

Before the Templers: The millenarist settlement in Artas Part II

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This is the second part of Falestin Naili's study of the support networks for the millenarist settlement in Artas. The first part, dealing with support from Britain and North America, appeared in the Spring 2011 – Issue 45 of Jerusalem Quarterly. This part deals with support from German-speaking countries during the period 1845-1878.



If, therefore, you have a mind to visit us in spirit, you will, after having come from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, past the grave of Rachael and the well of Elijah, though fig and olive gardens and vineyards, until you arrive in our beautiful valley, find Moller employed on Masonry, Steinborn in digging, his wife in making butter, and myself, perhaps in milking – as I am the best hand at the latter, it becomes part of my occupation. Is it not sweet to have to do with milk and honey in the Holy Land!¹

Millenarism as the belief in the Second Coming of Christ and his thousand-year reign on Earth was an important motivation driving early nineteenth-century European and American initiatives in Palestine.² Believing that the “restoration” of the Jews and their conversion to Christianity were indispensable conditions for the Second

Sitt Louise (Baldensperger). *Source: Palestine Exploration Fund.*



Henri Baldensperger, year unknown.
Source: *Palestine Exploration Fund*.

Coming, millenarist Christians created a wide variety of institutions, most of them missionary, to bring about this state of affairs. Some of these projects were initiated by missionary organizations such as the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews (founded in 1809, and sometimes abbreviated to London Jews' Society, or LJS), others were individual initiatives. One such individual project was the agricultural settlement founded by the Briton John Meshullam (1799-1878) in the village of Artas south of Bethlehem in the mid-nineteenth century.

This settlement, which was the first of its kind in Palestine, drew considerable support from individuals and organizations in Britain and North America, but also in German-speaking parts of Europe. It is an interesting example of the “multinational” alliances of millenarist Christians in Palestine and

of their extensive and increasingly interconnected support networks in Europe and North America. This article will focus on the German-speaking members of the Artas colony's support network, an earlier article having dealt with its British and North American support network.³

While millenarism was particularly widespread in nineteenth-century Britain and North America, this belief system was also present in continental Europe. In the aftermath of the religious revival movement (in German *Erweckungsbewegung*) which swept through Protestant communities on the “old continent,” several organizations calling for missionary work among the Jews saw the light of day in German-speaking parts of Europe. Their goal was to convert Jews to Christianity and to encourage their emigration to Palestine, both of which they saw as conditions *sine qua non* for the Second Coming of Christ. Members of these organizations who immigrated to Palestine generally went to Jerusalem first, where they sought the assistance of already established missionaries, and a number of them eventually joined John Meshullam's agricultural settlement in the Artas valley, which slowly became a multi-national millenarist hodgepodge.

Henri Baldensperger: a hermit becomes the center of a network

Henri (Heinrich) Baldensperger (1823-1896)⁴ joined John Meshullam's project in 1849 and became the first European to actually build a house and settle in the valley of Artas in the nineteenth century. At that time, Meshullam, who was a convert to Anglicanism of Jewish descent, had not yet moved into the valley with his family, but was still living in Jerusalem, where he owned a hotel. Having obtained a long-term lease for about half of the fertile valley in 1845, in the first few years Meshullam essentially ran an agricultural operation in Artas, the produce of which he sold (or donated) in Jerusalem. It was only from 1849 onwards that his agricultural exploitation became a settlement.

