

An Unusual Traveler: Ida Pfeiffer's Visit to the Holy Land in 1842

by Jennifer Michaels

Abstract

*In 1842 the middle-aged Austrian Ida Pfeiffer (1797-1858) set out for the Holy Land. To counter protests from her family, horrified by her plan to travel alone, Pfeiffer, who became a well-respected travel writer, disguised this journey as a pilgrimage. Her travel diary, which appeared as *Reise einer Wienerin in das Heilige Land* (1844; *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 1852), gives immediacy to her perceptions and conveys the excitement she felt despite the many hardships of the journey. In it she presented herself as a religious woman eager to visit sacred sites, but she also relished the freedom of traveling and she commented on life in the Holy Land at that time, views that were widely disseminated because of the book's popularity in Europe. Her diary vividly depicts her own perceptions of being a "pilgrim," presents a picture of life in the Holy Land, as she experienced it, and reveals the difficulties she encountered as a woman traveler.*

- Introduction
- Negotiating and Flouting 19th Century Gender Expectations
- Orientalist and Colonialist Perceptions of the "Other" in Pfeiffer's Time
- Pfeiffer's Itinerary in the Holy Land
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Introduction

In 1842 the Austrian Ida Pfeiffer (1797-1858) set out for the Holy Land.¹ To counter protests from her family, horrified by her plan to travel alone, Pfeiffer, who became a well-respected travel writer, in fact in Europe she was one of the most celebrated travel writers of her time, disguised this journey as a pilgrimage. Her travel diary, which appeared as *Reise einer Wienerin in das Heilige Land* (1844; *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 1852) gives immediacy to her perceptions and conveys the excitement she felt despite the many hardships of the journey. In it she presented herself as a religious woman eager to visit sacred sites, but she also relished the freedom of traveling and she commented on life in the Holy Land at that time, views that were widely disseminated because of her book's popularity in Europe.² Suzanne Marchand suggests that Pfeiffer "was

¹ Pfeiffer refers to the Holy Land frequently as Syria, sometimes as Palestine.

² In the decade after she wrote her account, four German editions appeared and it was

valued because she brought home not just religious experiences but new knowledge, new objects, and facts rather than feelings.”³ Her travel account, shaped to some extent by the Orientalist and colonialist views of the time, was popular not only for its representation of the Holy Land, but also for its vivid depictions of the other countries she visited such as Turkey, Egypt and Italy. It also gives insights into how Pfeiffer negotiated and flouted 19th century gender expectations. As the emphasis on “Wienerin” (Viennese woman) in the German title suggests, travel accounts by German-speaking women were unusual at that time, and it was even more unusual for such women to travel alone.⁴

From the 4th century on, Jerusalem, long considered by Christians as “the spiritual center of the world,” had inspired pilgrimages.⁵ In the decade prior to Pfeiffer’s journey, visits by Westerners to the Holy Land had increased, partly because advances in transportation such as steamships had made the journey there less difficult and partly because under Muhammad Ali, the ruler of Egypt, who occupied the region from 1831 until 1840, travel within the Holy Land had become if not safe then somewhat safer, a situation that continued under the resumption of Ottoman rule in 1840-41. The majority of these travelers were men, but women sometimes accompanied their husbands. Lady Francis Egerton, for example, visited the Holy Land in 1840 with her husband, her son, and an entourage that included her maid, other servants and a “medical gentleman.”⁶ Travel literature of any kind was popular throughout the 19th century in Europe, especially in German-speaking areas where “the number of armchair explorers participating vicariously in travels skyrocketed.”⁷ As a result of increased visits to the Holy Land numerous travel accounts of these journeys began appearing in the 1830s and later, many of which were primarily

translated into seven languages. See Eka Donner, *Und Nirgends eine Karawane: Die Weltreisen der Ida Pfeiffer (1797-1858)* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1997), 73.

³ Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 147. This comment applies to Pfeiffer’s entire oeuvre since the “new knowledge” and “new objects” are particularly relevant to her later works when she sent home natural-scientific collections, but it also sheds light on her first journey.

⁴ While travel by British women to various countries at this time was more common, it was more unusual for German-speaking women. Prominent British women travelers in the 18th century include Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), and Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823). In the 19th century more British women continued to travel extensively, for example, Maria Graham (1785-1842), Isabella Bird (1831-1904) and Mary Kingsley (1862-1900). In the mid-19th century travel by German-speaking women began to increase. For instance, a year after Pfeiffer’s journey, the German Countess Ida Hahn-Hahn (1805-1880) also visited the Holy Land and left an account of her travels in *Orientalische Briefe* (1844).

⁵ Nina Berman, *German Literature on the Middle East: Discourses and Practices, 1000-1989* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 26.

⁶ Lady Francis Egerton, *Journal of a Tour in the Holy Land, in May and June, 1840* (London: Harrison, 1841), 1.

⁷ Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 32.

interested in the region for its biblical sites.⁸

Negotiating and flouting 19th century gender expectations

Pfeiffer (Figure 1) was born as Ida Reyer into a bourgeois family in Vienna, the only girl in a large family of boys. Her father raised and educated her like her brothers, allowed her to wear boys' clothes, and fostered her interest in active outdoor pursuits, which, as her travel writing makes clear, remained with her throughout her life. When she was nine her father died and her mother took over her education, and tried over Ida's vehement protests to prepare her for being a "lady." She had to discard her boys' clothes, wear dresses, and take piano lessons. Ever since she was young, she was eager to travel, and the travelogues she read helped her escape for a while from the confines of her upbringing. When she was 17, she fell in love with her tutor, a feeling he reciprocated, but her mother, who wanted a better match for her daughter, opposed the relationship. At age 22, she married the middle-aged lawyer Pfeiffer, a widower who held an important position in the Austrian government. They had two sons. After her husband later lost his position, Pfeiffer gave music and drawing lessons to earn some money, but her family finances were very tight. When her mother died in 1831, she left her daughter a small inheritance that just covered living expenses and her sons' education. Pfeiffer separated from her husband in 1835. By 1842, both sons had their own homes and she decided to follow her long-desired dream of traveling.

At that time if a woman traveled alone it was viewed as improper and eccentric. "Respectable" women travelers were expected to have male chaperones and only few traveled alone. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, for example, set out with her husband for Turkey in 1716 where he had been appointed ambassador, and Mary Eliza Rogers traveled with her diplomat brother, the Vice-Consul of Haifa, to Palestine in 1855.⁹ Some, like Montagu or Egerton, were aristocrats, and others, like Rogers, were respected because of a male family member's profession. Some traveled in luxury.¹⁰ In contrast, Pfeiffer traveled with very little money, few possessions, and no patronage.¹¹

⁸ One example is the American biblical scholar Edward Robinson (1794-1863) who visited the Holy Land in 1838 and published his three volume *Biblical Researches in Palestine and Adjacent Countries* in 1841. For an account of other American visitors see Brian Yothers, *The Romance of the Holy Land in American Travel Writing, 1790-1876* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

⁹ On her, see the essay of Guy Galazka published in this issue.

