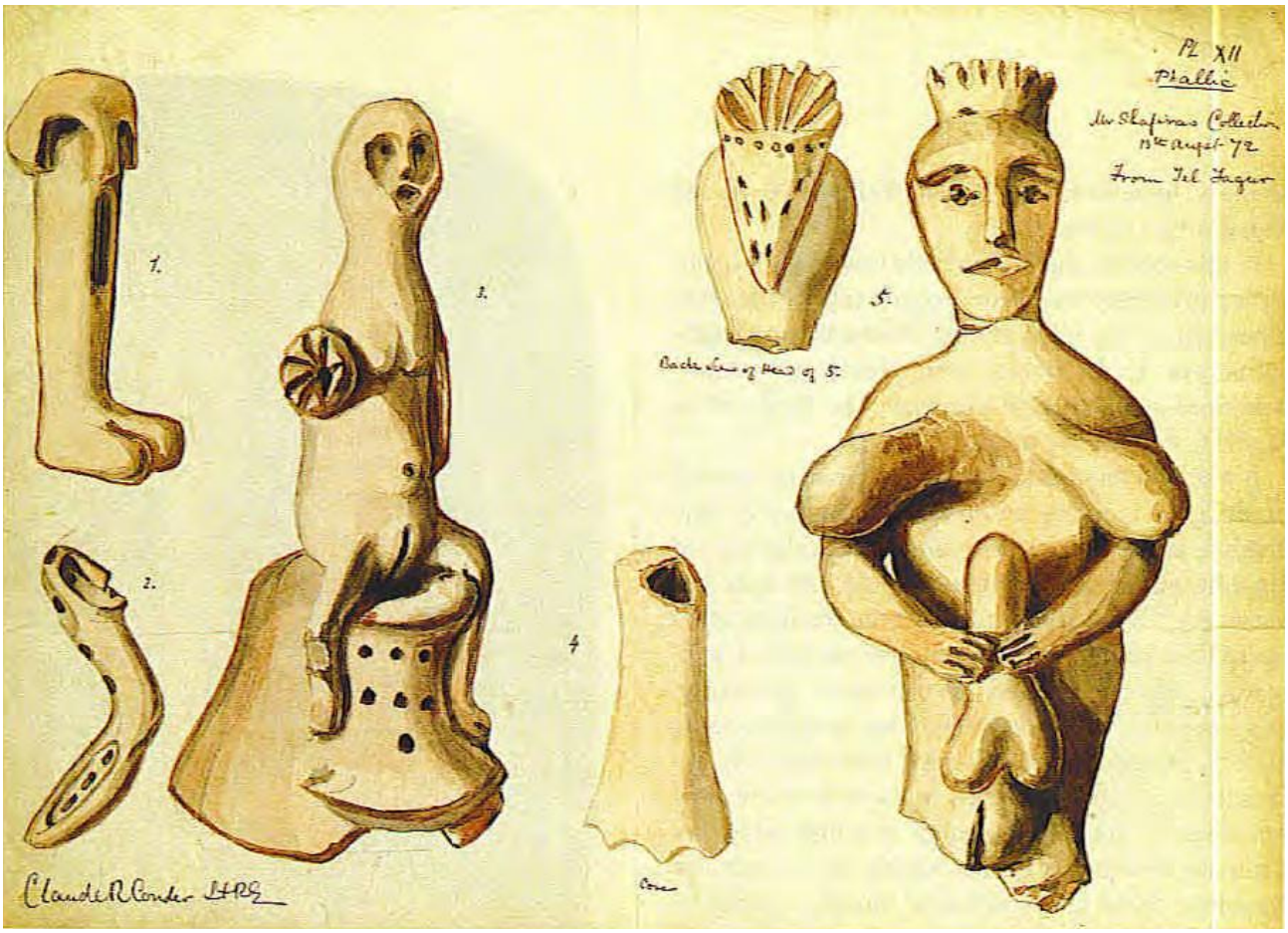
Between Apostate and Forger:

Moses Wilhelm Shapira and the Moabite Pottery Affair

Yoram Sabo

Two affairs which shook the world of archaeology during the second half of the nineteenth century were connected with the name Moses Wilhelm Shapira, an antiquities dealer from Jerusalem who was a Jewish apostate, having converted to Christianity. The better known one was the one relating to the scroll of the Book of Deuteronomy which was publicized in 1883 and was followed by Shapira's suicide. However, another saga preceded it, a very strange affair which became known as the Affair of the Moabite Pottery. Shapira sold a tremendous collection of figurines and clay vessels to the Berlin Museum in 1872, a collection which turned out to be a complete forgery to its very last artifact. It is difficult to understand what led the Germans to purchase the collection of artifacts which today appear to be clearly ridiculous, for such a large sum of money. Through a precise recreation of the affair based on previously unknown documents and



Moabite Pottery as sketched by Conder in Shapira's shop

segments from the press, Yoram Sabo sheds light on the story, which consisted of more than forgery of antiquities alone.

The Mission, Research of Palestine and the Mesha Stele

The decline of the Ottoman Empire in the mid-19th century enabled British and German Protestants to settle in Jerusalem. The construction of the Anglican Church (Christ Church) near the Jaffa Gate was completed in 1849 and became the center of missionary activity in Jerusalem. The Mission operated in Jerusalem through various means: the opening of schools, hospitals and employment centers,



Christ Church, the Old City, Jerusalem

all of which were constructed with higher standards than was commonplace in the city during that era. The more effective the services these institutions provided, the more the Jewish leadership increased its battle against them. The prohibition against receiving care from the missionary doctors was very firm. At times, struggles were conducted against the backdrop of the Jews' objection to allow the burial of a person who died in a missionary hospital. The House of Industry, which was established near the Nablus Gate, was designated as a training center for Jewish apostates who were shunned and cut off from the Jewish community and lacked the means to support themselves. In 1850 the well-known architect Conrad Schick joined that institution. He developed the vocational training there, taught engraving and wood-carving and, together with his students, created wooden models of Jerusalem. Moses Wilhelm Shapira was one of those students.

The word "apostate" was used by the Jewish community as a very strong derogatory term. In the press of that era, the fact that someone was an apostate was always mentioned before his name. In many cases the fact that one was an apostate explained why that person was a crook. Excommunications, denunciations, threats and curses served as the central weapons in this war. Indeed, the Jewish community viewed this struggle as no less than a war. The phrase "combat against the mission" became commonplace. When the press discussed "the inciters", "the troublemakers", "the destroyers" or "the kidnappers", it was clear to all who these phrases were referring to. In the periodical **Ḥavatzelet** a column called "the column of shame" was frequently dedicated to discussions of the mission and the apostates. In 1935, Pinḥas Grajewski published a booklet called "**The Wars of the Jews Against the Mission**", an emotional survey of the struggle through an eclectic collection of notices, stories and passionate declarations against the mission. In the introduction, Grajewski wrote: "persecution, physical and emotional suffering, contempt and wrath are our lot". Many 19th century Jewish

community leaders and their efforts in combating the mission are mentioned in the booklet: Rabbi Shmuel Salant, Rabbi YosefRivlin, Rabbi Yaakov Shaul Eliashar and many others.

Despite the sizeable growth of the Jewish population in Jerusalem during the second half of the 19th century and despite the fact that the various missionary services were of a high standard as mentioned earlier, the mission did not achieve an impressive level of success. Christian visitors to Jerusalem repeatedly expressed their disappointment with regard to the mission's achievements.

The Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) was established in London in 1865 under the auspices of Queen Victoria and with her support. The official motives for establishing the Fund were religious, its goal being the research of the Holy Land and the Holy City. However, despite the fact that men of the Church were among its founders, the Fund committed itself not to focus solely on religious matters. Among the delegation were more than a few scholars who made their mark in the region, especially in Jerusalem: Charles Wilson, Charles Warren, Claude Conder, Horatio Kitchener and others. A series of delegations began to professionally map Western Palestine and to conduct archaeological surveys. In 1867, the Fund delegation arrived in Jerusalem and its members sent regular reports of their numerous findings to England. They sent more and more findings and survey results to London, which created significant resonance in the press and in the public opinion in England. In 1870, the Fund's journal, **The Palestine Exploration Quarterly Statement (PEQ)**, began to appear. The members of the Fund were among the customers at Shapira's shop and its journal covered the affair of the Moabite Pottery regularly.

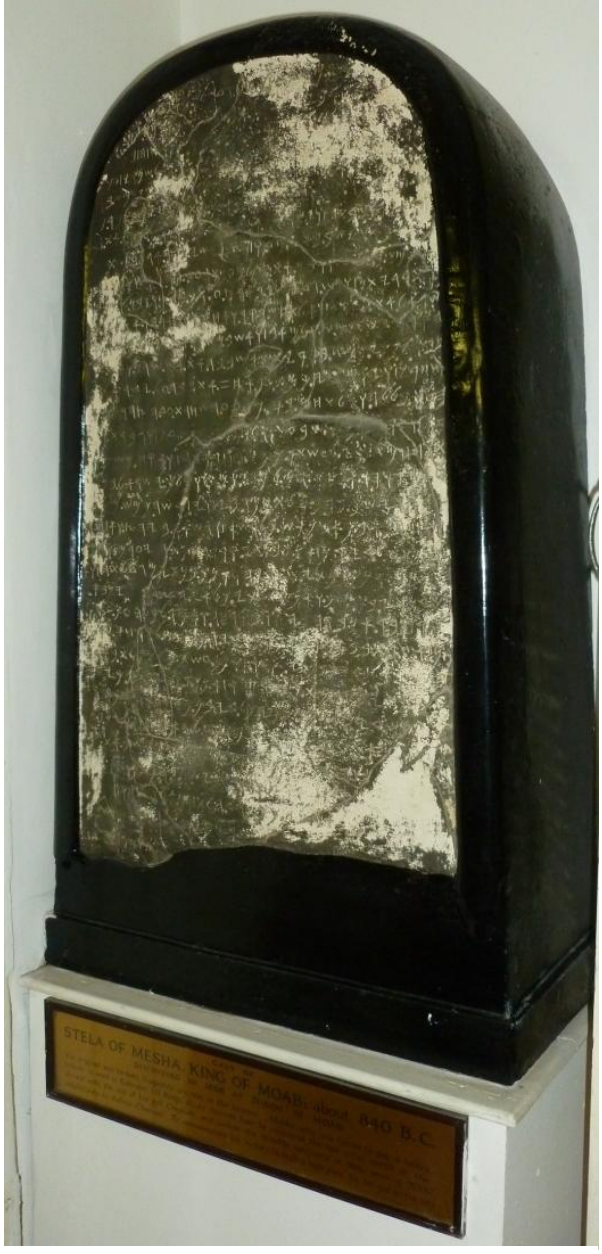


The PEF Logo

The affair of the Moabite Pottery is rooted in the discovery of the Mesha Stele in 1868. It was the Germans who were actually the first to reach the Stele. In the middle of the 60's of the 19th century, the German priest Frederick Klein arrived in Jerusalem as a representative of the mission. Klein succeeded in creating a friendly relationship with the Bedouins of the East Bank of the Jordan, and on August 19th, 1868, they took him to Dhiban (the Biblical Divon). There, they showed him a basalt stone, about 100 by 70 centimeters in size, which stood prominently upon the ground and bore an inscription. Klein didn't know how to interpret the inscription but sketched an illustration of it. Upon his return to Jerusalem, the rumor concerning the Stele began to spread. Shapira heard about it as well, from Pastor Klein, who was friendly with Shapira's wife who was of German ancestry. The race to purchase the stone had begun. In attempt to purchase the Moabite Stele, Charles Warren represented the British, and France was represented by a young 22 year old diplomat, Charles Clermont-Ganneau, who had joined the French consulate only a year earlier as an interpreter. In the end, Clermont-Ganneau succeeded in purchasing the Stele for the French.

In 1870, Clermont-Ganneau published the deciphered inscription of the Stele, which from that point on became known as the Mesha Stele or the Moabite Stone. A text in Phoenician characters appeared on the basalt stone. It contained the words of thanksgiving of Mesha, king of Moab to his god Kemosh for having granted him victory over Israel. It was one of the most important archaeological discoveries of that era, since it was the first archaeological finding which provided a parallel source to a Scriptural story (Kings II Chapter 3, Verses 4-5). The Mesha Stele is currently displayed at the Louvre Museum in Paris.

The discovery of the Stele encouraged the Bedouins to increase their efforts to search for similar findings on the East Bank of the Jordan. Someone who viewed this as an opportunity to increase his business was Moses Wilhelm Shapira, the antiquities dealer from Christian Quarter Road in Jerusalem, who began to invest great efforts to obtain additional findings. Shapira's liaison with the Bedouin tribes of the other bank of the Jordan was a Christian Arab named Salim al-Kari. Shapira's efforts were successful and in 1872, he was able to sell 1,700 pottery items to the Museum in Berlin, the capital of the German Empire which had just recently been founded.



The Mesha Stele or The Moabite Stone

Moses Wilhelm Shapira, the Man

Many have written about Shapira throughout the years: mainstream journalists, academic scholars and authors. Various inaccuracies appeared in many of their writings: according to their reports, Shapira's birthplace was either Kiev or Odessa; in one he was a Polish Jew and in another, a German Jew; in one, he converted to Christianity in Constantinople and in the other he only did so after reaching Jerusalem; some mention that Shapira came from a traditional Jewish family while others wrote that he was born to a pious family who were disciples of the Vilna Gaon. This phenomenon suits Shapira's evasive personality. However, the few facts pertaining to Moses Shapira's life before his arrival in Jerusalem can be derived from one small document which Shapira wrote to the Prussian Consul in Jerusalem in order to receive the Consulate's protection:

File A XV11/2

Jerusalem, April 7th 1860

Wilhelm Shapira, known personally, appeared (before us) and with a letter of recommendation from Bishop Gobat, presented a request as follows: I was born in 1830 in Kamenetz-Podolsk. I studied there during my childhood and at the age of 25, joined my grandfather who immigrated to Palestine. Due to the political situation, which made it almost impossible for Jews of my status to emigrate, I had to forego my passport, and when we crossed the border, we forfeited all rights to Russian protection. We remained in Bucharest for about five months. My ties with the Missionaries there convinced me of the truth of the Gospel, and by undergoing holy baptism, I was accepted to the Christian community. Awhile later, we continued our journey, and over three years ago I reached Jerusalem, where I am a member of the community of Anglican converts.

Being now, as I am, without protection whatsoever, my request is that I be accepted into the protection of the Prussian Consulate and be given a passport which testifies to my protected status.

W. Shapira

Written in Jerusalem

G. Rosen

(M. Eliav, Mordechai Eliav, *The Jewish Settlement in Palestine from the Perspective of German Policy* 1842-1914, p. 9-10 (Hebrew).

As a resident of Jerusalem whose business involved frequent travelling, Moses Wilhelm Shapira was highly interested in obtaining Prussian protection. As a foreign subject, Shapira could enjoy freedom of movement throughout the Ottoman Empire and would be exempt from the special taxes imposed by the local government on foreigners.

Upon his arrival in Jerusalem in 1856, Shapira joined the Anglican Church's community of converts near the Jaffa Gate. At a certain stage, he attempted to integrate into the Mission's House of Industry under the management of Conrad Schick, but was unhappy there. In winter 1860 he fell ill and was hospitalized in the nearby German Deaconess Hospital. There, Shapira met the German nurse Rosetta Jukel, whom he married on April 23, 1861 in a ceremony held in the Anglican Church. The couple had two daughters: Augusta Louisa, who was baptized on October 29, 1865 and Myriam, who was baptized on May 2, 1869. Sometime later, he opened a shop for the sale of antiquities and



Moses Wilhelm Shapira, C. 1870

souvenirs on Christian Street. At this stage, his main customers were Christian pilgrims who wished to purchase various religious souvenirs made of olive wood.

