

FOR THE LOVE OF WINE

Montefiore, Victorian England & 19th Century Palestine

Moses Montefiore is usually described as a philanthropist, but he was also a humanitarian, campaigner for Jewish emancipation, a forerunner of Zionism and a builder of Jerusalem. Far less important, but very much part of his day to day life, he was also a wine lover.

The evidence is obvious from Sir Moses & Lady Judith Montefiore's Diaries and the account by Dr. Louis Loewe, their secretary and companion. If you read them with an eye to finding mentions of either wine or vineyards, it is surprising how many times they appear. Clearly wine was part of the daily routine. Apart from wines given or received, enjoyed or shared, there are descriptions of vineyards, winery and wine regions and there are even comments which help explain the wine trade of the time.



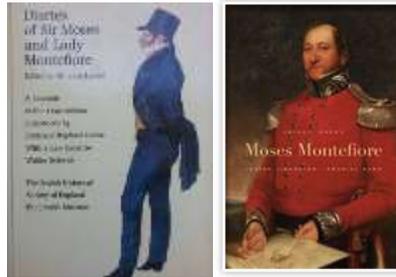
Reading these sources alongside others from the same time, provides an insight into wine's place in Victorian England and in 19th century Palestine, as pre-state Israel was then known.

No doubt, Moses Montefiore was a wine connoisseur with a fine cellar. He loved drinking wine. Apparently nothing gave him more pleasure than sharing a good wine and he particularly delighted in persuading those in the abstinence movement to have a glass, especially when they tried to decline.

He and Judith would regularly go to stay in the favorite local inn for a few days and he would always take wine from his cellar to enjoy when he was there.

POPULARITY OF PORT

In the early years, it appears the Moses and Judith Montefiore drank a broad range of wines. On a special occasion, he would call for Champagne, which had the same status it does today. With passing age, he settled on Port as the wine of choice. This was the most popular wine of the time in England in the late 18th century and early 19th century.



The love affair started in 1703 when Britain signed the Methuen Treaty with Portugal. It was as much an anti-French measure, as pro-Portuguese, and Port wine became available at especially low duty. Sales soared as a result and at one stage over seventy five percent of the wine sold in Britain was Port!

With both Port and Madeira, the story was similar. The wine, after being shipped over long distances, with long periods at sea, would often arrive at its destination in poor quality. However with a dollop of brandy added, the wine was not only far more stable but the fortified version was even preferred by the customers. Madeira also benefited from the intense heat as the ships sailed across the Atlantic. Hence new wine styles were born.

The Americans had a special affinity with Madeira, as can be seen by the cellar inventory of wine connoisseur Thomas Jefferson, the President of the United States of America.

However, the British were always more associated with Port. Unfortunately increased popularity encouraged dishonest practices like adulteration with raisin wine, cheap spirits and elderberries. In a watershed moment for quality control being enshrined in law, the area where Port could be produced was delineated in 1756 and stricter laws were introduced to ensure Port wines were authentic and of acceptable quality.

A PIPE OF PORT

Moses Montefiore would most likely have shipped a pipe of port, a barrel of 550 liters, which would be delivered to his cellar. Shipping wine by cask was standard procedure. Even today, enormous quantities of wine cross continents in container bags under the radar, to be bottled inexpensively in the country where it was to be sold.

Montefiore would have used a bottle only to bring the wine from the cellar to the table. The bottle would have had a glass seal on it denoting the owner's name, not the name of the wine. Moses Montefiore's bottles would have shown the lion from his coat of arms holding a banner with the word ירושלים (Jerusalem) on it and the family motto 'Think and Thank.'

Montefiore had a couple of glasses of Port for lunch and a few more glasses in the evening. He drank a bottle of wine every day. He lived until his 101st year, an unusually long time in Victorian times. He enjoyed a cigar and there was even a tobacco advertisement that claimed that its qualities contributed to Moses Montefiore's great age. Nevertheless, the regular wine intake undoubtedly contributed more to a long life than the cigars or tobacco!

Montefiore frequently sent cases of Port as gifts to his friends or to public figures he wanted to influence about Jewish rights. He also gave donations of wine to the sick and poor in large quantities. Clearly in those days, as today, wine was considered a very acceptable gift.