¹⁰ In an appendix Egerton presents a long list of indispensable items for a journey to Palestine that included tents, carpets and portable bedsteads. Egerton, *Journal of a Tour in the Holy Land*, 137-38. She terms this "roughing it." *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹ Other women, before Pfeiffer, had of course traveled without male chaperones. One such pioneer was the artist-naturalist Maria Sibylla Merian who went with her daughter to Suriname in June 1699 "to study and paint the insects, butterflies and plants." See Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 140.



Fig. 1: Ida Pfeiffer, Photograph by Franz Hanfstaengl, 1856.
Bildarchiv der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Vienna

Pfeiffer was not deterred by bourgeois expectations that women confine themselves to the domestic sphere. For Pfeiffer, as for other 18th and 19th century women, among them Montagu, Graham, and Rogers, travel was liberating since it freed them from such stifling conventions and gave them independence.¹² Pfeiffer's visit to the Holy Land was her first major journey.¹³ Inspired by its success she then explored Iceland,¹⁴ traveled around the world

¹² While in Constantinople, Montagu often wore Turkish attire since the veil allowed her to explore the city freely without being recognized. See *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Halsband, (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 397, 405. Graham refused to return home after the death of her husband and stayed in Valparaiso, traveled extensively in Chile, and recorded the country's post-independence years. See *Journal of a Residence in Chile During the Year 1822, and a Voyage from Chile to Brazil in 1823*, ed. Jennifer Hayward (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003). Rogers' travel account, published in 1862, demonstrates that she took an active role in her diplomat brother's duties. She mingled freely with people of different religions and classes, almost enjoying the freedom of a man. See Mary Eliza Rogers, *Domestic Life in Palestine* (London and New York: Kegan Paul, 1989).

¹³ Pfeiffer, one of the first German-language female explorers and travel writers, was elected to honorary membership in geographical societies in Berlin and Paris, an unusual honor in her time for a woman.

¹⁴ *Reise nach dem scandinavischen Norden und der Insel Island im Jahre 1845* (Pest: Heckenast, 1846); *Journey to Iceland and Travels in Sweden and Norway*, translated from the German by Charlotte Fenimore Cooper (London: Richard Bentley, 1852).

twice,¹⁵ and visited Madagascar.¹⁶ She set out on 22 March 1842 at the age of 45.

In her travel account Pfeiffer alludes to the strong disapproval of her family who tried to dissuade her by pointing out the many dangers she would encounter: “To think of a woman’s venturing alone, without protection of any kind, into the wide world, across sea and mountain and plain – it was quite preposterous.”¹⁷ To allay such fears and to make her travels “respectable” Pfeiffer disguised her journey as a pilgrimage. Traveling for “religious edification” provided her with “an appropriate motivation or cover,”¹⁸ but as her itinerary, which included present-day Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Malta, Sicily and Italy suggests, she was eager to see not only the Holy Land, but also many other countries and learn about their different customs and people. By calling her journey a pilgrimage Pfeiffer placed herself within the centuries-old tradition of religiously motivated travels by women. This was one of the few forms of travel open to women, and some female pilgrims left accounts of their experiences.¹⁹ Early pilgrim accounts had typically focused on practical and religious matters: “It was the education of the soul that was the text’s first concern,” and such narratives were often “little more than a compilation of passages from the Bible.”²⁰ From the late 15th century on, however, pilgrims’ accounts included broader depictions of different religions, customs, architecture and geography.²¹

Egerton, for example, comments on landscape features and other religions, but of paramount importance to her were biblical sites and she frequently quotes

¹⁵ *Eine Frauenfabrt um die Welt* (Vienna: Gerold, 1850); *A Lady’s Voyage Round the World: a Selected Translation*, translated from the German by Mrs. Percy Sinnett (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1851); *Meine zweite Weltreise* (Vienna: Gerold, 1856). The English translation appeared before the German version as *A Lady’s Second Journey round the World; from London to the Cape of Good Hope, Borneo, Java, Sumatra, Celebes, Ceram, the Moluccas, etc., California, Panama, Peru, Ecuador and the United States*, translated from the German by Mrs. Percy Sinnett (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1855).

¹⁶ *Reise nach Madagaskar. Nebst einer Biographie der Verfasserin, nach ihren eigenen Aufzeichnungen* (Vienna: Gerold, 1861); *The Last Travels of Ida Pfeiffer Inclusive of a Visit to Madagascar, with a Biographical Memoir of the Author*, translated from the German by H. W. Dulcken (London: Routledge, 1861).

¹⁷ I read the travel account in the original German, but I quote here from the English translation. Ida Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 2nd edition, translated from the German by H. W. Dulcken (London: Ingram Cooke, 1853), 18. EBook available at <http://archive.org/details/visittoholylande00pfeifiala> (accessed 1 September 2013).

¹⁸ Helga Schutte Watt, “Ida Pfeiffer: A Nineteenth-Century Woman Travel Writer,” *The German Quarterly* 64/3 (1991): 342.

¹⁹ One such example is as early as the fourth century when the nun Etheria visited Palestine, Constantinople and Egypt and in detailed letters reported about her journey to her fellow nuns at home. See Gabriele Habinger, *Ida Pfeiffer: Eine Forschungsreisende des Biedermeier* (Vienna: Milena Verlag, 2004), 59-60.

²⁰ Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 2011), 38-39.

²¹ Berman, *German Literature*, 67.

biblical passages. As she traveled, she relates, “a thousand passages of Scripture are hourly elucidated.”²² She disparaged Jews who, she thought, should be converted to Christianity and interpreted the condition of Palestine through a Christian worldview.²³ For example, she argued that the desolation and barrenness she perceived there had been predicted “in almost every page of the Bible.”²⁴ Pfeiffer lacked Egerton’s missionary zeal and she blamed Palestine’s condition on Ottoman rule. On the first page of her travel account she refers to her upcoming journey as a “dangerous pilgrimage,”²⁵ revealing mixed motives for her travel. Her journey was in part a pilgrimage since she was eager to see Jerusalem and visit holy sites, but, as mentioned earlier, she had long dreamed of traveling so her motivation was not primarily religious. As her use of “dangerous” suggests, her account contains elements of the secular heroic explorer tradition of travel literature by men.²⁶ In all her works, Pfeiffer was intensely curious about the different cultures she encountered and throughout her life continued to be excited and enthusiastic about traveling.

