

The Italian Jewish Cultural Centre
in the Heart of Jerusalem



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Edited by
Ruhama Bonfil



Hevrat Yehudè Italia Lif'ulà Ruhanit
U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art, Jerusalem



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Hevrat Yehudè Italia lif'ulà ruhanit



dedicate this volume

in memory of

Maurice Dwek

&

in honour of

Solo Dwek

Enrico Seralvo

Eugenio Morpurgo

Raymond and Albert Totah

Sergio and Emilio Castelbolognesi

Bice and Luca Ceretti

Federico Manetti

Edmondo de Picciotto



Dear Friends of Jerusalem,

As described in this book especially prepared in your honour by *Hevrat Yehudé Italia*, one of modern Jerusalem's treasures, a building on Hillel Street in the city centre, was erected at the end of the 19th century as a German Catholic inn for Christian pilgrims and an educational institute for girls. It has since undergone many changes and, happily, is today dedicated as the Italian Jewish Cultural Centre – a true home for the Italian Jewish community in Israel. The history and continuing development of this unique building is an integral part of the history and continuing development of Jerusalem.

Today is a day of celebration for all of Jerusalem: Thanks to your partnership, this shining gem in the crown of Jerusalem's cultural landscape will remain in public hands and continue to serve the people of the city. You understood the need to preserve this historic building, symbolizing the close ties between Italy and Jerusalem, and with an open heart took upon yourselves to make this meaningful contribution.

Our sincere gratitude, first and foremost to you, our dear and loyal friend Solo Dwek and to Maurice Dwek of blessed memory. We are delighted that your "contagious" love for Israel and Jerusalem has spread to the next generation of your family and to your friends and associates at Fineurop and Soditic, who have joined you and the Jerusalem Foundation family in realizing this wonderful endeavour.

The Jerusalem Foundation is grateful to you for enabling the preservation of the building, not only as a museum of treasures, but also as a thriving spiritual centre for the religious and secular life of Jews of Italian origin and visitors from around the world.

Thanks to your generosity, Italian Jewry can finally call it home.

With gratitude and admiration
Yours sincerely,



Mark Sofer
President, The Jerusalem Foundation

Acknowledgments

This booklet reveals a chapter in Jerusalem's spiritual life that has not been sufficiently studied — namely, the history of the building known as the *Old Schmidt Girls School*, as well as the incorporation of the Italian Jewish Community and the U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art within the city's cultural and spiritual landscape.

We are very pleased to be able to provide this brochure as a modest tribute to the newly-established *בית יהודי איטליה — The Italian Jewish Cultural Centre* and to dedicate it in honour of our supporters and friends, who have contributed generously, thereby making it possible for us to acquire, in their entirety, the proprietary rights to the ground and first floors of the building that is today recognized as a historic landmark — an area of over 1000 sq.m., constituting the entire original building before the addition of the second floor in 1927. It is our pleasant duty to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Jerusalem Foundation, and especially its former president, Ruth Cheshin, and the director of the Italian Desk, Tamar Millo, who labored day and night to advance this endeavor to its successful completion, together with Attorney Avraham Ben Naftali and my predecessor, Dr. Eliyahu Benzimra, who drew up the agreements with prudence and insight. Our profound thanks also goes to the Jerusalem Municipality, the Mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat and, especially, Deputy Mayor Yaakov (Koby) Kahlon, who assisted effectively in seeing to it that this site continues to serve all the people of Jerusalem and the State of Israel.

In addition, we wish to express our particular gratitude to the members of the Italian Jewish community who have been engaged, for many years now, in our attempts to purchase the property and have contributed generously of their time and resources to this end, as well as to the need to renovate the site to meet the ever-growing needs of the synagogue, the Italian Jewish community and the museum.

The present booklet follows the small, but qualitative exhibit that

has been set up to mark this gala occasion at the initiative and under the dedicated stewardship of Ruhama Bonfil, who studied unpublished archival material, ancient maps and old photographs. Like the professional archeologist that she is, Ruhama has uncovered the fascinating story underlying this historic structure. Congratulations to her and to all those who participated in bringing this project to fruition.

Since its inception, in 1886–87, until this very day, this building has served as the focal point for the dissemination of culture and education in the very heart of Israel's capital — an area of continual and dynamic urban, economic and cultural development.

Our non-profit association, the *Hevrat Yehudè Italia lif'ulà ruhanit*, was founded in 1946 and, since then, has been a magnet for people of Italian origin living in Israel. From 1952 onwards, we have been frequenting this impressive building — ever since the exquisite synagogue from Conegliano Veneto, built in 1701, was brought to Israel to be housed in this edifice. In 1955, treasures belonging to our quantitatively small but first-rate collection consisted of Judaica artifacts, manuscripts, documents, Torah arks and religious articles. Today, the collection comprises some 2300 pieces, of which, unfortunately, only a small portion is on public display, for want of suitable exhibition space. In 1983, we were officially recognized as a museum by the State of Israel, and we have been producing cultural events, exhibitions and presentations for the benefit of both Jerusalem residents and the entire people of Israel. All of these programs are made possible thanks to the unwavering support of the Ministry of Culture and Sport, the Ministry of Education, the Jerusalem Municipality and, of course, the Jerusalem Foundation.

Unlike many other synagogues and museums in Jerusalem, which incorporate ancient synagogues as museum pieces, the ancient Conegliano Veneto synagogue serves also as a living place of worship every Sabbath, thereby reviving the original purpose for which it was founded. This unique blending of an active community promoting the pursuit of a spiritual life and a museum that safeguards and displays its treasures is one of the foremost challenges of our association.

Furthermore, The Italian Jewish Cultural Centre also serves as a meeting place for different cultures and as an ideal bridge between Italy and Israel.

We salute our wonderful donors and the Jerusalem Foundation for giving us the opportunity to fulfill our dream.

Angelo M. Piattelli
Chairman of the *Hevrat Yehudè Italia lif'ulà ruhanit*



Photo by IMEX



Photo by Marco Jona

Foreword

Thanks to a generous donation by a group of contributors, headed by Maurice (ז"ל) and Solo Dwek, the *Hevrat Yehudè Italia lif'ulà ruhanit* was able to finalize the purchase of two floors in a building known as the *Old Schmidt School*, which today houses the Italian Synagogue and the U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art, located at 25 Hillel Street, Jerusalem.

In 1951, a synagogue (built in 1701) was shipped from the town of Conegliano Veneto to Israel. Initially, the Italian Jewish community conducted prayers there on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays, while, during the rest of the week, the building was used for the pupils of the prestigious Ma'aleh School (from 1950 till 1967).

These pupils witnessed the repairs and restoration of the original structure, which were carried out by master craftsmen, some of whom came from Italy especially for this purpose. The work took a full year to complete. Today, the synagogue serves the Italian Jewish community — constituting the core of its activities — as well as the Italian Jewish Museum.

The Museum is a familiar landmark to the Israeli public, serving as one of the mainstays of Italian culture in Israel as well as an artistic and cultural gem in the heart of Jerusalem. This culture is on display for the public at large — the story of Italian Jewish art serving as a window to a Jewish culture that developed in Italy over thousands of years. Placing this old/new ensemble of artifacts in a historic building in the center of Jerusalem to serve as *The Italian Jewish Cultural Centre* emphasizes the meeting point of two cultural worlds steeped in historical significance.

The Italian Jewish Centre is an additional tier in an edifice embodying a tale which began in the late 19th century and continued for 137 years thereafter. This building succinctly incorporates the changes that the New City of Jerusalem has undergone during the course of more than 150 years, since the establishment of the first neighborhoods outside the Old City walls — in the waning years of the Ottoman period

— continuing through the British Mandate regime and the 66 years of Israel's existence, until this very day. The building was constructed some 30 years prior to the end of Ottoman rule, at a time when the new city was taking shape — gradually surrounding the walled city, Jerusalem's historical nucleus for thousands of years.

Some stages of what took place within these walls, via major milestones along the way, are presented here in the following three articles:

- **“The German Catholic Establishment outside the Jaffa Gate”:
Pioneering German Catholic Activity in Palestine — Haim Goren.**
Illustrates the early days when construction took place within the confines of the “German Catholic Establishment outside the Jaffa Gate”, as part of the initial activity of the German Catholics in Palestine.
- **The Origins of the Italian Synagogue and the *Hevrat Yehudè Italia lif'ulà ruhanit* — Angelo Piattelli.**
Describes the consolidation of the Italian Jewish community in Jerusalem, the establishment of its rituals and the transport to Jerusalem of the Conegliano Veneto Synagogue.
- **From Italy to Jerusalem, The Birth of the U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art — Andreina Contessa.**
Gives us an account of the shipment to Jerusalem of Jewish artifacts from various communities in Italy and the history of the U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art.



The synagogue here in Jerusalem brings to life the traditions brought over by Italian Jewish immigrants over the years, from the late 1930's through the post-Second World War Aliyah, until this very day. They all chose to become Israelis and take an active role in Israel's dynamism and essence while interweaving into the fabric of Israeli society the cultural heritage that they brought from their origins.

We wish to thank all those who assisted in the research and production of this volume, which was an exhilarating journey back in time,

providing us with a view — through this historic building — of the fascinating story of Jerusalem beyond the Old City walls.

Special thanks are due to:

Prof. Haim Goren and Prof. Rehav Rubin, who gave generously of their time and enriched us with the depth and breadth of their knowledge and advice.

Bernd Mussinghoff, Representative and Office Director, Deutscher Verein vom Heiligen Lande (DVHL), German Association of the Holy Land, and his Administrative Assistant, Marlin Khamashta, who were always prepared to give us access to their documentation, including plans, photographs and letters, dating back to the early 20th century and allowing us a comprehensive view of life at the hospice and the Schmidt Girls School. This documentation dates back mainly to the period of British rule in Jerusalem. We are grateful to Joel Blankett, who graciously undertook to decipher and translate this treasure trove of material.

The enthusiastic collaboration of Pesach Ruder in constructing a model (scaled to 1:50) of the original building led to unforeseen questions that arose during the meticulously precise execution of the work that brought back to life that same original building, planned and constructed by architect Theodor Sandel in 1886. In matters pertaining to modifications of the building, the synagogue and the museum, Prof. David Cassuto was of great help, for he has been involved with this complex from childhood, later during his presidency from 1974–2008 and maintains his involvement to the present day. Similarly, the lives of Leah (Umberto Nahon's daughter, for whom the museum is named in recognition of his tireless efforts to enshrine the heritage of Italian Jewry in Jerusalem) and Moshe Felber have been interwoven in this undertaking since they were children in the Ma'aleh School in the 1950's. As always, they willingly performed all tasks at any time, contributing their considerable skills and knowledge, thereby earning our warmest gratitude.

For his unswerving dedication to the Italian Jewish community and to this historic building, mere words are insufficient to express our gratitude to Angelo Piattelli, who also currently serves president of the

Hevrat Yehudè Italia lif'ulà ruhanit and has worked tirelessly on every aspect of this project, both day and night, for the past three years.

I am indebted to Dr. Marvin Meital and Arie Marzel, who not only took on the task of bringing this volume to print, but accomplished it in an unbelievably short period of time.

We owe our deepest gratitude to our dedicated museum staff, headed by Director Gilad Levian, for their professionalism and ceaseless hard work to make this project a successful and vibrant reality.

Last but not least, a personal thanks is extended to two very special people who pitched in at the last moment when help was most needed to put the finishing touches on this demanding project: Susan Gorodetsky, who devoted her great expertise to copy edit and polish the English texts, and to Gabi Laron, for photographing the painted ceiling with the warmth and artistry that he is so well known for.

It is our fervent hope that today's dedication of *the Italian Jewish Cultural Centre* will mark the first step in fulfilling the goals and aspirations envisioned by our donors and the entire Italian Jewish community in Israel.

