostanskii, *Zhidy i ritualnye ubiistva*, p. 35.

⁷¹ On these trials and accompanying controversy, e.g.: *Gibt es einen jüdischen Ritualmord?*; *Die Gutachten der Sachverständigen über den Konitzer Mord*; Rychnovsky, "The Struggle," and see, too, n. 1 above (cf. Lichtblau, "Die Debatten").

⁷² There was a steady stream of Jewish rebuttals to the ritual-murder charge (1890–1914), e.g.: Frank, *Der Ritualmord*; Hellwig, *Ritualmord*; S. Reinach, *L'Accusation du Meurtre Rituel*; but particularly prominent in this countercampaign were two German Protestant scholars: Franz Delitzsch and Hermann Strack (see, e.g.: Delitzsch, *Schachmatt den Blutlügen*; Strack, *Der Blutaberglaube* and *The Jew and Human Sacrifice*).

if only because of its overt exploitation by the regime. Open discussion of the ritual-murder accusation did not gain momentum until late in the reign of Alexander II⁷³ (the period that also produced the sensational Kutaisi case).⁷⁴ It was then that two full-scale books on the issue attracted public attention: *On the Use of Christian Blood for Religious Purposes by the Jews (Talmudic Sects)* written by Ippolit Liutostanskii in favor of the accusation (it first appeared in 1876); and *On Certain Medieval Accusations against the Jews* reissued in 1880 (following a first edition of 1861) by D. A. Khvolson, a professor of Oriental studies at Moscow University and a Christian convert from Judaism. Both volumes devoted much space to the Damascus case,⁷⁵ Liutostanskii predictably relying on Achille Laurent, and Khvolson on Löwenstein and Jost.

All in all, though, as public discussion of the issue became more intense over the following decades, especially at the time of the Beilis case, attention came to focus primarily on two key domestic affairs that in their time had dragged on at inordinate length and had left suspicion hanging over the Jews: Velizh (1824–35) and Saratov (1853–60). In the three-volume stenographic report of the Beilis trial there was very little mention of the Damascus affair (even though, as already noted, a translation of Achille Laurent was especially prepared for the occasion). With its focus on Russian Orthodoxy and on Russia as essentially opposed to the West and to Europe, the extreme Right doubtless preferred to rely on national rather than foreign and Catholic history. Besides, as the defense stressed during the trial of 1913, the government of Nicholas I had publicly taken the side of the Jews in 1840.⁷⁶

While the Damascus case was being integrated as a cause célèbre into the ever more virulent ritual-murder agitation, the Jewish treatment of the sub-

⁷³ It can be argued – and it is an issue that deserves full-scale analysis – that in historical terms, the Orthodox Church had largely escaped that nexus of high scholarship and folk-belief that in the West produced the hunting down of heretics, witches, and Jewish ritual murderers. In the Russian case, the virtual exclusion of Jews from the country until the partitions of Poland would have likewise worked against the development of deep-rooted popular belief in Jewish ritual murder. The Velizh, Beilis, and most other modern cases erupted in the Pale of Settlement and not in the Great Russian heartlands. Saratov was a striking exception (as, of course, was the Kutaisi case in Georgia). (For a survey of the geographical distribution of the witch-hunts from the mid-fifteenth to mid-eighteenth centuries: Leavack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* pp. 170–211; on the relatively rare witch trials in Russia: Zguta, “Witchcraft Trials”; for a most thoughtful analysis of continuities and change in folk beliefs regarding witches: Ginzburg [introduction] *Ecstasies*, pp. 1–32.)

⁷⁴ E.g.: *Mishpat Kutaisi*.

⁷⁵ Liutostanskii, *Ob upotreblenii evreiami*, vol. 1, pp. 72–95; Khvolson, *O nekotorykh sred-novekovykh obvineniakh*, pp. 348–56. On Liutostanskii, Khvolson, and the ritual-murder charge in Russia, see the excellent analysis in Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, pp. 418–36.

⁷⁶ Gruzenberg in response to Paranaitis: *Delo Beilisa*, vol. 2, p. 341.

ject was developing on a totally different plane. In 1870 Heinrich Graetz published the eleventh volume of his *History of the Jews*, in which he devoted forty-five pages to the crisis of thirty years before. For Graetz, the affair was of enormous symbolic, even theological, significance. In fact, it is probable that his own worldview was partially shaped by the impression made on him at the time, then a young man of twenty-three. In March 1841 he had noted in his diary that in the wake of recent events a new "national feeling . . . a self-confidence and pride" were to be discerned among the German Jews and that, over all, "the finger of God"⁷⁷ (this phrase written in Hebrew) had directed the outcome. And the argument in his famous essay of 1846, "The Structure of Jewish History," that the political, social, and communal imperatives of Judaism were as crucial as its purely spiritual dimension might well have originated in the same formative experience.⁷⁸

His chapter on 1840 was strongly infused by both the didactic and the teleological. As there set down, the events of that year proclaimed a double message. First, it had been demonstrated in the boldest way that for all the talk of disintegration, the Jewish people across the world had been able to unite in a bold campaign of self-defense. Theologians such as Abraham Geiger, who regarded such political action as bereft of profound religious significance, simply did not grasp the real meaning of Judaism as developed over three thousand years of history. Second, the triumph of Montefiore and Crémieux had not been achieved in a vacuum, but could only be understood in the context of advancing civilization. Under the influence of the Idealist school of German philosophy, Graetz never doubted that waiting to be discovered in the vast complexity of mere empirical fact was a higher purpose and that the Jewish people had a crucial role to play in the upward march of mankind. History was directed ultimately by a providential force.

Given this optimistic reading of the Damascus affair, it was hardly surprising that, in his short bibliographical note, Graetz chose to criticize Löwenstein's *Damascia* ("unfortunately very unchronological and broken up by declamations")⁷⁹ and to omit all mention of the judicial protocols, whether in Achille Laurent's or any other edition. He argued explicitly that the crisis, like the story of Esther, should have been recorded in a megillah scroll to be recited annually in the synagogue on a selected day of thanksgiving.

His own description, although incomparably more sophisticated, was reminiscent of Mordecai Aaron Gintsburg's *Hamat Damesek* in its structured form and dramatic impact. He, too, explained the origins of the affair in

⁷⁷ Graetz, *Tagebuch und Briefe* p. 106. (For the term "the finger of God": Exodus 8:19).

⁷⁸ Graetz, "Die Konstruktion der jüdischen Geschichte," *Zeitschrift für die religiösen Interessen des Judentums* 3 (1846), pp. 81-97, 121-32. (English: idem, *The Structure*, pp. 63-124.)

⁷⁹ Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 11, p. 511.

terms of personalities, pinning the blame almost entirely on the French consul and a few associates. (Beaudin was hardly mentioned.) True, there was some suggestion that a hidden hand, situated high in the Catholic Church, had produced the upsurge of ritual-murder cases in 1840, but this conspiracy theory was not developed.