Shapira was undoubtedly a complex character. He immigrated to Jerusalem on his own at the age of 25 and within a few short years, he had established a family and had built a successful business. He was a faithful member of the Anglican Church, but for most of his life, he was immersed in the depths of Jewish manuscripts, and it appears that he his comprehension of the Talmud was profound. He was an autodidact who spoke many languages and even taught himself to decipher ancient languages. Many people who met Shapira (and even those who never did) recorded their impressions of him in writing. From these impressions it appears that there was something about Shapira that caused people to view him as someone who had a problematic personality. In 1876, the Caesar of Brazil, Don Pedro II, visited Jerusalem. He recorded the following comment in his diary: "So, out of curiosity, I visited the bric-a-brac shop of the famous Safira, whose face does not strike one as that of a reliable man […]" (R. Faingold, "Don Pedro 2nd Visits Antique Shop In Jerusalem", FAAP University, Brazil, 2008, p53).

Walter Besant, a British author and historian, who served as the secretary of the PEF during the 80's of the 19th century, recounted his meeting with Shapira in London in July 1883:

> Some years later a certain Shapira, a Polish Jew converted to Christianity but not to good works, came to England and called upon me mysteriously […] The man was a good actor; he was a man of handsome presence, tall, with fair hair and blue eyes, not in the least like the ordinary Polish Jew. (W. Besant, Autobiography, p.161)

From the point of view of the Jewish Community, Shapira was an apostate and therefore, a person to whom no compliments were to be paid. Additionally, it was permissible to attach derogatory titles to apostates and to attribute moral perversions to them- defamations which today would most probably result in slander charges. The more successful and famous Shapira became, the sharper the derogatory remarks against him became. When the affair of the Moabite Pottery was exposed, the Hebrew press celebrated the downfall of the apostate. Fifty years later, Grajewski described this in his book **The Wars of the Jews Against the Mission** under the heading "He has Conceived Mischief and Brings Forth Falsehood":

> Shapira, one of the missionaries and inciters, whom after he left his religion, founded for himself with the help of the mission a shop for books and antique artifacts. He would sell disqualified scrolls and decayed mezuzahs as if they were antiques, to unsuspecting people who in their innocence believed his falsehoods. This infamous man sold a number of vessels on which he wrote a few words in the Moabite language to the Museum in Berlin for twenty-two thousand thalers, claiming that he found them among the ruins of Moab, and later, the forgery became publicly known. (Page numbers do not appear in the booklet).

In 1914, Myriam Harry, Shapira's younger daughter, wrote an autobiographical novel about her life in Jerusalem called **The Little Daughter of Jerusalem** (see list of further reading). In her book, Harry calls herself

"Siona". The following is her description of her father's encounter with the Jews:

> They generally started by going to the Jews' settlement at the Jaffa gate. It was here that the carpenters lived who made all the olive-wood bindings for the tourists' books, and engraved the gold lettered inscriptions on the covers of the albums […] As soon as Mr. Benedictus and Siona appeared, a swarm of elder children took to their heels, screaming as if they were terrified, whilst the women whispered "Goye, Goye" (Christian, Christian) […] Sometimes there were rather high words between Siona's father and his employees […] But one day […] a decrepit old man appeared on the threshold, pale, and trembling with indignation. In a torrent of angry words he anathematized the speaker, but all that Siona could understand was the constantly recurring word: "Mechoumed, mechoumed!"-renegade, renegade! (p. 73).

Shapira the Antiquities Dealer

Shapira was strongly drawn to his Jewish roots and was able to make a good living out of it: Gradually, he established his status as a worldly man who had the ability to access important, rare manuscripts. His absences from his home sometimes lasted for several consecutive months as he went on purchasing journeys throughout the world, which led him to the most prominent museums in Europe and to doing business with them. In time, he formed connections with many well reputed scholars.

In the tourist guide **Baedeker** published in 1876 under the heading "Jerusalem" in the volume dedicated to Syria and Palestine, the following entry appeared: "Books, Photographs. Shapira, Christian Street, is the best shop". After he sold many items to the British Museum, Shapira was able to hang a sign on his shop on Christian Street identifying him as "Correspondent to the British Museum". The scholar Reinhard Heorning testified with regard to the tremendous importance of the Karaite manuscripts which Shapira provided to the British Museum: "This collection of Karaite manuscripts has raised the library of the British Museum to the level of one of the greatest centers of knowledge" (R. Hoerning, British Museum Karaite Mss., Williams and Norgate, London, 1889).

Shapira maintained relationships with at least three members of the Fund: Claude Conder, Horatio Kitchener and Charles Tyrwhitt Drake, all of whom frequented his shop. Drake was quoted as having said the following about Shapira: "In my research on the writing on manuscript rolls, I was helped by Shapira, a German Jew, a great expert on the Talmud and Jewish folklore" (Faingold, Don Pedro 2nd Visits Antique Shop in Jerusalem, p.53).

Shapira's business had less endearing aspects as well. It seems that the man acted without moral boundaries. In 1879 Shapira embarked on one of his many journeys, this time on a purchasing journey to the Jewish community in Yemen. The German cartographer Richard Kiepert took advantage of Shapira's journey in order to receive data from him which would help him draw up a map of Yemen. However, this time Shapira failed to obtain this desired manuscripts easily. He therefore bribed the local governor who sent his soldiers to take the books from the Yemenite Jews by force, then sold them to Shapira. The

Yemenites did not forget this even after they immigrated to Israel. Rabbi Yiḥye Kapaḥ, one of the great Yemenite scholars, mentioned the event in his book **The Book of God's Wars**:

> Many members of our community sold old books which they inherited from their ancestors to gentiles who came to the land of Yemen, like Moses son of Nathaniel who sat in the house of our teacher and master, Abraham Zalaḥ. He himself sold him holy Yemenite books, Prophets and Writings with the translation of Yonatan ben Uziel on the Prophets, and the translation of Rabbi Sa'adya Gaon in Arabic on Isaiah and Psalms. He also sold him a Mishna with Maimonides' commentary in Arabic, the Order of Kodashim, in elaborate script with illustrations of our holy, splendid Temple and the holy vessels in tractate Middot. I saw it with my own eyes in his hand, myself and the deceased Yiḥye Koraḥ, our master and teacher of blessed memory (may his memory merit the world to come) and we were helpless, unable to take it away from him (page 48).

Bertha Spafford, daughter of the founders of the American Colony, lived in Jerusalem for most of her life. In her memoirs, she tells of the Yemenites who recognized Shapira in the street and came to her father to tell him that they were shocked to meet the person who, when in Yemen, had posed as a Rabbi from Jerusalem and forcibly seized their precious manuscripts. The **Hamelitz** journal (edition of 12 Elul 5643, page 6) related to this, although a slight mistake was made with regard to the dates:

> Two years ago, this patron travelled to the land of Yemen and tricked the Jews there by telling them that he was one of the Rabbis of Jerusalem. They welcomed him with great honor, offering him food and drink, and showing him the holy manuscripts they had. He then went to the governor there and gave him a good sum, and as a result of receiving this money, the governor sent his officers to take all of the books the Jews had.

Toward the end of the 60's of the 19th century, Shapira had made a name for himself as a successful merchant. The small souvenir shop on Christian Street in Jerusalem had become an international center for the trade of ancient Jewish manuscripts. The man who assisted him in the store itself and became one of the central figures in the affair of the Moabite Stone was a Christian Arab named Salim Al-Kari.