Ruhama Bonfil

"The German Catholic Establishment outside the Jaffa Gate": Pioneering German Catholic Activity in Palestine

Haim Goren Tel-Hai College

Background: The German Catholics and their Activities in Palestine, 1838–1910

Germany was the only one of the Great Powers involved in Palestine during the waning years of the Ottoman period whose enterprises, and the people engaged in them, can be divided into religiously affiliated groups. Thus, scholars of this period tend to employ such terms as "German Protestant", "German Catholic" and "Templer" when referring to German activities. These three groups were completely dissimilar in their motives and in the background leading to their involvement in Palestine, including its duration and concrete manifestation. Added to this was the fact that until the early seventies of the 19th century there was no single German political entity. Thus, for at least most of the period under discussion, it would be inaccurate to talk about overall German activity and scholars are correct in studying each religious group separately.

The German Catholics were the smallest of these groups. Their involvement in Palestine, which began towards the end of the 1840s, reached its peak in April 1910. Given the guiding principle underpinning the activities, the nature and manifestation of the German Catholic enterprise can be divided into three major sub-periods:

1. 1838–1875: Raising funds for Catholic Christianity in Palestine.
2. 1875–1895: Burgeoning practical German Catholic activity in Palestine.
3. 1895–1910: Extensive institutional activities.

Organized fund-raising, especially on behalf of the Franciscans in Palestine, began in Bavaria in 1838, allowing the Franciscans to purchase in that year the site of the Flagellation — the second station on the Via Dolorosa — and to erect upon it a chapel that became the first modern Christian structure in the Old City of Jerusalem.

In 1855, Wilhelm Prisac from Aachen, and the artist Johann Anton Ramboux from Cologne, both of whom had just returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, established “The Holy Sepulchre Society to further Catholic interests in the Holy Land” (“Der Verein vom Hl. Grabe zur Förderung katholischer Interessen im h. Lande”), headquartered in Cologne (Prussia) and designed to operate throughout the German states. Its principal objectives, as defined in its articles of association, reflected the new situation confronting Western Catholicism in Palestine: in 1847, Jerusalem was returned to the Catholic Patriarch, who had presided in Rome since the end of the Crusader period. The society’s three objectives were

- support for the Franciscans and the Jerusalem Patriarchate,
- support for church structures and monastic orders already functioning in Palestine.
- promotion of pilgrimages.

During its forty-year operation, the Society sent very substantial amounts of money, exceeding those raised by most of the other organizations. The funds were distributed to almost all the Catholic institutions operating in Palestine and its environs, irrespective of their national affiliation. Moreover, in contrast to the involvement of other Great Powers and the German Protestants, until the last quarter of the 19th century there were no Catholic institutions that could be associated with German nationality. Practically speaking, the funds collected in the German states flowed in to support those institutions considered to be international in character, while others were affiliated with the Catholic Great Powers, mainly Italy and France, as well as the Hapsburg Empire.

Father Ladislaus Schneider, a native of Upper Silesia and a member of the Franciscan Order, attempted to correct what he called this “double distortion”. He was one of the prelates expelled from their homeland

as part of Bismark's struggle against his country's Catholic ecclesiastical and political establishment, which historiography has labeled "the cultural struggle". Schneider arrived to Jerusalem in 1875, ushering in the second period of German Catholic activity in Palestine. Shortly after reaching the city, he set about implementing his plan to set up Catholic institutions that could be identified as German. He purchased two plots of land, one of which was adjacent to the Mamilla Pool in Jerusalem, while the other was located in the village of Kubeibe, thought to be possibly the Emmaus of the Gospels. In both localities, he intended to create centers for his Catholic German countrymen, even recruiting for his institutions young people who intended to sustain themselves by manual labor and agriculture. The heads of the Catholic establishment in Jerusalem, who at first supported his endeavors, quickly changed their minds when it became clear to them that he intended to set up institutions that would be primarily German Catholic in nature. The actions of the Patriarch and the Franciscan Custos, in conjunction with French pressure, led to Schneider's removal to Alexandria at the beginning of 1879.

Hastening to place his institutions under the protection of the German consulate in Jerusalem, Schneider, together with Catholic activists, established a committee in Aachen to take possession of these institutions. In so doing, he sought to prevent a non-German entity from seizing control of his properties. At the same time, he began to wage a public battle against the Society of the Holy Sepulchre and its practices. The Society rejected the criticism, enlisting the aid of the Patriarch of Jerusalem in defense of the principles underlying its actions. They were, however, too late. Changing conditions in Germany and Palestine transformed the way in which German Catholics related to the emphasis of their operations in the Holy Land. In 1885 the committee whose establishment was initiated by Schneider became "The Palestine Society of German Catholics" ("Der Palästinaverein der Katholiken Deutschlands"), headquartered in Aachen. Headed by a dynamic and energetic chairman, Wilhelm Leopold Janssen, the Society set about achieving its objectives, which were threefold:

- To safeguard the interests of the German Catholics in the Holy Land.
- To establish a hospice, with an adjoining church and school, where German pilgrims could find lodging and where Germans wishing to settle in the city could benefit from advice and assistance.
- To propagate Catholicism and the “true Christian culture” in Palestine.

Indeed, initiatives were undertaken that were designed to establish German Catholic settlements in Palestine; in addition to the institutions in Jerusalem and Kubeibe, the Society set up institutions in Tabgha, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and in Haifa. German nuns of the Order of the Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo were sent to Palestine to operate and maintain these facilities. As for the management and overall responsibility for the Society’s operations in Palestine, in 1890 Janssen sent German clerics of the Order of St. Lazarus. The arrival in Jerusalem of the first two of these, Father Wilhelm Schmidt and an associate, ushered in a new era of great activity in the annals of the hospice in particular and German Catholic endeavors in general.

The new and final stage in the development of German Catholic activity in Palestine began in 1895. The amalgamation of the fund-holding organization (the Society of the Holy Sepulchre) with the workers in the field (the Palestine Society) led to the establishment of “The German Society of the Holy Land” (“Der Deutsche Verein vom Hl. Lande”). The new Society’s articles of association incorporated the major aims of both its predecessors:

- Protection of the holy sites and promotion of Catholic missionary activity in the Holy Land (the major goal of the Society of the Holy Sepulchre).
- Safeguarding the ecclesiastical and social interests of German Catholics in the Holy Land (the principal objective of the Palestine Society).

The practical activity in Palestine increased, reaching a climax in the twelve years following the visit of Emperor Wilhelm II. One of the two

highlights of the visit was the ceremony in which the Dormition property, which the Kaiser had received and acquired from the Sultan, was deeded to the Catholic Society. The culmination of this process took place on Easter, 1910. Within two days, three German institutions were inaugurated in Jerusalem: the Augusta Victoria Hospice on Mt. Scopus, the Dormition Church and Abbey, and the St. Paul Hospice outside the Damascus Gate. The latter two institutions are Catholic and their inauguration constituted the peak of German Catholic activity in Palestine, begun just over seventy years previously — with regard both to the preceding period and the subsequent ninety years.

Monument Erected in the Holy Land in Honor of the German Catholics: "The German Catholic Establishment outside the Jaffa Gate"

As mentioned above, Schneider (Fig. 1) purchased land outside, but close to, the city walls in 1877. During the years under discussion, the impetus of building outside the Old City's walls was in full swing, and it was easy to see the advantages of locating west of Jaffa Gate. The land acquired near the Mamilla Pool measured 4.6 dunams, or 4,600 square meters (Figs. 2–3). The property, defined in the sources as "a garden plot" including vegetation and water cisterns, had two small buildings on it. At first, the intention was to erect a hostel on the site, primarily to serve German pilgrims but also to



Fig. 1: Father Ladislaus Schneider (P. Ernst Schmitz S. M. *Das kathol. Deutschtum in Palästina*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1913, p. 19).



Fig. 2: Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem. The survey was made in the years 1864-5 by Captain Charles W. Wilson, R.E. and a party of Royal Engineers from the Ordnance Survey under the direction of Colonel Sir Henry James (Eran Laor Cartographic Collection, The National Library of Israel)

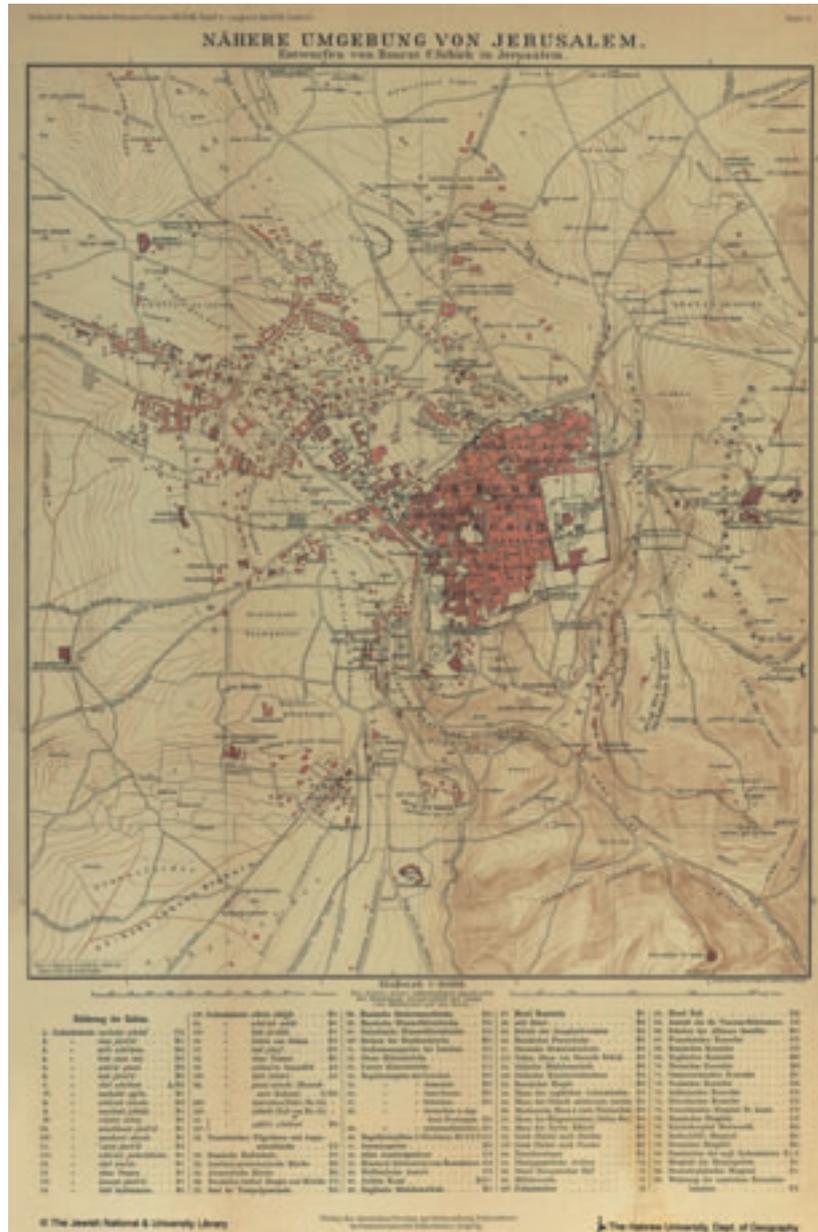


Fig. 3: Conrad Schick map of Jerusalem 1894-1895, based on Charles W. Wilson map (Eran Laor Cartographic Collection, The National Library of Israel)

provide housing for young German tradesmen seeking their fortune and their future in Palestine. The plot of land had certain advantages. It was situated on a well-drained slope with close access to Jaffa Gate, the main gate of the city. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, pilgrims could not avoid passing by the site. During this period (the 1870s), the entire region began to undergo rapid development (Figs. 2–3). The first two Jewish neighborhoods (besides Mishkenot Sha’ananim) were established: Mahaneh Yisrael, populated by the Moroccan community and initiated by Rabbi David Ben-Shimon, and Nahalat Shiva (Fig. 3). The German Protestants had already erected the Talita-Kumi girls’ school in 1868 and, five years later, the old “Jesus Hilfe” Asylum for the treatment of leprosy, nowadays the Lazarist Monastery on Agron Street. The last house on the burgeoning Mamilla Street, belonging to the Lutheran missionary Ferdinand Vester, was built in 1868, and the first half of the 1870s saw the initial construction of the Dutch Princess House in the same area. In the year in which Schneider began his acquisitions (1876), Ratisbonne purchased land to erect a large monastery and began construction. Only later, during the 1880s, did the center of prestigious European construction move slightly northward to the Street of the Prophets, following the line of the watershed.