Henri Baldensperger was an important partner for John Meshullam in the early years of the settlement and greatly facilitated its links to supporters in German-speaking countries. This young Alsatian had come to Jerusalem in 1848 as one of the first four missionaries of the Swiss Chrischona Mission society. This society was founded at the beginning of the nineteenth century by Christian Friedrich Spittler (1782-1867), a native of Württemberg. It was only one of nearly thirty organizations founded by Spittler, among which there also was a society for the promotion of Christianity among the Jews. The particularity of the Chrischona mission was Spittler's idea of sending young craftsmen to live among the populations targeted by missionary work and to show the good example of a "truly Christian" way of life. Henri Baldensperger was a wood or metal turner before becoming a missionary.⁵

In Jerusalem, Henri Baldensperger and his three colleagues (Schick,⁶ Palmer⁷ and Müller⁸) established the Brethrens' House (*Brüderhaus*) near Jaffa Gate in order to conduct missionary work among the native population. According to Henri Baldensperger's private diary,⁹ the four "brothers" mostly tried to assist orphans and poor children of all confessions.¹⁰ However, he soon had doubts about his work and the missionary enterprise in Jerusalem in general¹¹ and when his friend Christian Hanauer¹² of the LJS showed him the Artas "project" and introduced him to Meshullam, Baldensperger immediately began to consider leaving the Brethrens' House.

Today Mr. Hanauer persuaded me to go to the closed gardens of Solomon, so we left on horseback at 8 in the morning, with another convert, who has rented much land there. . . . I was astonished when I saw the magnificent gardens and fields in the deep valley! . . . The people of the village of Artas were very friendly, they received us with politeness. . . . We spoke a lot, about agriculture, profit and I heard everything, but my mind was elsewhere. . . . Because I was engaged in a dialogue with the Lord, about agriculture etc. and thinking about a mission . . .¹³

Henri Baldensperger preferred solitary meditation to communal prayer in church,¹⁴ so the prospect of living alone in the valley of Artas was very tempting for him. He spent several months contemplating the possibility of joining Meshullam in Artas. What

finally convinced him to take this step was Spittler's insistence on the celibacy¹⁵ of the missionaries, which Baldensperger was not ready to accept. He thus resigned from his functions in the autumn of 1849, joined Meshullam's project in Artas¹⁶ and soon arranged for his future wife to join him in Palestine.

The 7th of October [1849] Today I decided to leave the Brethrens' House in order to start anew in a different field of activity, following the Lord's advice. . . . I went to Mrs. Gobat for some business, she began to tell me of the danger I was putting myself in, because I wouldn't have any community, nothing Christian etc. . . . To this I responded that I had the Lord Jesus, who was Christian enough, and that his community was sufficient for me etc. . . .¹⁷

Henri thoroughly enjoyed his first few months of solitude in Artas.¹⁸ Nonetheless, at the end of November 1849, he witnessed a first manifestation of the local inhabitants' discontent when the villagers claimed that Meshullam's land was rightfully theirs and threatened to destroy his gardens and Henri's tent.¹⁹ Aside from these threats, which had no immediate consequences, the coexistence of Meshullam and Baldensperger with the villagers seems to have been peaceful and tranquil during this period. Henri Baldensperger had friendly contacts with villagers and soon began to learn the secrets of native apiculture from Jadallah, the village beekeeper.²⁰ According to his son Philip, his relationship with the neighboring semi-nomadic Ta'amra Bedouins was also good, since the latter were convinced that Henri, as a Christian hermit, was just as invulnerable as a Muslim dervish.²¹

In June 1850 John Meshullam himself settled in Artas with his wife and children,²² and in December 1850, Henri Baldensperger's wife Caroline joined her husband in Artas.²³ In the eyes of the first European settlers, the valley of Artas thus clearly was a safe place for them and their families.

The decade from the end of 1850 until 1860 was a period of great activity for the settlement in Artas: many people joined the settlement for more or less long periods of time, new alliances were forged, and many travelers visited and went back home to report on the colony. Henri was an important asset for Meshullam during this period, since his presence and his command of German and Arabic made it possible for German-speakers, who would otherwise not have been able to communicate with the local population, to join the settlement.²⁴

His full-time presence and involvement in the settlement however soon ended. In early 1851, the Baldenspergers accepted an offer from the Protestant bishop of Jerusalem, Samuel Gobat, to work in the new English school in Jerusalem.²⁵ For Henri, this was a difficult decision, since he had come to consider Artas his home.²⁶

The young couple kept their house in Artas where they later spent weekends and vacations with their children.²⁷ When after forty-five years of service in the Gobat school in Jerusalem Henri and Caroline Baldensperger retired, they went back to Artas. After their death their daughter Louise Baldensperger kept their house, dividing her time between Jerusalem and Artas, where she hosted many researchers, most

notably the Finnish anthropologist Hilma Granqvist who took a great interest in the Baldensperger's family history and carefully preserved the family documents Louise Baldensperger had handed over to her.