Disparaging attitudes to women traveling alone were widespread in mid-19th century society, including among male travelers. On the ship from Constantinople to the Holy Land Pfeiffer became acquainted with an Englishman, Mr. Bartlett, the only other Frank (the name used for Europeans) on board, and they decided to travel to Jerusalem together. This was the artist William Henry Bartlett (1809-1854), renowned for his steel engravings of scenes from his extensive travels in North America and the Middle East. Bartlett would later publish his own account of his visit to the Holy Land in which he would refer to Pfeiffer rather dismissively as “a German lady, who had accompanied me to Jerusalem; if that conventional term may be applied to one, who, on account of some religious motive, and with an insurmountable wish to tread the scenes of Biblical story, travelled without any attendant, or any protector from the risks of such a journey, but such as chance turned up.”²⁷ He would condescendingly acknowledge her religious motivation, but would imply that a woman traveling alone cannot be considered a “lady.”

²² Egerton, *Journal of a Tour in the Holy Land*, 94

²³ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁵ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 17.

²⁶ A later famous example of the popular male heroic explorer tradition is Henry Morton Stanley’s *Through the Dark Continent* (1878). See Thompson, *Travel Writing*, 140.

²⁷ W. H. Bartlett, *Walks about the City and Environs of Jerusalem* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue, and Co., 1844), 227. In her travel diary, Pfeiffer mentions him by name as soon as she becomes acquainted with him, describes conversations with him and their subsequent travels together. She, however, remains invisible in his account until page 227. He does acknowledge that she gave no one any trouble, “enjoyed everything in silence, and never uttered a murmur during the heat and fatigue of our journey” and was not nervous about staying the night alone in the tower at Mar Saba. *Ibid.*, 227. Bartlett’s work proved useful to future travelers. On her arrival in Jerusalem, Rogers notes, for example: “Mr. Bartlett has made the streets of the Holy City so familiar in his ‘Walks about Jerusalem.’” Rogers, *Domestic Life in Palestine*, 25.

Women travel writers had to overcome even more challenges than women travelers. By publishing their works they stepped from the domestic into the public sphere and often encountered criticism and ridicule. At that time travel writing was considered a typically masculine genre. Women “were caught in a ‘double-bind situation,’ unfavorably judged and trivialized if their texts were construed as feminine, and questioned for the legitimacy and truth value of their work if they chose masculine adventure-hero forms.”²⁸ They were not considered capable or qualified to discuss “serious” issues such as politics, art, or science.²⁹

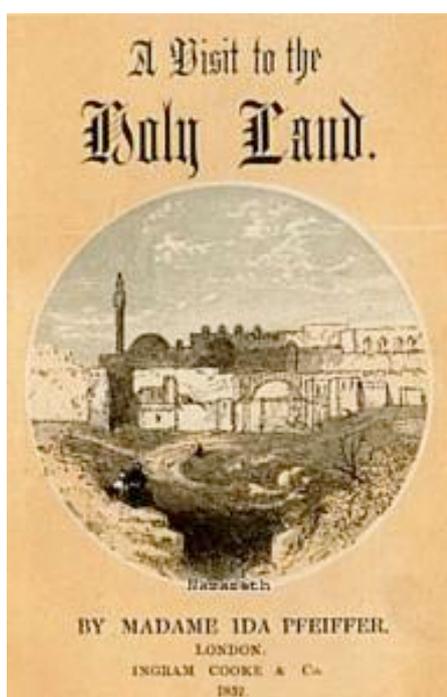


Fig. 2: Pfeiffer, “*A to Visit to Holy Land*”
London, 1853 (Cover).

The publishing history of *A Visit to the Holy Land* presents an example of their difficulties.³⁰ When Pfeiffer set out on her journey she did not intend to publish a travel account.³¹ Throughout her travels, she kept a diary, intended to

²⁸ Ravina Aggarwal, “‘Point of Departure’: Feminist Locations and the Politics of Travel in India,” *Feminist Studies* 26/3 (2000): 554.

²⁹ Tamara Felden, *Frauen Reisen: Zur literarischen Repräsentation weiblicher Geschlechterrollenerfahrung im 19. Jahrhundert* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 2.

³⁰ Lady Montagu’s family, for example, opposed the publication of her letters. Montagu wanted her Turkish letters published after her death but “her family were in terror lest they should be” and objected strongly. Her daughter thought it “unseemly for Lady Mary to be an author.” See Robert Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 287-89.

³¹ Women travel writers often used disclaimers about their intentions to publish their accounts and modesty about the quality of their work as strategies to circumvent society’s expectations

convey her experiences and impressions to her family and friends. Pressured by the Viennese publisher Jakob Dirnböck, however, she consented to publish it. (Figure 2) In *A Visit to the Holy Land* she notes her initial reluctance. Worried about how her readers would perceive her views she stresses that she is no “authoress” and has previously written only letters. Her diary is “a simple narration, in which I have described every circumstance as it occurred; a collection of notes which I wrote down for private reference, without dreaming that they would ever find their way into the great world.”³² Concerned about the propriety of her publishing her diary and fearing that it might damage its reputation, Pfeiffer’s family determined to have a say in the matter.

In one of her few letters still existing from this period, presumably written in 1843, she writes to the bookseller Bauer in Vienna, Dirnböck’s former partner, asking him to send her the fourteen notebooks of her diary, explaining that her husband, from whom she had long been separated, as well as her siblings insisted that several points needed to be clarified. Such family involvement suggests that the independence she had won for herself on her travels did not carry over into her life in Vienna, where she was forced back into the norms and conventions of patriarchal society, a reason why she stayed at home so briefly between her travels.³³ During her first journey around the world, she wrote to her sister Marie from Tiflis in August 1848 expressing concerns about returning home and likened herself to a schoolboy who had to return to the yoke after the vacation was over.³⁴ Since Pfeiffer’s original diary has not been found, it is not known if passages were cut or changed. Whether by her own choice or as a concession to her family the first edition of the diary appeared anonymously: twelve years later, in the fourth German edition in 1856, her name finally appeared as the author.³⁵

Negotiating an acceptable female persona

Like other women travel writers, Pfeiffer adopted strategies to conform to “accepted notions of womanhood” while protecting her independence.³⁶ In his

of women’s proper role. In Pfeiffer’s case, it is likely that she did not set out with the intention of publishing her diary, but on her return home she quickly saw the advantages of publishing. The profits from her travel account supported her next journey to Iceland. She intended her four subsequent travel accounts for publication.

³² Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 328.

³³ See Hiltgund Jehle, *Ida Pfeiffer: Weltreisende im 19. Jahrhundert: Zur Kulturgeschichte reisender Frauen* (Münster/New York: Waxmann, 1989), 27.

³⁴ Gabriele Habinger, ed., *Ida Pfeiffer: ‘Wir leben nach Matrosenweise’: Briefe einer Weltreisenden des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna: Promedia, 2008), 60. Other women travelers expressed similar reservations about returning home, as, for example, Montagu in a letter to her husband on 9 April 1718, in *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, vol. 1, 394.

³⁵ Habinger, *Wir leben nach Matrosenweise*, 36-38. Her name appeared earlier in the English translation.

