

ITALIAN LADY TRAVELERS TO JERUSALEM (1850-1935) DESCRIPTIONS AND IMPRESSIONS ON THE ARMENIAN PRESENCE IN THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM*

This paper focuses on the impressions and comments concerning the Armenian community in the Old City of Jerusalem as reported by Italian lady travelers in their published diaries. The guiding criteria for the choice of authors included in this analysis are: 1) The women were Italian travelers; 2) They traveled alone between the years 1850-1935, without husband or family, or had joined, unaccompanied, a group of travelers or pilgrims; 3) They wrote a diary of their experiences describing what they saw and witnessed directly and not by hearsay.

A survey of all suitable primary sources (their diaries) was carried out. Five lady travelers complied with all the selected criteria: four Christians and one Jewish. Three of them traveled in the second half of the nineteenth century and two in the first half of the twentieth century. These diaries, some composed in the same period, often have similar titles but are very different in scope and type of narration. Some are the product of the experience of a traveler motivated by curiosity and interest for new places and adventures. Others are the testimony of a pilgrim pushed by faith and desire to visit the sacred places cited in the Bible or in the Holy

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Gospel. None of these ladies is an explorer; none of them intends to scientifically study and report on the land that she visits; none of them consciously wants to say anything new about the geography and topography of the land or its people.

In his work *The Rediscovery of the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century*, Yehoshua Ben-Arieh stresses the importance of such books, often very different in value and importance, indeed because of one single involuntary new detail that contributes to the reconstruction of historical Palestine in the nineteenth century.¹ Nathan Schur reinforces this statement and adds a new insight: for him travel books and itineraries are, in spite of their many limitations and shortcomings, “potentially the most important source material we have at our disposal on the history of Palestine in the Ottoman period”, therefore, he thinks they should not be ignored by modern scholars.²

An important issue is the reliability of the sources. It is evident that visitors lacking any scientific background, knowledge or instruments, rely only on their impressions. Their reports are more or less reliable depending on their personal backgrounds, power of observation and gift for description. A staunch religious believer will not question the fact that what he sees and what is indicated as a sacred place might not correspond to the truth. In his effort to anchor scriptural data to specific geographical locations in Palestine, the explorer and scholar Edward Robinson discovered that a lot of information provided to the travelers principally by priests and monks was inaccurate or unscientific.³

A scientific approach of this kind is not to be found in the diaries of our women travelers and pilgrims. Not everyone, however, accepted blindly what the guides said.

1 Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *The Rediscovery of the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century*, Magnes Press and the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem, 1979, p. 14.

2 Nathan Schur, “Itineraries by Pilgrims and Travellers as Source Material, for the History of Palestine in the Ottoman Period”, D. Kushner (ed.), in *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period*, Jerusalem-Leiden, 1986, pp. 382-401, p. 394.

3 Y. Ben-Arieh, *The Rediscovery...*, cit., pp. 88-89.

Billie Melman puts a great emphasis on the importance of women's travel writings. She states in her *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918. Sexuality, Religion and Work*, that in the eighteenth century an alternative view of the Orient emerged, which developed alongside the dominant one during the nineteenth century. The main factor that contributed to this change was the mass of women travel writings that was produced describing the Orient and its way of life.⁴

Our lady travelers all came to Jerusalem with different interests and very different personalities. This paper presents them beginning with the most recent visitors and going backwards chronologically.

LADY TRAVELERS IN THE FIRST PART OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In this historical period, Jerusalem and Palestine were under British Mandate rule.

Maria Anna Spinelli from Pistoia and Maria Sticco from Milan both went to Jerusalem to make a Christian Pilgrimage; they were both Roman Catholics and wanted to see the Holy Sites that they had imagined since childhood. Their personalities, though, were very different and their diaries reflect this.

Maria Anna Spinelli

Maria Anna Spinelli's travel diary is *Ricordi di un viaggio in Terra-Santa* (Memories of a Journey to the Holy Land).⁵ In the Preface she explains the reasons and motivations of her journey and why she wrote the book. She had always wanted to go to the Holy Land. She writes her memories at the request of a dear

4 Billie Melman, *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918. Sexuality, Religion and Work*, Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1992, p. 7.

5 Maria Anna Spinelli, *Ricordi di un viaggio in Terra-Santa*, Ed. Niccolai, Pistoia, 1935. All translations of Italian titles and texts are mine.

friend, gravely ill at home, to whom the book is dedicated. In doing so, the journey would be kept alive for her even at a distance. Spinelli tells us nothing else about herself or her life.

Period of time in Jerusalem: 19-30 April 1934. She left her hometown Pistoia, Tuscany, alone, on April 12th to join the organized pilgrimage in Naples, which would take her to the Holy Land by sea. The ship docked in Jaffa, on April 19th. Spinelli arrived that same evening in Jerusalem.