No attempt was made to conceal the severity of the crisis caused the Jews in Europe by the resurgent blood accusation, "which could have dragged them down into the grave."⁸⁰ The spotlight, though, was on the other, positive, face of the West; on the support given the Jews by the Austrian, Russian, and American governments – and, of course, by both politicians and public opinion in England. At times, indeed, Graetz allowed this theme to carry him beyond, or even against, the evidence as, for example, in his description of the parliamentary debate in Paris on 2 June: "Even though the Chamber . . . did not introduce a vote of censure against the minister [Thiers], who had so grossly deviated from the honorable character of the French nation, he was still condemned by the looks of the deputies."⁸¹

The mission to the East and the liberation of the prisoners formed the natural climax of the account. ("The joy of the Jews in all parts of the world caused by the news that their just cause had triumphed can easily be imagined. Here was a national rejoicing.")⁸² A providential force, suggested Graetz, had not only raised the lowly, but also cast down the mighty: Thiers losing his premiership; Muhammed Ali, his territorial gains; Francesco Salina and Sherif Pasha, their lives – the one lynched by a Damascus mob, the other executed for high treason. (In actual fact, the former had escaped the mob and the latter had soon been restored to favor by Muhammed Ali.)⁸³ Following Jost, Graetz, too, saw Crémieux's schools in Egypt as of enormous significance, a first step to draw the Eastern Jews into the orbit of modern civilization – "they were amazed to see how much their European brethren could accomplish through education, influence and courage, and how they were treated with respect by princes and leaders, while they themselves had to bow their backs helplessly beneath every blow."⁸⁴

Determined to develop a tightly knit narrative, he omitted many of the themes included by Jost: the mobilization of the American Jews in the cause; the new ritual-murder affairs later in the 1840s; the restorationist plans of the Christian millennialists; the protonationalism of the *Orient*. For Graetz, then, the affair signified the renewal – religious, intellectual, and political – of the Jewish people, reinvigorated by contact with the open

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 521. ⁸¹ Ibid., p. 527.

⁸² Ibid., p. 542. ⁸³ Löwenstein, "Zur zweiten Auflage," *Damaskia* (2nd. ed.), p. v.

⁸⁴ Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 11, p. 544.

society and high culture of Central and, above all, Western Europe (Great Britain, of course, very much included).

No other historian of the Jews would ever again assign so central a place to the events of 1840. When Simon Dubnow, for example, published his ten-volume work in the 1920s, he set aside no more than a few pages for the subject.⁸⁵ In part, no doubt, it was felt that Graetz's account was definitive, but there was also a more fundamental process at work. Historians of the post-1881 period loyal to emergent Jewish nationalism (whether Hibat Zion, Zionism, Territorialism, or Autonomism) centered attention primarily on areas of direct appeal to them: Eastern rather than Western Europe; mass movements rather than plutocratic elites; communal self-government rather than integration; messianism and quasi-messianic ideologies rather than the Enlightenment associated with Moses Mendelssohn; the resurgence of Hebrew and Yiddish rather than the adoption of the major European languages. There was only limited room here for Crémieux and even for Montefiore. And, as against that, the historians involved in the various locally based Jewish historical societies set up in the late nineteenth century concentrated primarily on their own country (France, Germany, England, or the United States)⁸⁶ – a fact that precluded a comprehensive study of so international a subject as the Damascus affair.

In consequence, Jewish historiography has tended over the past hundred years to focus not on the crisis in its entirety, but rather on particular aspects neglected for one reason or another by Graetz. So, for instance, it fell to Zionist historians to piece together, over many decades, a comprehensive picture of the Jewish protonationalism and messianism, as well as of the Christian restorationism, which surfaced so conspicuously in 1840. During and after the First World War, in the years that witnessed the Balfour Declaration and the establishment of the British Mandate in Palestine, a flurry of publications served to disinter the many plans so much touted during the Damascus affair for Jewish settlement in the Holy Land. Nahum Sokolow, the prominent Zionist leader, in his two-volume *History of Zionism* published in London in 1919, and the historians Albert M. Hyamson and N. M. Gelber, all now dealt at length with the restorationist sentiment displayed, inter alia, by Ashley, Palmerston, the *Globe*, and the *Orient*.⁸⁷

In all of these historical studies, though, a deliberate effort was made to downplay the fact that most Christian proto-Zionism at that time had its

⁸⁵ Dubnow, *Weltgeschichte*, vol. 9, pp. 308–16.

⁸⁶ On the Jewish historical societies of England and America, e.g.: Lieberles, "Postemancipation Historiography."

⁸⁷ E.g.: Sokolow, *History of Zionism*, vol. 1, pp. 121–32; Hyamson, "British Projects"; idem, *The British Consulate in Jerusalem*, vol. 1, pp. 33–46, vol. 2, pp. lxvii–lxxiv; Gelber, *Vorgeschichte des Zionismus*, pp. 125–175.

roots in a deeply committed conversionist faith. It was only much later (lent new confidence, perhaps, by the establishment of Israel in 1948) that first Franz Kobler and then Mayir Vereté frankly analyzed the motives inspiring the premillennialist focus on the Jewish people. (Or, as Kobler put it, his goal was to describe Christian restorationism as "a parallel, not an annex of the histories of Jewish messianism and Zionism.")⁸⁸

With their heightened awareness of the British proposals regarding Palestine in 1840, a few historians actually began to argue that there had then existed a real opportunity to lay the foundations of a Jewish state. At no other time until late in the century, wrote Gelber anachronistically, was there such a determination to find "a solution to the Jewish question"⁸⁹ and in Palestine, at that. Dinur (as already noted) even attributed the entire Damascus affair to the determination of hostile forces to sabotage the proto-Zionist projects then, supposedly, already set in motion. This line of thought was carried to its greatest extreme by the well-known bibliographer and historian, Getzel Kressel, who in a centenary article of 1940, in the midst of war, launched a bitter attack on Montefiore, Crémieux, and Munk for having busied themselves with such matters as the schooling of the Eastern Jews, thus "seeking futile solutions rather than accelerating the attainment of a refuge."⁹⁰

It was not until the apocalyptic period of the Second World War and the Holocaust, followed almost immediately by the establishment of Israel, that attention turned to yet another aspect of the subject: 1840, or 1839–40 (TaR), as the year when many Jews had expected the messiah finally to arrive. Contributing to this new trend was not only the cataclysmic character of the times, but also the growing interest in messianism inspired by Gershom Scholem's influential research on Jewish mysticism. Typically enough, Kressel, seeking a positive foil to set against his negative depiction of the Western Jewish leaders, selected Yehuda Alkalai and his booklet of 1843. And in 1944 an annotated two-volume edition of Alkalai's works was published in Jerusalem under the auspices of the Mosad Harav Kook.⁹¹ In the immediate postwar period, major scholarly articles on 1840 as a messianic year and on the development of Alkalai's thought were brought out by Abraham Ducker and Jacob Katz, with the latter now advancing the argument that Alkalai, subsequently much involved in proposals for Jewish settlement in the Holy Land, had to be considered a key proto-Zionist.⁹²

⁸⁸ Kobler, *The Vision was There*, p. 9. ⁸⁹ Gelber, *Vorgeschichte des Zionismus*, p. 125.