As mentioned above, Schneider required authorization from the Catholic Patriarch and the Custos, head of the Franciscan Order in Palestine, for both his purchases, and most of the sources indicate that both prelates indeed gave their approval. The money was raised at his own initiative, since the Society of the Holy Sepulchre did not transfer adequate funds to meet his needs. Schneider recruited some 10 or 12 young German Catholics for his institutions, and all the sources use the term “itinerant craftsmen” to describe them. In fact, young Germans did come to Jerusalem, some seeking employment and others on pilgrimage, with members of both groups remaining in the city — voluntarily or otherwise — for a long period of time.

Construction had begun in 1877 on the southwest corner of the property. One source claims that the structure was built according to Schneider’s plans and under his supervision. 1880–1884 were lean years for the hostel, as for all German Catholic endeavors in Palestine.

Schneider moved to Alexandria, and the director whom he appointed in his stead reported to him regularly in writing on the progress of the institutions. For various reasons, however, he and his successors failed and the situation deteriorated. The French, who claimed to be the traditional protectorate of all the Western Catholic institutions in the East, saw an opportunity to take control of the institutions in Jerusalem and Kubeibe and were unscrupulous in seeking to attain their goal. The Germans, however, stood their ground, seeking a strong organized body to take over the management and maintenance of the institutions. In fact, Janssen, who had only just taken up his position, apparently did not yet feel capable of dealing with them. Consequently, an abortive attempt was made to bring the institutions under the aegis of the Maltese German Catholic Order of St. John. Meanwhile, the building was registered in the name of Janssen (Fig. 4), who thus became both the actual and the legal owner of the property.



Fig. 4: Wilhelm Leopold Janssen (Valmar Cramer, *Ein Jahrhundert deutscher katholischer Palästina-mission 1855-1955*, Druck und Verlag J.P. Bachem, Köln, 1956, p. 57).

In 1882, *The Holy Land (Das Heilige Land)*, the journal of the Society of the Holy Sepulchre, published a "Declaration of Intent" regarding the aims and projected activities of the new mission house:

1. It was to serve as a unifying focal point for the German Catholics in Jerusalem and its environs, a fellowship center for settlers and longtime residents of Palestine, a workers' hospice for indigent pilgrims remaining in Palestine in search of employment, and a place to promote contacts as well as social and religious ties among Germans, enabling such activities to take place.

2. It was to be a focal point for German Catholics coming to Palestine to settle in the land, while still being unfamiliar with the language and conditions of the country. Its primary purpose was to protect against fraud, to assure assistance and reliable advice, to offer religious services in their mother tongue and provide communal activities. Fulfilling this condition was the basis of the success of Protestants and Jews, while non-compliance prevented the Catholics from achieving a similar success.
3. It was to promote, by example, "a love of labor and of a true living Christian culture" among the local inhabitants, and was also to serve as a center for missionary activity among the young people that would be educated within its walls. Arab Catholics were to be provided with employment, training and study, for "its mission was to lead the peoples of the East from apathy to labor, and to rid them of the prejudice that work was undignified".

Only towards the end of 1884 did Janssen begin to act, quickly bringing the institution into line with his vision of transforming it from a "commune" of young tradesmen into a hostel, a German center and a school. This transformation included several phases: the appointment of a suitable director, the construction of a building and the recruitment of staff. His determination was manifested in the steps that he began to take in concert with publishing his manifesto, approximately a year before the formal establishment of the Palestine Society in September 1885. By May 1885, he was in possession of a document confirming that the Society's institutions in Palestine were under the aegis of the German Reich, and the consul in Jerusalem received instructions from the Foreign Ministry to be "courteous" to the Society and its members in Palestine.

First of all, a provisional director was appointed, a young German convert from Judaism and neophyte of the Latin Patriarchate named Josef Aaronstein. Although only recently ordained as a priest, Aaronstein was appointed director of the hospice in 1887. Aaronstein had studied theology and was trained for the priesthood at the Patriarchate's



Fig. 5: The German Catholic Hospice outside the Jaffa Gate (Valmar Cramer, *Ein Jahrhundert deutscher katholischer Palästina mission 1855-1955*, Druck und Verlag J.P. Bachem, Köln, 1956, p. 27).

seminar in Beit Jala. Construction had already begun in 1885, and the *Warte*, the Templer bulletin, reported that "this is an endeavor of the Catholics of Germany, who have taken upon themselves to be a part of the Catholic mission in Palestine". Planning was entrusted to Theodor Sandel, an architect and builder, who was a member of the Templer colony; he also directed the construction. The main building, in the southwest corner of the property, was completed in late 1886. Work on the interior was finished in October 1887.

The new two-story hostel had 30 rooms, some of which were reserved for women. The earliest picture that we have of the estate dates from 1886 and appears to be an entirely inaccurate likeness (Fig. 5). Two main buildings are shown within the walls: the new three-story structure (although it is clear from the sources that it had only two stories) and another, larger single-story building.

Father Aaronstein dedicated the new chapel in the center of the building's second floor in October 1887 (Figs. 6-7).

From then on, it served as the central place of worship for the city's German Catholics. Sandel planned and directed this project too, the altar being built "successfully" by artisans who were themselves members of the Templer colony: Cr(istoff?) Paulus, a sculptor, and Gottlieb Friedrich Gohl, a stonemason. The glass window and bell were ordered in Germany, while the furniture was built in the hospice's workshop by a German carpenter (whose name is not mentioned). The Germans also sought to expand the second building — which is described in



Fig. 6: The German Catholic hospice in Jerusalem, photographed by A. Gherardi, before 1927 — from the Dalman Archives, University of Greifswald.

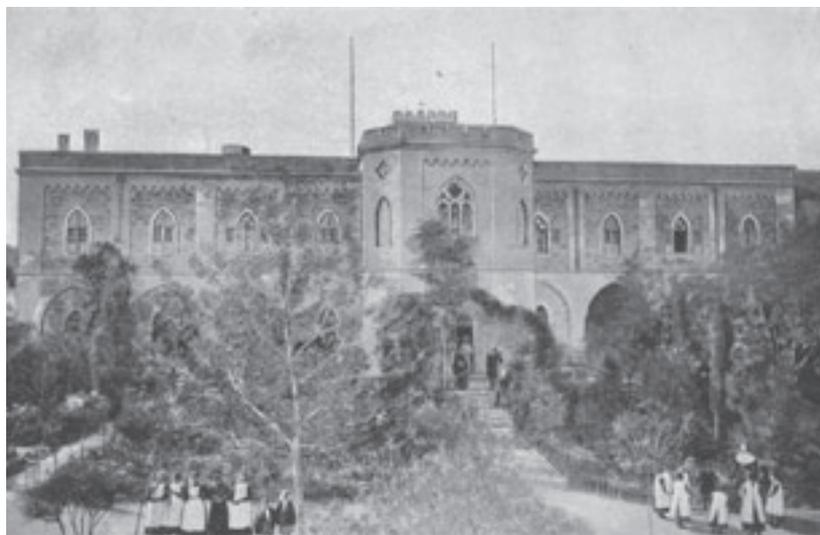


Fig. 7: The first German Catholic hospice and school in Jerusalem in "The German Catholic Establishment outside the Jaffa Gate" (hl. Lande *Ein alter schlesischer Pionier*, Nicolai O. S. Druck von C. Miarka, G. m. b. H., 1911, photo between pages 13 and 14).

the sources as "an older structure, separated from the hospice by a garden and reaching a height of one story" — and to build three school-rooms and three sickrooms, but they ran into difficulties in obtaining permission.

Janssen now needed to find a body that would undertake to operate the facility, for the buildings immediately began to bustle with activity. In 1886, the first pilgrims came to stay at the institution and in the same year Anna Theresa Saxe's school was transferred there. She was a German woman who arrived in Jerusalem in 1870 and independently set up a school for Arab girls three years later. Her efforts to maintain the school as an independent entity, however, were unsuccessful. Saxe joined the staff and in 1890 took on the management of the boarding school for orphan Arab girls. After lengthy negotiations between the Society's board and the Order's directorate in Dusseldorf, three nuns of the Order of the Sisters of Mercy of St. Charles Borromeo (Borromean Sisters) arrived in Jerusalem in October 1886 from the ethnically German Teschen community of Silesia. The sisters were responsible for the management and maintenance of the facility, as well as the school and dormitory that would be added later. After a short stay in the Austrian hospice, they took up residence in the new building's upper floor, close to the chapel.

Another difficulty that was a harbinger of things to come concerned the flags that were to be flown over the institution. The French consul, who continued to demand that the facility be transferred to his auspices, objected to the fact that the Borromean Sisters flew the German flag on national holidays. The latter turned to the German consul, while defiantly continuing to fly their country's flag. Although the French consul lodged a complaint with the Patriarch, he received no support from that quarter. This was only the opening salvo in a prolonged and strident conflict between the German Catholics and the French in Palestine, which rapidly proved to have diplomatic ramifications, involving not only both governments but also the Vatican, the Sublime Porte (the Ottoman authorities), the Patriarchate and others.

Towards the end of 1887, there were 15 members of staff. The expansion of the east building began, once again at Janssen's initiative



Fig. 8: Father Wilhelm Schmidt (P. Ernst Schmitz S. M. *Das kathol. Deutschtum in Palästina*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1913, p. 20).

and under Sandel's supervision. After a second story was added to the structure, the nuns moved into it and it became known as the Convent of the Borromeo Sisters. During the same period, in 1888, the school had 21 pupils, increasing in number to 36 by 1890 and consisting of both Arab and German girls. The teaching staff comprised two nuns and a local male teacher. The number of pupils grew to 50 by 1894 and to more than one hundred by 1901. The same building also housed the girls' boarding school, which was headed by Saxe until her death in 1891.

The next phase in the annals of the institution began with the arrival of Wilhelm Schmidt (Fig. 8) and a colleague in October 1890. Janssen considered Schmidt to be the appropriate person to direct all his institutions and operations in Palestine. There was, of course, nothing new in sending clergymen to represent the Society. In fact, most of the European Catholic activities in Palestine were in the hands of clerics and members of various religious orders. There were almost no lay Catholic settlers, in contrast to the Templers and some Protestant groups. Although Janssen himself turned to a religious order for the management and promotion of his operations, he set two conditions: clerics had to be German and experienced in working in the East. Schneider's recommendation was helpful in the selection of Father Wilhelm Schmidt to lead German Catholic operations in the Holy Land. Schmidt, who had studied theology and Eastern languages, was ordained as a priest in 1857 and joined the Lazarist Order in Cologne four years later. The members of this order, whose popular name was "Congrégation de la Mission" and

which was founded in 1652 by Vincent de Paul (ca. 1580–1660) and headquartered in the Monastery of St. Lazarus in Paris, were known in Germany as Paulines. The objectives of this order included religious missionary instruction among the masses, training young priests for religious educational positions, establishing institutions and disseminating Christianity among non-believers. During the "cultural struggle", the activities of many orders, including the Lazarists, were banned in Germany. Schmidt chose to move to Tripoli in Lebanon, where he began to work among the Maronites, devoting sixteen years of his life to that endeavor. During the course of his work, he became highly proficient in Arabic and Hebrew. In his letter of appointment, Janssen made a point of emphasizing the agreement whereby the priests and the institution would continue to remain under the aegis of the German Reich. Within a short time, Schmidt commenced several initiatives, following guidelines set by Janssen and himself regarding the character of the institution. He emphasized the separation between the school and the hospice, which were housed in different buildings. The institution increasingly bore the personal imprint of Father Schmidt, becoming known as the Schmidt School. The facility's character was established during this time, remaining practically unchanged over the years up to the First World War, especially with regard to expansion. The school operated successfully with the Borromean Sisters at the helm. The hospice, however, ran into numerous problems, largely owing to its limited accommodation coupled with its relatively inconvenient location for pilgrims. As a result, few people availed themselves of its services, since several hostels were available to them either within or close to the walls of Jerusalem's Old City. In order to increase both donations and visitors, Father Schmidt published a booklet on "the German Catholic Hospice in Jerusalem", in which he outlined his credo regarding the institution.