Her diary shows an interest in both the pilgrims' and the travelers' points of view. Her intention is to do more than merely describe the Holy Places. It shows a genuine interest in and enjoyment of the people and the land. She regrets not being able to speak the local language, whereas our other pilgrims were not so interested in speaking with or understanding the local people. She is the only one of our lady travelers to tackle this important issue.

Her diary is full of information and details on life in the Holy Land. Spinelli shows a talent for details, narration, and religious and historically grounded notions. She observes her surroundings and comments on the country's topography; she mentions the oil pipes that crossed the country, the only one of our lady travelers to do so. Her book is fascinating and exotic and stimulates the reader's imagination. She mentions the Armenians in connection with religion, as many travelers do when they describe to their readers the variegated Christian community that populates the Old City of Jerusalem.

Spinelli's only two mentions of the Armenian presence are at the Holy Sepulcher. She says upon entering for the first time, that there are functions according to various rituals and "that 'tower of Babylon' doesn't produce a nice effect but at the same time is also moving to think that all these different people celebrate Christ: the Greeks, the Copts, the Armenians, the Abyssinians, the Latins...etc".⁶

And, afterwards, while describing it: "In the center of the Basilica there is a small Chapel, called Aedicule, in Greek and Ar-

6 Ibid., p. 44.

menian style; it culminates in a kind of small muscovite style dome".⁷

Maria Sticco

Una Settimana in Terrasanta (A Week in the Holy Land) is the title of Maria Sticco's travel diary.⁸ Period in Jerusalem: April 15-22, 1930, the Holy Easter week. The night of April 11th, Maria Sticco, coming from Milan, left the port of Brindisi, in Southern Italy, on a boat headed for Jaffa with a group of enthusiastic pilgrims on their way to the land of Jesus.

They were fifty women, from the GFCI, Young Italian Catholic Women, on their first journey to the Holy Land. Many, like Sticco, were traveling alone. They came from different areas of Italy, from Milan to Sardinia; they were of all ages, from different social strata that included the working class, the professorial ranks and even an aristocrat. They were eager to see the Holy Land about which they had studied and dreamed; they were expectant and curious to see if their imagination matched reality. Sticco's diary has a short Preface written by the Director of the GFCI and not by the author. He neither gives any details about Sticco nor acknowledges her work. This is unusual.

The diary aims at presenting the Holy Land to prospective pilgrims; it is meant to increase their desire to go. This is one of the classic motivations of pilgrimage writings. It is clear from the first pages that Sticco's diary is for pilgrims and not for travelers. All the typical expectations and feelings of fervent pilgrims finally approaching their desired destination, the Holy Land, are present in her descriptions. Apart from prayers and singing, the reader finds no practical information, e.g., accommodations on board or travel anecdotes. Sticco falls under the category of a pilgrim "pushed by her faith and the desire of visiting the sacred places cited in the Bible or in the Holy Gospel". Moreover, her religious notions and considerations belong to the domain of religious liter-

7 Ibid., p. 56.

8 Maria Sticco, *Una Settimana in Terrasanta*, Ed. Vita e Pensiero, Milan, 1931.

ature. She published her travel diary for a Catholic editor. This fact is significant and explains why the author was much more interested in showing the Holy Places and religious rites than in giving pictorial or technical details to the traveler. This is one of the main differences between her book and Spinelli's. What unites the two writers is their motivation to see the Holy Land in the frame of the Catholic culture. Sticco, however, is a pure pilgrim, while Spinelli has also the curiosity of the traveler.

Sticco never speaks in the first person and says nothing about herself or her personal motivations and circumstances. Throughout the work the narration is impersonal. This is atypical for a travel diary, especially when written by a lady. However, the book is interesting and the reader enjoys her intelligence and culture.

Sticco mentions the Armenians in the classical way, in connection with religion and the religious sites that she visits, when she is at the Holy Sepulcher: "What is commonly called Holy Sepulcher gathers, beneath the vaults of a single large Basilica, an abundance of church altars and sacred crypts built on the most important places of the Passion and Resurrection and presided over by five different congregations, fully or partially exercising their rights: Latins, Greeks, Armenians and Copts, while the Holy Door is in the custody of Cerberus Turks".⁹

Sticco, a little further on in her diary, gives an ample description of the Armenian Church and the monastery, which is not so frequent for a fervent Roman Catholic pilgrim. She must be so impressed by the majesty and luxury of the church that she needs to share it with her readers. During their tour of the Old City "the pilgrims stopped at the church of St. James the Greater belonging to the non-united (sic!) Armenians. It houses the head of the first apostle martyr in a silver-lined chapel (...). The church is magnificent: it has pillars covered with white and turquoise majolica, many rich chandeliers and non-unworthy paintings. The main altar that day was hidden by a blue silk curtain from which, from time