A grape variety, named after Moses Montefiore, was developed in the United States in the 1870's. The Montefiore variety (Taylor x Ives) was a Vitis Riparia crossed with a Vitis Labrusca and was used for making red wines in the Missouri area as well as occasionally in New York. It is still registered with the TTB in America, but is rarely used today. It is pictured below.



In his final year, his biography notes that he lived almost entirely on milk and Port. Not long before he died, he called Dr. Loewe and said: *"Take a good supper and we shall have a glass of wine together in pleasing remembrance of what we have seen and endeavoured to do for our brethren."*

VICTORIAN ENGLAND

As far as drinking wine is concerned, Montefiore's associates, wider family and friends drank the best quality wines ordering the finest Claret (Bordeaux), Hock (German white wine), Champagne and Port. Hock in those days was priced as highly as claret.

Wine was already something to aspire too. The best wines would be discussed exactly as wine lovers do today. Talk would be of the vintage and the producer. The names of the most sought after wines, were astonishingly similar to those of today. The finest wines were appreciated by connoisseurs, shared with friends but also generously given as gifts to those people they wanted to impress. Wine was, even then, a status symbol.

The butler was an important person. He had to receive the wine and care for it. If a barrel arrived, he would have to know how to fine, rack and later on, even to bottle the wine. Certainly it was important to the prestige of the house to have a butler who was professional with regard to the storage and care of precious wines.

Victorian banquets were piled high with many courses. The food was very rich and extravagant. Many wines were served. Usually a mulled wine or punch would be served before a meal. Each home had its own recipe. An etiquette guide published in 1868 recommended: Sherry or

Madeira with soup, Sauternes with hors d'oeuvres, Rhenish (Hock) with sorbets, Claret with meat. Port was served after dinner with cigars.

Earlier in the century there was a habit of serving Champagne with the roast and the prestige Claret with the dessert or after the meal. Often the meal would start with a pint decanter of Sherry put by each place. There was not the same attention of matching food to wines as there is today.

Wine was used in cooking, in particular fortified wines such as Madeira, Port and Sherry, but also white wines.

The glasses were sometimes tinted green or red. There were small like an oversized egg cups or mini tulip glasses, with a stem, sometimes like a schooner glass. Different wines were served in different glasses. There were filled two thirds full.



There would almost certainly be two decanters permanently on the domestic dining room sideboard. One would be labelled Sherry and the other Port. A name plate on a chain would sit on the decanter to identify which was which, but both would be generic and there was no information about wine style or producer.

WINE TRADE

During Moses Montefiore's long lifetime from 1784 to 1885, the wine world was formed as it is known today. The quality wine regions became well-known and London became the center of the world's wine trade.

The main leap forward was in the use of corks and bottles. Modern day corks were only used from the mid-18th century onwards, but bottles were initially thick glassed and shaped in a bulbous onion style. Wine was made to be drunk young. When the straight sided bottle was introduced in the early 1800's, wines could then be laid on their side with the cork constantly moist.

Only then, for the first time, could wine be aged in the bottle. As a result, private houses were equipped with bins in cellars, where bottles could be stacked one on top of the other. The modern way of storage and bottle aging wine was introduced for the first time and this resulted in a new type of wine collector.

Bordeaux reds changed from a light red or deep pink colored wine, which was nicknamed Claret, to a deeper more tannic wine that would benefit by being aged in bottle. In the 1800's bottles were not too dissimilar to the Port bottles we know today.

Claret was on the rise. In the 18th century Dr. Samuel Johnson had said: “*Claret is the liquor for boys; port for men; but he who aspires to be a hero must drink brandy.*” Certainly, brandy was the spirit of choice in Montefiore’s time, often cut by water. By 1839 the balance had changed. Cyril Redding, wine merchant and author, explained Port and Claret’s place by writing: “*Claret for a Bishop, Port for a Rector, Currant for a Curate and Gin for the Clerk.*”

The famous Bordeaux classification of 1855 ranked Bordeaux wine according to how much they cost and this ranking is still used today. Wines were not labelled until at least 1860. Only then were wines named and identifiable as we are used to today. However it was only later, thanks to the pioneering Château Mouton Rothschild, that the label was used to become an expressive marketing tool. Surprisingly it was also not until 1924 that Mouton Rothschild became the first winery to bottle their wine at the château.