⁹⁰ Kressel, "Mi'olalot 'alilat Damasek." ⁹¹ [Alkalai], *Kitvei harav Yehuda Alkalai*.

⁹² Ducker, "The Tarniks"; Katz, "Leverur hamusag 'mevasrei haziyonut" and "Meshihut ulumiut."

The attribution of major significance to religious messianism in the pre-history of Zionism has become a source of prolonged controversy, culminating in the recent dispute between Arye Morgenstern and Israel Bartal as to whether the expectations leading up to 1839–40 exerted an actual impact on social or political realities. Be that as it may, nobody (as already noted) has found evidence to suggest that the special nature of the year in any way acted as a cause of the Damascus case.

Shifting political or intellectual concerns were not the only factors to inspire the excavation of strata long hidden from view. The simple fact that following the First World War a host of state archives were opened up encouraged historians to cast light on otherwise unknown, or little known, features of the crisis in 1840. Almost all our knowledge of the Vienna student group, which counted Benisch, Löwy, and Steinschneider among its members, is derived from the archival research of Gelber and Salo W. Baron.⁹³ Just how significant a role had been played in the affair by Werry in Damascus, Laurin in Alexandria, and the Rothschilds in Europe only became apparent when the relevant state papers were examined by Hyamson, Brawer, and the (indefatigable) Gelber.⁹⁴ And even then, erroneous but long-entrenched notions have proved to be remarkably tenacious. In 1937, for example, it was finally demonstrated by Brawer that Laurin had been far more consistent than Merlato in defense of the Jewish victims; and yet today, there are still historians who repeat the traditional view.⁹⁵

Unquestionably the most sensational find of this type was that made not long ago by Tudor Parfitt in the French foreign office – the large dossiers on the Damascus case that had been kept out of the public domain for some 140 years.⁹⁶ In his book of 1889 on ritual murder, Henri Desportes insisted that these documents had been removed by Crémieux, as minister of justice in 1870, in order to suppress the truth so damning to the Jews.⁹⁷ Repeated

⁹³ Gelber, *Vorgeschichte des Zionismus*, pp. 202–12; idem, “Agudat studentim”; Baron, “Abraham Benisch’s Project.”

⁹⁴ Hyamson, “The Damascus Affair”; Brawer, “Homer hadash”; Gelber, *Österreich und die Damaskusaffaire*.

⁹⁵ See chap. 5, n. 35.

⁹⁶ Parfitt, “The Year of the Pride of Israel.” Strictly speaking, other outsiders had earlier gained access to the Damascus materials in the French foreign office: first, members of the German occupation regime, seeking proof of Jewish guilt, and then after the war the Jewish historian, Zosa Szajkowski, who examined the German photocopies. Szajkowski, though, decided to wait for access to the French archives before bringing out a full-scale study of the materials – which he never did. Judging by the short inventory of documents that he published, it is very probable that the Germans in fact photocopied the entire file. (See Szajkowski, “Goral hatikim,” pp. 168–9.) (According to Mustafa al-Zarqa, Hitler personally endorsed plans to use the materials obtained in Paris for the production of a film about the Damascus affair: see his introduction to Nasr Allah, *al-Kanz al-Marṣūd*, pp. 12–13.)

⁹⁷ Desportes, *Le Mystère du Sang*, p. 188 n.

attempts over the following decades made by Jewish individuals and organizations to gain access to the material were refused, although it was disclosed that in reality nothing had been taken away. A letter of 1892 from an archivist of the French foreign office stated that it would be of great damage to Jewish interests to throw open the dossiers because they proved beyond any doubt that "Father Thomas, as well as his servant, really was murdered by the Jews."⁹⁸ In the 1930s, fear of provoking Arab unrest in the Middle East had become another argument to justify the policy of secrecy⁹⁹ – and even after the Second World War, the historian Zosa Szajkowski was still unable to break through the barrier.¹⁰⁰

With the Damascus dossiers finally available, it is now possible to follow the conduct of Ratti-Menton and des Meloizes in 1840, at times on a daily basis. It is doubtful that today any such important archival discovery related to 1840 and the Jews remains to be made.

The one major aspect of the subject that historians of the Jewish people have almost totally ignored is the development of the Damascus affair into a countermyth used with monotonous but nonetheless dangerous effect in popular agitation against the Jews. It is true that since the Second World war, the blood accusation appears to have lost most of its potency; and it was specifically repudiated by the pope in 1965 following the Second Vatican Council.

But up until 1945 it retained a central place in anti-Semitic propaganda. In a special number of the Nazi journal, the *Stürmer*, issued in May 1934 and devoted exclusively to Jewish ritual murders, much space was set aside for the assassination of Father Thomas. That murder, it stated, constituted a prime example of the way in which Jews kill their enemies – adults, not children – as part of their Purim festivals:

Through this case, it became known that Jewry in its entirety knows about, and tolerates, ritual murder; that it protects the murderers when they are arrested; and that it spares no means or methods to free those

⁹⁸ Letter from the archivist to the office of the minister, French ministry of foreign affairs (7 May 1892) in Damascus file, CAHJP. (A later attempt by Solomon Reinach to examine materials on the Damascus affair held by the British foreign office was refused as against standing rules, but the foreign secretary noted that as the case had involved torture, "grave suspicion attaches to the entire narrative" [Lord Curzon to Reinach, 24 May 1897, *ibid.*]). Cf. Szajkowski, "Goral hatikim," p. 167, nn. 4 and 5. All three Reinach brothers were outspoken Dreyfusards, while one of them, Joseph, wrote a history of the ritual-murder case of 1670 in Metz and another, Solomon, published a French edition of H. C. Lea's *History of the Inquisition*.

⁹⁹ Parfitt, "The Year of the Pride of Israel," p. 133. (Vain attempts had also been made by the Alliance Israélite Universelle to obtain access to the material in 1909 and 1913, *ibid.*)

¹⁰⁰ Szajkowski, "Goral hatikim."

awaiting punishment. Jewry demonstrated in the case of Father Thomas that it is nothing else but a well-organized gang of murderers and criminals.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ "Purimorde: die Schätzung des Pater Thomas," *Der Stürmer: Ritualmord Nummer (Sonder-Nummer 1)* (May 1934), p. 5. (A centrally placed motto in this issue was Luther's statement: "Their father is not God but the Devil," p. 2.) The *Stürmer* continued to devote space to the Damascus affair in later years: see, e.g., the *Ritualmord-Nummer* (May 1939).

Conclusion

As summed up, then, by Heinrich Graetz, the greatest of the nineteenth-century Jewish historians, the crisis of 1840 was a double triumph. First, Jews across the globe had demonstrated an astonishing degree of solidarity in their response to the ritual-murder affairs in Damascus and Rhodes. "Here was an event . . .," he wrote, "which gave the lie to the false prophets, demonstrating . . . how marvelous, how unbreakable, is the bond which unites the Jews [*Judenheit*] even if they themselves are unaware of the fact."¹ Second, the forces pitted against the Jewish people in Central and Western Europe – the French prime minister, "Catholic agitators," corrupt journalists – had been overwhelmed by the strength of enlightened (non-Jewish) public opinion. Indeed, the support so generously manifested in England had been "enough to make the Jews forget all the sufferings endured over the fifteen hundred years of Christian dominion."² Ultimately, the crisis had ended in the victory of European civilization over that medieval barbarism that was in full retreat in the West but remained almost untouched in the East.