Friedrich (Frederick) Grossteinbeck and the Rhineland group: the “avant-garde” of German settlers in the Holy Land

When Henri Baldensperger was still living and working in Artas he met a group of Germans in Jerusalem and invited them to the settlement in February 1850. Two weeks later, Henri noted in his diary that “Friedrich” wanted to join him and Meshullam in Artas.²⁸ This Friedrich must have been Frederick Grossteinbeck, whose letter is included in the back matter of the book *Meshullam! Or, Tidings from Jerusalem* written by John Meshullam's American associate, Clorinda Minor in 1851.²⁹ Friedrich Grossteinbeck eventually became an American citizen and shortened his name to Frederick Steinbeck.³⁰

His letter, in which he explains his reasons for coming to Palestine and describes his first experiences, shows the experimental nature of millenarist immigration to Palestine in the mid-nineteenth century.

We came to this country nearly a year ago, from the Rhine province in Prussia, where there are many brethren holding the same faith with us, about the restoration of Israel, and the coming of the Lord. Within the last few years, there were several societies established for Israel, and colporters sent out to the Jews, to distribute Bibles among them. Through these movements, many of us became so interested in behalf of the Holy Land, that many would willingly have started at once to emigrate there, if the undertaking had not seemed too hazardous at the present time. . . . Now in order that the cause might not suffer by delay, and in order to find out soon, if it were practicable to live in peace among the Arabs, and gain bread sufficient for our families, we concluded at once to go there with our families. Our beloved father gave each of us, several hundred dollars, and after many blessings from our people, we left them on Nov. 29, '49 by railroad from Barmen.

When we left, we numbered ten persons, five men, two women, and three children, the least of whom was two and a half years old. God Almighty brought us wonderfully through many storms, by sea and land, so we arrived after ten weeks, safely in Jerusalem! . . . Having all arrived, we were advised, and consulted with this and that person, about our future course, but generally they prophesied us no good. One gentleman thought ‘settling in the country is yet too insecure’, another said, ‘the soil is too unproductive’. But trusting in God, we were not discouraged, but gradually looked about at things as they were, and hired out as day laborers, and began to pick up a little of the language. After this we bought cows, sheep and goats. We had brought

with us some good churns, by means of which our butter very soon proved quite a celebrated object in Jerusalem, which we sold at a good price in the season of English and other travellers. . . . We have two large gardens, in which we plant European vegetables, etc., which we sell to the city. Thus we have worked our way thus far by God's blessing. . . . We are happy to state that since our arrival, we have all been indeed very happy, and not a single moment has any one of us regretted coming to live here. . . .³¹

Clorinda Minor's book contains an anonymous letter which, judging from its content, must also have been written by Friedrich Grossteinbeck. The letter is prefaced by a small paragraph stating that it was previously published by the Rhenish Westphalian Jews' Society, which is also known as the Rhenish Westphalian Society for Israel, founded by Heinrich J. Richter (1799-1847).³² Friedrich Grossteinbeck and his associates from Barmen seem to have been members of this society.

This letter mentions the Brethren's House in Jerusalem, which was an important first address for German-speaking Christian travelers and settlers in the mid-nineteenth century and refers to Henri Baldensperger as "an excellent young man from Alsace." It describes the settlers' living conditions in great detail and contains advice for future settlers.

