

“Among the immense marshes along the Danube”: Robinson and Smith’s odyssey between Constantinople and Vienna

Haim Goren

Tel-Hai Academic College, Upper-Galilee, Israel

Abstract: Edward Robinson (1794–1863) is, and, I imagine, always will be noted on maps of Jerusalem for ‘his’ arch, projecting from the southern part of the western wall of the Temple-Mount.¹ American Minister (Presbyterian Congregationalist), philologist, scriptural- and historical-geographer, he was, and remains, one of the most well-known Holy Land explorers, responsible for laying the foundation for its modern historic-geographical study.² This paper aims at reconstructing his, together with his colleague American missionary Eli Smith, voyage from Constantinople to Vienna after completing their 1838 travel, through the Black Sea and along the Danube.

Keywords: Edward Robinson, Eli Smith, Danube sailing, Iron Gates, Orsava, Zachariä von Lingenthal, TALVJ

Robinson and Smith’s travel, 1838, and publication

Not in vain, Robinson was crowned by his contemporaries as well as by later scholars as ‘The father of Land of Israel scientific study’.³ The American scholar Frederick Jones Bliss wrote in his 1907 ‘The Development of Palestine Exploration’, presenting Robinson and his deeds:

“The time had come for a scholar ... to enter this tempting field with thermometer, telescope, compass, and measuring-tape, but, above all, sharp-eyed and sufficiently skeptical, and then make report of what he had seen and

¹ Goren, 2020, pp. 245–274; Goren, 2022, and references in note 2, p. 46.

² Dearman, 1991; Goren, 2014; Goren, 2020. For earlier biographies: Smith & Hitchcock, 1863; Robinson, 1862–1864; Williams, 1999; Soler, 2014.

³ Benzinger, 1903, 585; Bliss, 1907, 184–223; Macalister, 1925, pp. 21–25; Ben-Arieh, 1979, pp. 85–91.

measured. Such a man was our late associate, raised up, endowed, and trained for this purpose; so keen of vision that nothing escaped his notice; so sound and solid of judgment that no mere fancy could sway him; so learned that nothing of any moment pertaining to his work was unknown to him; and yet, withal, so ardent in his religious affections to pursue his task like a new crusader. There never was a man better suited to his calling.”⁴

Robinson, this leading Biblical scholar and scriptural geographer conducted two expeditions (1838, 1852) and published three epoch-making books and numerous papers.⁵ His expeditions to the Holy Land, accompanied by Eli Smith, his approach to choosing travel routes, his method of documentation, are included in almost every publication dedicated to the history of the scientific study of the countries they studied, Palestine – the Holy Land, Sinai Peninsula, and Arabia Petraea – today’s Negev Desert and Jordan.

“My road to Robinson” began with my book *‘Go View the Land’: German Study of Palestine in the Nineteenth Century* (Hebrew 1999, German 2003). There, I dedicated a chapter to the American Robinson, in a way “Germanizing” him. It continued with my 2011 *Dead Sea Level*, where Robinson plays a significant role. Then came my chapter in *Mapping the Holy Land: The Origins of Cartography in Palestine* (2017), where I discuss the maps originating from Robinson and Smith’s travels, drawn by the Berlin cartographer Heinrich Berghaus. The last stage is the book, titled with one of Robinson’s mottos “*The loss of a minute is just so much loss of life*”, published by Brepols in 2020.⁶

The story of Robinson and Smith’s expedition and writing of the *Biblical Researches* that emerges from their extensive correspondence, underscores the difficulties they overcame, and the accuracy and magnitude of their scholarship in an age bereft of modern technology. My book examines the background to and progress of Robinson and Smith’s spring 1838 expedition and the genesis of the idea and writing process of the three volumes of *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petraea in 1838*, more than 600 pages each, published almost simultaneously in London (Murray), Boston (Crocker & Brewster) and Halle (*Waissenhaus*, German). Robinson, who actually performed the work while continuously conferring with Smith, had been

⁴ Bliss, 1907, pp. 189–190, quoting Roswell D. Hitchcock, Robinson’s colleague in the Union Theology Seminary.

⁵ Robinson & Smith, 1841; Robinson, 1856; Robinson, 1865.

⁶ Goren, 2003; Goren, 2011; Goren, 2017; Goren, 2020. The motto is taken from Rosewell Dwight Hitchcock’s address read before the New York Historical Society, Robinson, 1862–1864, p. 147.

obsessed with the writing and publication; he worked painstakingly in Berlin for twenty-two months, from November 1838 to September 1, 1840.