This view of 1840 expressed the liberal faith of the Jewish intelligentsia in the period of emancipation, and it was not systematically reexamined even with the emergence of Jewish nationalism after 1881. Rather (as noted in the previous chapter), the Damascus affair was simply marginalized by such nationalist historians as Dubnow or Dinur, who treated it as a relatively minor episode, an exception that proved the rule, an unusual example of unity and self-defense in an age of assimilation.

The findings as presented in this book both reinforce and undermine the classic, mid-nineteenth-century interpretation of the crisis. On the one hand, it is certainly impossible not to be impressed by the extraordinary efforts made by the Jewish people – or, more exactly, by Jews in those countries where open political organization was permitted – to mobilize themselves, their resources, and all possible allies in the face of the crisis.

True, as was only to be expected, the brunt of the burden was taken up by relatively few individuals. Adolphe Crémieux and Baron James de Roth-

¹ Graetz, *Geschichte*, vol. 11, p. 509. ² *Ibid.*, p. 534.

schild (urged on, it seems, by his wife Betty) acted almost alone in the early stages of the public campaign in Europe; and subsequent attempts to activate the provincial communities in France proved ineffective. In Germany, the Jewish weeklies (none more than three years old at the time) gave over much of their space to the crisis; and the scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* fought the battle to clear the Talmud of the ritual-murder charge, but otherwise (Hamburg apart) little enough was done. And, of course, the world's largest Jewish population, confined behind the walls of tsarist Russia under Nicholas I, could only passively watch events from afar.

As time went on, however, the representative organizations in France and Britain (the Central Consistory and the Board of Deputies) actively involved themselves in the affair. The Consistory knew that it would face the charge of disloyalty to France, but still, for all its hesitations and anxieties, chose to initiate the Jewish diplomatic delegation to the East, led by Crémieux and Montefiore. It was decided to send out official appeals requesting support, both moral and financial, for the delegation and they were taken up by communities far and wide – most demonstrably, in the West Indies and the United States. Thus, when negotiating with the viceroy of Egypt, Muhammed Ali, Crémieux and Montefiore could, with at least some degree of legitimacy, claim to be speaking for “the Israelites of the whole world.”³

The Jewish representatives did not achieve what they had set out to do: to have the verdicts of ritual murder in Damascus formally and conclusively disproved. Judged by their original aims, the mission was a failure; but by the deft use of despatches released to the press in England and France, they succeeded in presenting the modest results as a major triumph. This positive effect was further reinforced by Montefiore's genuine coup in subsequently winning a solemn declaration from the Ottoman Sultan in favor of the Jews and against the ritual-murder charge.

There was no precedent in modern Jewish history for an open political campaign of these dimensions. Since the French revolution of 1789, there had been various attempts to bring organized influence to bear in the cause of equal rights, but the concerted and prolonged battle to win over public opinion in 1840 was new. Of course, the battle did not involve any ideological reevaluations, for it simply gave expression to the liberal and emancipationist commitments of the Jewish leadership in the West. It is, therefore, best described as a major milestone rather than a cross-roads or turning point in the development of Jewish politics during the nineteenth century. But in this instance the quantitative changes were on great enough a scale to take on qualitative significance.

Both Montefiore and Crémieux hoped that the final outcome of the crisis

³ [Montefiore], *Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 226.

would be accepted as such a resounding victory for civilization that there would be no need for a repetition of similar campaigns. In actual fact, just the opposite proved to be the case. Beyond the limits of the Western world (France, Holland, the English-speaking countries) the names of Montefiore and Crémieux – linked to the Board of Deputies and the Central Consistory – rapidly became the stuff of legend and the Damascus affair a latter-day version of the biblical story of Esther. Henceforward, Jewish communities across the globe that felt under threat of hostile legislation from above or of popular violence from below – and, likewise, local leaders eager to develop a modern educational system – believed that they had powerful allies far away in Paris and London to whom they could appeal for effective help. Crémieux and Montefiore did not go to Russia in 1842 when invited, as heroes of the Damascus affair, to advise the tsarist government on the planned network of new Jewish schools, but four years later the latter was in Russia in an effort to ward off mass expulsions from the western frontier regions and was received personally by Nicholas I.⁴ Over the following decades further appeals for outside support took him to Rome, Morocco, and Romania, as well as – finally – to Damascus.⁵

Neither the Board of Deputies nor the Central Consistory saw themselves as constituted to deal on a systematic or regular basis with foreign affairs; and the eventual result of the constant pressure from so many different crisis points was the establishment in 1860 of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. This new organization, in which Adolphe Crémieux played a key role for many years, was specifically established with the aim of channeling support, both diplomatic and educational, from the Jews in the West to those in the

⁴ On the invitation, and Montefiore's eventual journey to Russia, e.g.: Abramsky, "The Visits"; Frankel, "Demanding Leadership."

⁵ Among Montefiore's political missions: (1) Rome: 1859 (the Mortara case); (2) Morocco: 1863; (3) Romania: 1867. The purpose of his journey to Damascus, where he stayed 3–7 July 1848, was to press for the removal of the inscription from the (alleged) tomb of Father Thomas. Nothing was thereby achieved and Montefiore later appealed to Palmerston, once again foreign secretary, to try "to convince the French government of the injustice of eternizing [this] falsehood" (Montefiore to Palmerston, 27 February 1850 [Gaster Papers, Mocatta Library: M.M. 34]). The French consul in Damascus (then being visited by Gustave de Rothschild) advised very strongly against any such concession to the Jews (Dupeyron to Paris [12 December 1850] in Talas, *Faṭir Siḥyawn*, pp. 227, 229). According to some accounts, the Capuchin friars removed the "precious remains" of Father Thomas to Beirut during the massacres of 1860 (e.g., *Aceldama*, p. 17); but writing to me, Father Isidor Agudo of the Capuchin archives in Rome argues that such reports were probably unfounded. He bases this on the fact that the tomb, together with the inscription (and presumably the remains) are still in Damascus, but since 1866 in the Franciscan church of Terra Sancta (see fig. 21) – and not, as originally, in the Capuchin monastery (which had been destroyed in 1860). If the Capuchins, who were no longer represented in Damascus by the 1860s, had in fact brought the remains to Beirut they would have preferred to keep them there in their own church rather than transfer them to the care of the Franciscans. (Letter from the Archivio Generale dei Frate Minori Cappuccini, 24 November 1995.)

more dangerous or less developed regions of the world, particularly in Eastern Europe and the Ottoman empire.⁶

The Alliance proved to be a cautious and pragmatic organization, able to contribute its share to certain modest diplomatic achievements (most notably at the Congress of Berlin in 1878) and to establish an impressive network of schools in Galicia, Romania, Bulgaria, North Africa, and the Middle East, including Palestine.⁷ At the same time, though, it rapidly became the subject of myth, as both Jews in many non-Western parts of the world and non-Jews throughout Europe developed fantasies about its enormous strength and political ambitions. Without this profound belief in the power of the Alliance, of the Rothschild family (of which Montefiore was a member), and of the Jewish leadership in the West generally, the new Jewish nationalist movements would not have been able to emerge into the light of day as they did after 1881. That Western Jews could be counted upon to provide massive aid for the efforts of East European Jews (proto-Zionists, Zionists, Territorialists) to create a homeland of their own in Palestine or elsewhere was the premise, the *sine qua non*, which then provided the numerous – and on the face of it, fantastic – plans and projects with some minimal semblance of realism.

