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JOHN STEINBECK'S ROOTS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PALESTINE

YARON PERRY

IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY, Johann Adolf Grosssteinbeck (1832–1913), the grandfather of John Ernst Steinbeck (1902–1968), arrived in the Holy Land. He wished to establish an agricultural settlement in which he would train the Jews of Palestine to engage in farming and thereby hasten the advent of the Christian Messiah. A few years later the settlement was totally wiped out in a single night of terror during which the brother of John Steinbeck's grandfather was killed, his grandmother's sister and mother were raped, and all the belongings of the settlers were pillaged.

This vile act reverberated throughout the country and caused those of foreign nationality a sense of insecurity and fateful apprehension. A handful of faithful Protestant believers had been lured to the area by their millenarian expectations of the imminent arrival of the End of Days, the Second Coming of the Christian Messiah, and the beginning of his thousand-year reign. The return of the Jews to Palestine and their conversion to Christianity was thought to be a prior condition for the realization of the millennium. Anticipating the return of Jesus Christ, the settlers saw the establishment of agricultural settlements and the involvement of Jews in farming work as a shortcut to His return.

The Christian attempts to settle Palestine under Ottoman rule were made possible by reforms introduced in the middle of the nineteenth century. These reforms accelerated the process by which foreign powers began penetrating the country, until Christian agricultural settlements gradually became

a matter of routine. However, the Grosssteinbeck farm was the first of its kind and therefore deserves special mention; this defiantly Christian Protestant group from Germany was joined by another group from the United States, both having set out for Palestine toward the end of 1849 without prior coordination or any previous acquaintance with each other. Both groups had initially resided at the same sites and eventually set up a settlement of agricultural farmsteads northeast of the city of Jaffa. In the center of this area stood a hill that the Americans chose to call Mount Hope, where today there stands an educational institution that is now within the municipal boundaries of Tel Aviv.

SETTLEMENT

The group of Germans immigrated to Palestine from Elberfeld near Barmen-Wuppertal (now in the western part of Germany) and included Johann Grosssteinbeck, his brother, Friedrich Wilhelm Grosssteinbeck (1821–1858), their sister, Maria Katharina (1826–1862) and her husband, Gustav Thiel (1825–1907) as well as two other families.

In a letter written on 28 November 1850, Friedrich describes the circumstances surrounding their departure and the voyage to the Holy Land:

We came to this country nearly a year ago [1849], 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....We came to the conclusion, to raise some funds, and to send first two deputies to Palestine, in order to ascertain if it were possible for us to dwell there with our families. Unfortunately most of the brethren who felt interested were farmers and mechanics, who had suffered much the last few years, from the failure of the produce of the fields, war, etc., so that money was scarce. 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 con-

cluded 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[ember] 29, [18]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. (qtd. in Minor 127–29)

The exhausting journey to Palestine took two months. The group traveled from Barmen to Berlin and from there to Vienna, Trieste, and Izmir. They sailed from that port through the Mediterranean in the dead of a stormy winter to Beirut, and from there traveled by another boat to Jaffa. On the very day of their arrival they set out for Jerusalem, but halfway along the road, near the village of Latrun, Maria Thiel went into labor and, with the assistance of the women of the village, gave birth to her first daughter (*Neueste Nachrichten* Aug. 1850). Her husband, Gustav, stayed behind for five days to take care of her and the child while the rest of the group hurried onward to Jerusalem, entering its gates on 4 February 1850.



Steinbeck Family
Archive, Germany.

The small European community in the city received the newcomers warmly and did all they could to help them find means for subsistence. Gustav Thiel and his wife, the young mother, lived in the new Christ Church compound that had been inaugurated by British missionaries a year earlier. Thiel served as a caretaker in the pilgrim's hostel adjoining the Church and was in charge of maintaining the cemetery of the Protestant community on Mount Zion. Johann Grosssteinbeck earned his living by working as a carpenter. His brother Friedrich joined a small agricultural enterprise set up by John Meshullam (1799–1878), a converted Jew and member of a British missionary society, near the Arab village of Artas in the neighborhood of Bethlehem, and he soon took an active part in this (Fliedner 102). However, for no apparent reason, Friedrich chose to abandon his work in Artas

and to move to Jerusalem in November 1851. Perhaps he did so because he knew that in that very month a group of Americans had left Philadelphia on their way to settle on Meshullam's land. And Friedrich would have known that Meshullam, sympathetic to England, would much prefer American settlers on his land to a German resident.



The Steinbeck sons in 1864—Charles, 7 years, Herbert 5 years, Ernst (father of John) 2 years.

The German group did not remain in Jerusalem for long before they leased a plot of land near Jaffa and began to cultivate it. A short while afterward, the three members of the Grosssteinbeck family bought eight acres of leased land, most of it planted with trees. At one end there was a courtyard surrounded by a high wall with a gate, and inside there was a two-story house with a few other houses as well and stalls for animals (*Neueste Nachrichten* Feb. 1853).