³⁶ Patricia Howe, “‘Die Wirklichkeit ist anders’: Ida Pfeiffer’s Visit to China 1847,” *German Life and Letters* 52/3 (1999): 326.

introduction to *A Visit to the Holy Land* her publisher, aiming his remarks at potential readers and future sales, underscores her womanly qualities, while at the same time praising her achievement, noting that he found it almost incredible that a “delicate lady (...) should have the heroism to do what thousands of men failed to achieve.”³⁷ In her private life, however, she remained the “most simple and unaffected, the most modest, and consequently also the most agreeable of beings.” He writes that Pfeiffer’s simple and unadorned facts and her candor, combined with strong sound sense “might put to shame the bombastic striving after originality of many a modern author.” In his view “strict truth shines forth from every page, and no one can doubt but that so pure and noble a mind must see things in a right point of view.”³⁸ He stresses that Pfeiffer did not crave publicity, considered an undesirable trait in women. On the contrary he had to persuade her to let it be published because of his wish to provide readers, particularly women, “with a very interesting and attractive, and at the same time a strictly authentic picture of the Holy Land.”³⁹

On the surface Pfeiffer conformed to this modest, self-effacing persona described by her publisher; and by adopting it she succeeded because men perceived her as unpretentious and non-threatening. This “delicate lady,” however, had the stamina and will power to ride through miles of desert, and despite the difficulties of this and her later travels she was determined to continue exploring. Helga Watt observes that Pfeiffer demonstrates “what a woman, relying almost solely on her own determination, can and did accomplish.” She praises her for daring “to imagine and pursue the virtually impossible: a mid-nineteenth-century middle-class older woman exploring the remotest corners of the world—and doing it alone.”⁴⁰

In her travel diary, a genre then considered typically female, Pfeiffer seeks to authenticate her experiences and to underscore the reliability of her eyewitness account. She stresses on several occasions that she strives “to represent every thing as I found it, as it appeared before my eyes; without adornment indeed, but truly.”⁴¹ Before setting off for the Holy Land she read extensively reports of other visits there and talked with a man who had previously visited the Holy Land.⁴² It is likely that she was familiar with Lady Hester Stanhope’s

³⁷ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, viii.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, ix.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, x.

⁴⁰ Watt, “Ida Pfeiffer,” 339.

⁴¹ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 30.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 17. No list has been found of which travel accounts she read. In the 18th century there were at least fourteen original accounts in German about journeys to Palestine, “a number that was to rise exponentially in the nineteenth century” (Berman, *German Literature*, 125), as well as translations from other languages. One can speculate that Pfeiffer might have read Montagu’s letters, translated into German by the painter Henry Fuseli in 1763. The letters were well received and continued to be available in German editions. Unlike Montagu, however, who

archaeological excavations and her subsequent life in the region because she refers to seeing her house on the way to Beirut.⁴³ She distances herself, however, from some previous accounts, considering them inaccurate and fanciful. In her opinion some travelers described “dangers which they have *not* experienced, in order to render their narrative more interesting.”⁴⁴ When visiting the hot springs near the Sea of Galilee she is not impressed by the bathhouse and thought that in previous descriptions of the baths “poetry or exaggeration had led many a pen far beyond the bounds of facts.” In contrast she endeavors “to see every thing exactly as it stands before me, and to describe it in my simple diary without addition or ornament.”⁴⁵ As Carl Thompson warns, however, “a degree of fictionality [is] inherent in all travel accounts.” Even writers, who like Pfeiffer, seek “to record faithfully their experiences” are selective in what they record and need to “edit, reconstruct, and so subtly distort, those experiences in the process of fashioning their narrative.”⁴⁶

Orientalist and Colonialist Perceptions of the “Other” in Pfeiffer’s Time

Pfeiffer had traveled before, mostly within the Habsburg Empire, but this journey was her first real encounter with the “other.” Although she was receptive and accepting of different cultures she nevertheless saw them through the eyes of a woman shaped by European, specifically Habsburg, value systems and stereotypes and in her diary she participates in, but also challenges, Orientalist and colonialist discourses of the time. As postcolonial critics have shown, representations of the “other” are inevitably political or ideological acts. For Edward Said, for example, Orientalism is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,”⁴⁷ and Mary Louise Pratt points out that cross-cultural encounters or “contact zones” are often characterized by “highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” that stem from colonial ideology with its “accounts of conquest and domination.”⁴⁸ The Habsburg Empire had no overseas colonies, but, like other European powers, it sought to expand its political and economic influence in the Middle East.⁴⁹ Travel writing, a genre “within which imperialist

took issue, for example, with Paul Rycaut’s *Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1668), in all her travel accounts Pfeiffer never named the writers she criticized. Taking issue with previous, unnamed travel accounts has long been a feature of both fictional and actual travel accounts, as in Jonathan Swift’s satirical *Gulliver’s Travels*, published in 1726.

⁴³ By not explaining who Lady Stanhope was, Pfeiffer shows that she expects her readers will be familiar with her.

⁴⁴ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 194.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁴⁶ Thompson, *Travel Writing*, 28-29.

⁴⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 3.

⁴⁸ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4, 7.

⁴⁹ See Berman, *German Literature*, 187.

knowledges are produced,”⁵⁰ often reinforced the colonialist discourse of the time, particularly its stereotypes of the “other.”⁵¹ Images of the Ottoman Turk in German-speaking areas, for example, ranged from “religious enemy to noble heathen, from debauched, violent, and hypersexed Arab to wise and amiable Oriental.”⁵² Turks were admired for their religious tolerance and sense of public welfare, but were also commonly seen as sensual, violent, despotic and indolent.⁵³ Even when travel writers attempt to engage honestly with another culture, they inevitably participate in othering, “since every travel account is premised on the assumption that it brings news of people and places that are to some degree unfamiliar and ‘other’ to the audience.”⁵⁴ Although Pfeiffer was not directly involved in the colonial expansion of the time, her travel account reflects to some extent such colonialist and Orientalist discourses.

Pfeiffer’s Itinerary in the Holy Land

Pfeiffer arrived in the Holy Land on 27 May and left on 18 June 1842. At the time of her visit the region was sparsely populated and largely rural. There were outbreaks of plague, which prevented her visiting some cities, and robberies and assaults, while less than in the earlier part of the century, were still frequent. Her travels included Caesarea, Jaffa (she calls it Joppa), and Jerusalem, where she remained for two weeks. Her original plan was to visit Jerusalem and then return to Jaffa, but she became acquainted with other travelers, four Habsburg counts, whom she accompanied to Bethlehem, the Dead Sea and the River Jordan. She then traveled with this group to Nablus, Nazareth, Tiberias, which she calls Tabarith, Haifa and Acre, continuing on to Beirut. Attaching herself to a group was a strategy that enabled her to widen her travels. Without this opportunity she would have been forced to remain only in Jerusalem because it was too dangerous for both men and women to travel alone in other areas. Traveling with a group meant, however, adhering to the group’s timetable, and she sometimes regretted not being able to linger longer at some places, such as the convent on Mount Carmel, and on the way to Nazareth she was compelled to travel when she felt quite sick, hiding her condition for fear she would be left behind. (*Fig. 3*)

⁵⁰ Sara Mills, “Knowledge, Gender, and Empire,” in *Writing Women and Space. Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*, ed. Alison Blunt, Gillian Rose (New York: Guilford Press, 1994), 30.