9 Ibid., p. 34.

to time, long-haired bearded priests in sumptuous vestments appeared and went away. When the curtain rose like in a theater it unveiled twelve bishops, pompously clothed; in the middle was the Armenian Patriarch, wearing his miter, going to wash the bishops' feet. They chanted psalms. (...). The Italian pilgrims did not attend the feet ablution ceremony and proceeded to visit the holy places of Zion. They first saw the Armenian monastery next to the church of St. James, the home of the astute Hanna (...) and then the house of Caiaphas, his well-deserved father-in-law".¹⁰

Later on, Sticco laments that she could not see the final ceremony of the Passion of Christ in the Holy Sepulcher that evening. That night they went back to the Basilica. They found a crowd of all sorts of people camping in front of the church, waiting for the ceremony of the Holy Fire that would take place the next day at noon. There were Armenians, Russians, Greeks, Egyptians, and Bedouins. The whole area was littered with papers, food, leftovers, bottles, etc. Sticco, the only one among our lady travelers who does it, describes the fire ceremony, which is unusual in Catholic pilgrim accounts. She says the pilgrims in the crowd had a feeling of disgust mixed with curiosity, dismay and sadness. The screams of the crowd overwhelmed the priest's speech and yet, she reports: "That loud infernal noise could not remove the pilgrims thought from that one night when the Divine Tragedy was consumed".¹¹

As all of our lady travelers, both Spinelli and Sticco lament the confusion and the lack of privacy at the Holy Sites and they invariably mention the fights among Christians.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 58-59.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 74-75.

LADY TRAVELERS IN THE SECOND PART OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Jerusalem and Palestine were under Ottoman Rule during the nineteenth century.

Matilde Serao from Naples, Flora Randegger from Trieste and Cristina Trivulzio, Princess of Belgiojoso, from Milan were three learned remarkable women traveling to the Holy Land. They represent three different stories with three different purposes.

Matilde Serao

Matilde Serao, journalist and novelist, was one of the most important Italian writers at the end of the nineteenth beginning of the twentieth centuries. She was born in Naples in 1856. She and Edoardo Scarfoglio, her husband and Neapolitan journalist, owned *Il Mattino*, still today the city's most important newspaper. She is the author of seventy novels, many editorials and articles on various subjects, from current affairs to mundane chronicle, fashion, customs and manners. She was a Roman Catholic respectful of religious traditions.

Serao is the only professional writer among our lady travelers. In her time, she was well known in Italy and European cultural circles. Her fame reached as far as the United States, thanks to her friendship with Henry James, the American-born writer, whom she met in the Parisian literary circles.

In May, 1893, she left for Palestine and remained nearly two months including 25 days in Jerusalem. She had two major goals for the journey: to pray for the ill health of her son, Antonio, and to write articles about Palestine for her newspaper. She later gathered them in a book-diary, *Ricordi di Palestina, un viaggio nel Paese di Gesù* (Memories of Palestine. A Journey in the Land of Jesus).¹² The only travel diary in her vast literary production.

12 Matilde Serao, *Ricordi di Palestina, un viaggio nel Paese di Gesù*, Perrella, Naples, 1910. Her journey is cited in *2000 Years of Pilgrimage to the Holy Land*, A.A.V.V., Alfa Communications, International Millennium Publ., Holy Land, 1999, p. 229, in-

Serao prepared her journey conscientiously, reading guides of the Holy Land and meeting with experts on Palestine. During her journey she sent articles to her newspaper, sharing her emotions as well as providing measurements and detailed descriptions. Comparisons to historical and geographical sources demonstrate that her descriptions of the land were not just emotional perceptions but also quite accurate. Her female-eye was keenly aware of fashion as she described the women that she encountered: their clothes, head coverings and jewelry. As a fashion journalist, curious for a taste of "orientalism", she willingly indulged in the picturesque bazaars, colorful settings and populations that constituted the fascinating background of traveling in the Middle East. As a believer-pilgrim, she dutifully described the Holy Places. She also states the objective of her diary: to encourage people to go to the Holy Land and even if only one person should go after reading her book, her objective would be reached.

Serao's book provides a lot of information about life in Palestine. The reader feels a part of her journey and enjoys the vivid descriptions of real places and the suggestions of how to overcome minor travel problems that could be encountered. The land she visits is "perceived" and, therefore, in some parts described in a subjective way. Prices and technical details of the journey, however, are objective and render the book a fairly reliable Tourist Guide.

Serao mentioned little else besides the classic Catholic itinerary; strange for a reporter and a journalist. She does not pay great attention to describing the modern Jerusalem and its new areas being built outside the Old City. Evidently she was looking for the Holy Places or simply knew that her readers were mainly interested in them. "In my journey to Palestine, I humbly searched the

cluding her biography. Her journey is also mentioned in N. Schur's works, *Jerusalem: In Pilgrims and Travellers' Accounts. A Thematic Bibliography of Western Christian Itineraries 1300-1917*, Ariel Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1980, p. 19, p. 24, p. 35, p. 38, p. 79, p. 105, p. 109, p. 135 and p. 144 and in *Twenty Centuries of Christian Pilgrimage to the Holy Land*, Dvir Publ., Tel Aviv, 1992, pp. 188-190, 198.

soul of that Sacred Land, which saw God and heard His voice", she states in the Introduction to her diary.¹³

Matilde Serao left her hometown Naples bound for Palestine on a May evening. The happiness and excitement of her adventure gave way to melancholy, to subtle oppressive anguish and doubts. She asked herself if the fantastic journey the travel brochure promised was, in reality, only a misleading business.