Sparkling champagne was considered as prestigious at it is today. It was even then a symbol of luxury and celebration, but in Moses Montefiore’s time, it was a sweet wine. Only in the mid-19th century were the first brut or dry champagnes produced. Perrier Jouet was the first Champagne house to make a wine in the new style and it took time to catch on.

The method of making the German style of late harvested wines and Sauternes wines from grapes affected by noble rot, really became known in Montefiore’s lifetime. Both Sherry (previously known as Sack) and Tokay were already well known by the time Montefiore was born.

The most revolutionary discovery of the century was made by scientist Louis Pasteur, immortalized by the pasteurization procedure which is named after him. He was the first, after thousands of years of winemaking, to finally understand and explain the process of fermentation. He established that if wine was not in contact with air, it would not come into contact with bacteria which would convert the wine to vinegar. The barrel, cork, bottle and this discovery, brought the quality of wine into a modern age.

INVESTMENT IN BORDEAUX & ISRAEL

In the middle of the 19th century, Jewish families, like the Foulds and Perreiras, began to invest in Bordeaux. Claret had by now replaced Port as the most sought after wine. Most prominent of these were the Rothschilds, who were relations.

Moses Montefiore’s nephew, Nathaniel Rothschild, from the English branch of the family, purchased Château Mouton in 1853. The brother of his brother-in-law, James de Rothschild,

bought Château Lafite in 1868. These are two of the most prestigious wines in the world. Of course, last but not least, one should not forget, the nephew of his brother-in-law, Edmond de Rothschild, founded the modern Israeli wine industry and Carmel Winery in 1882.

PRE STATE PALESTINE

On visits to the Holy Land, communities would always present Moses and Judith with cake and wine as a sign of welcome and hospitality. Once, someone travelled through the night to give them two bottles. Sometimes they refer to numerous bottles received at one event. It appears the Montefiores were expected to try the local wine that was proudly presented to them.

I can sympathise with this. During more than thirty years in the wine trade, it is amazing how often someone asks “would you like to taste my wine?” They assume the answer is yes, and then thrust a bottle under your nose. You have to be polite, taste patiently and mutter something like “very interesting,” before determinedly moving on.

When wine was enjoyed by the Montefiores, it was documented. ‘Old wine from Hebron’ appears a number of times, but apart from this, wines were not mentioned by name. They did however receive a gift of Cypriot wines from a Monastery. They seemed to enjoy wine on every occasion, even when camping. Their Arab guards referred to it as ‘the red water.’

In those days there was no wine industry and no retailers. Winemaking was a home-based, domestic pursuit. An individual would make wine for his own use, and if the wine was popular, extra would be made for his family, friends and maybe even for a small local community. However wine was only made for immediate use and not for keeping.



It was an objective of Moses Montefiore to encourage religious Jews to work for a living instead of living off charity. There were many domestic wineries in the Old City of Jerusalem. We remember only two of them, not because they were better or bigger than the others, but simply because they have stood the test of time and still exist today.

The Shor family started what was the first recorded winery in 1848 in order to increase their income. The first harvest of the winery coincided exactly with Moses Montefiore’s third visit to Israel.

Coincidentally the Shor family’s new profession as vintners was revealed in the censuses commissioned by Montefiore in subsequent years. Now, nearly 170 years later, the family is still

making wine. Arza, Hacormim, Zion and 1848 are the names of current wineries, owned by different members of the Shor family.

The other winery from those times with longevity was the Teperberg Winery, founded in 1870. Today it is the fourth largest winery in Israel and the largest family owned winery.

Both Shor and Teperberg made wine from grapes grown by Arabs in the Bethlehem and Hebron areas. The grapes would have included Marawi, aka Hamdani, Jandali, Dabouki and Muscat Alexandroni, which are undergoing a revival and renewal of interest today. Other varieties were Hallili (aka Hevroni), Sharwishi, Halbani, Romi, Hadari for whites, and Zeitani, Singeli, Karkashani, Razaki, Shemi and Karashi for reds. They were probably planted in mixed vineyards, hand harvested as one and brought by donkeys to the wineries.