We arrived in health and safety in Jerusalem, and went of course to the Brethren's House, where we were received with great kindness. We found employment almost immediately. . . . An excellent young man from Alsace, who was formerly in the Brethren's House in Jerusalem, settled half a year ago in Artos, near Bethlehem, in the gardens of Solomon, in the midst of Arabs. Conjointly with a baptized Jew in Jerusalem, he has farmed several of the gardens, and some land. They have also built a house there, although no good was prophesied for them; even the dear Bishop Gobat thought the undertaking too hazardous; but they have prospered beyond expectation. I at once joined this worthy young man. . . . I have erected my tent and use it both by day and night, Steinborn and his wife have also joined us here. We have already two cows and intend to purchase some more.

. . . We expect to earn our livelihood comfortably. No one of us desires to return. God turn his face again in mercy to this country. The abundant rain of the two last years, has again opened springs where for many years there were none, and also the pools of Solomon are full to overflowing. . . . As soon as our prospects shall have yet further improved, colonists from Wurtemberg and Alsace purpose settling here. There have now for two years been four men here, deputed by them, with the same object as brought us here. They have written home that people of property need not hesitate to come, as there is as much security here as in any other country, probably. But poor people would meet with some difficulties.

. . . The country round Jerusalem is said to be the most unfruitful part

of Palestine, and yet barley and wheat grow luxuriantly in the wretchedly cultivated soil, without any manure. . . . Fruit is abundant as oranges, olives, paradise apples, pome granates, &c. . . . There are several opportunities of purchasing land; but as we do not yet know what may be our final destination, we defer making any purchase. . . .

Whoever can be satisfied, as the country people here are, with bread, meal, eggs, oil, and milk, will find the living here both wholesome and cheap. But a person of many wants must bring a large supply of money, and even then, perhaps, he may not get on. Artizans of every kind are to be found in Jerusalem, where they are able to earn their livelihood. New comers, however, would have to struggle with difficulties before they can establish themselves in business. I can, therefore advise no one to come, unless an entire colony comes to settle here. Let, therefore, those who have at heart the well-being of this country and its people, promote the work as far as they are able, and rejoice in hope with us over Jerusalem, and the glorious promises relating to this country, such as Is. 1xvi; 1i.3; &c . . . Many of these most precious promises begin already to be fulfilled; and who can continue to doubt when we behold with our own eyes the zeal of the whole world to bring succor to this country? From England, France, Germany, and Russia, there are parties here for the same purpose. America does not lag behind. . . . We long with much anxiety when the fulness of the Gentiles shall have come in, and so all Israel shall be saved. (Rom. Xi. 25, 26) When believing Israelites shall be named priests of the Lord, and ministers of our God. (Is. 1xi. 5,6). We shall consider ourselves greatly honored in being permitted to be the ploughmen and vine-dressers. . . .³³

Friedrich Grossteinbeck, his brother Johann (John) and the rest of the group from the Rhineland shared the belief of John Meshullam, Henri Baldensperger and Clorinda Minor in the Second Coming of Christ and the important role of Jews in preparing for it. Together with Henri Baldensperger, the Rhinelanders represented the German-speaking wing of the millenarist tendency, which was strongly influenced by Protestant pietism. In his letter, Friedrich Grossteinbeck clearly expressed his hope of being part of an international movement for the “restoration” of the Jews.

Millenarist settlers from continental Europe were, however, in a situation different from that of their British and American counterparts. Their individual initiatives did not find the sort of nationwide resonance enjoyed by their British fellow believers, who could imagine and present themselves as the “spearhead” of British imperialism. Furthermore, in the mid-nineteenth century, they were comforted by a current of British foreign policy favoring Jewish and Protestant presence in Palestine. While North American millenarists did not have such political underpinnings, in ideological terms, they did see themselves in the tradition of the “pioneer” history of the European colonization of North America. Compared to their British and American fellow believers, German-speaking settlers in mid-nineteenth-century Palestine thus were

“free electrons” whose initiatives largely depended on their private support networks.