After docking in Jaffa, she went directly to Jerusalem by train. Her first visit was the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

Her observations of the Armenians are mainly connected to religion. On the Stone of Unction we find her first mention of them. Serao remarked on the eight lamps hanging there: three belong to the Latin Christian church, three to the schismatic Greeks, one to the Armenian Christian church and one to the Copt Christian church.

She shares an enjoyable anecdote: at the Stone of Unction there were a lot of children; she helped a very small boy reach the Stone; he kissed it with many loud kisses; the Armenian priest, guardian of the Holy Site, yelled "*Yalla, yalla!*" (Move on!) in Arabic but he was smiling and while the little barefoot boy fled without making any noise, the Armenian priest blessed him with the aspergillum and a bit of rose water.¹⁴

Further on in her description, Serao informs her readers that "The church of the Holy Sepulcher has a mixture of all the architectural forms. Its central part is round, where the Aedicule is located and in which the Holy Sepulcher is enclosed; a colonnade and a wide dark corridor surround it; the church's oval shaped plan elongates towards the apse, where, on a platform three feet above ground, the Chapel of the schismatic Greeks opens. The plan seems rectangular towards the chapel of Santa Mary Magdalene, which belongs to the Latin Church, but it forms a large trapezoid on the side where the Armenian Christians, the children of St. James, have their ecclesiastical domain".¹⁵

13 *Ricordi di Palestina...*, cit., p. XII.

14 Ibid., p. 82.

15 Ibid., p. 65.

Serao, like all our lady travelers, comments on the eternal conflict among the different Christian Confessions. Inside the Holy Sepulcher church conflicts and division are evident in the spaces into which the church is divided. The multitude of different celebrations creates confusion and disorientation. Serao remarks that this church has "multiple souls". She describes the Latin's space, the schismatic Greeks' space and at a certain point: "Go towards the underground chapel where St. Helena found The Cross in a well and all of a sudden, a small door opens and a foreign priest appears, dressed all in black with a large black silk hood over his eyes and a black beard floating on his chest: he is an Armenian priest, he has the aspergillum in his hands; he blesses you and the blessed water that goes on your face and hands smells like roses".¹⁶

On the Golgotha Serao comments that the singing of small birds mixes, in the hours of the sacred rites, with the mystic hymns that the Latins, Greeks, Armenians and Copts endlessly elevate to the memory of the Redeemer. At the Holy Tomb she informs her readers that "forty-three magnificent silver lamps suspended from the vault over the Tomb burn day and night: the first thirteen in the center belong to the Latin Catholics, that is, the Franciscans of the Holy Land, thirteen belong to the non-united (sic!) Greeks, thirteen belong to the Armenian Christians and four to the Copts".¹⁷

She describes a rite at the Holy Sepulcher and the variety of religious vestments. The Franciscans wear brown, the Dominicans wear white, the Greek priests wear their cylindrical head covering and the Armenian priests wear an ample silk hood, under which vivid eyes flash and a long black beard waves.¹⁸

Serao dedicates many pages to the Christians in Jerusalem, their composition, division and fights, sometimes even physical. She reports: "The Turkish government must always station a soldier at every altar, to avoid another Crimean War".¹⁹ She informs

16 Ibid., p. 66.

17 Ibid., p. 72.

18 Ibid., p. 81.

19 Ibid., p. 109.

her readers that “there are four thousand Greeks, two thousand Latins, and one thousand Armenians. They form a discordant conglomeration, always at war, which will never have a character of unity. Latin, Greek, Armenian, Copt, and even Protestant believers live in Jerusalem in a state of unrest, discomfort and anger, where only the Sublime Porte comes to enforce the peace, when wraths explode. (...); they do not accomplish any material work, any industry or any business; they do not think at all to make or to increase their fortunes. Latins, Greeks, Armenians, live in the shadow of their convents and hospices receiving accommodation, aid money, doctors, medicines, schools, all types of protection and help. Deep idleness reigns in these *nations*”.²⁰

She continues her description: “Christians of the Roman Church are divided into Latins, United Greeks, United Armenians, Maronites of Lebanon and United Copts; soon after come the heretic Christians, or schismatic Greeks, the schismatic Armenians, the schismatic Copts, the schismatic Abyssinians. The latter have no more than three hundred followers and yet they have their own church!” The Protestant Christians, who are also well established in the Holy Land, where, according to Serao, fortunately, they do not make a lot of propaganda, are also divided into two or three sects. In Jerusalem there are even some Mormons.²¹

“In the corner of the Holy Sepulcher cell”, Serao tell her readers, “there is almost always a Greek priest or an Armenian priest; he doesn’t move; he watches you carefully and recognizes you immediately as a Roman Catholic Christian; (...) he knows that you will not give him any alms; if you stay too long he mumbles and he makes a sign for you to go away; you do not obey and continue to pray. Sometimes, for the sake of peace you leave...”²²

Serao dedicates a chapter to the Franciscans in the Holy Land. They had to endure, often paying with their blood, persecutions and deprivations from the Ottomans, schismatic Greeks and Armenians: “After having been expelled from the Cenacle (...)

