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The Montefiore Endowment
www.montefioreendowment.org.uk

Call for paper: International Seminar 'Visions of Judaism and Jewish Community in the 19th Century: the Impact of Sir Moses Montefiore' to be held at University College London, 18 April 2013.

For decades, Sir Moses Montefiore (1784-1885) has been a towering presence in the life of Anglo-Jewry, and for Jews (and non-Jews) in Europe and around the world. As president of the British Board of Deputies (1835-1874), he exerted a significant degree of control over the life of Jewish congregations in the United Kingdom. His appointment as Sheriff of London through the Corporation of London and the bestowing of a knighthood by Queen Victoria (1837), and later a baronetcy, seemed to hold a promise for Jewish integration into the fabric of the British elite. To combine this obvious success in the society at large with strict observance and a lifelong commitment to the land of Israel, demonstrated through a number of pilgrimages and support for the Jewish congregations in the Holy Land, impressed Jews and non-Jews alike.

In the context of the Damascus Affair of 1840/41, and together with his French counterpart Adolphe Crémieux, Moses Montefiore redefined the meaning and the means of Jewish solidarity in the face of widespread discrimination and persecution. In a significant departure from traditional forms of Jewish intercession, he harnessed the possibilities of spreading information through the press in order to exert influence. Highly publicised instances of travels - often accompanied by his wife, Judith Lady Montefiore (1784-1862) - to countries where Jews found themselves in a precarious situation, and interventions with local rulers and authorities were intended as a form of individualized diplomacy. These interventions, despite being sometimes less successful than hoped or expected, contributed to his status as a global celebrity. The very fact of his longevity (Montefiore died a few months before his 101st birthday) contributed to his larger-than-life presence among Jews in the United Kingdom, Europe, and around the world. In its early days, the nascent Zionist movement adopted Moses Montefiore as spiritual father.

The purpose of the event is to investigate the different ways through which Moses Montefiore encouraged Jews to rethink and redefine - and also to re-assert - their visions of community. What should emerge is a remarkable diversity of these visions. Adherents of the most diverse strands of Judaism admired Moses Montefiore and referred to him as an example and, to different degree, a template to follow: strictly observant communities and associations in Poland-Lithuania, ardent reformers in the United States, members of

freemason lodges, secular nationalists, rabbis, religious leaders and intellectuals, but also secularized members of the early Jewish nationalist movement.

The task of this seminar to focus on the history of his image and the visions of community and identity he inspired.

More specifically, contributions are encouraged to discuss

- the impact of Montefiore on defining Jewish community and identity in the United Kingdom
- contemporary reflections of his political involvement in the Damascus Affair, in Russia, Morocco, Italy, and Romania and its consequences
- his impact on the Jewish congregations in the Land of Israel/Palestine
- his significance in redefining Jewish politics and cultural identity in Europe, North Africa, North America and beyond
- his impact on notions of Jewish charity, solidarity, and/or nationhood.
- the impact of his political interventions on Jewish political culture and movements in Europe, North Africa, North America and beyond

This one-day seminar, organized by the UCL Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies in close cooperation with the Montefiore Endowment, London, marks the conclusion of a project to digitize a significant collection of tributes to Moses Montefiore, held on loan from the Montefiore Endowment at UCL Special Collections, which will be presented and discussed during the event. The organizers are able to contribute to travel and/or accommodation expenses within the limits of the seminar budget. Speakers who require support to cover their expenses should request these together with their proposal.

Speakers will be invited to contribute to the planned publication of the proceedings.

Please send a short proposal (ca 250 words) not later than 31 December 2012 to Dr François Guesnet:
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