

The 1839 Montefiore Census of Eretz Israel

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The first census (1839) of the Jewish population in Eretz Israel, commissioned by Sir Moshe Montefiore before his visit, is probably the first head count of the Jewish population since biblical time.¹ With the implementation of the first census in 1801² and the civil registration (BMD) in England in 1837³, Montefiore had been exposed to the importance of information in planning development and distributing funds. Through the use of a standardized form that Montefiore sent, information was collected about 6,500 inhabitants. This census has been transliterated as part of the database being built by the Israel Genealogical Society for the use of people researching their roots in Eretz Israel in the 19th century.

The transcription is based upon the publication of the *A Census of the Jews of Eretz Israel (1839)* in 1987 by the Dinur Center at the Hebrew University⁴. The use of Excel for the basis of the transliteration allows, in addition to the database, an analysis of the population by many parameters, giving a comprehensive picture of immigration from various countries to Eretz Israel. To the best of our knowledge, from a search of materials published till today, a statistical analysis for the entire census of 1839 has not been conducted.

Prof. Bartal states that Montefiore echoed sentiments published in the London Times, and claimed that Montefiore collected the information in the communities in Eretz Israel as a basis for his philanthropic work, present and future.⁵ But there seems to be a contradiction between the aim of Montefiore and Dr. Schmelz's opinion, that the information was taken from the charity lists compiled for the distribution of funds collected abroad, the *halukah*.⁶ Through the description of the lives of women in Jerusalem in the 19th century done by Dr. Margalit Shilo⁷, which is based on documentation and diaries, there is support of this contradiction between the aim of Montefiore and the everyday way of life. Dr. Shilo states that immigration to Eretz Israel had an additional motive beyond those of religious and ideological motives and

¹ Nearly all of the original forms for the Montefiore census have survived, and today are housed in the Montefiore Collection, London School of Jewish Studies (LSJS), London, MS 528-557, and the microfilms of all the censuses are part of the collection of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jerusalem, reels No. 35115, 6151-6179.

² Ibid.

³ Hollingsworth, T. H. (1969). *Historical Demography*. London.

⁴ *A Census of the Jews of Eretz Israel (1839): (MS. MONTEFIORE 528)*, Jerusalem, The Dinur Center, The Hebrew University (Hebrew).

⁵ Bartal, I. (1984). "Montefiore and Eretz Israel." *Cathedra*, 22: 149-160.

⁶ Schelz, U. O. (1958), *Development of the Jewish Population in Jerusalem During the Last Hundred Years*. Unpublished Ph.D. diss., Jerusalem, The Hebrew University (Hebrew).

⁷ Shilo, M. (2005), *Princess or Prisoner? Jewish Women in Jerusalem, 1840-1914*. Waltham, Mass. Brandeis University Press.

persecution; they fled the *Haskalah* movement (secular enlightenment)⁸ and members of the lower classes hoped to benefit from abundant charitable funds being sent to Eretz Israel.⁹ Those living in the four Holy cities; Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias and Hebron believed it "their right" to receive alms.

The 1839 census was commissioned after the 1837 earthquake in the Galilee and the Druze uprising in 1838.¹⁰ This may explain the commission of the census for Djermak (Merom), Shefar'am, Acre, and Sidon (now southern Lebanon), which are not included in the other censuses. The format was sent in English to the heads of the communities 8-10 days prior to Montefiore's visit. The translation of the form individually by each community explains the variations in the column headings between the various communities settled in these Holy cities. In addition to the listing of the name and age, a number of changes were made in the "adaptation" of the British Census Form to Erez Israel: place of birth, date of arrival in the city or country, economic status or material wealth, profession, physical and mental disabilities, and "other" comments.¹¹ No instructions were given to the census takers, therefore explanations have to be extracted from the information collected.

Based on the in-depth analysis of immigration from North Africa by Dr. Michal Ben Yaakov¹², the following mistakes in taking the census were noted:

- mistakes in writing down the information,
- mistakes in copying the information to the final copy.

These are common for census filled in by hand with open ended questions.