20 Ibid., pp. 103-104.

21 Ibid., pp. 108-109.

22 Ibid., p. 110.

expelled from the church of Assumption, (...) prevented from saying Mass in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, they also lost, a few years ago, their secular right to celebrate the divine rites, one day a year, in the church of St. James, occupied by the schismatic Armenians, (...) which is located where Jesus Christ appeared before the high priest Caiaphas".²³

Flora Randegger

During his last journey to Eretz Israel, in 1875, Moses Montefiore wrote in his diary that in Venice, a young Italian school-teacher, Ms. Flora Randegger, submitted a project to him meant to benefit the Holy Land: she had the idea of establishing a girl's school in Jerusalem.²⁴

Flora, that "important, intelligent and cultivated woman", as Montefiore described her, went to Eretz Israel twice, in 1856 and in 1864. She stayed a total of two and a half years in Jerusalem. Her two extraordinary journeys were described in her diary, *Un pò di tutto, seconda strenna israelitica* (A Bit of Everything).²⁵ It was written in Italian, with an enjoyable freshness. Flora's diary constitutes a unique testimony of the feelings and the inner world of a cultivated woman, dedicated heart and soul to Judaism. Her best efforts and love for Eretz Israel were aimed at the redemption of the people of her land.

Flora Randegger was born in Trieste in 1824 to a "cultivated family whose members were all successfully dedicated to literary studies".²⁶ Her father, Rabbi Meir, was the Rabbi of the Ashkenazi

23 Ibid., p. 319.

24 D. Carpi and M. Rinott, "Sulle orme di Flora Randegger-Friedenberg. I viaggi di una giovane maestra da Trieste a Gerusalemme (1856, 1864) (Following the Footsteps of Flora Randegger-Friedenberg. The Travels of a Young Teacher from Trieste to Jerusalem)", *Annuario di Studi Ebraici XI 1985-1987*, Collegio Rabbinico, Rome, pp. 271-291, p. 271.

25 Flora Randegger, *Un pò di tutto, seconda strenna israelitica*, Ed. Friedenberg, Tipography Herrmanstrofer, Trieste, 1869.

26 M. Arbib, "Flora Sophia Clementina Randegger-Friedenberg", in *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, P. E. Hyman and D. Ofer (eds.), Jerusalem (2006), (CD-ROM), pp. 1-5.

synagogue and in 1848 he opened a private Jewish girl's school in Trieste. It was considered a model of "Illuministic education" for Jewish students. Flora's formation came from these two Triestine influences: on one hand, Illuminism and receptivity of different cultures and, on the other, adherence to traditional Judaism and love for Eretz Israel. There is very little information about her early years besides what she provides in her diary. In 1848, she began to teach in her father's private school; three years later, she made her first journey to Jerusalem in order to comply with her vow to her elderly father to spend Passover in Jerusalem and take part in the religious celebrations. She writes that her other important aim was to establish a girl's school in Jerusalem for teaching morality and religious precepts along with general secular subjects such as basic reading and writing, European languages and even manual practical work (sewing, embroidery, crochet, etc.). She published her diary hoping to transmit "part of the national ardor that almost consumed my soul".²⁷ She warns her readers that "It is not a book of leisure", it wants to transmit "from my fingers to your souls what my eyes have seen" what thousands of other people cannot see and to share her impressions with them.²⁸

On November 10, 1856, Flora left from the port of Trieste on a boat headed to Eretz Israel. Once in her cabin she burst into tears. She was going alone to "unknown barbarian places" faraway with little money and a few letters of recommendation. After six days of difficult navigation, many inconveniences and discomforts she finally arrived in the port of Jaffa from where she immediately headed for Jerusalem.

Flora's diary is full of information on what she sees around her and she is very concerned about sharing her own personal problems: to find an accommodation and a job. She is interested in describing local customs, focusing on the Jews. She intends to raise the Jewish audience's consciousness at home in describing the original Jewish community that never left the land of their ancestors. She never fails to show admiration for the Orthodox Jews,

27 D. Carpi and M. Rinott, "Sulle orme...", cit., p. 284.

28 *Un pò di tutto...*, cit., p. 1.

she indulges in describing their religious practices and the habits of their everyday life.