During the first half of 1853 the American group from Philadelphia joined the German settlers who by this time had been in the Jaffa area for nearly two years. The Americans had gone through the same process as the Germans. They arrived in Jerusalem, spent a short while at

Artas and then settled in the Jaffa area. Their leader was Clorinda S. Minor (1806–1855) of Philadelphia, also a millenarian believer. Minor possessed a deep religious faith and saw herself as a modern-day Queen Esther. She had set out in May 1849 on a long and difficult journey to the Holy Land. From September to November of that year she toured the country, came in touch with Meshullam, and made his farm in Artas her base station during her tours. Toward the end of her visit she made up her mind to settle in Palestine and returned to the United States to persuade her followers to come back with her to the country (Minor 91).

At the beginning of November 1851, accompanied by her son Charles and a small select group of faithful adherents, Clorinda Minor traveled to Palestine. The settlers brought along tents, furniture, tools, clothing, and medications, as well as various species of European fruits and vegetables. As soon

as they arrived, they joined Meshullam in Artas and toiled energetically for a year. But quarrels broke out between Minor and Meshullam, which ended with the American group moving to Jerusalem. The dispute had developed into a crisis between Clorinda Minor and the British Foreign Office, and was settled only in August 1853 with a signed agreement (British Consulate J22/9). The dispute that drove the Americans to leave Artas was described by a British missionary residing in Jerusalem at the end of the nineteenth century: "The fact was that the colonists and Mr. Meshullam had quarrelled. We need not enter into details. All the world over every quarrel has two sides to it. In this one, as is generally the case with Palestinian quarrels, there are many more sides than two" (Hanauer 131).

In the winter of 1853, after a brief delay in order to get organized, the Americans joined the group of Germans who had already settled down on their land near Jaffa. Clorinda Minor was probably aware of difficulties that might occur between her and the Jews because of the missionary aspect of her activities. Although her stated intention was not to convert Jews, the implication was there in her very presence in the area, cultivating and teaching farming. She therefore took advantage of her stay in Jerusalem to strengthen her ties with the Jewish establishment and even tried to gain their support. At the site of the new settlement she found a way to win the hearts of the local Jews and managed to forge especially close ties with Judah Halevi, the Rabbi of Jaffa. The great esteem he showed toward the settler group even developed into a business partnership to ensure the livelihood of the group in the initial stage of settlement.

In a letter dated July 1853, written to the editor of the *Occident*—which Minor herself probably wrote for Rabbi Halevi who had no command of the English language—the rabbi hinted at the expected arrival of the Americans. He acquired an orchard that he leased to the members of the group with the intention of profiting from their experience to train the 30 Jews in his Jaffa community in agricultural work. The rabbi undoubtedly lent his support to the Grosssteinbeck/Minor enterprise to ensure that the land would be cultivated, a precondition for the second advent of the Messiah and an enterprise that prepared for the eventual return of the Jewish people. The rabbi wanted to make sure that the orchard would be available

for the Americans and maybe wanted to make some money from leasing the piece of land as well. However, the wearisome task of running the orchard business forced Minor herself to make an appeal through the Jewish-American publication *Occident* to the Jews of America for their support of her efforts to assist their fellow Jews in the Holy Land.

Our poor Jewish brethren are so enfeebled by want and inaction, that for the first year, with comfortable support, they will not more than be able to get accustomed and begin to work efficiently. It therefore needs much patient love and wisdom to deal truly with them. Even when they are well disposed, they are like children about active business; and the more experience we have, the more we are convinced that they need the tender care of "nursing mothers," as well as fathers, to elevate them.... This we could gladly do, but we have not the means. If any of our Hebrew friends in the United States will help us, we will do all in our power, and return them an exact account of every expenditure...only let not the opportunity pass, and the sufferers perish while help is deferred. (Minor, *Occident* 204-05)

The long and well-formulated letter of request had no effect, and donations were not forthcoming. But help arrived from an unexpected quarter. In 1855 Moses Montefiore (1784-1885), the well-known philanthropic English Jew, arrived on his fourth visit to Palestine with the intention of buying land and establishing various enterprises to increase productivity among the Jews of Palestine who were then dependent mainly on charitable contributions from their brethren abroad. After some hesitation, he chose to buy Rabbi Halevi's orchard in Jaffa, and in August 1855 an agreement was signed between him and Montefiore. Minor herself demanded and received monetary compensation on the basis of her prior agreement with Halevi and retained her position as manager of the orchard (Montefiore).