This fundamental assumption was, of course, based on an extraordinary misreading of the actual situation. The Alliance and other similar organizations in the West were pledged to an emancipationist and integrationist ideology radically opposed to modern Jewish nationalism. Nonetheless, as is so often the case, here, too, a myth without real foundation ultimately proved to have a life of its own. It was, after all, a Rothschild who decided to underwrite the new settlements established by the immigrants from Russia and Romania arriving in Palestine during the 1881–1904 period. Without this aid, few of the new farming villages there would have survived; and without them, it is improbable that the Zionist movement could have eventually established the Jewish state in 1948.

There is, therefore, much of the paradoxical in the historiography of the Damascus affair. For Graetz, 1840 was of crucial importance because, in courageously fighting their own battle, the Jews had also fought the battle of mankind, winning all men of good will to their side. Here was encapsulated his vision of the future. The Jews would integrate fully into the majority nations, linguistically, culturally, politically, but would survive as a religious people, making its own particular and active contribution to universal progress. All this smacked too much of “assimilationism” or philanthropy or

⁶ On the factors leading to the foundation of the Alliance Israélite Universelle: Graetz, *Haperi-feriyah hayetah lemerkaz*, pp. 281–322.

⁷ On the Alliance's school system in the Ottoman empire: Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, pp. 47–120.

shtadlanut for the nationalist historians, who saw the Jews as a nationality with a separate linguistic identity and with goals to be defined in political rather than religious terms. In downplaying 1840, though, they overlooked the fact that the nationalist movements had drawn so freely and with such success on the myth of Jewish power in the West.

Thus, in the last resort, whether seen from his own or from the nationalist point of view, the passage of time has surely justified the extraordinary importance that Graetz attached to Jewish solidarity in 1840. The same cannot be said of the second of his two major themes. The evidence summarized in this book clearly suggests the need for significant modifications in the picture that he painted of massive support for the Jewish cause in the constitutional states in Europe: of a progressive West pitted against the barbaric medievalism still regnant in the East and in Catholic Rome. Graetz was a romantic, but also an extreme rationalist unwilling to credit the forces of mysticism, reaction, and sheer irrationality with their due weight in the modern age – an era when, to paraphrase Hegel, the real should have been becoming rational, and the rational real. Like Jost before him, Graetz was therefore sharply critical of Lipmann Hirsch Löwenstein, whose book on the Damascus affair rushed out in 1840 had given such anguished and angry expression to the bewildered shock prevalent in the Jewish world at the time.

There is no denying, of course, that a most impressive array of facts can be marshalled to justify an optimistic reading of 1840. The modern observer, coming from a world-weary and much less self-confident age, cannot but be startled by the almost universal homage then paid to the idea of the nineteenth century as a towering summit finally scaled in man's long climb toward moral redemption. Appeals to such concepts as "civilization," "humanity," "progress," "toleration," and against "fanaticism" and "barbarism" were the stock-in-trade not only of the constitutional but also of the absolutist states in Europe.

It was against this background that Crémieux felt able to defy his own government so fearlessly and that the Jewish leadership in London could rely so confidently on the House of Commons and the City to provide an outpouring of support. Similarly, the fact that the most brutal forms of torture had been employed in Damascus proved to be a permanent handicap in attempts to win public sympathy for the case against the Jews; and when the use of torture could no longer be denied, the attempt was made to blame it entirely on the benighted ways of the Muslim East.

Seen in this context, it was logical that Graetz chose to put so much emphasis on England (thus following Jost who, for his part, had also given over much space to America). In the English-speaking world, the ritual murder accusation did face a high wall of disbelief and skepticism. The deeply rooted traditions of religious pluralism, on the one hand, and of

judicial empiricism, on the other, all combined to insure the Jews a favorable hearing. Moreover, reception of the ritual murder story was rendered particularly difficult by the fact that belief in witchcraft and satanic rites had been largely discredited since the eighteenth century in both England and the United States. (Indeed, as Alan Macfarlane and Keith Thomas have demonstrated, even at their height the witch-hunts in England had hardly ever reached the pitch of frenzy common in Central Europe.)⁸

In general, a close study of 1840 leads to the conclusion that although the term, the "Jewish Question," was by then already in use,⁹ it had still not acquired the sinister import so familiar by the final two decades of the century. Most significant, perhaps, there were, as yet, few signs of that fantasy which would later ascribe omnipotence to the Jews and seek out the Jewish conspiracy in every major event. The extraordinary interest centered on the Jewish people during the Damascus affair went into sharp decline as the Middle East war took over the headlines. Nobody suggested that the Jews were responsible for the war or its results (and even the accusation that they had prevented French intervention did not take hold at the time). All this was in marked contrast to what would occur during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-8, the Boer War, and the First World War, when vast and usually malevolent importance was ascribed to Jewish influence. In 1840 sensationalism rather than obsessive paranoia caused much of the uproar that initially burst in upon the Jews and Judaism.

When all this has been said, however, the fact remains that Graetz's highly focused depiction of the Damascus affair as a triumph of Western civilization was one-sided. It severely downplayed or even ignored much that horrified the Jews then and that, by its sheer unfamiliarity, surprises the modern observer now. From the classic historiography it can barely be learned just how threatening the crisis appeared and just how shocked, unsettled, and anguished the consequent reaction of the Jews in Europe actually was.

On close examination, it turns out that neither the Damascus nor the Rhodes affair can be understood as primarily the product of the backward and Muslim East. In both cases, on the contrary, it was the European consular corps that (at first unanimously) drove the prosecution relentlessly forward. The consuls did not doubt that, as the local Christian communities firmly held, human sacrifice constituted an integral part of Jewish ritual in the region, if not necessarily worldwide. Only when it came to the threat of

⁸ Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, pp. 23-65; Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 435-68, 502-34. Conversely, historians have seen the German-speaking lands of Central Europe as exceptional in the intensity of the witch-hunts and in the persistence of witch beliefs. (E.g.: "probably more witches were killed within the confines of present-day Germany than in the rest of Europe put together" [Monter, *Witchcraft*, p. 191].)

⁹ See, e.g.: Toury, "The Jewish Question." (Cf. Rürup, "Jewish Emancipation".)

wholesale massacre did the consuls draw the line, advising that the Jewish communities receive military protection. (Just how real that danger was would become apparent twenty years later, when the Christian population of Damascus was decimated in a Muslim, primarily Druse, slaughter.)