⁵¹ Indira Ghose, *Women Travellers in Colonial India. The Power of the Female Gaze* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 160.

⁵² Berman, *German Literature*, 16.

⁵³ Such stereotypes were widespread in Austria. In 1829, for example, the Austrian Orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall referred to the first Ottoman siege of Vienna as “the hooved invasion of Turkish barbarism and Ottoman tyranny.” Cited in Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 26.

⁵⁴ Thompson, *Travel Writing*, 133.



Fig. 3: Ida Pfeiffer, Traveling costume adopted for later travels. Lithograph by Adolf Dauthage, 1858

Religious Reflections

During her stay in the Holy Land Pfeiffer pays little heed to Islam and does not discuss Judaism. In her earlier stay in Constantinople, where she could visit mosques, and later in Egypt she comments approvingly and in detail on Islam and Islamic customs and challenges negative European stereotypes of Turks as barbarous, stressing instead their sense of social responsibility, such as the kitchens near the mosques where poor Muslims were fed, and their tolerance of other religions. She approves of Islam's prohibition of alcohol, the overindulgence of which led in her view to misery in Europe. In Jerusalem, however, she thinks the Turks are more fanatical than those in Constantinople since she is not allowed access to the mosques.⁵⁵ She has little to say about the Jews in Palestine except when she stayed at the house of a Jewish doctor in

⁵⁵ Pfeiffer often uses "Turk" and "Arab" as synonyms. Sometimes she distinguishes Bedouins, but at other times refers to them as Arabs, an example of the generalizing tendency of Orientalist discourse. Generalizing is also true of writers such as Egerton.

Tiberias, the only Jew she records talking to.⁵⁶

As a “pilgrim” her first focus is on sacred sites associated especially with Christianity, but also with the Old Testament. At this time there was already an established itinerary of holy places associated with the life and passion of Christ, especially in Jerusalem, the most significant site for Western visitors to the Holy Land, but also in Bethlehem, Nazareth and other towns. Pfeiffer remarks that previously pilgrims were charged for visiting some of the holy sites, until Muhammad Ali stopped this practice. Pfeiffer visits numerous places of religious significance such as the Via Dolorosa and is shown many objects of veneration, including a footprint of the Savior and footprints of the Virgin Mary. She vividly depicts the interior of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, in particular the small chapel containing the tomb of Christ built in the center of the nave. Pfeiffer finds the church confusing. With its many niches belonging to different Christian sects and its many sacred objects the church seems to her like a labyrinth. In her opinion, the church’s architect deserved praise for managing to unite the many holy places under one roof. On several occasions in her diary Pfeiffer notes that holy sites belonged to a particular denomination. The chapel with Christ’s tomb belonged, for example, to the Catholics, but the Greeks had the right to celebrate masses there alternately and the church in Bethlehem belonged to the Catholics, Greeks and Armenians.

Like pilgrims such as Egerton, Pfeiffer is overwhelmed with emotion at seeing religious sites in Jerusalem and other towns and being where Jesus had lived. In Caesarea, which she was warned not to visit because of the danger of Bedouins and snakes,⁵⁷ she is overcome with a “feeling of awe hitherto unknown to me that I trod the ground where my Redeemer had walked.”⁵⁸ On first seeing Jerusalem, her “sacred goal,”⁵⁹ her voice becomes lyrical. For her “the most beautiful morning of my life dawned” and she searches for words to describe her feelings: “My emotion was deep and powerful; my expression of it would be poor and cold.”⁶⁰ Spending the night in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher she notes that these “were the most blissful hours of my life” and reflects “he who has lived to enjoy such hours has lived long enough.”⁶¹ On leaving

⁵⁶ Omitting any discussion of Judaism is puzzling. However, Pfeiffer tends to report on what she herself had actually seen or heard. It is quite likely that, given the group she traveled with, she did not have any contact with Jews until she was in Tiberias. In contrast, Egerton became acquainted with some missionaries whose negative views of Jews can be detected in her narrative. For example, see Egerton, *Journal of a Tour in the Holy Land*, 22.

⁵⁷ Pfeiffer notes that this warning came from the boat’s captain and was meant to deter Pfeiffer and Bartlett from landing since the captain, despite prior agreement, did not want to waste time stopping there.

⁵⁸ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 97.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

Jerusalem she writes: “A calm and peaceful feeling of happiness filled my breast; and ever shall I be thankful to the Almighty that He has vouchsafed me to behold these realms.”⁶² She reflects on what she has seen and experienced: “The remembrance of these holy places, and of Him who lived and suffered here, shall surely strengthen and console me wherever I may be and whatever I may be called upon to endure.”⁶³

Skepticism about ‘Holy’ Sites

Despite her awe, however, Pfeiffer doubted the authenticity of some of the sacred sites, using exclamation marks and words such as “supposed” or “asserted to be” to express her skepticism. Such skepticism was not unusual at the time. Egerton, for example, expressed her doubts that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was the site of the crucifixion.⁶⁴ Pfeiffer describes the chapel containing Christ’s tomb in which there was a stone that was “vehemently asserted” to be the one on which the angel sat when announcing the Lord’s resurrection. She is shown footsteps of the disciples (she puts an exclamation mark after this) and a building supposed to stand on the site where the wood was felled for the Savior’s cross (also an exclamation mark). In Nazareth she sees the grotto thought to be where Mary received God’s message from the angel. Three small granite pillars could still be seen, the lower part of one, broken off by the Turks, was only fastened from above. This pillar was said to hang miraculously in the air. She observes sarcastically: “Had these men but looked beyond their noses, had they only cast their eyes upwards, they could not have had the face to preach a miracle where it is so palpable that none exists,”⁶⁵ an example both of her outspoken style and her challenge to the accuracy of the male gaze.

Criticism of Christians

Pfeiffer was quite critical of her fellow Christians. Shortly after she arrived in Jerusalem, she attended services at the church in the Franciscan convent.⁶⁶ As in mosques, men and women worshipped separately. In the women’s section she thought there was little devotion since they talked a lot and prayed very little. Used to Viennese Catholicism Pfeiffer was disturbed that the services seemed to be a social occasion and that children ate their breakfasts during the service and jostled each other. She decided to pray in her room rather “than among people who seem to attend to any thing rather than their devotions.”⁶⁷ Another unfavorable impression of Catholics was shaped by their practices

⁶² Ibid., 144.