Although the hospice was a short distance from the Old City, the land there was no less sacred, for even within the city walls there was a layer of ruins at least a meter thick separating the believer from the object of his veneration. The location was quiet and calm, with clean fresh air, and surrounded by parks. German-speaking Catholic pilgrims were welcomed at the hostel, though not all of them; it was not for

transients, drifters or those down on their luck, who would be well advised to look elsewhere. Only “good and well-disciplined people”, genuine, highly recommended pilgrims and those employed in “a worthy profession” were welcome. Most importantly, they all had to make some payment, for the hospice could not afford the reputation of being an establishment that did not charge for its services and being known as a cheap establishment in every sense. We should note the difference in approach between Schneider and Schmidt, which may be due to the difference in the period and the circumstances in which they worked in Jerusalem.

The hospice was connected to the school, both of them under the same religious authority. This was the only Catholic institution in the city to teach German, a language that became increasingly important because of the growing number of Germans settlers and visitors in Palestine and the rapprochement between Germany and Turkey. The school was, however, in no way a German institution: “We cannot, and are even forbidden, to force native-born pupils to become European, and those adopting such an approach are in error”, said Schmidt. The Easterners, he continued, must become good Eastern Christians rather than hybrids giving the external impression of no longer being Easterners, for they will never be true Germans. Human nature cannot be changed. Educating children in the hospice school for the benefit of their own country earned the institution the respect of the local population. The facility’s objective was to instruct and educate Easterners in their own language and customs, to form and reinforce their religious faith, and to raise them to be Eastern Catholic Christians. Transforming youngsters into Germans was doomed to failure; they were to be brought up to be Eastern Catholics, thus accomplishing the institution’s major task — namely, the primary goal of the German Catholic Mission, which, in the last decade of the 19th century, was the enhancement of Germany’s reputation in the East.

These principles, underscored by Schmidt, were scrupulously adhered to by the German Catholics in all their educational institutions. Since they clearly understood that education was the basis of their missionary work, the school was the major instrument by which all the

Christian missionary societies operating in Palestine and Syria sought to achieve their goals. The Germans saw around them the growing activity of the other groups — Russians, Greek Orthodox, Anglican and German Protestants, French and Italian Catholics — and found that their major problem lay in the fact that these were not only religious institutions but also “conduits of propaganda for the national and political ends of the various countries”.

The school included a dormitory housing 18 girls from all over the country, while girls from Jerusalem and its environs studied in the “external” school. Neither school charged tuition fees. The teaching staff consisted of the Borromean Sisters, together with local instructors. The staff initially included the rector of the institution (the principal), two nuns who taught academic subjects and one who gave instruction in handicrafts, and a local teacher of Arabic.

Religious activities were entrusted to the priest. The chapel, which was open to the public, served as a religious center for the Catholics of the area, especially those residing in the newly established Jerusalem neighborhoods outside the Old City’s walls, along the Street of the Prophets, Jaffa Road and their vicinity. Prayers were held in both German and Arabic.

Advanced studies, comprising research and commentary on the Bible and study of the Old and New Testaments as a basis for establishing Christian truth, were the most important subjects for the Catholic. The need for this was growing with the increasing number of non-believing scholars, mainly Protestants, arriving in Palestine from Germany. They used their research to challenge the veracity of the Bible, Jerusalem being the preferred venue for this field of study. Schmidt wished to set up in the hospice a center that would provide a base for scholars of his own nationality and religion — young people who would conduct research on the Holy Land, revealing its past and relics. To this end, he established a large library, containing a research library for scholars and a reading library for the hospice and school. Schmidt was steeped in the scientific method and, in practice, supported every research initiative.

Schmidt concludes his pamphlet with a moving appeal, in which he details his immediate plans for the institution and its aims, especially

the needs he considers vital: "The construction of a small church is required; the hospice must be augmented to provide appropriate accommodations for the ever-growing torrent of German-speaking visitors and pilgrims. We must expand the girls' school, and, in so doing, enlarge the rooms for these pupils as well as the housekeepers and teaching staff. In addition, we must add onto the existing institution a school for boys, the importance of which is incalculable."

Apparently, it was the physical limitations that prevented the opening of a boys' school on the site that troubled Schmidt the most. The nature and scope of the operations within the institution had been established by him in the early 1890s: hospice, religious center, scholarly center and girls' school, including a dormitory. The scope of activities was restricted by the small area of land and the correspondingly small number of buildings. Thus, the hospice was able to accommodate a maximum of 25 guests and the school could house up to 100 pupils. Figures show that in 1898 there were some 60 students. Two years later, their number had reached 100, although according to another source there were only 80. In July 1902, Schmidt sent a report to the consulate in which he listed 42 pupils in the boarding school and a similar number of "external" students.

From contemporary descriptions we can glean information about both buildings, including the division and function of the rooms. Furthermore, the St. Paul Hospice archive holds several plans of the building, which were drawn up by Heinrich Renard, the architect of the Dormition Abbey and the hospice, in 1927, a year prior to his death. The blueprints bear the title "P. Schmidt's Girls' School, Completion of the Boarding House, Jerusalem, Palestine" (Figs. 9–11). They served as a basis for adding a third floor to the two existing ones, giving the structure the shape that has been preserved to this very day.

The ground floor of the western building, the hostel, contained eight rooms: a reception room, a dining room for staff and guests in the central section, which protrudes from the facade of the building, a dining room for the girls, a kitchen and storeroom, the office of the procurator (responsible for the equipment and upkeep of the buildings), a workshop and adjoining storeroom. The upper floor contained

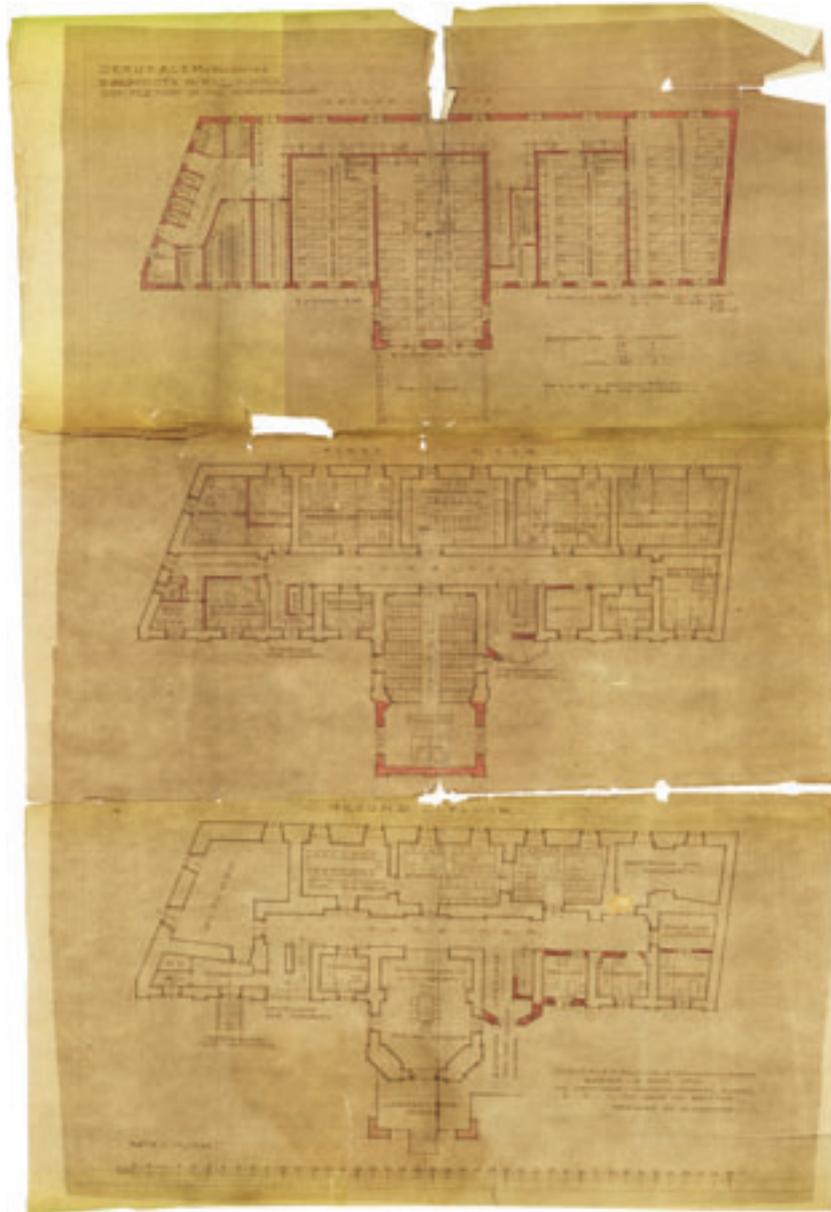


Fig. 9: Blueprints of the architect Heinrich Renard's 1927 plan of "P. Schmidt's Girls' School, Completion of the Boarding House, Jerusalem, Palestine" (By courtesy of Deutscher Verein vom Heiligen Lande, Jerusalem).

11 rooms. The chapel, located in the center of the building above the dining room, contained two altars and stained glass windows; opposite it were a *diwan* and a guest room. On both sides were hospice rooms, and at the end were the living quarters of the director and an adjacent library. The ceiling of the central dining room was covered with paintings (Figs. 12–17) on religious themes done by visitors to the facility, including Joseph Kaltenbach (Fig. 14) and Franz Heichele (Fig. 15), who

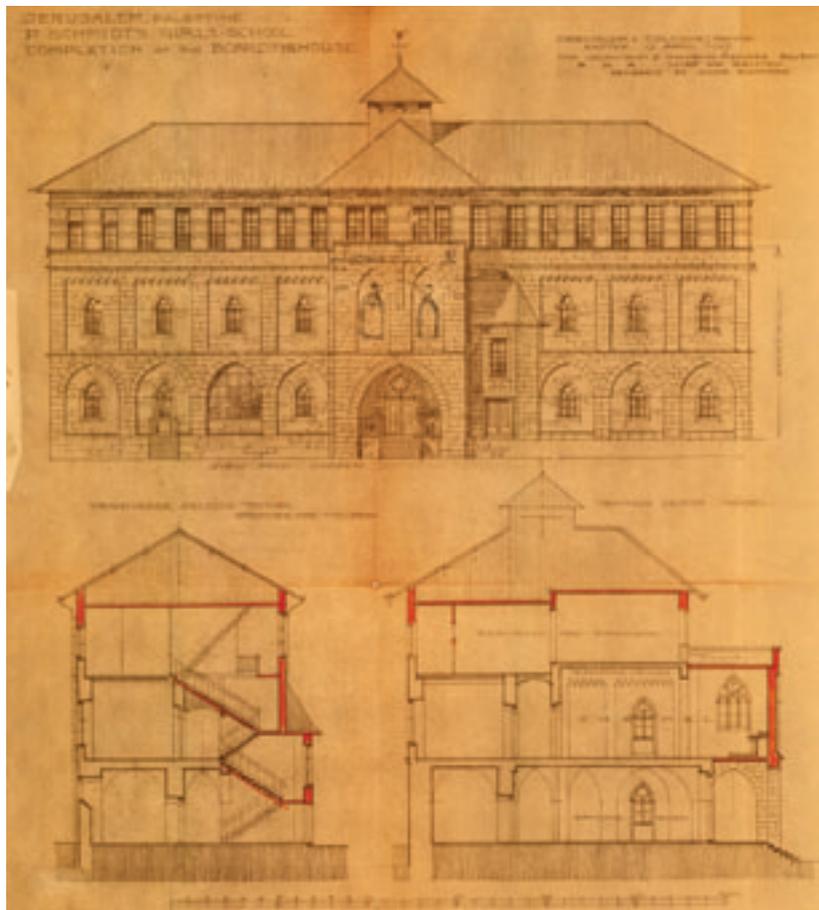


Fig. 10: Blueprints of the architect Heinrich Renard: façade and section of "P. Schmidt's Girls' School, Jerusalem, Palestine". Completion of the Boardinghouse, 1927 (By courtesy of Deutscher Verein vom Heiligen Lande, Jerusalem).

incorporated their names in the northeast and northwest corners of the ceiling. According to written documentation, some of the artists were indigent, offering their talent as payment for their stay at the hospice.