The wines were likely to be sweet or sweetish, because the residual sugar acted as a preservative and the 19th century wine customer had a distinct sweet tooth. They were sold in small barrels, and were served in a flask, often made from animal skin, rather than a bottle. The Montefiores would occasionally purchase a cask of wine as a souvenir, rather like the tourist today buying a bottle of wine at the winery shop or visitors center.



Once Moses Montefiore received a letter from a 'Yosef of Brisk' from Safed, who had heard of his interest in wine, offering to prepare a bath of wine for him on the Sabbath! He said he had done it for the Kaiser and offered the same service. History does not record if Montefiore took him up on the offer!

Founders of the village of Gedera recognized the Montefiores love of wine. They named two hills where vineyards were planned, Moshe's Hill and Yehudit's Hill, in their honor. In fact, the vineyards on Yehudit's Hill were a success, whereas those on Moshe's Hill did not survive.

JUDEAN HILLS VINEYARDS

Moses and Judith's diaries are full of descriptions of the surrounding views and they paid particular attention to the flowers, trees and crops. They were extremely observant, loved nature and saw everything through positive eyes, unlike Mark Twain who saw it as a desolate country.

They make numerous references to the beautiful vineyards they saw on their travels, particularly in the Judean Hills and Jerusalem Mountains. They wrote: *"The mountains are cultivated in terraces and planted to the summit with vines and olives. Indeed it would be*

impossible to travel through a richer or more beautiful country” and also “the country here is extremely rich in vineyards and their hills are clothed with olive trees...”



In 1839, over forty years before Herzl and Rothschild, Moses Montefiore first recommended that the Jewish people living in the Holy Land return to agriculture. In 1855 he bought the first land for this use, the Montefiore Orchard, which was mainly covered with citrus trees. It was adjacent to what was soon to become known as ‘Sarona’. Today it is called the Montefiore Quarter of Tel Aviv. David Ben Gurion wrote *“this was the first symbolic attempt to make Jews farmers again.”*

Montefiore also recommended planting of vines and olive trees to *“to give people a taste of agriculture.”* When he purchased Mishkenot Sha’ananim, the first neighborhood outside the Old City walls of Jerusalem, he called it *Kerem Moshe and Yehudit*, which translates as *Moses and Judith’s Vineyard*.



Coincidentally his last donation in 1884, was made to the new farming villages of Rishon Le Zion and Zichron Ya’acov, which were to become the center of the new Israeli wine industry. By this time, Baron Edmond de Rothschild was financing the planting of vineyards and the return to agriculture that Montefiore had encouraged so many years before.

WINE TOURIST

Sir Moses and Lady Judith were passionate tourists. They loved travelling. Apart from visiting Israel seven times, they also visited France, Italy and Germany, amongst many other places. When visiting wine regions, they were interested and knowledgeable enough about wine to mention it.

For example on a visit to Tuscany, Judith remarked how beautiful the vineyards were in the winter, even without their foliage. When visiting a wine region on the Rhine, she pointed out

that 'this' was the area where the best wine was made. In the South of France, they enjoyed drinking the best local wine, the Muscat de Frontignan, also prized by Thomas Jefferson.

They would even remark about the start of the harvest. When visiting a winery, Judith also made amusing comments about the practice of pressing grapes with the feet. She wrote: *"The manner is rather disgusting that of standing in tubs and stamp with their feet on the grapes, but it is of no consequence as it...becomes purified."*

KOSHER WINE

Moses Montefiore was well aware of the importance of wine to the Jewish religion. He wrote: *"When I recite the blessing of Kiddush, I made the cup pass round as often as possible."* He had a silver goblet Kiddush cup, again with his family crest with the word ירושלים (Jerusalem) proudly engraved on it. He always used the best wine for Kiddush.

I remember when I worked for the Golan Heights Winery, there was a Haredi (Ultra Orthodox Jew), who bought 52 bottles of Yarden Cabernet Sauvignon a year for Kiddush and used a Riedel glass as a Kiddush cup, because he wanted to honor the Shabbat. Montefiore would have approved! Seems more appropriate than using the cheapest Kiddush wine!

Moses Montefiore was in a sense was a born again Jew. After his first visit to Palestine in 1827, he became religious. Early pictures show him with his head uncovered and later ones show him with head covered and a beard.