Flora repeats over and over that her aim is to awaken the Jews at home and to render the Holy Places dear to them. Her desire to keep a diary of her journey is in line with that of travelers and pilgrims of all creeds: to commit their experiences to writing in order to share them with others, especially with the ones who cannot go. Her diary, like Serao's and Spinelli's, is a combination of both traveler and pilgrim observations. Flora's intentions and goals, however, differ substantially from our other pilgrims. She is not only a pilgrim but also an immigrant. She complains of a chronic lack of money and the difficulties and discomforts that a poor new immigrant has to face. She does not visit the holiest Jewish places since she has other priorities and worries.

Flora informs her readers that the population of Jerusalem is 20,000. Nearly half the people are Jews, almost all poor, waiting with anxiety for donations and funds from Europe, which are scarce and infrequent. The Turks are rich and own houses and fields. They vegetate in indolence. They keep various women and have schools only for males. They study the Koran by heart.

Like all our Christian lady travelers, also Flora mentions the Armenians. Her only reference to them is quite interesting: "The Armenians, all rich, have their own quarter, a church with a square in front, a garden and a convent. All religious sects have a church and many or few representatives. All powers have a Consul".²⁹ If only one of them had helped her with her school, things could have been different for Flora.

Cristina Trivulzio, Princess of Belgiojoso

Period in Jerusalem: spring 1852 during Holy Easter week-early summer. She stayed one month.

Her reasons for going abroad were peculiar and far removed from a desire for traveling or making a pilgrimage to the Holy

²⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

Places. She traveled to the Orient for political reasons, in order to escape a dangerous situation.

Cristina Trivulzio was born on June 28, 1808, in Lombardy to an ancient aristocratic Italian family. She profited from an excellent education and was entrusted to learned teachers well known for their broad views and political creeds. She was afforded the benefits of freethinking and self-expression through this education, which explains her later interest in active politics. At sixteen years old, she married Prince Emilio Barbiano of Belgiojoso d'Este from whom she separated three years later. In 1815, the Congress of Vienna returned Lombardy to Austrian jurisdiction. Cristina became deeply involved in a political group whose objective was to force the Austrians out of Italy and unite the country under a democratic king. A warrant was issued for her arrest; she fled to France where she wrote political articles for French newspapers. In Paris she hosted a popular literary salon and worked to convert leading Frenchmen to the cause of Italian independence. She was elected the President of the Academy of Women in France. When Italian cities under Austrian jurisdiction revolted, Cristina, again, got involved. In 1848, for her own safety, she traveled to the Orient hoping for a new life.

Cristina left Rome for Malta, going first to Athens and then to Constantinople. From there she reached a small community in Anatolia where she purchased a large estate and resided there with her daughter and other refugees for four years. This was her situation in 1852, when she decided to embark on a journey to Jerusalem, alone, with her small daughter Maria, horses and a caravan.

Her travel book, *Vita intima e vita nomade in Oriente*,³⁰ first written in French and published with the title *La vie intime et la vie nomade en Orient*, 1855, was initially motivated by financial needs but fits in well with her social and political interests. It describes her adventurous life in the Orient, her four years in Anatolia and the journey she made from there to Jerusalem on horse-

30 Cristina Trivulzio, Princess of Belgiojoso, *Vita intima e vita nomade in Oriente*, Ed. Ibis, Como, 1993.

back. Her travel book aims at studying and describing, for the western reader, private life (the *vie intime*) and family life in the Orient, mainly the Muslim Orient. In the Preface to her book, the well-known literary critic and contemporary scholar Giorgio Cusatelli states: "Her diary constitutes a true and lively ethnographic document, written with an elegant and gripping style".³¹ Her intent is not merely to visit famous Holy Places, as she states in her Introduction: "In spite of my vivid and pleasant memories of Jerusalem, I must confess that I experienced more than one disappointment. My propensity to anticipate the aspect of the famous places in my imagination, and then to remain cold in front of reality, was put to a severe test. Luckily, I was looking for everything else but sites or monuments in the Orient".³²

Her curiosity for people and places pushed her into this adventure. Another stimulus could have been professional, connected to her journalistic contribution to the Parisian *Revue des Deux Mondes*, whose readers loved the "Oriental-exotic theme". However, Belgiojoso's book is not written following the oriental style, so fashionable at the time. She has a direct approach to the subject, a lucid eye and sincerity, which the reader appreciates. Her book is a precious testimony of women's conditions in the Orient. She visited many *harems*, from the most luxurious to the poorest, including one for children. She describes *harem* life and its atmosphere as a temple of the oriental masculine sexuality.³³ In her travel diary, she gives a lot of information about the places that she visits, pleasant anecdotes and truly felt descriptions. She takes a sincere interest in some people she meets and their stories, sympathizing with one or deploring the ill actions of another. From her diary we see that she was a mere traveler and not a pilgrim. She falls under the definition of "a traveler motivated by curiosity and interest for new places and adventures". Belgiojoso's diary is peculiar because it presents an Italian woman, supposedly Catholic,

31 Ibid., p. 1.

32 Ibid., p. 169.

33 Ibid., p. 112. Her journey is listed in N. Schur, *Jerusalem in Pilgrims and Travellers' Accounts...*, cit., pp. 18, 68, 75, 76, 79, 81, 100, 101 and p. 117. See also his work, *Twenty Centuries of Christian Pilgrimage...*, cit., p. 183.

with an atypical secular view of the land of Christ, something unexpected.