The eastern building, the school (Fig. 11), included four classrooms and a couple of washrooms on the ground floor, while the upper floor contained five bedrooms for boarding-school girls, a classroom, a study and a "poetry room".

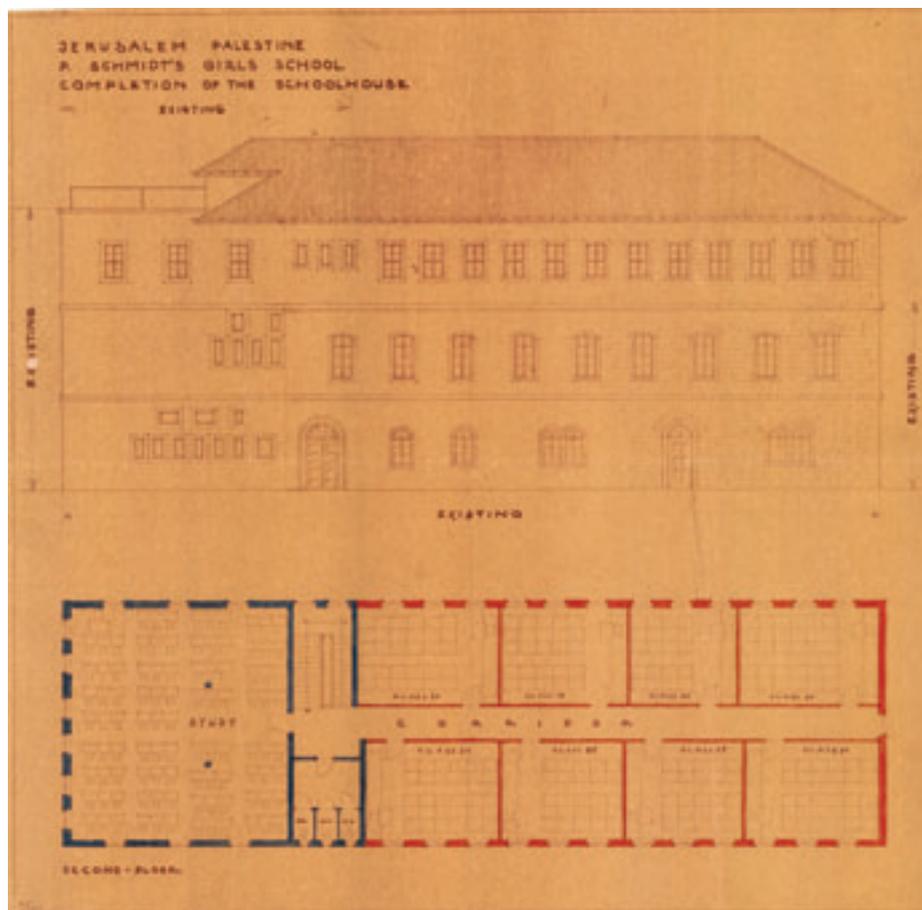


Fig. 11: Facade and blueprints of the "P. Schmidt's Girls' School, Jerusalem, Palestine" 1927. Completion of the schoolhouse (By courtesy of Deutscher Verein vom Heiligen Lande, Jerusalem).



Fig. 12: Ceiling of the central dining room, covered with paintings on religious themes — looking North (Photo by Gabi Laron).



Fig. 13: Northwest corner of the ceiling (Photo by Gabi Laron)



Fig. 14: Joseph Kaltenbach name incorporated in the northwest corner of the ceiling (Photo by Gabi Laron).

Fig. 15: Franz Heichele name incorporated in the northeast corner of the ceiling (Photo by Gabi Laron)

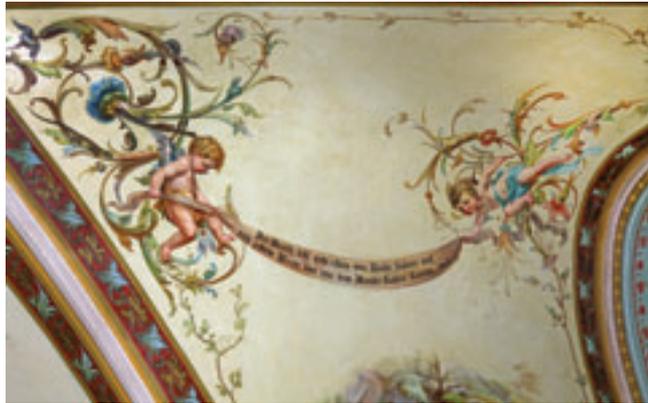
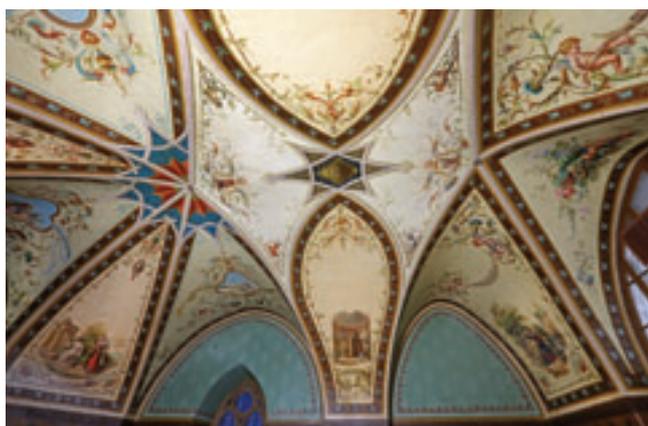


Fig. 16: Ceiling of the central dining room — looking South (Photo by Gabi Laron).



Fig. 17: Ceiling of the central dining room — looking West (Photo by Gabi Laron).



By the late 1890s, after more than a decade of existence, the hospice concentrated on providing hospitality for German pilgrims, especially those coming in organized groups of ever-increasing numbers. Schmidt, who wished to bring the institution to the attention of the German Catholic public, published and disseminated a brochure on the hospice, in which he made a point of mentioning his longstanding aspiration to build a boys' school and a church on the premises. However, many donations would be required to bring this to fruition. He appealed to his readers to donate the money through the Society. Many of the books published by pilgrims contain descriptions of the institution and recount mainly positive experiences, describing the pleasant atmosphere, the warm hospitality and the cordial treatment accorded them. An additional topic of major importance was Schmidt's genial personality and the fact that he "had the finest beard in Palestine" and even provided guidance for their tours of Jerusalem.

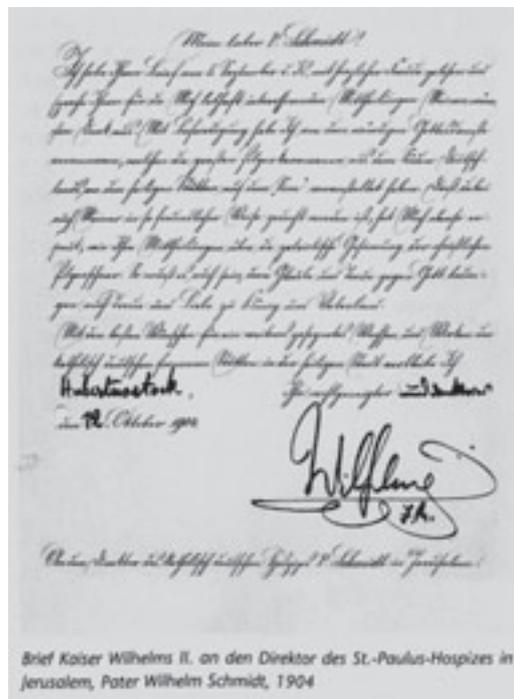


Fig. 18: letter of Kaiser Wilhelm II to Father Wilhelm Schmidt (1904)

The Kaiser and his entourage visited the institution during their stay in Jerusalem in late 1898. The great impression that Schmidt and his enterprise made on the visitors directly resulted in a one-time government grant to Father Schmidt for the school, which was a great boon to its budget. In 1908, the hospice moved to a new building, the St. Paul Hospice opposite the Damascus Gate, as did the Lazarist priests and the Society's center of operations in Palestine. While the institution's status and importance declined, the girls' school could now expand into both buildings. The initial intention was to turn an old idea into reality by establishing a German Catholic hospital in one of them; this was a concept to which Schmidt returned, especially when he became aware of the medical activity undertaken by the French religious orders. In speaking of this, Schmidt would remark, "Whatever the other nations are doing — we want to do also." However, when the Society realized that it could not undertake such an enterprise, it abandoned the idea.

The Old Schmidt School, as the institution was known, continued to be run by the Borromean Sisters, who took over more and more of the teaching duties. The management remained in the hands of the Lazarists, who also helped with the teaching, until 1913, when the nuns officially took charge. Naturally, the main source of financial support continued to be the Society; the institution's expenses were rather high.

Schmidt's fiftieth anniversary as a priest was celebrated in Jerusalem in late 1907. Immediately thereafter, Father Schmidt went on home leave, during which he visited several areas of Germany and was even accorded an audience with the Kaiser himself, who had come to know and appreciate Schmidt during the former's visit to Palestine in 1898. During his stay in Cologne, where he naturally attended a meeting of the Society's central committee, Schmidt was injured by a trolley and died in late November of complications arising from his injuries. The sudden death of this aged cleric dealt a severe blow to the Society, coming at the worst possible time from its standpoint when the work in Palestine was being conducted at an unprecedented pace: both the Dormition Abbey and the new hospice were nearing completion, changes in management caused the Society to renew intensive development of the property at Tabgha, and construction at Emmaus (Kubeibe) was already

under way. At the Society's next General Meeting in 1908, all the speakers gave lengthy eulogies and encomiums to the late Father Schmidt. Committee Member Dr. Lausberg, from Cologne expressed it best when he said of the late prelate:

I can only touch upon all these things perfunctorily, in order to point out the goal toward which we are proceeding with a discerning eye and steadfast perseverance, at times even with unbridled enthusiasm. Behold, this is our goal: to live to see, in the service of the German Society for the Holy Land, that **the German name**, too, is respected alongside that of the other Christian nations, that **the German way of life** becomes familiar, that **German effectiveness** is developed and that **German piety** is manifested in its vigorous actions **on behalf and for the benefit of non-Christian children**.

Following Schmidt's death, the Borromean Sisters, aided by the Lazarist priests, took over the administration of the institution. Schmidt's replacement, Father Ernst Schmitz, arrived at the end of 1908 and served as the supreme director. With the outbreak of war the girls' school was closed, but it reopened in January 1915 with some fifty pupils. After the city was captured by the British in December 1917, teaching at first continued as usual but was terminated when the staff was deported to Helwan in Egypt, together with the other German residents of Palestine. Teaching was renewed in 1921, but in English, and six years later the school had 150 pupils. As mentioned above, the school's expansion, mainly the addition of a third floor, began in 1927 and was completed in 1931. In 1930, it became, for the first time, a teachers' training institute. The number of pupils continued to rise, reaching 370 in 1936/7. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the priests and teachers holding German citizenship were moved to a closed compound and operations plummeted. The staff was allowed to return in 1943 and the institution regained its former scope of activities. In October 1950, the Lazarists completed the transfer of the school to the St. Paul premises in East Jerusalem, where the "New Schmidt School" is still in operation.