Salim Al-Kari

In books, documents and in journal segments, the name Salim Al-Kari is frequently mentioned alongside that of Shapira. When the souvenir shop had just opened, he was mentioned as responsible for seeking out the Christian tourists in the Old City and bringing them to the store. However, as time passed, he became an increasingly prominent figure in Shapira's life and a central figure in the affair of the Moabite Pottery.

Clermont-Ganneau mentioned that Salim had good drawing skills and that he had sufficient knowledge of the Moabite characters in order to draw out the characters on the Moabite Pottery. Additionally, he claimed that Al-Kari would copy images from the religious Christian literature onto canvas and sell them to Greek pilgrims. He later wrote:

> In my first publication on the Moabite Stone (1870), I mentioned, among other things which aided me in restoring the mutilated text, a copy of several lines of the

> inscription executed by an Arab of the city, who had seen the original before its destruction. This Arab was Selim el Gari (**American Palestine Exploration Society**, Quarterly Statement, April 1874, The Shapira Collection, p. 203).

However, it seems that Salim Al-Kari's main occupation was serving as a liaison between the scholars, with Shapira among them, and the Bedouin tribes on the east bank of the



Charles Simon Clermont-Ganneau, French Orientalist

Jordan. In any case, it was he who brought the Moabite Pottery to Shapira. It is possible to learn about the rise and fall of Salim Al-Kari from two descriptions which represent the two opposite ends of the affair of the Moabite pottery. The German Herman Weser, a member of the local Protestant community and an amateur archaeologist, participated in Shapira's first delegation to the East Bank of the Jordan. One can learn about the dawn of Salim's success from his 1872 letter, as well as obtaining a significant impression with regard to the character of antiquities dealing in those days:

> Shapira accepted into his employment a local Arab, a member of the Greek-Christian community, named Salim. Salim was indeed not an educated man - he hardly knew to read and write […] but he was very sly and diligent. He was very familiar with the area of the Jordan, had travelled there more than once, and had made connections with the Bedouin tribes residing there. He was beloved to these tribes because of his entertaining stories and the favors and services he provided to them […] He brought them tobacco, sugar and coffee and in return, he was easily able to obtain antiquities which others could not purchase even with good sums of money. It was Shapira who sent Salim, after he had understood his character and worth, to these remote areas beyond the Jordan River, in order to discover archaeological findings and to bring them to him. He promised him a handsome reward in addition to his salary for each valuable finding. (**Journal of the German Oriental Society, Z.D.M.G**. 1872, p. 722-723 Translated from German, Prof. Yaakov Shavit's Shapira Collection)

Six years later, in February 1878, a notice was published in a German newspaper in Stuttgart as follows:

> Regarding the matter of the Moabite pottery, the **Athenaeum** has published additional interesting documents. The infamous Salim is now suspected to be a forger. In a police search of his home, an unfinished item of the familiar type that had not yet been burned, with the requisite inscriptions and punctuation, alongside work tools which served him for their production. In the interim, he decided to flee to Alexandria for his safety. The hope is that it will be possible to apprehend him in order to receive additional information about his relations with the merchant Shapira, who abandoned him after the letter of Socin and Kautch [who, in 1876, published a book about the Moabite Pottery, and they concluded that the pottery were forgeries]. Salim became a pauper when he was fired and it is said that he threatened to reveal the entire story of the antiquities.

Shapira himself, in a letter to the **PEQ** from April 1878, portrayed Salim as his agent and called him a swindler. Clermont-Ganneau also took care not to accuse Shapira of forgery and attributed all the guilt to the Arab, who, as he said, set a trap for Shapira. There is no argument, however, with regard to one thing: Salim Al-Kari's unique talents succeeded in duping many of the best scholars in Europe.

However, it became clear that the affair did not bring an end to Salim Al-Kari's career. Abraham Shalom Yahuda, a scholar in the field of Jewish History and Arabic Culture visited Palestine and in 1902 published an article on the Mesha Stele. The lion's share of the article was dedicated to a Christian Arab from Jerusalem named Salim who introduced himself to Yahuda as an interpreter. Salim told Yahuda that since he had heard that Yahuda was interested in the archaeology of Palestine, he, Salim, would like to offer his services as a guide, and mentioned that he would be able to obtain very unusual antiques. Two or three days later, Salim arrived with "Moabite antiquities". Yahuda, who knew of the Shapira affairs, realized immediately that this was the very same infamous Salim. This is how he describes the experience:

> The sight of all these monstrous figures brought to my memory those Moabite antiques which had been acquired from Shapira by the Berlin Museum for a considerably high price just a few years after the discovery of the Mesa Stone in 1868, and which stirred up a storm of controversies among scholars until these antiques were finally proved to be forgeries, and removed from the luxurious show-cases of the Museum to the dark cellars, to the utter shame and humiliation of the Museum authorities, who had insisted on their genuineness. (A. S. Yahuda, "The Story of a Forgery and the Mesa Inscription", **Jewish Quarterly Review**, Vol. xxxv, 1944-5, p.140)

Despite this, Yahuda embarked on a search delegation with Salim. Of course, they found "exciting findings" which also turned out to be forgeries. The two argued and fought but reconciled. This is how Salim, in a burst of honesty, tells Yahuda of the means he used to create the Moabite forgeries. So writes Yahuda:

> Walking one day with me through a street, leading to the Nablus-Gate, he (Salim) pointed to one of the cellars of the then well-known oil press *khan-el-zeit* in which he had installed a large oven to burn the forged clay antiques. He even showed me the figures he had drawn for the use of the potters and some of the "inscriptions" which he had composed for the antiques. On this occasion he revealed to me that his surname al-Qari which means "the reader" was given to him by the Bedouins, because he could read all sorts of inscriptions "in every language in the world" (ibid. p. 145).

Then Yahuda asked Salim how he could have expected to find customers for such ludicrous inventions. Salim replied that it was the enthusiasm of the European scholars and tourists to obtain antiquities that encouraged him to become involved in this criminal occupation.

The Affair of the Moabite Pottery
1872-1878

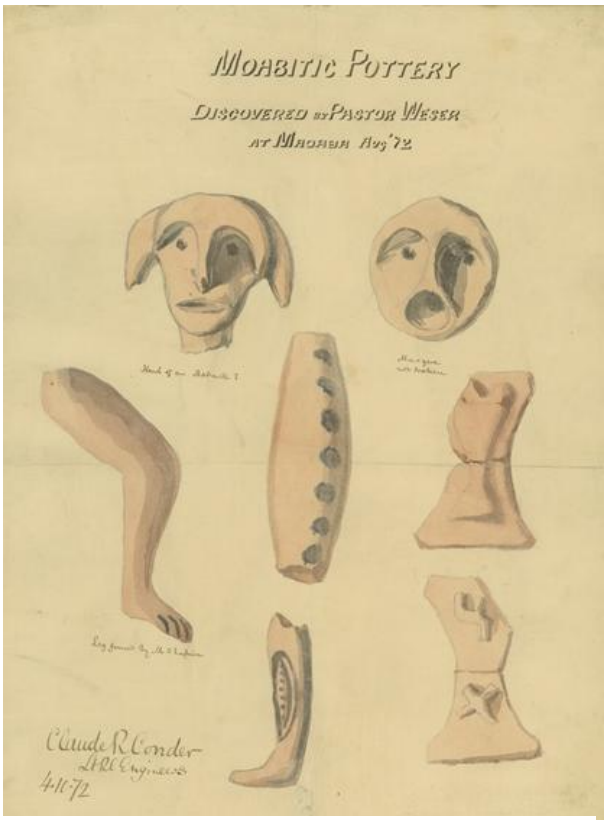
In early 1872 Shapira's shop became increasingly filled with a collection of



Claude Conder, member of the PEF

earthenware jugs and figurines which arrived from the East Bank of the Jordan by means of Salim Al-Kari's brokerage. Some of them featured inscriptions in letters that were similar to those which appeared on the Mesha Stele, that is, Phoenician script. The large collection did not arrive in one shipment but flowed into it throughout that entire year. The PEF members began to visit Shapira's shop

more frequently and Claude Conder and Tyrwhitt Drake sat in the shop and sketched many of the pottery. They sent the illustrations to the offices of the Fund in London. On July 11th, 1872 Conder wrote: "In Jerusalem I spent time in the shop of Mr. Shapira on Christian Street drawing sketches of the pottery that had recently arrived from Moab and which he offered to the PEF for



Moabite Pottery as sketched by Conder in Shapira's

examination" (C. Conder, **PEQ**, October 1872, London, p. 156).