At the beginning of 1854 another American family joined the settlement. It was headed by Walter Dickson (1799-1860) of Groton, Massachusetts, who belonged to the American Agricultural Mission. He admitted that, having been seized with enthu-

siastic frenzy by the letters of Clorinda Minor—she undoubtedly wrote several—he sold his home and took his wife, Sarah (1800–1878), his son, Henry, and his daughters, Almira Anne (1828–1923), Mary E. (1833–1867), and Caroline Samueletta (1847–1932) to Palestine. They were preceded by another son, Philip Doddridge Dickson, who had gone there in July 1842 with his young wife, Susan, in order to teach the local inhabitants the basic principles of American farming. Philip Dickson became ill and died on 25 April 1853 (Richardson 7), and his wife decided to return to New England. She sailed to Boston and on her arrival there on October 21, she heard that her husband's family had left the city ten days earlier on their way to the country she had just left (Chamberlain 195–98).

The Dickson family adjusted well to the life of the settlement and very soon took on a central role. In June 1854, two of Walter's daughters were wed to the two Grosssteinbeck brothers: Almira married Johann and Mary married Friedrich, who decided to forgo his Prussian citizenship and requested the protection of the United States Consulate in Jerusalem (Rosen, 14 Jan 1858).

The importance of the American component in the combined group of settlers living at Mount Hope became more pronounced as time went on, and this is evident in the documentary evidence. In September 1854 the Swiss-born Protestant Bishop of Jerusalem, Samuel Gobat (1799–1879), reported that the Americans living together with the Germans near Jaffa were generally supported by donations from the United States and were taking advantage of their strong economic position: “by that means not only are they well off, but able to reduce the poor Germans to servitude; they make them work all Sunday, and keep Sabbath on the Saturday” (Gobat 308).

Meanwhile, additional members joined the settlement, but unlike the Dickson family, they came for limited periods and with specific needs. For instance, in the spring of 1854, Charles (1811–1876) and Martha (1813–1883) Saunders left Westerly, Rhode Island, for Palestine as missionaries of the Seventh Day Baptists Church. The couple chose to stay with the settlers at Mount Hope until they could find a permanent place to set up a Mission House in Jaffa itself. In January 1857, the writer Herman Melville (1819–1891) visited Palestine in the year when the Saunders couple were already living in Jaffa, and noted his impressions:

Mr. Saunders a broken-down machinist & returned Californian out at elbows. Mrs. S. a superior woman in many respects. They were sent out to found an Agricultural School for the Jews. They tried it but miserably failed. The Jews would come, pretend to be touched & all that, get clothing & then—vanished. Mrs. S. said they were very “deceitful.” Mr. S. now does nothing—health gone by climate. Mrs. S. learning Arabic from a Sheik, & turned doctress to the poor. She is waiting the Lord’s time, she says. For this she is well qualified, being of great patience. Their little girl looks sickly & pines for home—but the Lord’s work must be done. (Melville 101–02)

DECLINE

The gloomy picture described by Herman Melville after his visit to Jaffa also reflected the situation on Mount Hope in those days. The sanitary conditions in the area in which the settlement was set up, on a plain between the city of Jaffa and the Musrara rivulet (today known as the Ayalon River), were substandard. The bad drainage of the stream caused repeated flooding in the winter months that brought about attacks of malarial fever. Also outlaw gangs roaming the deserted areas outside the city made life more hazardous.

The Crimean War, which broke out in 1853 between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, contributed its share as well to the anarchic situation in nineteenth-century Palestine. The local Moslems regarded all Christian foreigners as a single entity so that they all, without exception, felt the effects of Moslem rage and fury at the drawn-out war between the Empire, which represented Islam, and a European power. There were increasing numbers of hostile acts against the German and American “infidels” in spite of the fact that the Ottoman struggle was specifically against the Russians.

In order to deter the local population from acts of aggression against the settlers and to make a show of strength, the *Levant*—an American warship under the command of Captain Carl C. Turner—was sent to Palestine in 1854, in the tradition of the Gun Boat Policy prevalent at the time. The officers met with the

consular representatives in Jaffa and Jerusalem and, of course, with the people of Mount Hope. There was a practical outcome of the visit since Turner provided the settlers with firearms from his armory with which they could defend themselves. In his report, the Acting Consul of the United States in Jerusalem, Warder Cresson, affirmed the important contribution made by the visit of a warship of the American Navy, adding that Turner had speeded up the process of bringing the attackers to justice and changed the attitude of the authorities who, from then onward, treated the settlers with respect (Alpert 278–81).

In the meantime, Clorinda Minor died, most probably from cancer and in great pain and suffering. She was buried in the settlement and the gravestone was inscribed: “Mrs. C.S. Minor from Philadelphia U.S.A. Industrial Missionary to the Jews. Died Nov. 6 1855 aged forty-six years. She hath done what she could.” This gravestone, as well as those of a few other

The criminal assault that took place in January 1858 was the culmination of a series of hostile acts against the settlement...

settlers, stood for many years on Mount Hope. When the educational institution was built on that site, the gravestones were removed and their present location is unknown.