⁶³ Ibid., 144-145.

⁶⁴ Egerton, *Journal of a Tour in the Holy Land*, 18-19.

⁶⁵ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 152.

⁶⁶ Pfeiffer does not state the location of what she calls the Franciscan convent. It is likely that it was the Franciscan Monastery on Mount Zion whose church she attended.

⁶⁷ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 128. Also protestants such as Egerton and Rogers expressed similar views. See Egerton, *Journal of a Tour in the Holy Land*, 19 and Rogers, *Domestic Life in Palestine*, especially her comments about pilgrim behavior, 299-306.

when someone died. One day she heard screaming, which turned out to be the wails of mourning women. She requested admission to the room where the dead man lay. If it had not been for pictures of saints and a crucifix she would not have imagined that the man was Catholic. The women wailed, drank coffee, and wailed again. Pfeiffer felt disgusted and left, not, however, reflecting that her own behavior was intrusive and insensitive. During the night she spent in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher the “inharmonious din” of the midnight services disturbed her. In her view: “The constant noise and multifarious ceremonies are calculated rather to disconcert than to inspire the stranger.”⁶⁸ Pfeiffer particularly regretted the frequent conflicts between the various Christian sects and wondered what the Turks, whom she reminds her readers Christians considered infidels, thought of Christians when they saw “with what hatred and virulence each sect of Christians pursues the other” and she asked when “this dishonorable bigotry” would cease. Conflicts became particularly acute, she was told, when the Greek and the Roman Catholic Easter fell on the same day. Quarreling was so extreme that fights broke out and some were even killed. Generally the Turks had to intervene to restore peace and order amongst “us Christians.”⁶⁹

Insights into Pilgrim Life

Pfeiffer’s travel diary gives insights into accommodations for pilgrims and describes the food they received. She praises the Franciscan convent where she stayed where the friars welcomed rich and poor Roman Catholics and Protestants. Her room was simply furnished with an iron bedstead, a mattress coverlet and bolster, a shabby table and two chairs. Breakfast was coffee without milk or sugar. Dinner, eaten at noon, consisted typically of mutton broth, pastry prepared with oil or a dish of cucumbers, and roast or spiced mutton. On Fridays, Saturdays and saint days there was fast-day fare, such as lentils, omelets, salt fish, bread and wine. The food was sufficient, but Pfeiffer took a while to get used to the constant mutton and missed having beef. Visitors were allowed to stay for a month at no charge, a practice that Pfeiffer with her limited funds appreciated. A donation for masses was customary, but nobody inquired how much the pilgrims gave, or even if they gave anything, nor if they were Catholic, Protestant or another religion. In contrast to this generosity, she reports, the handsome Greek convent charged pilgrims an exorbitant price for bad accommodations, as did the Armenian convent.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 116.

⁶⁹ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 115. Other travelers also left critical reports about Easter celebrations. For example, Rogers witnessed fights between Greeks and Armenians during Easter celebrations. Rogers, *Domestic Life in Palestine*, 302. Egerton was thankful to have missed Easter celebrations, which she terms “a most disgraceful scene of violence, superstition, fraud, and schism.” Egerton, *Journal of a Tour in the Holy Land*, 19.

⁷⁰ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 120.

Depictions of Landscape

Pfeiffer leaves vivid descriptions of the Holy Land's varied landscape and topography. From her European perspective she was disappointed that there were no lawns or flowers, but she quickly saw beauty in what she perceived as an exotic arid landscape. Around Jaffa she describes the sand and the plains and on her journey to Jerusalem the barren and rocky Judean mountains. On the way to Bethlehem she found the view "as grand as it is peculiar."⁷¹ Everything was stony, yet between the stones fruit trees and grape vines grew. During her journey to the Dead Sea and the River Jordan she depicts the rugged grandeur of the desert. Using popular Romantic tropes of the picturesque she writes: "Majestic rocky terraces, piled one above the other by nature with such exquisite symmetry that the beholder gazes in silent wonder."⁷² Arriving at the Dead Sea she did not notice fields of salt or smoke rising and did not find the exhalations from the sea unpleasant. She put her hands in the water and let them dry and experienced no itching, and none of her party experienced the headaches or nausea that she reports several previous travelers, whom she does not name, had mentioned. In contrast to the stark scenery of the Dead Sea the banks of the River Jordan were verdant. She admired the beauty of the Nablus valley and the magnificent views of Mount Tabor and uses again Romantic tropes to depict the scenery around the Sea of Galilee: "a glorious chain of mountains rises in varied and picturesque terrace-like forms."⁷³ Despite her appreciation of the landscape, European notions of natural beauty shape her gaze, as her following rather dismissive observation indicates: "In a mountain region of Europe, a sight like the one we were now admiring would scarcely have charmed us so much. But in these regions, poor alike in inhabitants and in scenery, the traveller is contented with little, and a little thing charms him."⁷⁴

Comments on Agriculture

David Spurr notes that the "writer's eye is always in some sense colonizing the landscape,"⁷⁵ and his observation sheds light on Pfeiffer's account. The supposed inability of native inhabitants to cultivate the land properly and the lack of population were common tropes in colonialist discourse, used to justify the "need" for European interventions. In her account Pfeiffer reports both on agriculture and, expressing colonialist views, also on the potential for agricultural development. She was especially fascinated with plants and fruits that were for her exotic, such as the pomegranate and orange plantations near Acre, and the numerous large gardens in Jaffa filled with trees laden with a variety of tropical fruits and surrounded by hedges of Indian fig trees. On her

⁷¹ Ibid., 123.

⁷² Ibid., 133.

⁷³ Ibid., 155.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 156.

⁷⁵ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 27.

journey to Jerusalem she remarked on the large herds of sheep and goats and the fertile and well-populated valley of Sharon. Around Jerusalem she thought the land was desolate and barren, thus criticizing the inhabitants for not improving the cultivation of their natural products, in the process echoing European stereotypes of the indolent and backward Oriental: “If they would but exert themselves, many a plant would doubtless flourish luxuriantly.”⁷⁶ She also remarked that if people knew how to cultivate the vineyards and prepare the wine it could be excellent.⁷⁷ From the summit of Mount Tabor she viewed the valley below, noting that despite the richness of the soil the population was sparse. Throughout her stay she never saw agricultural produce carried by wagons. Because the roads were bad, horses, donkeys and sometimes camels were used.⁷⁸ She later blamed, however, the poverty she saw and the lack of agricultural development not on the inhabitants, but on Ottoman policies. In her opinion the inhabitants of Syria were ground down, and the taxes were too high. She learned that the orchards, for example, were not taxed as orchards, but instead each individual tree was taxed, a system that discouraged agricultural development. Since the peasants did not own the land they had little incentive to improve it. At the whim of the local pashas they could be moved to another piece of land or even dispossessed. Although she was overall well disposed towards Turks, she echoes Orientalist notions of the despotic Turk when she criticizes the arbitrary tyranny of the local pashas whose power in the area they ruled was as great, in her opinion, as that of the Sultan in Constantinople.⁷⁹

Impressions of Towns

In her diary Pfeiffer leaves snapshots of the towns she visited. She gives a vivid description of the damage to Acre and its fortifications during the war two years previously (1840). The town seemed to “sigh in vain for repairs,”⁸⁰ and looked as if the enemy had only recently left. From her visit to Turkey she considered most Turkish towns ugly, even when, unlike the ruined Acre, they were well preserved. She found Jaffa dirty and crowded.⁸¹ At the time she visited Jerusalem it was, with its 25,000 inhabitants, the largest city in the Holy

⁷⁶ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 130.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 131. While this criticism appears to be Orientalist, it was also one she made on her journey to Iceland.