That is to say, if Conder wrote in 1872 that Shapira offered the pottery to the PEF, it can be assumed that the Germans had not yet purchased them; in any case, the Germans are no where mentioned at this stage.

On October 15th 1872 Conder wrote a lengthy report for the Fund's quarterly regarding Shapira's collection. According to the contents of the report, his opinion regarding the authenticity of the pottery is clear: "By far, the most interesting objects of study is the gradually increasing collection of Moabite earthenware of Mr. Shapira. (Conder, **PEQ**, 1873, p.13)

Subsequently, Conder described the items at length and developed an entire theory regarding their historical and archaeological significance. He took care to send enthusiastic reports about the Shapira collection frequently.

On November 1st, 1872, an article appeared in the British newspaper, The **Art Journal**, entitled "The Ancient Figurines of Moab". It was the first to note to the erotic explicitness of some of the figurines:

> There is a resident at Jerusalem, a German Jew of the name of Shapira, who, though a man learned in the rabbinical literature, is, we understand, not a very large tradesman. This person, has, for some time past, bought of the Arabs […] any antiquities or works of ancient Art that they could recover [….]. Of their beauty we cannot speak in any commendatory terms. That, however, is not the question. Our readers can judge of that

> for themselves if they call at the office of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 9, Pall Mall East, where a series of water-color sketches of the principal objects, made by Lieut. Conder […] and of pencil sketches by Mr. Tyrwhitt Drake […] may be seen. We are not recommending ladies to be too curious in the matter.

The first reference I was able to find relating to the affair in the Hebrew press is in the newspaper **Ha-Levanon** from the 26th of February, 1873:

> Jerusalem. We have already announced that Mr. Shapira (a Jew who converted out of his religion) is in possession of ancient monuments which were brought to him from the plains of Moab, and that many antiquities scholars have determined that these monuments are forgeries. And now, the journals have announced that the scholars at the British Museum in London have sent one of their men who knows how to distinguish between genuine and forged antiquities so that he might examine the monuments in Shapira's possession. After this scholar saw these stones he found them to be genuine antiques! Now that Mr. Shapira realizes that he will receive gold from Britain in place of the stones from the plains of Moab, he has travelled to the land of Moab again in order to search the ruins for ancient artifacts.

It is possible that the use of the word "monuments" was used by the author because of the association with the Mesha Stele. The identity of the man sent by the British Museum is unclear, but it may be assumed that it was Claude Conder, who arrived in Jerusalem a few months earlier after being appointed as the head of the PEF delegation for conducting a survey in Western Palestine.

On May 2nd, 1873 Conder wrote again to the **PEQ** concerning the Shapira collection. It is clear from the letter that on this date, the potteries were already in the possession of the Germans, despite the fact that in Jerusalem, Shapira's collection continued to grow:

> The talk of Jerusalem, and of the travelers then crowding in and around it, was the great Shapira collection. Since I last wrote on this subject, many important events have occurred. The collection has struggled through the first stage of disrepute and incredulity, and the German savants have distinguished this valuable and unique series from the clumsy forgeries so common in Palestine, ranking it with the Moabite Stone […] Mr. Shapira has received the official position of an agent for the Prussian Government, and his first series of 911 pieces has just been bought by the Emperor himself at a price, I believe, of over £1000.
>
> […] He has since been able to lay the foundation of the second collection, containing already over 250 pieces, of a character, if possible, more curious than those formerly found, and daily almost

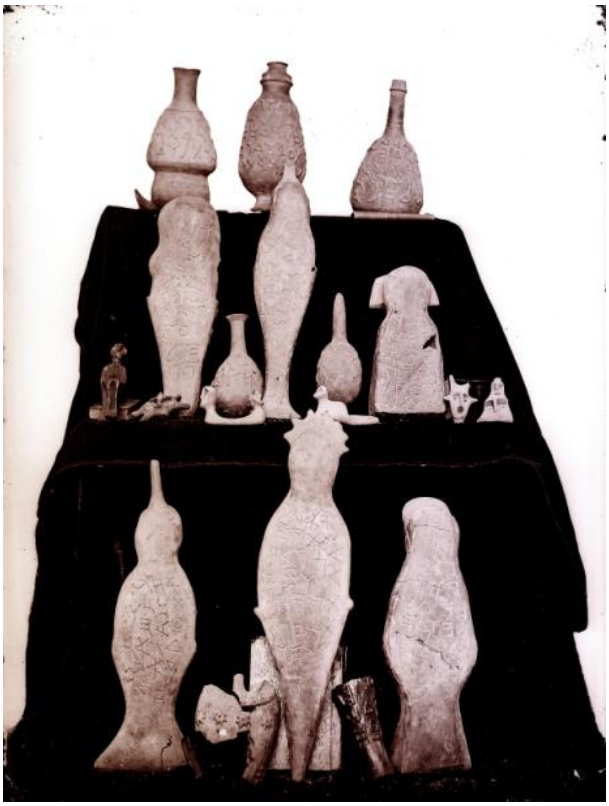
> growing in numbers. Some of these he brought back from Moab himself during his recent visit in company with Dr. Chaplin, and as they are as yet unsold, and as he is free to sell them to any one he thinks best, he courteously allowed me to take the first sketches of the new objects of which I copied as many as time would allow, and now hasten to send them home to the Fund. (p. 88)

According to this information, it seems possible to date the purchase of most of the pottery by the Germans to the months between July 1872 and May 1873.

Aloys Sprenger, an Austrian expert in Middle Eastern affairs, published a survey in the **PEQ** entitled "The Shapira Pottery". He mentioned that after the discovery of the Mesha Stele, the Arabs embarked on extensive searches for antiquities both in Jerusalem and in the desert. Sprenger was indeed writing about the pottery held by the Germans, but because he wrote in 1876, his article cannot be relied upon to date the purchase. However, one can gather from his survey how large the sum paid for the pottery was, and what a dramatic change the deal affected in Shapira's finances. Among other things, he wrote:

> In the year 1872 almost every day brought some curious remains into the shop of Shapira in Jerusalem […] the lion's share was reserved for the Prussian Government. It bought 1700 choice specimens for 22,000 thalers (£3300). Of this sum, two thousand thalers were contributed by the Emperor (A. Sprenger, **PEQ**, April 1876, p.100).

Shapira became a well-to-do man, and like



Moabite Pottery as photographed by Kitchner in Shapira's shop

many others who could afford to do so in that era, left the old city and moved with his family into a magnificent home in the Western part of the city which had belonged to the Arab businessman Haga Rashid, a building which is known today as the Ticho House. Shapira frequently hosted diplomats and business men in his new home.

The First Delegation to the East Bank of the Jordan

Different reactions were heard in Berlin with regard to the tremendous sum paid, part of which came from the Emperor's own pocket. The reactions, even those of individuals who decidedly defended the authenticity of the collection, demonstrate that there were considerable doubts in this regard.