No less important than Robinson's archive has been that of American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM)⁷ Beirut Presbyterian missionary Eli Smith (1801–1857), Robinson's travel companion and partner in producing the book. A devoted missionary, fluent in Arabic and highly familiar with the country and its inhabitants, Smith was Robinson's singularly well-suited travel and research companion.⁸ Robinson wrote:

"I count myself fortunate in having been thus early assured of the company of one, who, by his familiar and accurate knowledge of the Arabic language, by his acquaintance with the people of Syria, and by the experience gained in former extensive journeys, was so well qualified to alleviate the difficulties and overcome the obstacles which usually accompany oriental travel. Indeed, to these qualifications of my companion, combined with his taste for geographical and historical researches, and his tact in eliciting and sifting the information to be obtained from an Arab population, are mainly to be ascribed for more important and interesting results of our journey."⁹

Robinson had a unique personality, fortitude, and a profound faith in God. He was a devout man, but one with a religious passion for science, and perhaps a scientific passion for religion, as well. He employed the protestant ethos to the fullest: work was a calling, an opportunity, and a right; protestant ethics are the trifecta of hard work, religious humility, and a sense of mission. Edward Robinson's education, perceptions, and beliefs impelled him to embark on a historical geographic study of the Scriptures – and their land.

"My journey in the east was undertaken in weakness & fear & much trembling; I instead went first to satisfy an ardent longing to visit those scenes (...) & then to satisfy myself with regard to some few points round the Holy City, as to which I could gain no satisfaction from the works of former travelers. But I did not dream of discovery, nor of any special enlargement of the limits of Sacred Geography."¹⁰

⁷ For the role of the ABCFM in the Near East, cf. Anderson, 1863; Anderson, 1872; Kawerau, 1958; Vogel, 1993, pp. 190–194; Soler, 2014, pp. 154–163; Zeuge-Buberl, 2017.

⁸ Cf. Kawerau, 1958; Leavy, 1992; Farah, 2000, esp. pp. 299–303; Stoddard, 2009; Goren, 2020, *passim*.

⁹ Robinson & Smith, 1841, I, p. 2.

¹⁰ Letter Robinson to Hamilton, New York, 1842, ERP, I, 4.

After studying in the first class of the newly founded Hamilton College in Clinton, New York,¹¹ the young Edward Robinson came to Andover Theological Seminary in 1821 planning to finish his translation of and commentary to the *Iliad*. Here, pioneer American Hebraist Moses B. Stuart (1780–1852) brought him into his field, the study of the Bible and of the Hebrew language.¹² Robinson began formulating the idea of a Holy Land expedition during his German study period, from 1826 to 1830. His interaction with German scholars and exposure to their ideas and research methods most likely catalyzed Robinson's unique thinking.¹³ But it was his 1832 meeting with his former student Smith at Andover that had been the turning point for his life, career, and publications, the most influential event paving the road to the Holy Land.¹⁴

Robinson took his final decision to set out on a Holy Land expedition only in January 1837, following his visit to New York, when he accepted an offer for the position of Professor of Biblical Literature at the newly founded New York Theological Seminary (later UTS). The seminary agreed to his condition that he delays his teaching until after completion of his expedition.

“Nursling under the circumstances in which I was pleased, this seemed an offering in Providence, with which I might enter with the hope of being useful; all my previous studies & pursuits having prepared me for just such a station, if for any. I therefore accepted the appointment, on condition of having leave of absence after July next, in order to go abroad for the purpose of procuring a library and, if possible, of visiting Palestine.”¹⁵

This was nearly five years after the pivotal 1832 meeting with Smith. In the years prior, Smith had been working toward his lifetime goal of establishing an Arabic printing house in Beirut,¹⁶ so when he found out that Robinson had set out and was already in Greece, he at first declined the offer to join the expedition, but later changed his mind. In addition to scientific discoveries, Smith was hoping “to find many openings for missionary labor,” writing to

¹¹ Williams, 1997, 1999 (passim).

¹² Kitto, 1853; Dearman, 1979–1980; Giltner, 1988.

¹³ Goren, 2020, pp. 17–32.

¹⁴ Williams, 1997, p. 194; Weigel Williams, 2007, p. 83.

¹⁵ Letter Robinson to Norton, Boston, 9.2.1837, ERP, ER I.13. Reverend Asahel Strong Norton (1765–1853), minister of the Congregational Church in Clinton, was Robinson's only surviving uncle from his mother's side, and had been very close to him ever since his studies at Hamilton College.

¹⁶ Ayalon, 2016. Cf. also Coakley, 2003; Hallock, 1929; Glass, 1997; Roper, 1998; Auji, 2016.

Robinson, "I trust you will allow me to act the missionary wherever I have opportunity."¹⁷

Robinson and Smith met in Cairo and left for Suez on March 12, completing and finishing their expedition in Beirut, Lebanon, after three and half months.