⁷⁸ Egerton and Rogers also commented on the lack of wagons and the bad roads. For example, see Egerton, *Journal of a Tour in the Holy Land*, 77, and Rogers, *Domestic Life in Palestine*, 13.

⁷⁹ Since some local Ottoman rulers did, in fact, misuse their powers, her comment could quite well be accurate rather than Orientalist. For an analysis of Ottoman rule in the late 18th and early 19th centuries see Dick Douwes, *The Ottomans in Syria: A History of Justice and Oppression* (London: Tauris, 2000), especially chapter 5 (104-124) and chapter 7 (152-187).

⁸⁰ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 96.

⁸¹ Dirt is often mentioned in travel writing, not only about the Holy Land. On her journey to Iceland, Pfeiffer also comments on dirt. Both Egerton and Rogers comment on dirt in Palestine, and Rogers describes an attempted clean up of Haifa: Rogers, *Domestic Life in Palestine*, 143.

Land. She reports that the houses, many with round cupolas, were built of stone and that the city wall was lofty and well preserved. Among the mosques she thought the mosque of Omar with its lead covered roof was the most handsome.⁸² In her opinion, Jerusalem was bustling, but had a poor-looking bazaar and the densely populated Jewish quarter, where the plague typically broke out first, had an offensive smell. When she visited Tiberias the town still lay half in ruins from the devastating 1837 (she mistakenly writes 1839) earthquake in which, she heard, many had perished.

Representations of People

Colonialist discourse tended to homogenize native inhabitants and treat them as backward, and their voices were ignored or silenced.⁸³ Pfeiffer also generalizes, observing people in Palestine from the outside since she could not communicate with them, except through an interpreter.⁸⁴ Overall, she views the inhabitants of the Holy Land quite positively. She undermines, for example, European stereotypes of “cruel,” “dishonest” and “barbaric” Turks. Although she sometimes criticizes the Arabs, she thinks that those she met were good-natured and hospitable. She refers to notions of thievish Bedouins, but in her experience they were hospitable and welcoming. Pfeiffer also gives her impressions of individuals she met. She sometimes appears patronizing, but she is nevertheless interested in these people.

One picture she gives is of the honorary (and unpaid) consul of Austria and France in Jaffa, whose family she describes at length. Like other women travel writers, she focuses here on characteristics of the family’s domestic life such as clothes and food.⁸⁵ She does not say what nationality or ethnicity the consul was.⁸⁶ Besides his wife there were three sons and three daughters, all of whom wore Turkish costume. The women wore wide trousers, a caftan and a sash around the waist and on their heads they had small fez caps. They braided their hair, plaiting into it small gold coins, and they also wore necklaces of gold

⁸² Pfeiffer mentions that the mosque “is said to occupy” the site of Solomon’s temple: Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 119. Egerton, in contrast, notes that the mosque “usurps” the place of the temple, a much less tolerant observation than Pfeiffer’s: Egerton, *Journal of a Tour in the Holy Land*, 25.

⁸³ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 21-78.

⁸⁴ Besides German, Pfeiffer at this time spoke French and Italian. On her later travels she learned languages to avoid needing an interpreter and to communicate directly with the different peoples she encountered. She learned, for example, some English and Danish for her journey to Iceland. When she was in the Dutch East Indies on her second journey around the world she learned Dutch and enough Malay to converse for several hours with a king and she picked up some phrases in the Dyak and Batak languages.

⁸⁵ In contrast to men, women travel writers often focused on the domestic sphere, see Thompson, *Travel Writing*, 186.

⁸⁶ She mentions only that some of the consul’s family spoke a little Italian with a strong Greek accent, suggesting that they were of Greek origin.

coins. Such adornment, she observes, was very popular in Syria, and those who could not afford gold coins used silver or copper ones.⁸⁷ The consul and his sons wore Turkish dress, but the consul had an old European cocked hat, strangely mixing Turkish and Western styles. In honor of her visit the family prepared what she calls an oriental entertainment, her first meal in the Holy Land. Sitting on mats on the floor, all except Pfeiffer and the consul, who used knives and forks, ate with their fingers. The food consisted of pilaf with mutton, cucumbers, rice milk flavored with attar of roses, cheese made of ewe's milk, gherkins, and burned hazel nuts. She found the flat bread tastier than she expected. The dishes were not to her taste, but she recognized: "I had still too much of the European about me, and too little appetite, to be able to endure what these good people seemed to consider immense delicacies." Some of the family spoke a little Italian, and the consul supposedly spoke French well, but because of their strong accents she had difficulty understanding and had to guess what they said. She reflects that no doubt they had to do the same with her speech: "Much was spoken, and little understood. The same thing is said often to be the case in learned societies; so it was not of much consequence."⁸⁸ She received hospitable treatment later from the honorary consul for Austria and France in Haifa who was Catholic, but lived in "Oriental fashion."⁸⁹

Another individual she reports meeting was a kindly Jewish doctor in Tiberias in whose house Pfeiffer and her party stayed because there were no inns. She reports that numerous Jews lived in the town. They did not wear Greek or Turkish clothes, but dressed like their fellow Jews in Galicia and Poland and most spoke German. She learned that all the Jewish families in the town came originally from Poland or Russia and had moved there because they wanted to die in the Promised Land. The doctor told her about the suffering caused by the earthquake in which he had lost his wife and children and he had only escaped because he was at the bedside of a patient. In her discussion of Jews in Tiberias her comments are factual and descriptive and not judgmental.

Depictions of Women

Like other women travel writers, Pfeiffer commented on her impressions of aspects of women's lives.⁹⁰ She describes, for example, a wedding where the bride was beautifully dressed, a costume seen, however, only within the family circle since men not belonging to the family were seldom allowed to view

⁸⁷ Pfeiffer reports that "the costume of the Christians is precisely the same as that of the Syrians". Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 109-10.