As for the issue of Jewish self-defense, there, too, the picture of the advanced West intervening to rectify the ways of the primitive East proves to be overdrawn. In the Rhodes affair, the persecutions were brought to a halt by the Ottoman authorities in the teeth of consular opposition on the island and largely at the urging of the Jewish leadership in Constantinople. Even though Jewish influence in the Ottoman capital had long been in decline, it still carried weight and could rely on the some three hundred years of relatively privileged status enjoyed by the community.

The situation of the Jews in Syria was much more vulnerable because Muhammed Ali, with his ostentatiously pro-Western orientation, tended to favor the indigenous Christian population at their expense. But in that case, too, the Jews on the spot (the Picciottos in Damascus and Aleppo, the Murpargos, Valensinos, and Lorias in Alexandria) played a key role in the first six months of the affair, as did Anton Laurin, the Austrian consul-general and a Catholic who, a marked exception within the consular corps, tenaciously and from the start fought the ritual-murder charge as vicious nonsense.

Ultimately, though, the epicenter of the ritual-murder affair proved to be not in the East but in the heart of Europe, and there the Jewish people found themselves subjected to a series of major blows. First, there was the press reaction, the fact that the initial reports from Damascus on the macabre murders were uncritically reproduced as authentic by the most respected newspapers of continental Europe (albeit not, for example, in Holland, Sweden, England, or the United States); that, when challenged, those papers tended to lapse into an ominous silence rather than publish well-argued refutations; and that even the journals favorable to the Jewish cause usually shied away from serious treatment of the issue, as though skirting a land mine. All this, taken together, clearly suggested that what the Jews saw as a given – the patent absurdity of the charges – was widely regarded in the upper echelons of society on the European Continent as an open question.

Second, the Jews were astonished to find themselves under attack from within the world of theological scholarship and face to face with learned arguments seeking to track down the source of the murder cult to the Talmud. What had begun with a number of arrests in Damascus was thus transformed into a charge against the very cornerstone of Jewish faith. Accusations assiduously honed by Church scholars since the thirteenth century and regarded by Jews as totally antiquated were now remmarshalled for effective presentation to a mass newspaper readership. If it was the ultra-Catholic

(or "Ultramontane") press that insisted in the most lurid terms that the Jews had murdered Father Thomas for ritual purposes, it was German Protestant scholarship which proved to be the primary source of these anti-Talmudic polemics. And the fact that hardly any prominent theologian in Germany chose to speak out against the charges was the cause of bitter disappointment to Jewish circles.

To compound all this was the sudden outcrop of new would-be ritual-murder cases in Europe, providing evidence of how tenaciously the popular imagination was held in the grip of this collective chimera. Löwenstein, with his penchant for bitter irony, suggested that the Damascus affair had either "suddenly awakened an irresistible lust for Christian blood among the European Jews," or else had "heightened to an extraordinary degree the power of observation"¹⁰ in the population at large, making it possible to detect far more Jewish murderers than hitherto. He referred to specific cases in the Rhineland, Baden, East Prussia, Galicia, Hungary, and Moldavia. None of these investigations ended in a formal trial, but some did produce outbursts of popular violence.

It did not take long for Jews throughout Europe to conclude that the ritual-murder issue, which should have disappeared into the medieval past, had come back to haunt them, constituting a tangible danger to their public standing, their civil rights (existing or prospective), and even their physical safety. The famous mission to the East was, in reality, inspired not so much by concern for the prisoners in Damascus (only ten were still incarcerated) as by a somewhat desperate determination to bring the real murderers to open trial and thus clear the name of the Jewish people before more damage was done.

Severely aggravating the nightmare for the Jews in Europe was the fact that the ritual-murder theory received crucial support (whether explicit or implicit) from the least expected quarters. That the ultra-Catholics, bitterly opposed to Jewish emancipation, were in the van of the hostile forces, was no surprise. But it was highly disturbing to find the most famous constitutionalist papers in Germany (the *Allgemeine Zeitung* of both Leipzig and Augsburg); the most influential paper in Britain and, indeed, in the world (the *Times*); and the most liberal (Center-Left) government installed in France since the revolution of July 1830, all treating the ritual-murder charges as, at the very least, eminently plausible. This feature of the affair (like the conduct of the English consuls in Damascus and Rhodes) was so bewildering that few attempts were made in the Jewish world to discuss its meaning. Löwenstein, it is true, did unleash a torrent of anger against Thiers, but he was reprimanded by Jost for making a mountain out of a molehill; and Graetz thirty

¹⁰ Löwenstein, *Stimmen berühmter Christen*, p. 1.

years later likewise chose to skirt what was, after all, a most disconcerting subject.

With the benefit of hindsight, it can be argued that here was possibly the most significant aspect of the entire crisis. The state that provided the Damascus Jews with their most consistent, and at times courageous, support was the Habsburg empire, the linch-pin of the absolutist political system predominant in Central and Eastern Europe. Conversely, the state that chose in effect, by various acts of commission and omission, to put the Jewish people and religion on trial was the France of Thiers – the statesman who was threatening to launch a revolutionary war against that same reactionary system.

Was there not encapsulated in this apparent paradox the fundamental dilemma facing the Jews of Europe in the modern era (or, more exactly, from the French revolution until the Second World War)? The reactionary empires and monarchies denied the Jews equal rights, banned them from key areas (including Vienna and St. Petersburg) and in the Russian case even employed brutally coercive measures to render them more “useful.” At the same time, though, in the strictly hierarchical and stratified societies there still jealously maintained, the Jews occupied their own niche and had their own legitimate functions. This was particularly true in Prussia and Austria, with their tradition of the “tolerated” and the “court” Jews. Metternich’s policy in 1840 was, in part, to be explained in precisely such terms, given the economic value assigned in state policy to the Rothschild and Picciotto connections. But even in the tsarist empire, the Jews could still count for their safety on the regime’s determination to maintain strict order; to use censorship against incitement to violence; and to leave the inherited order of things largely intact. Moreover, for all their fear of revolution and of liberal or nationalist subversion, men like Metternich and Nicholas I had not repudiated the eighteenth-century ideas of enlightened absolutism and rational government, and this fact also contributed its share to the stance adopted by the “Holy Alliance” toward the Damascus affair.

The opposite policy pursued by Thiers in the case can also best be understood, perhaps, as more than a merely individual or momentary aberration. A self-made man who had clawed his way to the top, the product of a society that had been in constant flux for fifty years, a self-proclaimed heir to the revolutionary and Napoleonic ethos, he would not allow an issue affecting a small minority of the population, a mere question of abstract justice, to detract from the chance for a spectacular foreign-policy victory. The Paris described so relentlessly by Balzac, with its worship of money, display, and fame, its romantic cult of genius, and its bottomless cynicism, formed the natural backdrop to Thiers’ bid to establish his impregnable command of the political stage. In order to defend his consul in Syria, he did not hesitate to

play the chauvinistic card, describing the attempts of the French Jews to refute the ritual-murder charge as nothing less than a link in an international campaign to sabotage vital national interests – a method of intimidation that he repeated in October against the Rothschilds, whose commitment to peace in Europe he considered excessive.