The Origins of the Italian Synagogue and the *Hevrat Yehudè Italia Lif'ulà Ruhanit*

Angelo Mordechai Piattelli Hevrat Yehudè Italia Lif'ulà Ruhanit

The First Congregation using the Roman Rite in Rehov ha-Nevi'im

In September 1940, a group of worshippers gathered in Jerusalem, at the initiative of Rabbi Menachem Emanuele Artom and Moshe Coen Pirani, to conduct prayers according to the Roman rite and to “revive in the Holy City this ancient ritual, whose origins date back to the ancient rite practiced in the Land of Israel”. The first service took place on the Jewish New Year in 1940. Thereafter, prayer services were held in the hall of the Margalioth School, on the Street of the Prophets (Rehov ha-Nevi'im) in Jerusalem. The school was founded by Yehuda Menachem Alfonso Pacifici, with Mrs. Sidonia Eckert as principal.

Although the congregants were already immersed in life in Palestine, praying in the ritual of their childhood within the Holy City reinforced their identification with their common heritage, brought from Italy and capable of galvanizing them into a community with shared cultural values and the same native language.

Given the great success of the initiative to establish a new community, a decision was taken at a meeting held immediately after the holiday prayers to continue holding services every Sabbath and on Jewish holidays. Thus, the Italian (Roman) Synagogue became a reality, despite the fact that not all its worshippers were accustomed to the liturgy. Those from Florence, and, more so, those coming from Leghorn (Livorno) were used to the Sephardic ritual — and, indeed, over time, these groups wielded significant influence over the community's practices.

The synagogue was located in the modest kindergarten of the

Margalioth School (The principal of the kindergarten was Mrs. Leah Rocca-Cassuto, daughter of Prof. Moshe David Cassuto). To an outside observer, it was probably strange to see a distinguished group of worshippers seated on kindergarten chairs. Even the Holy Ark was extremely modest and decorated by Prof. Enzo Bonaventura (founder of the Hebrew University's Faculty of Psychology and later murdered with 72 other members of the convoy to Hadassah Mt. Scopus in the winter of 1948). The Torah scrolls were on loan from the Ohel Rivka and Or Zarua synagogues in exchange for a donation of 2 Palestinian Pounds.

For the first two years, it was somewhat difficult to conduct regular services; however, towards the middle of 1942, a quorum (*minyan*) of worshippers was achieved and Rabbi Elia Samuele Artom was appointed community Rabbi — with pay — a position he held for ten years.

At first, there was discussion about the name of the synagogue, with several suggestions being offered. A proposal to call it the "Bet Ha-keneset Ke-minhag Italiani" was rejected for fear of an unfavorable reaction on the part of the British Mandate authorities, who viewed Italy as a hostile country. Instead, the community decided to adopt the name "Bet ha-Keneset ke-minhag benè Romi". However, soon after, under the influence of Rabbi Elia Artom and his son, Menachem Emanuele, the official name of the Synagogue became "Bet Ha-keneset ke-minhag Italki", using the adjective form commonly used in modern Hebrew.

Prayers were not conducted according to one exclusive rite. Prayers conducted by Moshe Coen Pirani and his brother, Renzo, were according to the liturgy of the Milan community — a combination of various traditions. Whereas prayers conducted by Rabbis Elia and Menachem Artom were according to the Italian ritual, whose origins lay in the traditions of Piedmont and Florence. At that time, there was only one congregant from Rome — Aldo Sonnino.

In comparing the recordings of Italian Jewish liturgical music, collected by Dr. Leo Levi, with the body of liturgy used in the synagogue today and very similar to that introduced by the Pirani brothers, one can discern that the melodies come from many sources — Mantua, Reggio Emilia, Piedmont, Ferrara, Rome, Ancona and Florence.

The liturgy crystalized during the congregation's first two years of

existence. Rabbi Elia Artom adapted the liturgy of the Diaspora to Jewish practice in the Land of Israel, taking courageous decisions in finalizing the ritual — a blend of several Italian traditions — by adapting some sections and omitting others, especially liturgical hymns that were incorporated at a later date. In so doing, he produced a liturgy that was appropriate for most of the congregants, even though objections were voiced from time to time, forcing him, at times, to reconsider his decisions. A prominent instance of fierce opposition, ending in compromise, arose from his desire to omit the liturgical hymn *El nora alila*, recited in Sephardic communities at the beginning of the Concluding (*Ne'ilah*) Service on *Yom Kippur*. The compromise practiced in the synagogue to this day is that the hymn is recited by three cantors while seated, to indicate that it is not part of the original tradition.

In fact, no linguistic examination had ever been conducted of the text in the Italian prayer book, and Rabbi Artom chose to determine the ritual based on the Machzor containing commentary *Kimcha de-Avishuna* by Rabbi Yohanan Treves and published in Bologna in 1540. At first, they used the edition of the prayer book edited by Rabbi Donato Camerini, who served the Piedmont community, including northern Italy. In his personal prayer book, Rabbi Elia Artom cites the appropriate norms and his son, Rabbi Menachem Emanuele Artom instituted the practice in a booklet issued in 1952 and later published in 1966. It was republished, with revisions and addenda, in 1991.

With the establishment of the State, it became necessary to formulate a prayer service for Israel's Independence Day. This was achieved in 1955 by a committee chaired by Rabbi Elia Artom, with the participation of Gad Ben Ami Sarfatti and Shlomo Umberto Nahon.

The Founding of the Hevrat Yehudè Italia Lif'ulà Ruhanit (Association of Italian Jews for Spiritual Work)

On December 11, 1944 the three *Parnasim* (M. Artom, Pirani and R. Jarach) invited all the members to a plenary meeting to discuss the expansion of the cultural and social activities of the newly constituted

Italian community. At the meeting, a decision was passed to publish a mimeographed bulletin containing articles on current events and announcements concerning the community's cultural activities. The first of several issues of the "Chozer Bet ha-Keneset ke-Minhag Italki" (Bulletin of the Italian Synagogue) was published on January 29, 1945. That first issue contained an announcement of the tragic death of Renato Jarach, one of the three *Parnasim*, in a car accident. To honor the deceased *Parnas*, funds were collected to buy a new Torah scroll that was placed in the Aron (the Holy Ark) on the first day of Pesach, 1945.

The *Minyan* of the Italian synagogue thus became a full-fledged community, also owing to the *aliya* wave of 1944–45. The community organized weekly classes in Hebrew, Torah, Jewish philosophy, medieval poetry and Talmud (soon replaced by courses on Mishna, which was less difficult for the new *olim*), and lectures on Jewish topics given by both the senior and junior Rabbies Artom, and other scholars.

On March 10 of that year, the two *Parnasim*, together with Ottolenghi, the community treasurer, sent an invitation to all the new *olim*, as well as the few other Italians in Israel not yet registered with the association, to officially join the community, so as to help cover the expenses for the intensive cultural activity. But the turning point in the community's organization took place at the plenary meeting of August 20, 1945. In that meeting it was decided to officially constitute "an association for cultural activity among the Italian Jews". The three elected *Gabbaim* — Artom, Pirani and Joseph Levi (originally from Trieste) — were "put in charge of formulating the bylaws of the cultural association and submitting them to the authorities for approval." On the 5th anniversary of the synagogue, during Sukkot of 1945, Dr. Padoa organized a gathering of Italian *olim* living in Jerusalem, who considered the new association a necessary and vital center after the tragedy of WWII.

Eventually, in the pages of the first issue of the "Alon Chevrat Yehude Italia lif'ula ruhanit", from February 2, 1946, the *Gabbaim* announced that the bylaws of the new association named *Hevrat Yehudè Italia Lif'ulà Ruhanit* had been submitted to the relevant authorities. Later in the year the Ottoman Registrar of Corporations officially approved the text of the bylaws.

Thus M.E. Artom and Pirani charted the program and the goals of the new association, which undertook the duty of sustaining the synagogue services. The opening statement of the bylaws also declared that the association would:

help anyone who desires to learn and follow the ways of Torah, reinforce those who are close to the Tradition through teaching; stimulating the interest of those who are far[from the Torah] toward a spiritual awakening and a return to the tradition that kept us alive as a People [...] We shall help individuals and groups find satisfying solutions to spiritual problems, especially in the field of education [...] We shall spread knowledge in Italy about life in the land of Israel [...] We shall contribute to the preservation and rescue of the cultural and artistic heritage of the Italian Jewry.

The association was able to reach most of the Italian immigrants and to promote cultural and educational activities of various kinds, in Jerusalem and beyond. The rabbi (Artom) and other community representatives regularly visited kibbutzim, villages and other cities, where they gave classes and lectures to the Italian *olim*. The Hevra leadership was eventually able to find a “*modus vivendi*” in its relationship with the “Irgun Ole Italia”, which had been until then quite uneasy.

With the increase in teaching activity, the most urgent problem became finding an available space to host these classes. The plenary meetings were often held in the rooms of the prestigious religious public high school “Ma’ale”, but the community desired a place of its own, and, above all, a real synagogue. Alfonso Pacifici was one of the first to promote the idea of transferring the interior of an Italian synagogue to Jerusalem, while Federico Luzzatto, already in 1944, had singled out the Conegliano Veneto synagogue as the most suitable option. Following a lecture by the Army Rabbi Aharon Zeev Aescoly, it was suggested to advance “a joint initiative of our group (the *Hevrat Yehudè Italia Lif’ulà Ruhanit*) and the Bezalel Museum to salvage the surviving artistic heritage of the ancient Italian communities”. The very next day the administrations of the Bezalel Museum and the Hevra launched several

joint projects to transfer to Jerusalem Judaica artifacts from Italian Jewish communities. One of these projects was a proposal for the “aliya of a Beth Hakeneset” to be presented in Rome at the conference of the Italian Jewish communities on March 26, 1946. Enrico Franco offered the documentation in his possession concerning an earlier attempt to transfer a Venetian synagogue; this proposal had been put forward prior to WWII, in collaboration with Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Chai Uziel, but did not get anywhere. Meanwhile, donations of ritual objects began arriving from various communities, and the Jarach family also established a fund to be used to finance the building of a children’s house in Sde Eliahu. The community bulletin was now published regularly, with a more extensive Italian section than before.

In June 1946, Renzo Toaff, Corrado Corinaldi and Padoa were elected to the board, while M.E. Artom and Pirani were confirmed as *Parnasim* of the synagogue. Josef Levi, who had been *Gabbai* for a few months, left that position. In those years A. Ottolenghi, Leo Levi and Arturo Lipshitz became more involved in the community activities. The Hevra decided to “sustain the activities meant to raise the level of Jewish studies in the teacher’s schools in Italy by instituting three prizes of 10,000 Italian Liras each”, which were taken from the Jarach Fund. It also issued a message to Italian Jewish youth, which was well-received by some but also raised some strong opposition. The message, which was polemical and critical of secular Zionism, aimed to show young Italian Jews “the [right] path to follow”, directing them exclusively to programs affiliated with the religiously observant organizations. Thus, the old conflicts with the “Irgun Olei Italia” flared up again, as the Irgun leadership strongly protested to the presidents of the Italian communities and to the Italian Zionist Federation about the aforementioned message. However, in spite of the polemics, ties with Italian Jewry and its institutions become stronger, with collaborations and cultural exchanges taking place.