⁸⁸ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 101.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁹⁰ Throughout her account Rogers leaves detailed descriptions of her many positive interactions with women in the Holy Land: Rogers, *Domestic Life in Palestine*, for example, 102-103, 220-235. Egerton, however, dismisses Palestinian women as being "intrusive and annoying": Egerton, *Journal of a Tour in the Holy Land*, 66.

women in their “gorgeous apparel.”⁹¹ After the ceremony the young wife had to sit in a corner of the room and not speak, a silence intended to demonstrate the bride’s sorrow at changing her condition. When Pfeiffer and her group were in Acre the women of the pasha’s harem invited her to visit them, an invitation she gladly accepted since it offered the opportunity of gratifying her curiosity. Reporting on the harem, which appealed to readers’ sense of the exotic, was almost a requirement for women travel writers since only women were allowed access.⁹² Pfeiffer thought the women in the harem were ignorant, but inquisitive. They could not read or write, did no work and did not know any foreign languages. Like Montagu before her, Pfeiffer uses the harem to critique the situation of European women. From this and other visits to harems, for example, she had the impression that they might be happier than European women. Since no interpreter was allowed to accompany her, she had only the surface to look at and could not communicate with the women, except through gestures. She could not see any signs of beauty, unless, she remarks, stoutness could be considered beautiful, an observation that reveals her inkling that notions of female beauty could be culturally shaped. She did not think these women “capable of deep passions or feeling either for good or evil,” but adds: “I only report what I observed on the average,”⁹³ recognizing perhaps that her impressions were overhasty and superficial.

Traveling in the Holy Land as a Woman

As Pfeiffer demonstrates, traveling in the Holy Land at that time was difficult for anyone, but especially so for a woman. In Constantinople she was advised to disguise herself as a man, which, showing her independence, she refused to do, noting that although her small stocky frame looked like that of a youth her face would be like an old man’s, an example of her frequent humorous self-deprecation. She continued to wear the costume she adopted of a blouse and wide Turkish trousers, and this, she writes, was a good decision because everywhere she went she was treated with kindness, consideration and respect. Pfeiffer was, however, relieved to accompany Bartlett to Jerusalem since she was no longer “unprotected,” showing a mixture on this her first journey of both independence and dependence. She calls the group, with whom she later

⁹¹ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 129.

⁹² Male writers had long imagined the harem either as an eroticized space or, like Montesquieu, as confirmation of oriental despotism. Women visitors to the harem were not immune to using it for their own agendas. Montagu, who visited with an interpreter, used the harem to critique the situation of women in England. The harem women were in her opinion freer than women in England: *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, vol. 1, 328. For Egerton, who like Pfeiffer could communicate only through gestures, the harem represented oriental despotism: “Poor things, what a miserable existence is theirs! Living like birds in a cage without apparent occupation or interest of any sort, unless it be their children”: Egerton, *Journal of a Tour in the Holy Land*, 50. Rogers, who had learned sufficient Arabic to communicate, gives a more nuanced account of individual women: Rogers, *Domestic Life in Palestine*, for example, 137-38.

⁹³ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 166.

traveled, her “gentleman-protectors.”⁹⁴ In the church a priest, wanting her to conform to accepted attire for women, requested her to exchange her straw hat for a veil to cover her head and face. She discarded the hat and used a handkerchief, but refused to muffle her face. When she visited Mar Saba, she was forced to spend the night alone in a tower since women were not allowed entrance into the monastery. She also had to contend with European notions of women’s weakness when, for example, she wanted to accompany her acquaintances to the Dead Sea. Some in the group feared that the journey on horseback would be too strenuous and tiring for a woman.⁹⁵ From Jaffa to Jerusalem was a strenuous sixteen-hour ride, which Bartlett wanted to complete in one day. After five hours of uninterrupted riding in the heat, already eleven hours on horseback, Pfeiffer felt giddy, but refused to confess her predicament for fear it would be perceived as a sign of weakness. Long hours of riding in the heat were required for her ten-day journey back to Beirut during which she slept in tents or on the ground. By pointing out the long distances covered and the difficulties of the travel Pfeiffer depicts herself as a hardy and resolute traveler. Pfeiffer, the only woman in the group, was justifiably proud of her accomplishments since she never lagged behind the men, but she reports: “Whoever is not very hardy and courageous, and insensible to hunger, thirst, heat, and cold; whoever cannot sleep on the hard ground, or even on stones, passing the cold nights under the open sky’ should not venture farther than from Joppa to Jerusalem.”⁹⁶

The Reciprocal Gaze

Observing different cultures, as Pfeiffer and all travel writers did, is rarely neutral or objective, as the title of Pratt’s book *Imperial Eyes* underscores. Pfeiffer scrutinized but did not objectify people, and in her experience the gaze was reciprocal. She realized, sometimes with humor, but often with discomfort, that as she was gazing at them, they were gazing back and judging her. In the church of St. Francis she was the object of such curiosity. The women looked at her and touched her, which made her uncomfortable. Other local people were also curious to see Europeans and made them what Pfeiffer calls a “gazing-stock,”⁹⁷ which annoyed some travelers. On her visit to the harem in Acre, the women were just as curious about her as she was about them. They were fascinated with her clothes, her short hair, which they all came up to touch, and her thinness. Pfeiffer’s discomfort at being observed did not, however, lead to self-reflection that her own gaze might be intrusive and

⁹⁴ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 145.

⁹⁵ Pfeiffer was new to riding. A few weeks earlier in Turkey she accompanied acquaintances to Bursa, a journey that required her to ride. She had never been on horseback before, but was so interested in seeing the city that she did not confess to this. She managed to keep up with the group without falling off, albeit in an inelegant way, as she recounts with her characteristic self-deprecation.

⁹⁶ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 145.

⁹⁷ Pfeiffer, *A Visit to the Holy Land*, 148.

offensive to them.

Conclusions

Pfeiffer's travel diary, with its mixture of pilgrim and secular adventure/hero narratives, gives insights not only into religious sites and pilgrimages, but also presents vivid scenes of life at that time. Although hampered by being unable to communicate directly with the inhabitants, her impressions of the Holy Land are nevertheless insightful and unsentimental. With today's hindsight, her Eurocentric biases are clear, but for her time she was open to other cultures and showed that she was able to learn from her experiences. For example, she notes that she had found few things as she had imagined them to be and she recognizes "how falsely I had judged the poor denizens of the East when I took them for the most thievish of tribes,"⁹⁸ thereby revising stereotypes she had previously held. In this first journey Pfeiffer sometimes seems naïve and unsure of herself and relies on men to protect her, at least some of the time. Having successfully completed the journey, however, she gained more self-confidence and independence, as her later travels demonstrate. Her journey also taught her the importance of being able to communicate directly with people, rather than relying on an interpreter, the reason why she avidly learned other languages for her future travels. Pfeiffer never lost her enthusiasm for traveling and, as with her later books, she communicates here the excitement and the awe she felt.

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⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 287.