Kosher wine was a domestic industry in the 19th century. The religious Jew bought from someone he knew. Wine in Eastern Europe was made from raisins. In New York it was made from Concord grapes and in Israel and Morocco, from local Arab varieties. Wine was not sold in bottles. There were no bottles or labels and no kashrut certificate.

The first commercial wineries to actively sell and market kosher wine were Schapiro in New York, which became a national brand and Carmel from pre state Israel, which was the first international kosher brand. Both were founded after Montefiore passed away in 1885.



Moses Montefiore enjoyed being considered an English gentleman, but was not ashamed to be outwardly religious. When the Queen offered him a gift of a deer from Richmond Park, he insisted on sending his Shochet (ritual slaughterer), to ensure it was slaughtered in the correct way. He even travelled with his own Shochet. When he was Sheriff of London, he would arrive with a kosher chicken or cold kosher beef, so he had something to eat at the banquets. He

insisted on having Hebrew on his Coat of Arms, defiantly combining his Judaism and Englishness together. He was a proud Jew as well as being a patriotic Englishman.

Judith Montefiore was also a figurehead and role model in her own right. She wrote the first ever Jewish cookbook, published in 1846, which taught Jewish women how to be English ladies and to prepare dishes according to Kashrut.

It contained a wide range of recipes, both Sephardi and Ashkenazi, with influences from France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Portugal and Palestine. Interestingly the so called Jewish cuisine from Eastern Europe was not included, being before its time in Britain. The message was that regular recipes could be adapted to the kosher kitchen. She taught you could be both observant Jews and have English manners and customs. She espoused refinement and elegance instead showy, pomposity.

So both Moses and Judith were proudly Jewish, whilst also succeeding to be very English. Yet Moses Montefiore drank Port and there was no evidence it was kosher. Maybe it was because he was an Italian born Jew from Italian stock and the Italians had a uniquely relaxed view about the Stam Yeinam kosher laws, (wines produced by non-Jews.)

Maybe he chose Port because it was sweet and fortified. He only had to arrange for a spoonful of sugar to be added to the barrel and the wine would have the same status as Yayin Mevushal. According to Halacha adding leaven or honey to a wine would make it unfit to be used on the Misbeach (Altar) of the Holy Temple. Being Port, the taste would not have been affected. He would have been able to drink Port and keep up appearances. Maybe he sent his own representative to make the wine. Who knows?

We have to appreciate the kosher laws were laxer in those days. No wine was sold by bottle in retail outlets until 1860. Labels came later and kashrut supervision only came about in the next century. So guaranteeing kashrut was virtually impossible. All was by word of mouth and personal trust was the only criteria to go by. Fraud was rife. Clearly things were very different then.



Not only then, but comparatively recently too. It is hard to believe but Carmel Winery was still sending Palwin in barrels to London in the 1970's, where the wine was bottled. Furthermore, workers at Carmel Winery did not have to be Shomrei Shabbat, (Sabbath observers), as recently as the early 1980's, though of course they were Jewish.

Neither of these occurrences could possibly happen today with the stricter observance of Kashrut. This illustrates how today's situation is far removed from what was normal only thirty years ago, let alone as long ago as in the 19th century.

Whatever the story, Moses Montefiore was a religious Jew and he drank Port. The rest is for educated conjecture.

SUMMARY

During Moses Montefiore's lifetime he saw the rise of port and claret, observed the change from cask to bottle at a time when England ruled the world's wine trade. It was a fascinating time when the wine industry became molded in a fashion that has remained until today. No doubt his lifetime, from 1784 to 1885, was a particularly important period in the development of wine as we know it.



The historian Cecil Roth referred to Moses Montefiore as “the father of the agricultural yishuv.” David Ben Gurion, wrote: *“The outstanding merits of Montefiore should never be underestimated.....he ushered in Jewish agriculture in the 19th century.”* Indeed Montefiore wanted Jews to return to agriculture, which included planting vines and olive trees and he set an example by the orchard he purchased. As such he receives an honorable mention in the beginnings of both Israeli wine and the Israeli citrus industry.

Adam Montefiore is a direct descendant of Moses Montefiore's heir Joseph Sebag Montefiore and the first member of the family to make Aliyah to Israel. He works for Carmel Winery and is the wine writer for the Jerusalem Post.

PHOTOS: Yakis Kidron, Dani Kronenberg