In many ways, the France of 1840 was the most politically modernized country in Europe and developments there would later reproduce themselves (in varying degrees) across the entire Continent. It offered the Jews full equality before the law and unprecedented opportunities to achieve success in almost any field. (Crémieux no less than Thiers had been produced by the Napoleonic policy of opening up careers to the most gifted.) It also enabled Jews to organize themselves effectively in defense of their own interests and, as proved by the Damascus affair, to put their case with passion and force to the public.

Yet, as the crisis of 1840 likewise demonstrated, this newly emerging world was potentially more dangerous for the Jews than the old. Stripped of the protection offered by state censorship, they could easily fall victim to a scandal-seeking press and to demagogic politicians outbidding each other for electoral advantage. During the Damascus affair, the Jews in France – and in the constitutional states of Germany – were deeply mortified to find themselves left almost alone to fight their own battles as best they could; on the other hand, their opponents often enough felt free to pour forth a veritable stream of invective and sheer hatred.

Every form of resentment against the established order – the ultra-Catholicism of the *Univers*, the frustrated German nationalism of the Leipzig and Augsburg papers, the radical atheism of Ghillany and Daumer – could now batten on the ritual-murder affair as an issue both real enough in itself, but also as a terrible warning against the unconditional grant of equality to the Jews. (Even the *Times*, the exception on the English scene, was then in angry opposition to the Whig government and to Palmerston's policies.) The very idea that the Jewish people was emerging from its pariah status was enough, it turned out, to open a Pandora's box of furious reactions. Many people, perhaps even a majority in large areas of continental Europe, had a profound emotional and psychological stake in the image of the Jew as the outsider, the "other," a mysterious, alien and potentially demonic figure to be kept on the margins of society at all costs.

This image was nourished by – and, in turn, reinforced – the ritual-murder myth. Clearly, nothing could do more to induce a sense of horror and abhorrence, than the belief then still widely and firmly held in Central and Eastern Europe that the Jewish religion prescribed not only the murder but also the preliminary torture of Christians, particularly young boys. The blood chimera, however, not only worked its way up from the lower depths of

society; it was also disseminated from above. In France, for example (as in England), the popular tradition identifying the Jew as a satanic murderer had apparently been much attenuated (Alsace, excepted) by the virtual absence of any Jewish population over a period of many centuries following the expulsions of the Middle Ages. But in that country powerful forces within the Catholic Church, inspired variously by the romantic cult of medievalism, the cultivation of mysticism, and the logic of the war against secular liberalism, did everything possible to breathe new life into the ancient superstitions.

As the nineteenth century wore on, it became evident that the ritual-murder issue, far from atrophying, on the contrary had assumed ever greater proportions. There is no definitive estimate of the cases that occurred in the modern period, although one scholarly listing provides the figure of fifty-nine serious instances in the 1800–1933 period.¹¹ Beyond dispute, however, is the fact that there were more cases in the 1840–80 period than earlier in the century and that after 1881 there was a sharp upswing in both the numbers and the public uproar involved. The Tisza-Eszlar, Xanten, Polna, Konitz, and Beilis affairs followed each other in quick succession as causes-célèbres; the volume of books, pamphlets, and articles, both pro and con, turned into nothing less than a flood. The phobias and hatreds, which had been kept in check by the absolutist system until it was undermined by the revolutions of 1848, had free rein in a period of emergent democratization and militant nationalism. Now, for example, it was considered an act of remarkable civil courage on the part of Thomas Masaryk to question the ritual nature of the murder at Polna.¹²

This development would appear to lend support to those historians (Gavin Langmuir¹³ most recently among them) who have argued that the depth of the discontinuity dividing traditional Judeophobia from modern anti-Semitism should not be exaggerated. The blood myth originated in thirteenth-century Europe and had an unbroken history thereafter, sustained by ecclesiastical

¹¹ A. Safanov, "Blood Accusation," *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (New York: 1940), pp. 409–10; cf. Barnai, who describes the ritual-murder charge as taking on "epidemic" proportions in the Ottoman empire by the latter half of the nineteenth century, when "hardly a year passed without a blood libel in one town or another" ("Hayehudim baimperiyah ha'otomanit," p. 234).

¹² See Rychnovsky, "The Struggle."

¹³ E.g.: "And because Christian belief and irrational fantasies about Jews permeated their culture, they [the Nazis] took them over and made the Jews the target of extreme illicit reification: they thought of Jews as 'viruses'" (Langmuir, *History, Religion and Antisemitism*, p. 368). The case for a high degree of continuity between traditional and Nazi anti-Semitism has likewise been made forcefully by Trachtenberg (*The Devil and the Jews*) and Cohn (*Europe's Inner Demons*). Cf. Volkov, "Reflections"; in a later study, Volkov argues that a profound break with the past was made by Nazi anti-Semitism (idem, "Kontinuität"). For a wide-ranging discussion of the recent historiography dealing with the continuity-discontinuity issue: Aschheim, "Nazism"; and idem, "Small Forays."

scholarship, an ever-lengthening list of (alleged) martyrs, and fear-ridden folk beliefs. Given the gradual adoption, over hundreds of years, of more or less objective judicial systems, it had become almost impossible by the nineteenth century to obtain convictions in Europe,¹⁴ but this fact was not sufficient to break the grip of the myth across broad swathes of the Continent. Every unexplained murder or disappearance served as the most concrete and devastating evidence in the eyes of those already convinced; and the failure to bring the guilty to justice was taken as proof that Jewish bribes had yet again subverted the system.

With the formal rise of the anti-Semitic movement in the years 1878–82, nothing was more natural than for it to adopt the ritual-murder charge that had served to demonize the Jew over a period of seven centuries. This is not to deny, of course, that race theory, by dismissing conversion to Christianity as an irrelevancy, brought with it a qualitative escalation in the drive to exclude Jews from society. Logically, church doctrine was incompatible with the extremes of racism but, in practice, this did not prevent the formation of a united front between Christian forces (combining traditionalism with radicalism) and biological determinists in a crescendo of support for the murder myth.

Classic Jewish historiography, then, has tended to underestimate the hostility to – and to exaggerate, at least relatively, the public backing for – the Jews during 1840 in Central and Western Europe. But the urge to keep the spotlight focused steadily on rationality and the rational did not stop there. What contemporaries could hardly avoid seeing, but has been partially obscured since, was the fact that in many cases not only the attack on, but also the defense of, the Jewish people was inspired by highly irrational mythologies. Thus, by far the most impressive fact finding report from Damascus and by far the most effective theological refutation of the blood accusation were written in 1840 by, respectively, George Wildon Pieritz and Alexander McCaul – both missionaries associated with the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews. And, in general, the London Society played a major role in rallying support for the Jewish cause during the crisis.