The settlers from the Rhineland did not stay very long at Artas, though Friedrich Grossteinbeck seems to have stayed longer than the rest of the group. In 1855, he finally joined the Mount Hope settlement founded by Clorinda Minor in Wadi Musrara near Jaffa after the highly conflictual end of her alliance with John Meshullam.³⁴ After her death he became the head of this small American and German settlement until he was killed in January 1858 in a criminal attack on the settlers.³⁵ This assault, in the course of which Friedrich Grossteinbeck’s American wife and mother-in-law were raped and his father-in-law gravely injured, temporarily led to a serious deterioration of US and Ottoman diplomatic relations.³⁶ It also dealt a blow to other European Christian groups considering settlement in Palestine.

How Artas almost became the first Templar settlement in nineteenth-century Palestine

Among those following the development of the Mount Hope settlement near Jaffa were the Templers from Württemberg in the south of today’s Germany. Known at that time as the Society for the Ingathering of God’s People in Jerusalem, this group of Pietist Protestants considered that they, as the “people of God,” should settle in Palestine in order to rebuild the temple and thus hasten the Second Coming of Christ.

The society sent its first delegation for an exploratory visit to Palestine in the immediate aftermath of the violent attack on the Mount Hope settlement in early 1858.³⁷ During this visit, the three delegates from Württemberg met Theodor Schneller and Henri Baldensperger, who described his contacts with them in his diary.³⁸ The Mount Hope assault was an important factor in the delegation’s decision to submit a report discouraging emigration to Palestine in the near future, considering it too risky and difficult.

Two years later, another small delegation from Württemberg arrived in Palestine. In the meantime, the Templers’ difficulties in their home country had increased and several members of the group had been officially excluded from the Protestant Church of Württemberg.³⁹ Henri Baldensperger noted the arrival of Hoffmann and four “brothers” in April 1860.⁴⁰ A few weeks later he recorded that he took Hoffmann and his companions to Artas where they signed a preliminary agreement with John Meshullam to join his settlement. He added that this did not please Theodor Schneller, who was another important contact for the Templers’ founding fathers in Palestine.⁴¹ The diary does not contain any information about later developments, but we know that the Templers finally created their first settlement in Haifa.⁴² Artas seems, however, to have remained an option in the minds of some of the pioneering settlers of the Templer movement as late as June 1869, when Henri Baldensperger made the following entry in his diary:

3rd of June. I went to Artas today with some brothers who are Hoffmann’s

companions and who come to the country in order to see where they could best settle down. May all of this be in the hands of the Lord who wants to do good for his people and this country.⁴³

While the Templers finally did not settle in Artas, it is interesting to think about the impact their presence there would have had on this early millenarist colony. In their vision of the “end of days,” the Templers, unlike millenarist Anglicans, did not attribute a particular role to the Jews. The key role was to be played by the “people of God,” i.e. the Templers themselves. How would this vision have fit in with those espoused by John Meshullam and most of his associates and supporters from Great Britain and North America? For the founder of the Artas colony and his inner circle of supporters, millenarism and restorationism went hand in hand, whereas the Templers’ idea of the kingdom of God on earth contained no restorationist elements. In any case, the Templers’ sustained interest in Artas is yet another sign of the visibility this settlement had attained in spite of its relatively small size compared to those which were to be founded elsewhere by the Templers.