After the death of Clorinda Minor, the number of settlers decreased. The Saunders family had found a permanent residence for themselves in Jaffa itself. In 1859, Charles Saunders even gained the position of U.S. Vice-Consul in the city and Minor’s son, Charles, continued supervising the Montefiore orchard for a while longer till, in all probability, he returned to the United States. From the time of Minor’s death in 1855 until the closure of the settlement, only three families remained there. Johann Grosssteinbeck, who had been Minor’s closest associate, continued her work and lived in the same buildings with his wife, Almira. Living nearby was the American, Walter Dickson, his wife, Sarah, and their two children, Henry and Caroline. And next door to them were Friedrich Grosssteinbeck, his wife, Mary, and their two young children.

The criminal assault that took place in January 1858 was the culmination of a series of hostile acts against the settlement and confrontations between the settlers and the surrounding Arab population that began to gain momentum five years ear-

lier. On 5 June 1853, after Friedrich Grosssteinbeck returned from grazing his flock, he complained to Jacob S. Murad, Vice-Consul of the United States and Prussia in Jaffa, that one of the farmers ("fellahin") and his daughter from the nearby village had rained blows upon him. Murad immediately demanded that the Governor of Jerusalem instruct his colleague in Jaffa to punish the guilty persons. When this was not done, Murad used his authority as Vice-Consul of a foreign power to arrest the suspects himself. In an attempt to settle the dispute, Murad summoned the representatives of both sides, but they did not appear. The German settlers demanded an apology in writing, while the Sheikh of the village, representing the suspects, advised Murad to release them because they lived in the same neighborhood as the settlers and might continue to show hostility toward them.

These events forced the Prussian Consul in Jerusalem, Georg Rosen (1829–1891), to travel from Jerusalem to Jaffa and to exert the full weight of his authority in the matter. Before applying to the City Council, Rosen conducted his own private investigation and found that Grosssteinbeck bore some of the responsibility for what had occurred. His flock had crossed into the farmer's land and eaten the farmer's crop. While these clarifications were being made, Grosssteinbeck resumed grazing his flock, and Rosen concluded that the damage suffered by the plaintiff was "merely that of pain."

Armed with these conclusions, the Consul approached the Jaffa City Council and calmed down those involved in the affair. He suggested that 150 piasters be allocated to hire the services of a mounted guard with imposing features who would patrol the settlers' farms daily in order to show that their lives were not undefended. A few weeks later, in a summarizing report to the Embassies at Constantinople, Rosen wrote that all matters were now resolved, the farmer's penalty had been reduced in exchange for good behavior, the mounted guard was performing his function well and the bad-tempered feelings had dissipated (Rosen, 27 June 1858).

In October 1857, a few other incidents occurred that seem to have led directly to the criminal act of 1858. Three riders came to the farm on Mount Hope and encountered Mary

Johann Adolf and wife, Almira (nee Dickson) with son Charles.



Grosssteinbeck who was working in the yard. The encounter was described by Edwin DeLeon, the United States Consul in Alexandria, on the basis of testimony he had obtained from members of the family during his stay at Jaffa for a few months after the event [the Steinbeck family dropped the Gross at some time, but the exact date is unknown]:

A short time ago, about the month of October, Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Steinbeck were living in a small hut, within Mr. Dickson's enclosure, but about 20 yards distant from his house. One morning, while Steinbeck was working in the fields, and Mrs. Steinbeck and her little sister Caroline, a girl of 11 years of age, were alone in the house with the infant children of Mrs. Steinbeck, two Arabs, one dressed like a soldier and the other like a Bedouin of the hills, rode up to the door and demanded fire for their pipes; Mrs. Steinbeck sent Caroline to Mrs. Dickson's house for fire, having none in her own. While she was absent, the man dressed as a soldier, who was of much fairer complexion than the other, dismounted from his horse, walked up to where Mrs. Steinbeck was standing, smoothed down her hair with his hand, took other liberties, and, in the Arabic language, which she understands, made use of very improper expressions, ending with a direct request to be permitted to sleep with her. Mrs. Steinbeck, becoming alarmed, pushed the man away, ran out of the door, and called to her father to summon her husband to her assistance; both men then rode off; before they did so, the fairer Arab said to Mrs. Steinbeck, "if you hear horsemen in the night don't be alarmed." Mrs. Steinbeck is a young and pretty woman, of fair complexion and light hair, both of which are very attractive to the Arabs and this was not the first time she had been assailed with rudeness but her husband being a young, fearless, and powerful man, she was confident in his ability to protect her. (DeLeon, 8 February 1858)

That very night the Arabs kept their promise and returned to the farm in order to attack Friedrich. During the struggle that ensued, the Arabs noticed the chimney stack on the roof of the Dickson house nearby which they took to be the form of a man. Steinbeck confirmed their impressions by saying that it was his brother Johann who was standing there with a rifle in his hand. The Arabs took off, but the seriousness of the incident caused Friedrich and his family to leave their home and move into the main building of the farm occupied by Walter Dickson and his family.