Shapira attempted to refute the rumors casting doubt on the authenticity of the pottery by various means. He ultimately decided to arrange a delegation under his own auspices to the East Bank of the Jordan. He took Salim Al-Kari with him as well as the German priest Weser and an additional German citizen named M. Dinsberg. On August 21, 1872, the small delegation departed for Moab. From Shapira's point of view, the journey was a tremendous success and its success resonated in Jerusalem, Germany and London. The following is Weser's summary of the journey, written in Jerusalem on September 6th, 1872:

> Thanks to the efforts of the local bookseller Shapira, important findings have been brought from Moab […] following the accusations […] the name of a respectable man has been slandered by both Germans and British. An admired family has suffered weeks of sorrow and bitterness as well as financial losses […]. In conclusion, I repeat my comments regarding the positive accomplishments of our ten day journey. Our success should be attributed first and foremost to the efforts Mr. Shapira, to his relationship with Salim and especially to Sheikh Ali Diab (Weser for the **Journal of the German Oriental Society**, letter translated from German, Jacob Shavit Collection).

In September 1872, Professor Constantin Schlottman of Halle University in Germany published a letter he wrote in the Journal of the German Oriental Society:

> The possibility that additional doubts will arise regarding the authenticity of the Moabite findings is now nonexistent […] I am certain that now all will recognize Shapira's merits, his expertise and his diligence. He knew how to gain the trust of the desert tribes in order to reach his goals in the area of the Moabite hills, despite the extreme difficulty in reaching that area, thereby earning for himself great merit in the scientific field. (Schlottman for the **Journal of the German Oriental Society**, letter translated from German, Yaakov Shavit collection)

Conder responded to Wasser's journey: "Now, however, the late visit of Pastor Weser and of Mr. Dinsberg (a German resident at Jerusalem) has placed the authenticity of the pottery beyond dispute". (Conder, **PEQ**, 1873, p.13).

However, the affair did not subside. Clermont-Ganneau saw Conder and Drake's illustrations and suspected a forgery. He decided to come to Jerusalem in order to examine the collection with his own eyes, and then published the letter which explicitly describes to the pottery as an act of forgery:

> I may be permitted to record the fact that my opinion on the subject was formed at the outset, and has never varied […] One of my earliest cares, therefore, on arriving here was to visit the new collection of M. Shapira […] and intended to join its elder sister in the Museum of Berlin […] I visited the famous collection in company with Mr. Drake and in presence of M. Shapira himself. It is composed of statues and vases, covered with inscriptions, supposed to be Moabite, lavished in suspicious profusion […] In short, I did not see, in the whole collection, *one single object which could be regarded as genuine*, so that I remarked to Drake when we came out […] as to the pottery itself, it only remains for us to find who is the potter that made it […] My opinion is, and always has been[…] that the pottery was the work of Selim el Gari, and that it was made at Jerusalem […] Starting with this certainty, I looked about among the potters of Jerusalem, five or six in all, and very soon I found out the whole truth. (C. Clermont-Ganneau, **PEQ**, July 1874, p.115-116)

Clermont-Ganneau described in his letter in detail how he went from potter to potter in Jerusalem until he succeeded in mapping the chain of forgery of the Pottery. As he suspected, Salim Al-Kari stood behind this chain. However, Clermont-Ganneau's decisiveness and proof did not convince most of those involved in the affair. About a month and a half later, Shapira sent his response:

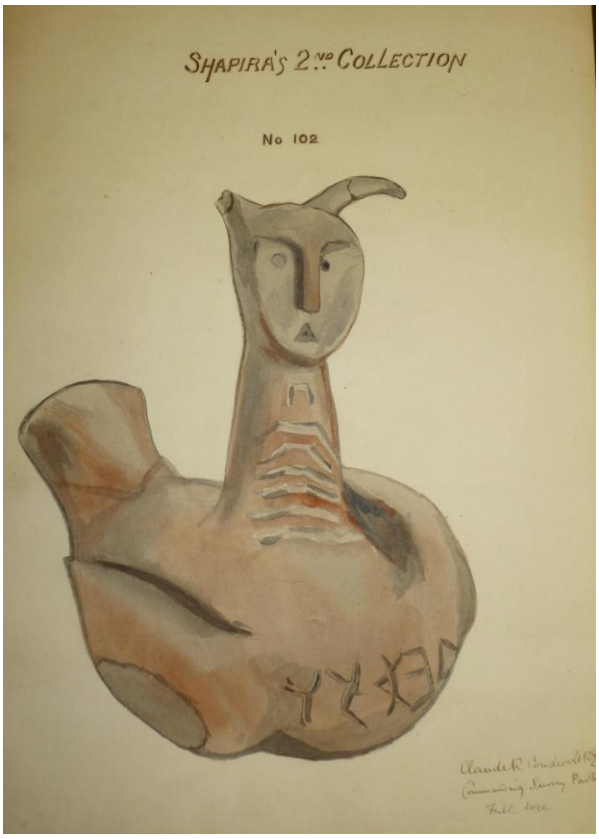
> Jerusalem, Feb. 19, 1874. Allow me to inform those of your readers who have perused M. Ganneau's letter concerning the above subject, that the evidence adduced therein is just now being sifted on the spot by four gentlemen of the highest character, one of whom is an Englishman; and, although the Minutes of the Proceedings are not yet in my hands, I am warranted in telling you that all the witnesses on whom M. Ganneau relies have been found utterly worthless […] I hope, with your permission, to give you, by-and-by, a detailed and complete refutation of the charges brought against the genuineness of my collection. (M. W. Shapira, **PEQ**, July 1874, p.121).

Three days later, Clermont-Ganneau responded to Shapira in the PEQ. This time, he described how Salim was arrested and questioned at the home of the German Consul. There, to his great surprise, Salim retracted his confession and told the Consul how Clermont-Ganneau attempted to bribe him and had threatened his life, demanding that he confess that he and Shapira forged the pottery. Clermont-Ganneau was not impressed by the

fact that Salim retracted his statement and concluded his response by saying that all this is of no importance; he still maintains his opinion that only one thing is of importance and that is: “this entire collection is forged”.

The Second Delegation to the East Bank of the Jordan

Almost three years lapsed and the matter had not been settled in either way. In Germany, a Parliamentary Committee was even established in order to examine the matter. In 1877, Freiherr von Munchhausen, the German Consul in Jerusalem, decided to arrange an additional delegation to the East Bank of the Jordan in order to reach the bottom of the matter and clarify with the Bedouins, for once and for all, the question of the pottery. The Consul turned to the German Foreign Ministry to receive budgetary approval for the journey, and the approval he received included an explicit condition, that Shapira and Salim not take part in the delegation. The delegation consisted of seven people, among them the scholar and architect Conrad Schick, and the duration of the journey was set for 21 days. In April 1877, the Consul signed an agreement with an interpreter by the name of Hannah Louise from Jerusalem who was to prepare all that was necessary for the delegation to depart.



Moabite Pottery as sketched by Conder in Shapira's shop

The wording of the contract is instructive with regard to the structure of this type of delegation in those days:

> The Baron Munchhausen, German Consul in Palestine, has hired the services of the interpreter Hannah Louise of Jerusalem in preparation for the tour in the Land of Moab […] Ms. Hannah Louise has, on her part, committed to provide the following:
>
> a. All riding horses and cargo horses
> b. Three tents with beds and necessary accessories
> c. All necessary mules, according to need, for carrying the tents and water containers

d. First class tableware, cutlery and food for the masters on the delegation
e. Second class tableware, cutlery and food for the chief assistant and laborers […]

Written in Jerusalem on April 9th 1877 (**Israel State Archives**, Shapira's Moabitische Alterthumer, Document 23)

This delegation too returned with some archaeological findings that matched the "Moabite pottery".

The English translation of a letter written by Freiherr von Munchhausen to Shapira appeared in the London newspaper **The Athenaeum** published on December 1st 1877. The letter is very long and is replete with fascinating details. If there had been any doubt regarding Munchhausen's opinion concerning the pottery, this letter serves to clarify his opinion:

Consulate of the German Empire for Palestine, Jerusalem, November 1st 1877.