At the end of 1947, the Board, which comprised R. Toaff, C. Corinaldi and A. Sonnino, initiated the creation of a library in memory of Meir Artom (the son of E.S. Artom) and of a social center for the community, while, at the same time, trying to speed up the process of transferring a

synagogue from Italy. However the War of Independence was approaching, as reported in the community bulletin:

“The effects of the war were also felt on the work of our Hevra, and the interruption of communications between Jerusalem and the rest of the country and between Eretz Israel and the outside world forced a reduction in our activities. This reduction was also caused by the fact that most of the leaders and people active in the Hevra were busy with military obligations. The Bet Hakkeneset [...] remained closed for the four Shabbats [when the city was under] artillery fire. Right after that, as soon as the truce took hold, the Tefillah was restarted.

The situation was becoming dangerous and several members of the Community left Jerusalem, under the protection of the Italian consulate. Their conduct was criticized by E.S. Artom and the community leaders as “unbecoming and absurd,” as practically a betrayal compared to those who chose to remain and resist. Particularly given the reports that were arriving at the same time with sad news about Italian casualties killed in those days.

Once the hostilities ended and Israel declared its independence, the activities gradually resumed. First of all, the massive project of transferring the Conegliano Veneto synagogue to Jerusalem got back underway. The project was enthusiastically received by the president of the Venice Jewish community, Vittorio Fano, and by the chief rabbi of Venice, Elio Toaff, the brother of Renzo. On October 7, 1948, the Jewish community of Venice, authorized by the Union of Communities in the name of its president, Raffaele Cantoni, offered to donate to the Hevra and to the Irgun Olei Italia, represented by Augusto Levi, the entire Conegliano synagogue, which had been abandoned and fallen into a state of neglect over the previous decades. The honorary secretary of the Irgun Olei Italia, Angelo Fano, a former Venetian living in Givat Brenner, together with Federico Luzzatto and Guido Bassan of Venice, oversaw the dismantling, packing and transport of the synagogue. All in all, it took three years from the time the matter was discussed until the project was carried out. From the start, it took time to obtain the

necessary permits from the relevant Italian authorities and once these were finally obtained by the end of 1949, the project was delayed again due to disputes among the associations of Italians in Israel over organizational and economic matters. Vittorio Fano, president of the Venice community, had to send an ultimatum to Angelo Fano of the Irgun and to Renzo Toaff of the Hevra, urging them to immediately come to an accord and by January 15, 1951 to have "complete instructions signed by both associations for the immediate shipment of the cases." A few days later, thanks to the efforts of Irgun representative Umberto Nahon and Rav Emanuele Artom, secretary of the Hevra, the agreement was reached and the cases containing a genuine jewel of Italian Baroque art departed for Israel. The operation was undertaken with maximum discretion, for fear that the leadership of the Bezalel Museum would attempt to block the shipment with the intent of keeping the synagogue exclusively as a museum. At the end of April 1951, as the steamship Abbazia approached the port of Haifa with its precious cargo, Nahon and Toaff drew up an agreement with the administration of the Ma'ale school. The high school, which was located in the historic Schmidt building at 25 Hillel Street, undertook to look after the synagogue during the school week, while on holidays and Shabbat, this would be done by the Italian community. The cost of the shipment and reconstruction of the synagogue in its new location was to be covered by a community fundraising effort. Among the 132 donors, there were also some generous donors who lived in Italy, such as Astorre Mayer.

The splendid synagogue was finally inaugurated on Friday, April 4th, 1952, on the eve of *Shabbat ha-gadol*, in the presence of numerous officials and a crowd of about 200. Rav E.S. Artom affixed the *mezuzah* and Alfonso Pacifici, using the key donated by Padoa, opened the Holy Ark in which the new Torah scrolls were placed after the *haqqafot* were completed. Rav Artom and Nahon each addressed the excited audience.

During *chol ha-mo'ed* Pesah, another prayer service was held that was attended by Israel's two chief rabbis, Herzog and Uziel, who expressed their admiration for the project's success. The reproductions of the wall inscriptions (this work was done by Miriam Bolaffio Morpurgo) were not completed until the end of November 1952, and a special

ceremony was held to mark the occasion, during which the names of Renato Jarach, Umberto Cassuto and the 18 Italian-born casualties of the War of Independence were inscribed on parchment.

Not long afterwards, Rabbi E.S. Artom, having been invited to teach at the Turin rabbinical school, gave up his position in Israel. His departure also seemed to mark the end of the Piedmontese era in the community. The void was filled by new community leaders, many with roots in Livorno, such as Renzo Toaff, Eliyahu Benzimra and, above all, Umberto Nahon, who became a member of the board of the Hevra in 1952, and from 1959 until his death in 1974 was the legendary charismatic president of the Community.

► Fig. 19: Rav E. S. Artom affixed the *mezuzah*, April 4th, 1952 (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art pictures Archive Collection)



▼ Fig. 20: M.E. Artom, R. Toaff & M. Padoa, April 4th, 1952 (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art pictures Archive Collection)





Fig. 21: U. Nahon, April 4th, 1952 (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art pictures Archive Collection)



Fig. 22: M. Narkis, S.P. Colbi, April 4th, 1952 (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art pictures Archive Collection)



Fig. 23: M. Cohen Pirani, E.S: Artom, E. Eliashar, M. Lebanon, April 4th, 1952 (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art pictures Archive Collection)



Fig. 24: M. Cohen Pirani, Mr. Lahav, A. Milano, G. Mustacchi, A. Pacifici,, April 4th, 1952 (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art pictures Archive Collection)



Fig. 25: S.P. Colbi, L. Levi, A. Fano, April 4th, 1952, April 4th, 1952 (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art pictures Archive Collection)



Fig. 26: Manuscript on parchment: list of 132 donors for the reconstruction of the Synagogue of Conegliano in Jerusalem, 1952 (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art, ON 1837a)



Fig. 27: Manuscript on parchment in memory of R. Jarach, U. Cassuto and the 18 Italian-born casualties of the War of Independence, Jerusalem, 1952 (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art, ON 1837b)

From Italy to Jerusalem: The Birth of the U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art

Andreina Contessa

U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art

After the end of the Second World War, an urgent need arose to preserve the spiritual heritage of European Jewry, saving Jewish artwork in the Diaspora — books and objects related to synagogue liturgy and ritual. At that historic moment, “to save” meant bringing these articles and preserving them in the State of Israel, the homeland of the Jewish People. Against this backdrop, Shlomo Umberto Nahon began his vigorous endeavors to rescue the spiritual and artistic treasures of Italian Jewry, by bringing Torah arks abandoned throughout Italy to Israel and infusing them with new life and glory.

First and foremost — and as an example of things to come — was the task, undertaken in 1951, of shipping the synagogue of the Jewish community of Conegliano Veneto in its entirety to a building on Hillel Street in Jerusalem for use by the Italian Jewish community already established in Israel’s capital. This event was a formative step in the history of Jerusalem, constituting a milestone in the annals of Jerusalem’s Italian Jewish community — which was fortunate enough to acquire the spectacularly beautiful 18th century synagogue furniture. In describing Nahon’s actions in the commemorative book he wrote in 1987, Giorgio Romano recounts how, during its restoration, the synagogue’s religious articles were lovingly repaired and how Nahon succeeded, by dint of painstaking, yet enthusiastic activity, to add ritual objects, ornaments, candelabras and ark curtains in order to enhance the beauty of the synagogue (Figs. 28–32).



Fig. 28: The street and exterior of the Conegliano Veneto synagogue, 1939, (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art, Picture Archive Collection)



Fig. 29: Holy Ark of the Conegliano Veneto synagogue in its original location (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art, Picture Archive Collection)



◀ Fig. 30: Drawing of the pulpit in its original location in the Conegliano Veneto synagogue (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art, Picture Archive Collection)



▼ Fig. 31: View of the pulpit and both entrances to the Conegliano Veneto synagogue (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art, Picture Archive Collection)

Fig. 32: View of pulpit and women's gallery after dismantling the wooden furniture in the Conegliano Veneto synagogue (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art pictures Archive Collection)



The “Aliyah” of Art and Beauty

It is interesting to note that the term “Aliyah” (immigration to the Land of Israel) appeared in the Jewish Italian press, striking thereby a Zionist tone in describing the restoration of the Conegliano Synagogue in Jerusalem, thus emphasizing the new future in store for Palestine — unlike Europe’s somber fate. This message was highlighted in headlines appearing in the weekly publication, *Israel*, in May 1952: “The Evidence of Hope in the Ghettos is coming true in Zion”, “The First Aliyah of an Ark from the Diaspora — a testimonial to Italian Jewry”. When the synagogue of Conegliano — dating back to 1701 — was brought to Jerusalem, it was the oldest synagogue in the city. In fact, after the loss of the Old City and the destruction of its ancient synagogues in 1948, Jerusalem possessed no synagogue dating back earlier than the middle of the 19th century. This fact was pointed out by Romano in an article published in *Israel* (October 25, 1951), in which he describes the shipment of the synagogue from Conegliano and its restoration in Jerusalem.

He also expressed the hope that Israeli youngsters, accustomed to more modest houses of worship, would be exposed to the artistic beauty of Italian ritual objects and that this first initiative in bringing these articles to Israel would lead to a second “Aliya” of synagogues being made available to new-immigrant communities in Israel.

Romano’s hope did indeed become reality, and many spectacularly



Fig. 33: President Yitzhak Ben Zvi at synagogue dedication in Jerusalem; seated in front are David Cassuto and Shlomo Umberto Nahon, (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art, Picture Archive Collection)

beautiful objects continued to arrive, culminating in the establishment of an important collection here, embodying the majesty of the Italian Jewish tradition. The heads of government agencies in Jerusalem praised the Italian Jewish community, thanking it publicly for its contribution to the city's cultural and esthetic life. An example of this can be seen in a speech delivered by the Minister of Religion, thanking the community and Dr. Leo Levi personally, for his contribution in collecting the music of various traditions — as well as for installing a Torah ark and furniture from Padua in the Hechal Shlomo Synagogue, seat of the Chief Rabbinate at the time. Attending the dedication of the synagogue were President Yitzhak Ben Zvi (Fig. 33) and other dignitaries — with Israel's leading personalities attending the anniversary of the synagogue's dedication in the ensuing years, usually on the Sabbath preceding Passover.

It is moving to read Nahon's observations in a handwritten notebook entitled *Gifts to the Conegliano Synagogue in Jerusalem*, in which he describes each piece, the date of its arrival in Jerusalem and a brief account of its history (Fig. 34). Thus, for example, the Mantua-Sermide



Fig. 34: Notebook of Umberto Nahon to register contents of Conegliano Veneto synagogue, (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art, Picture Archive Collection)

Ark arrived in September 1955; large wooden garlands from the Great Synagogue of Padua in September 1956; a silver Hanukka candelabrum in February 1958; and the Ark from Siena arrived in September 1958.

Every object was recorded succinctly, with no mention of the great inconvenience, work and effort involved in its rescue. Someone close to Nahon at the time remembers the innumerable solicitation letters he wrote to achieve his objective and the disappointments he experienced at not receiving a response or, even worse, a rejection to one of his requests. Nahon recruited friends and acquaintances, appointing them as his special agents, representatives and proxies for one assignment or another. His motto was "Importunity will overcome the miser."

Nahon's tireless actions led to dozens of holy arks and religious articles reaching Israel and being installed in synagogues throughout the country. He found benefactors to cover the shipment costs and to finance restoration. Behind this entire endeavor, undertaken by "the synagogue collector" as he was known, lay ceaseless negotiations with institutions, personalities and authorities, both in Italy and Israel.

It is important to note that neither Nahon nor any of his colleagues sharing the onus of setting up the synagogue and shipping others to Israel, ever thought about a museum. On the contrary, they sought to infuse new life into these synagogues through the prayers of remote Jewish communities which had returned to their ancestral homeland.