THE CRIME

The number of sources regarding what took place on the night between the 11th and 12th of January 1858 makes it possible to throw light upon this tragic incident. Five days after the murder, members of the family gave evidence before Warren J. Gorham, the United States Consul in Jerusalem, who had arrived in Jaffa to deal with the crime. The Consul took down the testimony of Walter Dickson, his wife, Sarah, and their youngest daughter, Caroline. But the most horrifying details are recorded in the testimony of Mary Steinbeck, the wife of Friedrich. This testimony was given two days later, on 18 January, apparently to allow her enough time to recover from her ordeal. The testimony is very detailed, agitated and fragmented. It is quoted here in full:

About ten o'clock, on the night of the eleventh of January, 1858, the dogs began to bark; my husband, Frederick Steinbeck, went out and opened the gate and saw a man running away. Then Frederick [*sic*] and Mr. Dickson, my father, went out together, and three men came outside the gate and said they were looking for a cow which they had lost. Frederick and father said there was no cow there, and the men went away. Frederick went to bed, but father sat up. In a short time, we again heard voices, someone came to the gate and called "Steinbeck." Frederick rose, and went to the gate, and they said they had been to a shepherd's that lived near us, and he said that the cow was in our



Johann Peter
Grosssteinbeck,
1794–1873

yard. They wished to come in and look for the cow. Frederick told them to go and get the shepherd. They talked a long time; Frederick left them and came into the house again. He took off his clothes and came to bed; he laid down for about ten minutes, then got up, dressed, and went out. They again told him to open the gate, and said they would break it down if he did not. He came in and said they were going to break down the gate; he began to load the revolver. Presently we heard a

crash; father said, "they have broken the gate." Frederick and father both went out. Frederick took the gun, for the revolver was not loaded. We soon heard the report of a gun, and Frederick soon after opened the door, and said, "Oh! Mary, I have a ball!" He staggered into the middle of the room and fell. I went to him and took his head in my lap; then I unbuttoned his pantaloons and saw where the wound was. I saw only one wound, which was a little above the right groin; the blood was flowing very copiously; he tried to speak; he said "Oh! Father forgive all my sins and help me to bear this dreadful pain." The thieves came to the door of the room where we were at this time; they pried the door open from below; the door opened and five men entered; the foremost had a large, long stick, and he struck father. Father fell backwards; I sprang to him, the blood was running all over his face in streams; I assisted him to the back part of the room, and he sat down. They then took the funnel off the stove; another went to the clock and tore out the weights, &c. The white man caught part of Caroline's wearing apparel and threw it over his head and face. The other had their faces covered, excepting their eyes; they then began to open what trunks were in that room unlocked; others went into the other room and found locked trunks; they wanted me to go in and open them. I refused, but said if they would bring the trunks to where I was, I would unlock them; I did so. I then went back and sat down by my husband. The white man came to me and wanted me to go out doors and show him other rooms. I refused; he took hold of my arms; I seized the bedstead; then one of the black men came and struck me in the breast with the back of his gun, and once or twice in the back. He pulled me until the bedstead gave way, over my husband's body outside of the house. He pulled me some distance from the door; he was accompanied by two black men. He threw me down on the ground; I struggled, he took out his pistol and held it to my breast; then I yielded.

He violated me. Before I had time to rise, another one came; he violated me and bit my cheek. Then a third one violated me. They then went into the house, and I got up and followed them. I went to Frederick; I could not feel his pulse; I sat down by father and mother on the floor. The men were ransacking everything. They came and asked where the money was; they took hold of me, and pulled me into the other room, striking me on the head; they all left the room but one; he threw me down, he bit me, and violated me. Then there was but one light left, which they took, and went into the other part of the house. Father prayed. They came back and asked for a light; I lighted one for them. Then they went out but one came back and asked me where the others were; I answered; guided by my voice, he came in and took hold of me. I struggled violently; he pulled me into the other room and violated me. Before he left me, the white man came in with a lantern. They demanded money; I told them we had none. They pointed guns at father's breast; one of them put his hand on father's head, bent it down and struck at him. Father caught hold of the sword, and so did I; father had his hand badly cut. The man then raised his hand over me, he struck at me with a sword; I shrunk my head under the table and the sword struck the table violently. One said, "kill her, and let us go"; one asked me why Frederick slept there; I did not answer. He took a hammer and struck me on the hip; he tried to take my ring. One said, "Let it be." They then went out. We sat half an hour at least without stirring, in the dark. Then I got up and went to the door; I could hear them, but not see them. Mother managed to get a light. I suppose it was nearly five o'clock before they went away. (Mary Steinbeck, 18 January 1858)

Additional details on what had occurred that night can be gleaned from the evidence of the young eleven-year-old Caroline Dickson: "They kept coming for father and mother, saying, 'money;' then they came and took hold of Mary. She

caught hold of the bedstead and pulled it down, with myself and two children in it; she lost hold of the bedstead, and they dragged her out of doors; they struck her with the wood end of their guns; then a tall black man came, and took mother into the other room; I gave the baby to father and went into the other room to see what they were going to do with mother" (Caroline Dickson, 16 January 1858). The testimony of the mother, Sarah Dickson, completes the picture: "They then seized Mary [...and] dragged her out of the house; four men went out with her, one remained. This last man caught me by the arms and dragged me into the other room [...] he then violated my person" (Sarah Dickson, 16 January 1858).