My Dear Mr. Shapira,

Mrs. Shapira has informed me of your departure for England on business, and, at the same time, requested me to give you in writing my detailed opinion on the present state of the disputed Moabite question, immediately after my expedition to Moab, and to forward it to you in London. I accede with pleasure to so reasonable a request, and hereby authorize you expressly to have the following statement translated into English, and to make such use of it as you may think fit.

I considered the falsification of the collections to be *less probable* […] the interment of thousands of vases and idols in the ground of which they are sole lords and masters, and the desecration of which must be unavoidably followed by the heaviest divine punishments […]

I must here ignore entirely the superficial opinions which have been put forth among the German public in consequence of the pamphlet emanating from Kautzsch and Socin […]

I should like to see the great conjurer who is able to create artificially that stratum of flint protruding from the side wall of one of the caves more than one metre high above the ground […]

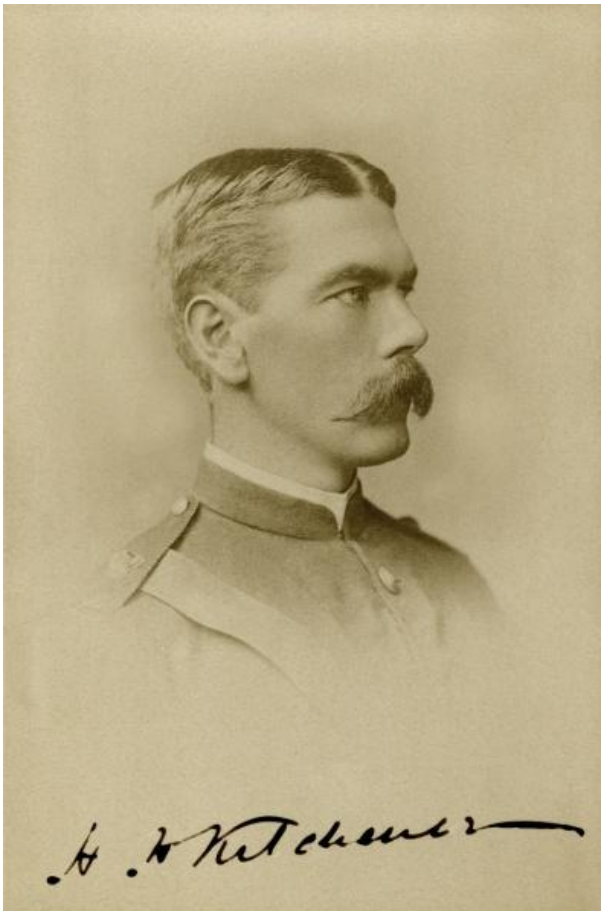
The surface of the cave was covered by a kind of fine grey moss […], a proof that no human hand had touched it for long periods.

The gentlemen appointed to accompany me on the part of the Imperial Government […] all of whom are perfectly impartial and unconcerned in all matters relating to the disputed Moabite question have declared with me that the supposition of a forgery was, under these circumstances, utterly impossible […] It is thus to be hoped that the truth may at last be known […].

In the hope that the foregoing explanation may be of service to you in England, I remain, my dear Mr. Shapira, very faithfully

yours, Freiherr von Munchhausen, Imperial German Consul in the Holy Land.

However, at this stage it appeared that despite



Horatio Kitchener, member of the PEF

the German Consul's enthusiastic, unambiguous letter that defended the authenticity of the pottery, from that moment on, the balance shifted. Among the British, doubts became stronger and the tone of the letters changed. Charles Wilson, one of the members of the PEF delegation, hastened to reply to the German Consul:

> December 1877. I have hitherto taken no part in the discussion as to the genuineness of the so-called Moabite pottery, nor do I wish to do so, but the letter of Freiherr von Munchhausen […] seems to call for some remark. The letter is avowedly written for publication and, as it were, officially recognizes the genuineness of the pottery […] No inscribed pottery, or images of any kind that I am aware of were found in Moab before the discovery of the Moabite stone, of which Selim is known to have made a copy, opened up visions of untold wealth to the hungry eyes of the Bedawin sheikhs […]
>
> I may add that after carefully reading the German Consul-General's letter, I can quite conceive that he was deceived by the Bedawin. (C. Wilson, **PEQ**, April 1878, p. 94)

On September 3rd, 1878, Horatio Kitchener sent a letter to England in which he took the pains to emphasize the following:

> I have carefully refrained from giving any opinion on the genuineness of the whole collection, and have merely reported to the Committee how I became possessed of the two idols I brought home. I do not suppose that my acquisition proves more than that it is possible to obtain in Jerusalem pottery similar to that in the Shapira collection (**Israel State Archives**, Shapira's Moabitische Alterthumer, Documents 19, 20).

It appears that at this stage, everyone recognized the fact that the Moabite Pottery were nothing other than a forgery; in any

case, the affair was not mentioned again in the professional literature.

Why Were the Germans Hasty?

Dr. Adolph Neubauer, a librarian at the Bodleian University in Oxford and an expert in Biblical Writings, went to see the collection of the Moabite pottery during a visit to Berlin in December 1877. He later wrote:

> I must say, however, that I have never seen such a heap of ugly object altogether as in this collection, and I was quite astonished that a man of learning and common sense should not have seen in them at once the rudest forgeries possible (A. Neubauer, **PEQ**, April 1878, p.102).

In 2000, an Israel Museum exhibition on the topic of the Shapira Forgeries was held in at the Ticho House in Jerusalem. In the exhibition catalogue, Yaakov Meshorer, a professor of archaeology, wrote:

> The forgeries mentioned above were not really copies of existing archaeological finds, but rather original creations on the part of the forgers […] Looking at these farfetched nineteenth-century "biblical" forgeries, so removed from archaeological reality, it is difficult to understand how they managed to convince the various antique collectors and experts in the field. (Israel Museum, Truly Fake, Moses Wilhelm Shapira, Master Forger, 2000, Catalogue no. 441)

The German experts at the time lacked the means and knowledge that are at the disposal of contemporary archaeologists. Despite this, Clermont-Ganneau determined that the pottery were forged in as early as 1873, and two German scholars, Socin and Kautch, published a booklet in 1876 in which they casted doubt on the authenticity of the pottery. However, it appears that everyone preferred to ignore their assertion. The potteries were indeed sent to Berlin to be examined prior to being purchased, but it appears that everyone wanted the result to be that the collection was original. It is clear that the Germans were overenthusiastic. Why? Why were they so hasty? Why were they willing to pay such a high price? And why were they so interested in Moabite culture?

Two important reasons were mentioned above: One was the success of the French in 1868 to come into possession of the prestigious Mesha Stele under the very noses of the Germans, and to move it to the Louvre museum. The second was the status obtained by the British as the primary scholars researching Palestine in general and Jerusalem in particular. Thanks to their efforts, the storehouses of the archives in

London were filled with many treasures and their journals were replete with hundreds of scholarly articles. Although the German scholars accomplished important work in Palestine, they remained far behind and were in need of more accomplishments, and quickly.

However, another dimension was involved. During the years following Clermont-Ganneau's attack on the pottery, there were some who claimed that he was motivated by the profound hatred between the French and the Germans, which became even more severe as a result of the humiliation the French suffered at the hand of the Germans on January 18th, 1871, when Chancellor Otto von Bismarck crowned Wilhelm I as Emperor of the United German Empire in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. It is therefore clear that the competition between the French and Germans extended beyond the scientific realm and those significant components of national pride were involved in it. Imperial Germany now needed symbols and a magnificent culture to decorate the Empire's museum in Berlin, just as the British had in the British Museum in London with its great many treasures from the ancient world, and as the French had in the Louvre in Paris with the largest collection of art in the world. The treasures of the Moabite culture seemed to the Germans to be an opportunity to realize their dream, so that they had no intention to let it slip away from them.