"All my previous studies & pursuits having prepared me for just such a station... My first motive had been simply the gratification of personal feelings... The scenes of the Bible had made a deep impression upon my mind. I entered upon it without the slightest anticipation of the results to which we were providentially led."¹⁸

The decision to write a book resulting from the expedition came only later, developing and taking its shape during the process of writing in Berlin. There, Talvj, Robinson's (second) wife, wrote that "My husband [...] lives there [in Jerusalem] more than here". A scholar in her own right, Talvj, *Therese Albertine Luise von Jakob-Robinson*, had been "Mediator of the Balkan Slav, and Holy Land Studies".¹⁹

As mentioned, the outcome of twenty-two months of work was the three-volume *Biblical Researches* published in 1841. Comprising nearly two thousand pages, it was certainly one of the most detailed scientific undertakings originating from travels in Sinai and Palestine, remembering that the expedition lasted only three and a half months! Robinson's system of writing led him on long investigations, detailed discussions with Smith, Berlin and Leipzig are actually not that far, extensive letter change, as well as researching all available written sources.²⁰

His biographers, Smith and Hitchcock, described him:

"In person, he was built upon a large and even massive scale; with broad shoulders and muscular limbs, that denoted capacity for great endurance and toil; crowned with a head of unusual volume, a broad and open forehead, with perspective powers predominant; a shaggy eye-brow, a full, bright, piercing eye, though usually shaded through infirmity; a firm, yet pliant mouth; and, altogether, giving the impression, even to casual observer, of a man of weight and mark."²¹

¹⁷ Smith to Robinson, Smyrna, 19.12.1837, ESP, ABC 60 (105/7).

¹⁸ Robinson to Norton, Boston, 9.2.1837, ERP, ER 1.13.

¹⁹ Weigel Williams, 2007; Krause & Dobrašinović, 2001; Goren, 2020, pp. 215–238, list of studies on p. 215, n. 101.

²⁰ See in detail Goren, 2020, pp. 110–146.

²¹ Smith & Hitchcock, 1863, p. 13.

Man is more than but a mirror of his native landscape; man is also a reflection of his dreams and longing. This was Robinson, who succeeded in realizing his dreams and longing.

The post-travel experience, Constantinople to Vienna

As mentioned, Robinson and Smith's research-expedition begun in Cairo on March 12, 1838, and reached Beirut, the final station of their journey, on Thursday, June 26, in exactly three and a half months.²² Robinson, now 44 years old, suffered there a slight attack of the chronic illness that plagued him from time to time, but soon recovered enough to continue. In his youth, Robinson began suffering from "upper respiratory disorders" and much later from Bright's disease, acute or chronic nephritis, a kidney disease.²³

His travel plans from Beirut were straightforward. His wife and children awaited him in Halle, Germany. Robinson intended to go to Halle and maintain his original plan to begin his teaching and other duties at UTS in the fall. He decided to sail up the Danube, taking the direct route back to Germany.

Smith's travel plans were far from clearly established. Originally intending to go directly to the States, he now meant to actualize a plan deferred given the timing of the expedition with Robinson.²⁴ Prior to the expedition, Smith was preoccupied with producing the Arabic types for the mission Arabic printing press in Beirut where they planned to print an Arabic translation of the Bible. These Arabic types became a determining factor in Smith's post-expedition travel plans. In 1834, four years earlier, the task of completing the Arabic printing press had been put in the hands of punchcutter Homan Hallock (1803–1894) under the supervision and responsibility of Smith. Hallock "had the capability, almost alone of American printers at the time, of dealing with Oriental languages."²⁵ In 1833, the printing office and equipment of the ABCFM were moved from Malta to Smyrna where the Hallock family settled, and the Arabic printing material was sent in 1834 with Smith to Beirut. Hallock's detailed letters foresee many of the personal, technical, and financial obstacles that would hamper his efforts and successful completion of the Arabic printing press in the coming years.²⁶ Smith returned to Smyrna on

²² Robinson & Smith, 1841, all three volumes. Cf. Goren, 2020, pp. 59–83, and references there.

²³ Weigel Williams, 2007, pp. 86–87; Goren, 2020, p. 83, n. 80.

²⁴ See in detail Goren, 2020, pp. 84–91.

²⁵ Hallock, 1929; Coakley, 2003; Goren, 2020, pp. 44–47, 84–87.

²⁶ Letters Hallock to Smith, Smyrna, 20.4.1834, 28.4.1834, 28.5.1834, ESP, ABC 60 (32).