Toward morning the assailants went away laden with all they had plundered during the night. They left behind the Steinbeck children and Caroline Dickson seized with fright, Mary Steinbeck and Sarah Dickson beaten and shamed, Walter Dickson wounded and in a state of shock, and the body of Friedrich Steinbeck.

DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY

When the particulars of the assault became known, intensive diplomatic activity began with the aim of arresting the guilty persons and bringing them to justice. But very soon other aspects of this matter had to be dealt with, including the need to calm the fears and to protect all the foreign residents in Palestine, as well as to guard the interests of the Western Powers and ensure their prestige. The diplomats in Palestine lacked confidence in the goodwill and ability of the Turkish authorities to discover those guilty of the crime and to punish them. Some of their procedures seemed peculiar for a state governed by the rule of law. The representatives who played a decisive role in dealing with this affair were Warren Gorham, a physician by profession, who served as the United States Consul in Jerusalem for a brief period of time, and Georg Rosen, the experienced Prussian Consul. Compared with them, the role played by the highly influential British Consul, James Finn (1806–1872), was merely a marginal one in spite of the strong political influence that was generally exercised by Britain at that time, and in particular by its representative in Jerusalem.

Gorham and Rosen had already met on 14 January, two days after the murder, in order to coordinate their positions.

Immediately afterward they held a meeting with the Governor of Jerusalem to express the need for his direct intervention. As a result, the Governor sent his own man to supervise what was being done in Jaffa and provided him with a letter to the local governor demanding that every means be employed to reveal the identity of the perpetrators responsible for the crime. Gorham was not satisfied with this and went to Jaffa to further the investigation himself. He met with the Governor and members of the City Council, and during his long session with them he spoke in a very strong yet respectful tone, hinting that it might be impossible to prevent the captains of the American warships now sailing in the Mediterranean from receiving a report of the crime committed. His doubts regarding the efficacy of the Governor's efforts induced him to take independent action. He hired a few secret agents and appointed a retired police officer to take charge of them. Notices signed by him and Rosen were affixed upon the city gates offering a reward of 1000 piasters for information leading to the arrest of the assailants and to their conviction (*Barmer Bürgerblatt* 2).

During the week that followed, in a report to the Prussian Embassy in Constantinople, Rosen linked the incidents of October 1857 with those of January 1858. He mentioned that Steinbeck's wife had indicated one man who had led the attackers on both occasions. As a result, an attempt was made to arrest this man, Hussein Abou-Aita, the gardener of a neighboring farm. But in Rosen's opinion, the fellow was warned by a member of the city council and when the police arrived to arrest him, he "vanished into thin air" (Rosen, 22 Jan. 1858).

The pronounced lethargy shown during that time in conducting the investigation led Gorham on 20 January to request the assistance of Edwin DeLeon, the United States Consul in Alexandria, who was far more experienced than himself. DeLeon wasted no time and immediately tried to enlist the help of Charles H. Bell, Captain of the *Constellation*—the flagship of the American fleet in the Mediterranean. He suggested that the Captain sail to Jaffa to demonstrate American presence and power in the region. In the exchange of letters between them, DeLeon attached a copy of Gorham's report in order to emphasize the seriousness of the incident (DeLeon, 26–29, 1958).

Charles Bell was reluctant to act and replied that he saw no urgency to justify placing his ship and crew in jeopardy by bringing

it close to the shores of Jaffa at this time of year. As a result, DeLeon was forced to board an Austrian ship that took him from Alexandria to Beirut, to take a French ship to Jaffa from there.

Before the arrival of DeLeon, Gorham had already acted by raising the banner of the United States on the flagpole of the consulate buildings in Jaffa and Jerusalem as a sign of confidence and encouragement to the small number of agitated Americans then living in Palestine. The authorities were called upon to make an immediate protest to this, and after a while the flags were packed away (Gorham, 3 February 1858).

Nevertheless, this symbolic act may have had some effect, because the next day Rosen reported to Constantinople that, in response to his request to issue an order of arrest against Abou-Aita, the man was found and captured near Jaffa.

In the following days Abou-Aita was interrogated intensively and was forced to admit his part in the assault. He even transmitted the names of his accomplices (Rosen, 4 and 19 Feb. 1858).

In his report to the Secretary of State, Gorham listed the names of the four men who were arrested: Hussein Abou-Aita, Abd el-Salaam, Matter el-Abed (also known as "Negro"), and Khaleel il-Kaabeh. The fifth suspect, Ali Abou-Ghazelle was caught toward the end of February.