Cristina was no stranger to writing. During her lifetime she published numerous books and articles about subjects such as the Catholic Church, the history of Lombardy and the House of Savoy, the social condition of women, and the political condition of Italy and France. She also founded and financed numerous journals and newspapers. Under these circumstances she met Matilde Serao. Unlike Serao, Belgiojoso was a semi-professional writer. Comparing these two lady travelers we note similarities of physical strength, determination and courage in overcoming the difficulties of travel. Their journeys, however, are profoundly different in terms of personal situation, motivation and means. Belgiojoso's travels in Palestine were only part of a longer journey to the Orient and not her final destination. The journey to Palestine occupies only the last 36 pages of her diary. For her, Palestine is, with Lebanon, a part of the Christian Orient that she was curious to visit. Her religious faith is neither clear nor mentioned in her diary. She repeatedly shows skepticism in front of what she sees. She does not blindly accept what her guide says. She is a practical woman. She finds it difficult to accept dogma. She is a typical pragmatic woman from Lombardy where the Illuminist culture prevails, an environment very different from the more traditional and religious Catholic Naples, where Serao was raised. When Belgiojoso confronts her Christian traditions with the reality of Palestine, she feels that she has been deceived. Her attitude is very different from Serao's, who, though slightly critical of the appearance of some of the sacred places, never doubts or discusses their authenticity.

Cristina's adventurous journey from Anatolia to Jerusalem begins in 1852, "on a cold January morning with a cavalry escort, without which it is impossible to travel in the Orient", as she states.³⁴ She arrives in Jerusalem in the spring of the same year.

Belgiojoso was an aristocrat. She was a wealthy woman with good connections. Her journey, though very difficult, was com-

34 C. Trivulzio di Belgiojoso, *Vita intima...*, cit., p. 30.

forted by money, which she used for food, hospitality, good escorts and dragomans, who had the dual function of guide-interpreter and guard along the way. She entered Jerusalem galloping towards the Damascus gate and the nearby Franciscan hostel. The house, probably *Casa Nova*, was full of travelers. It was Easter Saturday. She remained in Jerusalem for a month.

On all the Holy Sites, Belgiojoso's skepticism is evident when she expresses doubts about the authenticity of the place and about the topography of the sacred sites. She first goes to the Holy Sepulcher Church. Her immediate impression concerns the road: she had imagined climbing up the hill of the Calvary while the road was in descent. Or at the Cenacle, in a degraded state, reduced to a den, she again expresses doubts about the authenticity of the small cell that is believed to have kept Christ imprisoned the first night of his Passion: "...a door opens on to a room so small that it is very difficult to believe it was ever inhabited by a human being".³⁵ She often refers to Christians of all congregations that bitterly fought over the property of the Holy Sites, as did Serao and all our other lady pilgrims.

Belgiojoso is not terribly interested in describing the historical Jerusalem. Remarkable, for example, is the absence of a description of the Via Dolorosa. She says in her diary that she wants to describe some of the modern aspects of Jerusalem. At Solomon's Gardens she describes an English *party* held by a colony of Protestant missionaries. She visited the most important lay institutions in Jerusalem, a hospital, a pharmacy, a school; she described the lepers' refuge in Jerusalem and the conditions of the patients. She is the only one of our lady travelers to report these issues.

Then Belgiojoso focuses on the various communities in the Old City. She writes about the Armenians:

"I had seen the monks and nuns of charity, I had known Protestant hospices and others; I still had to visit the convent of the Armenians. I went there and received an exquisite welcoming. The Armenians of Asia Minor do not resemble the Greeks of this

35 Ibid., p. 187.

country, who, under the domination of their uncivilized masters, acquired a sort of coarseness foreign to the Hellenic race. Superior to the Greeks for intelligence and wealth, the Armenians of Syria and Palestine also surpass them for their peculiar grace and dignity. There is nothing more beautiful, richer or of better taste than their buildings, the ornaments of their churches and their homes. In all the cities of the Ottoman Empire the most beautiful houses belong to them and these houses, as well as their churches are not only gorgeous, but also clean, well maintained, elegant and comfortable. They have the manners of great lords and the interior of their palaces corresponds perfectly to the idea that we have in Europe of a princely residence in Asia. The Armenian convent of Jerusalem is immense, consisting of several buildings and surrounded by delightful gardens. There is a library full of beautiful manuscripts and miniatures on parchment, a treasure full of precious stones mounted with exquisite taste, and finally religious vestments woven with gold, silver and the most brilliant silks; everything dazzles the eyes and seduces the imagination. The Armenian Patriarch, surrounded by his monks with long well-groomed beards, his purple vestment, headdress and veil of the same color, bears no resemblance to a head of a European monastic community. It must have cost them a lot to humble themselves as they have for many centuries before the power of their conquerors, or rather they must have obtained great advantages from this humiliation that they endured so patiently, because these are not men who prostrate themselves in the dust just because it is dangerous to remain standing".³⁶