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Endnotes

- 1 A.L. Wood, *Meshullam! Or Tidings from Jerusalem, From the Journal of a Believer Recently Returned from the Holy Land*, 2nd edition (Philadelphia: published by the author, 1851), 122. This is a quote from a letter probably written by Friedrich Grossteinbeck.
- 2 Millenarism often goes hand-in-hand with Restorationism, the conviction that the Bible mandates a final “restoration” of the Jews to the land of Israel. While Millenarism and Zionism thus share the goal of “restoring” the Jews, the ultimate objective is obviously not the same: political Zionism aims to create a nation-state for the Jews in Palestine, while Millenarism sees the ingathering of the Jews in Palestine, along with their conversion to Christianity, as a necessary step for the final redemption of Christendom.
- 3 Falestin Naili, “The Millenarist Settlement in Artas and its support network in Britain and North America, 1845-1878,” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 45 (Spring 2011) 43-56.
- 4 Heinrich Baldensperger was born into a family of craftsmen and farmers in the small village of Baldenheim near Colmar in the French Alsace. For more biographical information about him see F. Naili, “Henri Baldensperger : un missionnaire alsacien et le ‘vivre ensemble’ en Palestine ottomane,” *Annuaire de la Société d’Histoire de la Hardt et du Ried*, no. 23 (2011): 121-134.
- 5 Gottfried Burger, personal communication (email), 15 March 2005.
- 6 Conrad Schick later joined the staff of the London Jews’ Society and went on to do research in archeology. A number of his articles were published in the *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* (J.E. Hanauer, “Notes on the History of Modern Colonisation in Palestine,” *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, April (1900): 126).
- 7 Frederick Palmer later became the director of the Protestant Boys’ School in Jerusalem established by Bishop Gobat (A.L. Tibawi, *British Interests in Palestine, 1800-1901: A Study of Religious and Educational Enterprise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 119.
- 8 Henri Baldensperger’s diary, 50, in the Granqvist archives held by the Palestine Exploration Fund in London. After leaving the Brethrens’ House, Müller became involved in the German Mission in Bethlehem (Hanauer, “Notes,” 126).

- 9 Baldensperger's diary is part of the archives of the Finnish anthropologist Hilma Granqvist, who was hosted by Henri's daughter Louise in Artas during the Mandate period. The Granqvist archives are held by the Palestine Exploration Fund in London.
- 10 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 6.
- 11 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 2-4.
- 12 Christian Wilhelm Hanauer (1810-1873), LJS missionary in Palestine, was from Fellheim near Memmingen in Bavaria. See Yaron Perry, *British Mission to the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Palestine* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 81.
- 13 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 35, my translation.
- 14 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 17.
- 15 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 68.
- 16 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 69.
- 17 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 69, my translation.
- 18 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 69.
- 19 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 74.
- 20 Philip J. Baldensperger, "95 ans d'apiculture" [signed 'Papa Baldens'], *Bulletin de la Société d'Apiculture des Alpes-Maritimes*, 21st year, Jan.-Feb.-March (1942): 9.
- 21 Philip J. Baldensperger, 9.
- 22 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 85.
- 23 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 100.
- 24 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 99.
- 25 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 106.
- 26 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 108.
- 27 Philip J. Baldensperger, *The Immovable East, Studies of the People and Customs of Palestine* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1913), 113-114.
- 28 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 83-85.
- 29 The book was published in Philadelphia under the name of A. L. Wood (see note 1). For more information about Clorinda Minor, see the first part of this article in Falestin Naili, "The Millenarist Settlement in Artas and its support network in Britain and North America, 1845-1878," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 45, Spring (2011): 43-56.
- 30 He was the great-uncle of the US American writer John Steinbeck.
- 31 Wood, *Meshullam*, 128-129.
- 32 Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses et Millénarismes* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), 158.
- 33 Wood, *Meshullam*, 121-124.
- 34 Hanauer, "Notes," 131, 140.
- 35 Barbara Kreiger (with Shalom Goldman), *Divine Expectations: An American Woman in Nineteenth-Century Palestine* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999), 155-159.
- 36 Alex Carmel, *Die Siedlungen der württembergischen Templer in Palästina, 1868-1918* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), 14.
- 37 Carmel, *Die Siedlungen*, 14.
- 38 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 177.
- 39 Carmel, *Die Siedlungen*, 16.
- 40 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 214.
- 41 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 215.
- 42 Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xiii.
- 43 Henri Baldensperger's diary, 269, my translation.