On January 22, an optimistic DeLeon returned to Alexandria, and in a comprehensive report on his activities in Jaffa, included a suggestion to the American ambassador in Constantinople that he should personally attend the execution. It may be that this gave the wrong impression in Washington that the affair had reached its conclusion and that justice had been meted out to the guilty parties. This impression was later corrected by Gorham in a telegram dispatched to the assistant secretary of state in June 1858 in which he stated that the accused men had not yet been indicted (Gorham, 10 June 1858).

During those months there were increasing signs that the local authorities were trying to impede the proceedings on various pretexts. In one of these attempts to delay justice, the governor of Jaffa requested that the trial be transferred to Jerusalem, claiming that his city did not have the legal author-

During those months there were increasing signs that the local authorities were trying to impede the proceedings on various pretexts.

ization to try cases of this kind. However, the governor of Jerusalem had been absent from the city for a long while and in his absence there was no possibility of conducting legal hearings. In June 1858 a representative of the American Embassy in Constantinople was sent to Palestine in order to bring the affair to a speedy conclusion. This man, accompanied by Gorham, set off in search of the governor who had preferred to leave Jerusalem so as to avoid the pressure exerted upon him by the foreign consuls. At the end of the month they managed to locate him and after much discussion they were forced to agree to his suggestion that Beirut be made the place for the continuation of the trial. They did so because the governor was known for his hatred of Christians and headed a fanatic and corrupt city council. Beirut had a large Christian community living there, including a significant number of Americans whose influence over the city council was greater than in Jerusalem. Also, the proximity of Beirut to the capital of the Ottoman Empire where the Supreme Court presided, was seen as an advantage by the Americans (Gorham, 5 July 1858).

At the beginning of July 1858, an American representative arrived in Beirut to take part in the opening session of the court. Doubts as to the identity of the accused very soon led to another delay, during which time a commission was appointed to make a thorough inquiry into the matter in Jaffa. At the beginning of September the first sitting of the inquiry commission was held. On the judges' bench sat two representatives of the Beirut judiciary court and the United States Consul in Jerusalem. Until mid-September many witnesses were examined and their testimony overturned the situation. Of the five men previously suspected, three were acquitted and others were convicted in their stead.

The protocols of the inquiry commission were translated into English and dispatched from Jerusalem to Washington to dispel the fog of confusion. Ali Abou Jarboua, one of the newly accused men who was convicted during the course of the inquiry, testified as follows:

QUEST: When did you enter the house! And how long did you stay there?

ANS: We went there near to midnight; and we remained there about four hours.

QUEST: The woman says she saw five men enter the house, and you mention only four. You must tell us the truth. If you do not, you will never be released from prison.

ANS: What the woman said is true. We were five, and the fifth is Abd el-Salaam, who is now in prison at Beirut....

QUEST: What did Abd el-Salaam say, or do, in connection with the outrage?

ANS: When we arrived at the house, Abd el-Salaam said "This is the Signora's garden, I came here the other day, and we drank some water; and I had a friend with me. We talked with the Signora, and asked her to sleep with us." Abd el-Salaam told me this himself. Abd el-Salaam and Abou Aita went into the house first, and the others followed. When Abd el-Sallam entered he seized the Signora; and was the first to violate her. Then the others violated her; and I was one. (30 Sept. 1858)

The in-depth investigation of the Jaffa commission of inquiry covered all those involved in the affair and included deliberate confrontations between the witnesses themselves. In the course of the investigation Mustafa el-Atra was forced to retract his earlier testimony and to state exactly what part had been played by each of the assailants that night:

QUEST: Why did you implicate Abou Ghazelle, and then deny that he was with you? Now Ali Abou Jerboua is here; and he has confessed that Abd el-Sallam, who is now at Beirut, was with you. We asked you the name of the fifth man, and you would not give it. Now, tell us, is Abou Ghazelle or Abd el-Sallam the man.

ANS: (After a long and painful examination): The fifth man is really Abd el-Sallam, who is in prison at Beirut.

QUEST: Why did you not say this at first?

ANS: I was afraid, that after a long time, when I was released from prison, Abd el-Sallam's family would kill me.

QUEST: We want you to tell us correctly how Abd el-Sallam came with you, and the details of the conspiracy. Tell us the truth without fear, as before God, and the last Judgement.

ANS: Abou Aita, Sellam el-Abed and Abd el-Sallam, who is now at Beirut, and Abou Jarboua, came to me at the French Consul's garden, and said, We want you to go with us. There is a good job to be done, at the house of the European, who has money. We went together five of us....

QUEST: Oh, Mustafa! Tell the truth! Who struck Mr. Dickson on the head? And who fired the gun?