In 1955, in a room adjacent to the Italian synagogue, Nahon launched an exhibition of ritual objects, ark curtains, books and documents — articles that were donated by Italian Jewish Communities and private individuals fearful of losing their family treasures, but which were unsuitable for synagogues in Israel. The tradition of making such donations increased over the years, resulting in the amassing of a large number of objects. Over time, the exhibition drew many high-ranking personalities from Israel and abroad, as well as those attending the synagogue itself. Upon his death, the exhibition was named the Nahon Collection, giving rise to the idea of a museum — inconsistent with the initial aspirations of those who had undertaken the rescue project.

Art and Museums in Israel during the 1950's

To understand the importance of Nahon's activities in bringing to Israel synagogue-related objets d'art, we must examine the cultural landscape of Israel during the 1950's, shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel.

The Israel Museum, which would become a huge depository of Jewish Diaspora art, had not yet been founded. Culturally, the Italian Synagogue was outstanding in its unique beauty and in its embodiment of an ancient tradition of art and culture.

The museal landscape of this period was very different from that of today. The Bezalel National Museum consisted of a scant collection, inasmuch as it was an "appendage" to the Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts, founded by Professor Boris Schatz. The Museum contained a collection of natural finds and local cultural artifacts, together with Jewish exhibits originating in the Diaspora. Mordechai Narkiss, director of the Bezalel Museum from 1932 until 1957, expanded the Judaica collection and saw to it that the Museum evolved in this direction. The collection of the Bezalel National Museum was incorporated into the Israel Museum, with the latter's establishment in 1965.

The relatively few museums in Israel at the time were largely devoted to archeology, zoology and nature; their collections consisted mainly of finds from all over Israel. These areas corresponded with studies being conducted in Israel at the time, concentrating principally on research institutes such as the Hebrew University, as well as churches and monasteries, in a concerted attempt to study and rejuvenate the Biblical world.

Among the notable collectors, mention must be made of Ernst Schmitz, who served as head of the German Catholic institutions in Israel, including the premises now housing the Italian Synagogue and the U. Nahon Museum. A world-renowned scholar, Schmitz studied and collected various animals and insects, thus contributing greatly to the development of the natural sciences in Israel. The collections he put on display in 1908 at the St. Paul Hospice opposite the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem, contained 40 types of hitherto unknown local ants — one of

which was named after him. In time, the collection was transferred to Tel Aviv University's Zoological Institute.

Art, Jewish Art and Zionism

The germination of the museum concept in Israel developed alongside research and study of Jewish art. It should be remembered that the desire to preserve and study Jewish art within a museum context is a relatively new concept that began to develop in Europe, simultaneously with the study of Jewish art and its recognition as a legitimate academic field of inquiry. Among the cornerstones of this process, we must cite the perseverance of the Bezalel School of Art in the formation, through art, of a Jewish nationality in Palestine. The discovery of mosaics of ancient synagogues early in the 20th century in Niran, Beit Alfa, Jericho and Dura Europos (in Syria) stimulated discussion among scholars as to the existence of Jewish art in late antiquity. Establishing Judaica museums in Israel was a complex process, given the national need to proceed from a theoretical utopian Zionism to the practical fulfilment of Jewish settlement in Palestine evidenced by a dispute as to whether the Jewish cultural baggage amassed in the Diaspora had any place here in Israel.

At the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901, an extensive debate was held on the status of Jewish art and the pedagogical value of conducting research in this field; also under discussion was the desirability of such art and whether there was any such thing as a Jewish style. On the same occasion, several prominent figures in the Zionist Movement — such as Efraim (Maurycy) Lilien, Martin Buber and Chaim Weizmann — organized the first exhibition of Jewish artists from that period. It was also a demonstration of Jewish creativity, marking a Jewish renaissance beyond ghetto and synagogue in an atmosphere of freedom akin to that of post-emancipation Europe.

The museums that began to arise in Israel were largely influenced by the European museum tradition. Their goal was to display images not only of Israel and its history (through archeology, natural science,

nature and technology) but also of Jewish culture and traditions beyond Israel's borders.

Naturally, criticism based on contemporary museum criteria, may have been leveled at the huge endeavor that had been undertaken over the previous years — the dismantling of synagogue objects brought to Israel and their reassembly in alien spaces. However, one must view what took place with a modicum of understanding. At the end of the Second World War, many Jews did not see Europe as their future: in addition to the extermination of so many of them, the property and historic art treasures of European synagogues had been confiscated and for the most part, destroyed. In Italy, too, there were many abandoned and damaged synagogues, either as a result of bombings during the war or because holy places were ransacked following the enactment of the race laws. Were it not for its rescue, all that property would have been doomed to oblivion. Jewish museums in Europe, except for Prague, had part of their collections looted by the Nazis and after the war, many objects (confiscated and unclaimed) were shipped outside of Europe, mainly to Israel and the United States.

Arriving somewhat late in Italy was an awareness of the artistic and ethnographic value of Judaica items and the need to preserve them within a museum context. Only in 1930 did Rabbi Alfredo Toaff see to it that artifacts were displayed in a room near the Great Synagogue of Livorno. A museum was founded in Venice in the mid-1950's; in Rome and Casale Monferrato in the 1960's; museums were founded in Florence and Soragna in the 1980's; and those of Trieste, Ferrara, Bologna, Asti, Merano and Gorizia only during the 1990's. These developments reflect the growing recognition of the intrinsic value of the cultural and artistic treasures of Italian Jewry beyond religious and liturgical considerations. Various documents and texts were preserved only for educational, religious or administrative purposes — rather than for their essential value.

In 1950, valuable ritual articles discovered and rescued after the Jewish communities of Ferrara, Milan and Rome were liberated, were sent to Jerusalem. The shipment was officially labeled by those who recorded the inventory as "a sign of Jewish national reinforcement, in a

place where Jews will never be persecuted again and to guard against further acts of robbery”.

From Collection to Museum

As mentioned earlier, at the outset of Nahon’s activities, there was no concept of a museum to house the ritual objects which were also of great artistic value, since the intent in bringing them to Israel was ‘to bring them back to life’ by being used for religious purposes in Israeli synagogues. That these articles had intrinsic value — not solely religious, but also historic artistic, cultural, and documentary — came to light only at a later stage.

Elected chairman of the Italian Jewish Society after Nahon’s death in 1974, architect David Cassuto made certain that the collection which had accumulated in the rooms adjacent to the synagogue be organized into a museum and recognized as such by the authorities of the State of Israel. This occurred in 1983.

Cassuto also arranged for the construction of a women’s gallery on the floor above that of the men, just as it exists today, replicating the women’s gallery in the original Conegliano Synagogue (Figs. 29, 31–32). This would not have been possible in the 1950’s, since the space was still being used for classrooms by the Ma’aleh School. Later, he installed air-conditioning in the synagogue and planned the rooms of the future museum with an expanded entrance. The blueprints for all these renovations are to be found in the museum archives.

Since then, the museum has developed its own particular style, which has become well known to the Israeli public. For dozens of years, the museum has become a mainstay of Italian culture in Israel as well as an artistic and cultural gem in the heart of Jerusalem. In this way, the public at large can enjoy the story of Italian Jewish art, which in turn serves as a window to the Jewish culture which had evolved in Italy over thousands of years. This is a significant development, which presupposes a vision to expand upon the subject and the space utilized for it beyond the “private” treasure of Jerusalem’s Italian community.

Present and Future in the U. Nahon Museum

The artistic and museal context in Israel is now completely different from what it was in the 1950's. Many museums, 54 recognized as museums and some 200 that are not, have been built here, and contain spectacular collections displaying valuable local and international exhibits.

Given its limited resources, the U. Nahon Museum has begun a modernization process at the initiative of the Association of Italian Jews for Spiritual Activity (Hevrat Yehudè Italia Lif'ulà Ruhanit), originally under the leadership of Judge Eliyahu Ben-Zimra. In 2009, the appointment of a new curator ushered in the process of modernization as well as an upgraded museum concept and a better way of displaying artifacts. The permanent exhibition "Made in Italy" reflects the connection between Jewish and Italian art throughout the generations, thereby articulating the beauty and elegance of religious objects created in Italy. Indeed, Italian Jewry has managed to place the greatest achievements of Italian art at the service of their faith and tradition, joining the material side of artifacts with their most spiritual aspirations. The Conegliano Synagogue, the place of worship for Jerusalem's Italian community, is also the epicenter of the Museum, with the task of bridging between past and present, brilliantly connecting the objects in the display cases within the museum rooms within a temporal continuum (Fig. 35).

One of the rooms houses the Arbib Educational Center, an interactive multimedia complex containing hundreds of items of information about the history of Italian Jewry, and the religious artifacts created in the various Jewish communities. This touch-screen complex recounting the history of Italian Jewry provides detailed information about all the museum pieces, their origin by community as well as their techniques and diverse styles. In addition, the account of each community is included within the time line of world history.

The present exhibition incorporates not only an individualized kind of lighting appropriate for each item on display but also digital media and large video screens, providing information about the artifact.

Work on the collection's catalog and inventory has recently been completed. The inventory has been digitalized and is linked to the



Fig. 35: Display room in Museum of Italian Jewish Art, (U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art, Picture Archive Collection)

inventories of other museums (the Ministry of Culture Manah Project) and will appear on a national portal of all the museums in Israel. The U. Nahon Museum is one of the first museums entering the national portal, which will be seen online. Also, a collection of old photographs of all the Torah Arks brought over from various Jewish communities of Italy has been inventoried in a digital catalogue that will appear online on the Judaica Europeana website, making it accessible to everyone around the world.

The museum now has a tri-lingual website (Hebrew, Italian and English), containing a wealth of information presented in a graphically excellent format. The fact that we have been included in the National Web-Portal of museums in Israel and the concomitant future exposure to Judaica Europeana will facilitate access to information for geographically-dispersed people. In future, it will be possible to create a virtual network of collections in Jewish museums in Italy and transmit them beyond its borders.

In additional to all the state-of-the-art streamlining described above,

the museum possesses another unique feature: the Italian expertise of wood conservation. This is a field of knowledge that was brought to Israel as a trailblazing initiative by Giuliano Orvieto, who worked together with a team of craftsmen on the professional preservation of synagogue furniture. Awareness of the challenges involved in restoration was made public and visible in the museum through an initiative entitled “Live Restoration” (2011) of one of the most ancient Arks in the world, from the Mantua-Sermide Jewish community dating back to 1543.



This process of change and innovation could not have taken place without a renewed importance given to rethinking the concept, significance and role of the Museum in the society within which it is situated. The U. Nahon Museum attests to the rich cultural life of the Jewish communities of Italy — a country with a glorious Jewish past. Therefore, much effort has been invested to shed light on this fascinating story in the most vivid way possible, using the most advanced technological aids available.

It is important to note that the area on which the museum now stands is insufficient to hold all the major items in our collection, and there is no space to set up large temporary exhibitions which would be of interest to a wider public. We are housed in a uniquely historic building and I can only hope that we will be able to add extensive areas within this building to meet the museum’s needs.

When additional space becomes available, it will be possible to organize the exhibit as a geographic and cultural journey, leading to the various Jewish communities and their histories. Along such a route, each city and community would enjoy its own special space with its own distinctive graphics and colors. Then, objects would not be detached from their local and cultural context, but rather would be integrated within the original framework from which they emanated together with pictures from the same localities. Only then will we have an innovative track to display Italian Jewry, including each locality where Jewish

community life flourished. We will be able to shed light on well-known and lesser-known traditions and personalities and to provide a window to Italian art in Jerusalem and beyond. The Museum will reflect the history of Italian Jewry, combining the display of the vast treasures of Jewish art and ritual. In this way, the Museum of Italian Jewish Art will also become one of the important museums of the Jerusalem.

The U. Nahon Museum, which, from its inception has met the need and desire to display the beauty of Italian Art, has the wherewithal to provide an appropriate response to the fascination that Italy evokes in Israel. This project will have special importance not only to those Israelis who know and appreciate Italy and its culture but also to the leaders and citizens of Italy. Such a museum will house testimonies of well-known Jewish localities that have been restored to life, here in their ancestral city. This is the project that we are currently engaged in bringing to fruition.