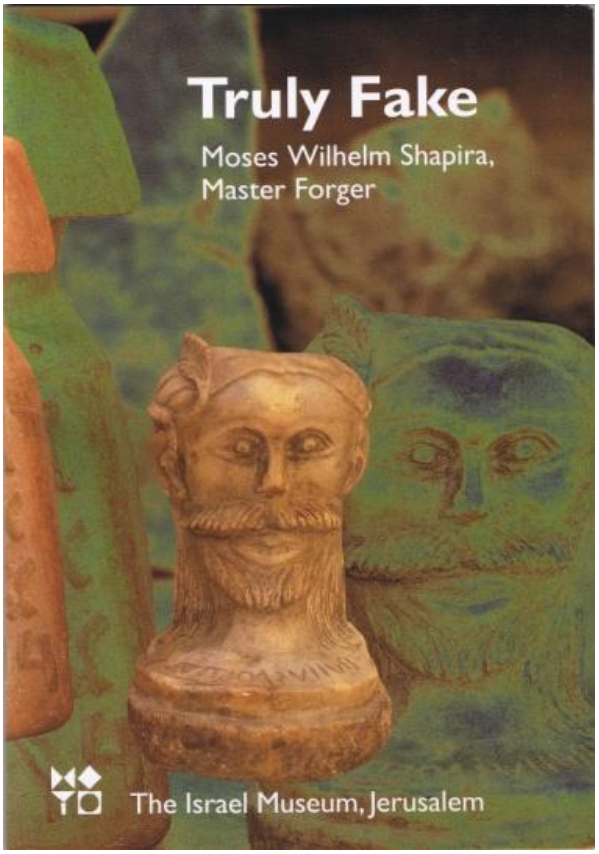
It was no less astonishing that the Germans, after putting the collection away in storage, humiliated, did not sue Shapira to refund the money paid to him for the Moabite forgeries. After all, the humiliation was great, the amount of funds was very high, and some of it had been paid by the Emperor out of his own pocket. If such measures were taken, I have not found any support for the fact. Shapira continued to live in his magnificent house in Western Jerusalem and continued doing business with museums throughout Europe. The only explanation that comes to my mind is that the Germans preferred to put the affair behind them and hope that the world would forget their humiliation.

In preparation for the exhibition that opened in 2000 at the Israel Museum on the topic of the Shapira Collection, the exhibition curator, Irit Salmon, turned to the Berlin Museum with a request to borrow items from the Moabite Pottery collection. She received the reply that the Museum did not have even one of the 1700 items purchased from Shapira.

Was Shapira Himself a Forger?

The Hebrew press of that era persisted in appending the title "apostate" to Shapira's name, and after the suspicion of forging the pottery arose, they hastened to add the title "forger". Therefore, the attitude toward Shapira should be viewed as part of the anger of the Jews, and that of the Hebrew press in particular, against apostates in general. Indeed, more than a few publications relating to Shapira present him as the individual who counterfeited the Moabite pottery with his very own hands. About a century after his death, the entry "Shapira, Moses Wilhelm" appeared in the Hebrew Encyclopedia, and began with the words: "a merchant who became known as an antiquities forger".

The Ticho House, the house in which Shapira resided, belongs today to the Israel Museum, and the exhibition that opened there in 2000 under the title "Truly Fakes" contained items- pottery from the assembly line of that same famous sale Shapira made to the Germans - which the museum received from private collectors, churches and museums. The following was written in the catalogue: "The Life and Death of the Antiquities forger, Moses Wilhelm Shapira". In the introduction to the catalogue James Snyder, the Museum's



The Israel Museum catalogue for the exhibition about Shapira

CEO, wrote about "Shapira's acts of forgery". The author Haim Be'er also wrote about

Shapira in the catalogue that he stood "at the

head of a complex industry of acts of forgery". In 2002, the scholar Herschel Shanks also wrote about Shapira indicating that it was he who counterfeited the pottery with his very own hands (Hershel Shankes – Fakes! How Moses Shapira Forged an Entire Civilization, Odyssey, September/October 2002)

As we have seen, Shapira aroused hostile feelings among people who met him. Nevertheless, until the affair died down in about 1878, and despite scores of news items in the German and British press dealing with the topic, I have not found even one place where someone from Shapira's own era who accused Shapira himself of being involved in producing the forgeries. Clermont-Ganneau, who exposed the forgery of the pottery and was considered Shapira's sworn enemy, did not accuse him of being involved in the forgery process or of knowing that the pottery were counterfeited before he sold them to the Germans. Constantin Schlottman of Halle University in Germany, whose personal prestige was harmed after he frequently praised the Moabite pottery publicly and had insisted upon their authenticity, sent an angry letter to Shapira in October 1878. He blamed Shapira for being ignorant, but not for being involved in the forgery itself. This was the case with regard to the German Consul and the British scholars. Is it possible that the Bedouins, through the brokerage of Salim Al-Kari, succeeded in swindling the sly merchant from Christian Street in Jerusalem? Possibly.

Until this point, it seems that there was a clear distinction between Shapira's contemporaries who did not accuse him of forgery and those who wrote about him during the second half of the twentieth century who attributed the title "forger" to him. But this distinction is insufficient. Contemporary authors do not have evidence to prove that Shapira himself forged the pottery. However, it should be noted that everyone who referred to Shapira as a forger was Jewish (the 19th century Jewish press, Herschel Shankes, The Hebrew Encyclopedia, Haim Be'er, Yaakov Meshorer and others) while those who abstained from doing so, then and now, were not Jewish (Clermont-Ganneau, Schlottman, Allegro, Conder and others). Is the fact that Shapira was an apostate what influenced this distinction? Did the sharp opposition in Judaism to apostates, as it has always been, distort their objective judgment? It is difficult to pinpoint one explanation for these facts.

Concluding Remarks

The affair of the Moabite pottery made waves for quite a while after its occurrence. The echoes of the affair gradually subsided during the 80's of the 19th century. But while the affair of the Moabite pottery subsided, the flowers of the next affair began to bud. Shapira obtained 15 leather strips which appeared to be the most ancient texts ever discovered from the book of Deuteronomy. Unlike the Moabite pottery affair, the affair of

the book of Deuteronomy (coined "The Shapira Scrolls") made waves internationally in the daily press as well. However, my research shows that the earlier affair also aroused great interest, more than is commonly believed, whether due to the disagreements among the scholars, due to the Germans' enthusiasm to turn their country into a cultural superpower as well, or due to the animosity of the Jews towards apostates residing in their midst.

On March 11th, 1884, Shapira's body was discovered in his hotel room in Rotterdam, Holland. On March 31st, 1884, the **Ḥavatzelet** newspaper published the following news item (the question mark appears in the original):

> Jerusalem. The apostate Shapira, a resident of our city and the proprietor of a book shop here, who is known infamously (?) regarding the forgery of the Moabite jugs, has recently committed suicide during his stay in Rotterdam […]. The proprietor of the hotel where Shapira was staying, seeing that two days had passed and Shapira had not left his room, notified the police of this. The police broke down the door and came into the room and found Shapira lying dead upon his bed surrounded by a stream of blood, for he had taken his own life and killed himself with the barrel of a rifle.

Grajewski quotes this news item in his book **The Wars of the Jews against the Mission**, preceding it with a title of his own: "and at long last, he committed suicide in the city of Rotterdam in the month of Av, in the year 5643".

For further reading:

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Bertha Spafford Vester, *Our Jerusalem*, An American Family in the Holy City, 1881-1949, Doubleday & Company, New York, 1950

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The Athenaeum, London, 1872-1878

Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement, London, 1872-1878

Notes:

1. The illustrations in pages 1, 4, 11, 12, 14, 17, 19 are courtesy of the Palestine Exploration Fund, London

2. This article is translation of the Hebrew article published in 'Zmanim' magazine 123, summer 2013

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