ANS: Sellam el-Abed, servant of Abd el-Sallam fired the gun, and Abou Aita struck down Mr. Dickson. (Investigation Committee)

The legal proceedings were completed and the verdict was handed down on 30 September 1858. According to this, four of the prisoners—Abou-Aita and el-Sallam jailed in Beirut, and el-Atra and Abou Jarboua jailed in Jaffa—were convicted of murder in the second degree and condemned to life imprisonment. In April 1859, after the attempts to capture Sellam el-Abed, the fifth suspect and the one who had actually committed the murder, proved to be unsuccessful, the four convicted men were transferred to the prison in Citadel of Acre to serve their sentence. The person guilty in the affair was never brought to justice (Johnston, 27 Apr. 1858 and 3 Nov. 1858).

POSTSCRIPT

The vigorous diplomatic efforts concerning the incident make it possible to compare Prussian and American foreign policies in the second half of the nineteenth century with regard to their interests in the Ottoman Empire. The special relationship that was gradually formed between Germany and Turkey—reaching its climax in the First World War—was already evident in the policy of the Prussian Consulate in Jerusalem as set out by the Embassy in Constantinople in connection with the murder. One cannot ignore the fact that at the time of the murder in 1858, the Prussian Consulate in Jerusalem had already been in existence for 16 years. It was

headed by an experienced man, while his American counterpart, serving as the acting First Consul of the United States, had arrived in Palestine only in March 1857. Yet this did not prevent the Americans from conducting an aggressive and purposeful policy while the Prussian Embassy in Constantinople kept trying to bind the hands of its own consul in the murder case, claiming that the victim had earlier renounced his Prussian citizenship. The exchange of letters between the Prussian Consulate in Jerusalem and the Embassy in Constantinople during February and March 1858 indicate a restraint to the degree of feebleness in Prussian policy. At the start of the exchange the ambassador gave the consul a free hand in determining his own course of action, but as time went on the ambassador expressed his reservations about exerting pressure on the Sublime Porte. Rosen in Jerusalem tried to prod his superiors into action and praised his American colleague who threatened the Jaffa governor that he would bombard the city if within "three times 24 hours" the criminals were not thrown into prison.

The Prussian Ambassador was not impressed and desired to put an end to the affair, explaining his reasons as follows: "If someone gives up his connection with the Consulate and turns his back on Prussia as Steinbeck did, he should bear the consequences of his actions.... I leave it to our honoured representative in Jerusalem to take the necessary steps to bring about the capture and legal imprisonment of the criminals [but do it] by *word of mouth* and *quietly* [emphasis in the original] and under no circumstances should the Embassies be involved" (German Consulates, Feb.–March, 1858).

The purposeful way in which the United States protected its citizens in the East during the 1850s and on other occasions in the nineteenth century left an indelible impression upon the minds of the Palestine residents as well as on the historians of those times. In 1935, one of them summed up the wretched affair of Mount Hope in the following manner: "The hope had become an encumbrance for them; Friedrich Steinbeck was one of the German Americans murdered by one of the Moslem inhabitants, and when one of the American warships arrived to seek just revenge, they hanged the murderer up for all to see" (Grajewsky).

However, it seems that even this did not bring the pitiable story to a close. In the memoirs of James Edward Hanauer

(1850–1938), an emissary of a British missionary society and one of the prominent figures active for many years in Jaffa and Jerusalem, one can find a slightly different version of the way the murderer ended his life. Hanauer also describes the arrival of the American man of war at Jaffa with the intention of bringing the guilty to justice. Hanauer states that a dark-skinned Arab of weak

intellect gave himself up to the Americans because he was told that: “The Americans...greatly admired Negroes and would...set free and enrich any they saw ill-treated” (Hanauer’s Diary 9).

On 12 June 1858, the Steinbeck and Dickson families left Jaffa port on their way to the United States. Dickson and his son Henry remained behind for a while in Constantinople in order to consult with the American consular representative about possible restitution. The rest proceeded directly to Boston, and the entire group arrived on 16 September 1858. Johann Steinbeck and his wife, Almira, chose to live in Florida where their third son, John Ernst, was born. Johann enlisted in the Civil War and afterward the family moved to Massachusetts

to be near Almira’s family. Ten years later they tried their luck in the West and settled in California. There John Ernst married and in 1902 a son was born to him, John Steinbeck.

The grievous story recounted here raises speculations that are not necessarily of purely historical interest. For instance, it might be worth examining whether, in the wide literary panorama that John Steinbeck spreads before us, there are any shadows of the family trauma and to what extent this may have influenced his writing. It is certain that Steinbeck knew of the event through family diaries, and perhaps, as Robert DeMott has suggested, the brutal rape of Lee’s mother in *East of Eden* suggests something of the Steinbeck family history. And in the old burying ground of Groton, Massachusetts, an impressive monument immortalizes the events and the characters to whom fate was so unkind.



Clark C. Steinbeck and wife, Gertrude in 1947. Clark was a grandson of Fritz Grosssteinbeck.

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