Belgiojoso dedicates these beautiful and heartfelt lines to the Armenians. She is the only one among our lady travelers who speaks of them not only in a religious context but also as a community of individuals. We know nothing about her knowledge of or her acquaintance with the Armenian people and their culture. But her words must be sincere. According to her personality she would not indulge in gratuitous compliments or in *clichés*. As an aristocrat, she was used to a rich environment and was educated to

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 205-206.

beauty and manners. She sees all this in the Armenians. Her opinion must then be considered very valuable.

From the comments of our lady travelers on the Armenian presence in the Old City of Jerusalem the most evident data are:

- The Armenian presence could never be ignored. It is always reported and commented.

- The ladies' admiration for the beauty of the Armenian Church and monastery. They cannot avoid mentioning them while describing the Old City of Jerusalem's treasures.

- The impression of opulence, richness and magnificence of the Armenians: their attires, the priest's vestments, the ornaments and furnishings. "The Armenians, all rich", summarizes Flora Randegger. This is the impression that our lady travelers have of the Armenians. And this must have seemed true to all travelers, old and contemporary, when in St. James Church or in the Armenian Patriarchate. The Armenian possessions in the Old City of Jerusalem give an impression of abundance. Even the excellent restaurant, the Armenian Tavern, near Jaffa Gate, is spectacular, beautifully and richly adorned.

MARIA CRISTINA RATTIGHIERI

Summary

VIAGGIATRICI ITALIANE A GERUSALEMME (1850-1935). DESCRIZIONI E IMPRESSIONI SULLA PRESENZA ARMENA NELLA CITTÀ VECCHIA DI GERUSALEMME.

MARIA CRISTINA RATTIGHIERI

L' articolo offre un punto di vista esterno e "dall'estero" della Città Vecchia di Gerusalemme, tra la metà del 1800 e il primo periodo del Mandato Britannico, con particolare riguardo alla presenza armena. Nel lasso di tempo indicato, cinque viaggiatrici italiane si sono recate a Gerusalemme per motivi diversi: tutte hanno scritto e pubblicato un diario sulla loro esperienza.

Una di loro era la famosa giornalista e scrittrice napoletana Matilde Serao, cattolica credente non convenzionale, ma rispettosa della tradizione, che, nel 1893, decise di andare in Terra Santa per ricavarne un *reportage* giornalistico. Altre due viaggiatrici, invece, si sono recate a Gerusalemme per compiere un pellegrinaggio: Maria Sticco milanese, fervente cattolica, è andata con il primo pellegrinaggio effettuato dall'associazione Gioventù Femminile Cattolica Italiana (GFCI) nel 1930; quattro anni più tardi è andata per lo stesso scopo l'altra, Maria Anna Spinelli da Pistoia. Per un'altra, la lombarda Cristina Trivulzio, un'agnostica scettica, Gerusalemme è stata invece la tappa di un lungo tour che stava effettuando nel Medio Oriente. Infine, Flora Randegger, figlia di un rabbino di Trieste, appassionata credente ebrea, era andata nella Città Santa nel 1856 per vivere lì e fondarvi una scuola per ragazze.

Tutte hanno descritto le loro esperienze e ciò che hanno visto: una Città Vecchia, variegata, caotica, multiculturale, multireligiosa, multiethnica, policentrica e poliglotta. Una città dall' "anima multipla" come una di queste viaggiatrici la definisce. Nei loro diari sono sempre presenti interessanti riferimenti alle comunità cristiane di Gerusalemme e, in particolare, alla comunità armena della Città Vecchia.

Volutamente, nell'articolo, le viaggiatrici sono presentate in senso cronologico inverso: dalla più recente alla più lontana nel tempo, che è l'aristocratica lombarda Cristina Trivulzio, principessa di Belgioioso, proprio per dare risalto alle sue osservazioni sugli armeni, che sono riportate per intero. La Trivulzio aveva un occhio particolarmente attento e ha descritto, come nessun altro, la comunità armena che ha visto mentre si trovava nella Città Vecchia nel 1852. Le sue descrizioni e i commenti, tratti dal suo diario "Vita intima e vita nomade in Oriente", prima scritto in francese nel 1855, è il fulcro del presente contributo. Il suo diario è ricordato in due lavori molto importanti di Nathan Schur, pubblicati a Gerusalemme: *Jerusalem in Pilgrims and Travellers' Accounts, A Thematic Bibliography of Western Christian Itineraries 1300-1917* e *Twenty Centuries of Christian Pilgrimage to the Holy Land*.