Motivating this response was an activist millennialism based on a highly structured set of eschatological predictions. In this scheme of things, the Jews had a crucial role to play in the Second Advent, restored as a nation to their ancient land in order there finally to recognize Jesus as King and

¹⁴ Exceptions were the Saratov and Polna affairs, where convictions were obtained against the Jewish defendants, albeit without explicit mention in the verdicts of the religious rituals allegedly involved. For the vociferous dispute (at the time of the Beilis case) over Saratov: Zamyslovskii, *Umuchennye ot zhidov*; and Lvovich, *Poslednaia pozitsiia*; on the Polna (or Hilsner) case, e.g.: Cervinka, "The Hilsner Affair"; Kieval, "Representation," pp. 59–72.

Messiah. For a McCaul or a Lord Ashley in London or a Bunsen in Berlin, the ideas of Jewish emancipation or religious reform were absolute anathema because it was the destiny of the Jews to remain a nation apart – a “peculiar people”¹⁵ – loyal to its messianic faith and acting in accord with biblical Prophecy. In a pre-Darwinian age, when powerful movements of religious revival were so prominent and when the belief in Providence and in progress constantly overlapped, the millennialists (above all in England, but also in Protestant Germany) were regarded less as marginal eccentrics than as part of the established order of things. The pressure that they brought to bear on Lord Palmerston was undoubtedly a factor in his decision, however tentative and temporary, to have the case for Jewish resettlement in the Holy Land put strongly to the Ottoman government – a decision of policy that he made sure to have widely publicized in the press.

Given the voices heard from so many sides, both friend and foe, declaring the Jews to be a nation set apart, it was hardly surprising that the same view should have won at least some adherents within the Jewish population itself. The embryonic nationalism and proto-Zionism that manifested themselves very vocally amid the Jewish student body in Central Europe was a natural enough reaction to the doubts now casting their shadow over the emancipationist process. And this response to the crisis prefigured, albeit in miniature, the epoch-making reevaluation of 1881–2. What was really surprising in all this, though, was the fact that the direct challenge to the integrationist assumptions of the time met with so little overt, unequivocal criticism from within the Jewish world – a further sign, presumably, of the profound shock induced by the Damascus affair. No less intriguing was the response of Montefiore, who proved willing to lend his name to a restorationist project sponsored by protonationalist students (in the person of Abraham Benisch) and backed by Christian millennialists (in the person of William T. Young). But, of course, Montefiore, here like Disraeli, was himself very much of an enigma in such matters, profoundly committed to his English persona, a rationalist, with all the empiricism of his Rothschild family, and yet – somehow, both paradoxically and logically – all the more open to the various romanticist, millennialist, and messianic visions of the Jewish people as come from, and destined to return to, the East.

To sum up, by 1840 even though the “Jewish Question” (as that term came to be understood by late in the century) had not yet crystallized, most of its constituent elements were clearly brought into view by the crisis of that year. In a striking metaphor, Louis Namier once described the year 1848 as a

¹⁵ A “peculiar people [*am segulah*],” Deuteronomy 14:2 and 26:18 (a phrase much employed in millennialist circles).

"seed-plot"¹⁶ of history. The destruction of the old order and the birth of the new in 1917-18 could be traced back to the abortive revolutions some seventy years earlier. In the context of Jewish history, the crisis of 1840 is, perhaps, best seen not as a seed-, but as a garden-, plot, containing a variety of historical trends at very different stages of growth.

The bitter conflict between those in favor of and those opposed to emancipation was already highly advanced, although still far from its murderous maturity. Similarly, the concept of Jewish self-defense, and of assistance from the secure communities in the West to insecure communities elsewhere had now also demonstrated its strong appeal. In contrast, such projects as millennialist (Christian) "restorationism," activist (Jewish) messianism, and proto-nationalism were only then beginning to germinate; they would develop almost imperceptibly, intertwined in complex ways, over the coming decades. Only with the radical change of the political climate after 1881 would some of those plants, too, enter their period of dramatic growth.

¹⁶ I.e.: L. B. Namier, "1848: Seed-Plot of History," in idem, *Vanished Supremacies* (London: 1958), pp. 20-30.

Abbreviations

<i>AAZ</i>	<i>Allgemeine Zeitung</i> (Augsburg)
<i>AC</i>	Adolphe Crémieux's diary (Archives Nationales, Paris: 369 AP.)
<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>AI</i>	<i>Archives Israélites de France</i>
<i>AJA</i>	<i>Anglo-Jewish Archives</i>
<i>AZdesJ</i>	<i>Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums</i>
<i>BofD</i>	Deputies of the British Jews: minute book (1838–August 1840)
<i>BofD (October–)</i>	Minute book (October 1840–April 1841)
<i>CAHJP</i>	Central Archive of the History of the Jewish People
<i>CCAE</i>	Consistoire Central: CC/M/Affaires étrangères, correspondance generale, 1840
<i>CCPV</i>	Consistoire Central: Procès-verbeaux
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>FO</i>	Foreign Office archives, Public Record Office
<i>GdeF</i>	<i>Gazette de France</i>
<i>GdeL</i>	<i>Gazette de Languedoc</i>
<i>GdesT</i>	<i>Gazette des Tribunaux</i>
<i>HHS</i>	Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna
<i>IA</i>	<i>Israelitische Annalen</i>
<i>JC</i>	<i>Jewish Chronicle</i>
<i>JdesD</i>	<i>Journal des Débats</i>
<i>JJ</i>	<i>Jewish Intelligence</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Jewish Social Studies</i>
<i>LAZ</i>	<i>Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung</i>
<i>LBIYB</i>	<i>Leo Baeck Institute Year Book</i>
<i>MES</i>	<i>Middle Eastern Studies</i>

<i>MGWdesJ</i>	<i>Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums</i>
MREA	Ministère des Relations Extérieures, Archives
MREA:N	Ministère des Relations Extérieures, Archives (Nantes)
MREA:CCC	Ministère des Relations Extérieures, Archives: Correspondance Consulaire et Commerciale (Alexandrie, vol. 28)
MREA:TAD	Ministère des Relations Extérieures Archives: Affaires Étrangères, Turquie: Affaires Diverses (Assassinat du Père Thomas)
NMRA -	N. M. Rothschild: Archives (London)
<i>PAJHS</i>	<i>Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society</i>
PvA	Correspondence books of Hapekidim vехаamarkalim, Amsterdam (Ben Zvi Institute, Jerusalem)
SDA	State Department archives, National Archives (Washington, D.C.)
<i>SdeM</i>	<i>Sémaphore de Marseille</i>
<i>TEJHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the English Jewish Historical Society</i>
<i>VofJ</i>	<i>Voice of Jacob</i>

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*As summarized by Steenwijk, "De Damascus Affaire," pp. 59-63.

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*Journal de Haye**
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Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung
Linzer Zeitung
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Malta Times
Manchester Guardian
Moniteur Universel
Morning Chronicle
Morning Herald (London)
Morning Herald (New York) (from 21 September 1840: *New York Herald*)
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Oesterreichischer Beobachter
Orient
Osservatore Triestino
Östgötha Correspondenten (Linköping, Sweden)
Pilot (Dublin)
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Quotidienne
Schwäbischer Merkur
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*As summarized by Steenwijk, "De Damascus Affaire," pp. 59–63.

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