The person listed in the census, may have purposely stated a certain place as his place of birth in order to receive patronage from the consul of that country in Eretz Israel. In the 1839 census the listing of the residents is the most simple of the five. Therefore the information on the resident's ethnic identity must be extracted from the information listed under "place of birth" with all the limitations mentioned above. There is no way, unless you find an "independent" document, to know if the place of birth listed is where they were born, the next largest town, or where they lived before they immigrated. It is also possible that the census taker didn't differentiate between the places. While analyzing the ethnic identity of the population, it is recommended to consider the sociological and anthropological approach where people are considered of an ethnic group when they have communal behavioral norms^{13, 14}. Communal

⁸ Ibid, p. 24.

⁹ Ibid. p. 25.

¹⁰ Ben Ya'akov, M. (2001). "The Montefiore Census: The First Modern Census of Jews in Eretz Israel". In S. DellaPergola & J. Even (eds.), *Papers in Jewish Demography, 1997*, Jerusalem, Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 79-87

¹¹ Ibid, p. 79-87.

¹² Ben Ya'akov, M. (2006). "Mifkad Montefiore ve Heker Hayehudim Beagan Hayam Hatichon", *Peamim*, 107: 117-147 (Hebrew) [Montefiore Census and the Research the Mediterranean Basin Jewry]

¹³ Cohen, A. (1974). Introduction: The Lesson of Ethnicity, *Urban Ethnicity*, London, pp. ix-xxiv.

behavioral norms include praying at the same *kollel*. This could be the explanation for finding people listed in a certain *kollel* though they weren't born in the geographical area that *kollel* represents. One example is the "Volin *Kollel*" in Tiberias, which has members from the Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, Romania, Moldavia, Hungary and Eretz Israel. Another example would be those who considered themselves as "*Maaravim*" and "*Mizrahim*" being listed in the 1839 census as Sephardim. In this instance, it might have been due to the decision of the census taker-scribe and not of the people themselves.

When discussing "missing" information Ben Ya'akov states there are two types:

- a specific field is left blank for everyone on the page or community; as not listing the place of birth for orphans or widows.
- a specific field is left blank for a specific person.

Due to the format of listing the members of a whole family in one line (usually) most of the missing information concerns married women. The wives are not listed, but "inferred" because the head of the household is listed as being "married". Therefore there is no information as to her first name, her maiden name or her father's name. In addition, because of:

1. early marriages (the earliest one found in the census is a girl of 11),
2. high death rate, and
3. second and thirds marriages,

there is no way to differentiate between the marriages and if the children listed are of the father, the mother, or both parents. Nevertheless there are instances of children listed as being of the wife's, from which it can be deduced that she was probably a widow who remarried, although there is no mention of who the father of the child was. Therefore it is impossible to know the family name or trace the family very far back.

In the instance of the listing of the widows and orphans, because each category is usually a separate page, there is a possibility of more individual information such as first name and age for the widows, in contrast to when a widow is listed with her son, as "the mother of". But other information given for the families, such as country of birth, is usually not given. In contrast to the widows, the widowers are listed as the head of the family and "free" as in contrast to being reported as "married" or "widowers".

Listed among the families, are the families of *shadarim* (emissaries) who were sent abroad to collect money for the community. The members of their family stayed in Eretz Israel and are listed in the census.

Genealogy is considered a micro-history, yet it can not be ignored that the building of such a database as a tool for micro-history can enable the analysis of the Jewish population in Eretz Israel which would be considered macro-history. This analysis enables a comparison of communities by their ethnic background, immigration patterns, communities affected by disasters (earthquake, plague), etc.

¹⁴ Morris, H.S. (1968). Ethnic Groups. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 5. New York, 167-172

In a comparison of those listed in the Sephardic communities to those listed in the Ashkenazi communities, a greater number of those in the Sephardic communities have family names. Depending upon the roots being researched, it may make the search either easier or harder. For this reason, additional fields were added to our database for father's name, and husband's name instead of including the information in the field of comments. This adaptation of the information will enable the use of a search engine. This is especially important in the instances where the wife's first name is not given or the children are listed as "son", "baby", etc. The listing of the children varies from community to community. Sometimes they are separated into columns of "above 13" and "below 13", and sometimes they are listed together.

There are two instances where it stands to reason that the country of birth of the child can be guessed. The first is when the country of birth of the father is Eretz Israel, and the second is when the child is younger than the amount of years that the father is in Eretz Israel.

The demographic analysis of this database allows for a description of certain aspects of the way of life of the Jewish communities in Eretz Israel in the first half of the 19th century. It is for this reason that not only the individual information of a person be considered, but also where this information fits into the patterns discerned in his community and Eretz Israel as a whole.