January 1837, and contemplated whether Hallock will be able to produce the Arabic types successfully. Hallock's slow progress in cutting the punches of the Arabic typeface designed by him prevented the disappointed Smith from returning quickly to Syria. Four days later, Smith wrote from Smyrna to his "brethren of the Syrian mission" unveiling his plan to accompany Robinson.²⁷ Smith remained absorbed with the printing press on his way to Egypt to meet Robinson for the start of their expedition. After reaching Jerusalem in April 1838, Smith wrote to Hallock in Smyrna that "in reference to my future movements, my brethren have concluded that it will possibly be best for me to go to Germany to get the matrices fitted up." Smith added that the fact that Robinson had paid his expenses to date, he was expected to accompany him, most likely to Germany.²⁸ In the end, upon reaching Beirut, Smith decided to sail first to Alexandria, and received a final decision only upon reaching Smyrna on August 4th. In the meantime, having arrived in Constantinople from Beirut, Robinson wrote to Smith:

"I was in hopes to have heard definitely of you accompanying me to Germany; but I can well enter into all your doubts; & also into your wishes & the motives for going directly to the U. States. As to the mere matter of the bound of types, my belief is that you can get them done much more readily & cheaply in Germany; – whether better or not I cannot of course decide; – but whether these motives are sufficient to overbalance the general virtues for proceeding to America, you can judge much better than I."²⁹

Clearly, until this point, Smith had been in favor of going directly to the States, but now he hoped to receive the ABCFM permission to travel to Germany. Germany was the leader in Arabic typography and casting of types, offering the services "of the best workers, & also the best advices." Smith had one person in mind, "probably there is none superior to it [his establishment]": Karl Christian Philipp Tauchnitz (1798–1884) who, in 1836, inherited his father's printing business, established in 1796. The Tauchnitz script foundry and printing and publication house also concentrated in "improving the ancient scripts, the Russian, Greek as well as the Oriental writings." Smith writes further that Robinson offered to finance his travel to Berlin.³⁰

²⁷ Smith to Brethren of the Syrian Mission, Smyrna, 16.12.1837, ESP, ABC 60 (105/7).

²⁸ Smith to Hallock, Jerusalem, 25.4.1838, ESP, ABC 60 (105/8).

²⁹ Robinson to Smith, Constantinople, 7.8.1838, ESP, ABC 60 (63).

³⁰ Smith to Anderson, Smyrna, 9.8.1838, ESP, ABC 60 (105/9) Jul.-Dec. For Tauchnitz see: Schwarz, 1924.

Having made his decision, Smith joined Robinson in Constantinople to embark on their course up the Danube. It is quite clear that he received the formal permission to travel to Germany from his ABCFM superiors only after acting upon his decision. Robinson arrived in the Ottoman capital on July 30, Smith joined him on the morning of August 13th. On that very day they embarked on a Danube steamboat.

What does Robinson tell us about their travel? Not too much:

“We embarked ... on the board of one of the Danube steam-boats; and after a slow but pleasant voyage across the Black Sea and up the ‘dark rolling’ river, skirted with cities renowned in the wars of former centuries, we entered the borders of Hungary. Our quarantine of ten days was spent at Orsova, in the midst of the green Carpathian chain, above the far-famed Iron Gate...”³¹

So, how can one learn about the details of the voyage, this *Odyssey*? Also here, Robinson solves the question. In a footnote he adds, that “our voyage up the Danube had already been described by one of the party, Dr. E. Zachariä, a young jurist of Heidelberg...”³² Carl Edward Zachariä von Lingenthal (1812–1894) was a German jurist and expert in Roman and Byzantine law. During his travels in 1837–1838, he met Robinson twice, first in Vienna on their way to the East and then in Constantinople on their return. His travels took him, as detailed in his book’s title, through “*Wien, Venedig, Florenz, Rom, Neapel, Malta, Sicilien und Griechenland*,” to “*Saloniki, dem Berg Athos, Konstantinople und Trapezunt*.”³³ The sixteenth chapter of his book, thirteen pages long in Gothic letters, describes in detail the route from Constantinople to Vienna, August 13 to September 13.³⁴ This is probably one of the best existing descriptions of this sailing dating from the first half of the nineteenth century.

At noon they embarked the steam-boat *Ferdinand I*, Captain Everson, which belonged to the 1829 established company of steamboats for Danube sailing (*Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaft*, DDSG), which immediately left the harbor and sailed through the Bosphorus. On board they were nine travelers who returned from voyages in the Orient. On the next day, August 14, before noon, the boat anchored in a bay north of Varna, used by Zacharia for a short

³¹ Robinson & Smith, 1841, III, p. 450. For the quarantine system on the borders between the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empires, established in 1829 following the Treaty of Adrianople in order to fight the dangers of epidemics, see e.g. Sechel, 2011; Promitzer, 2011; Cotoi, 2016. My deepest gratitude to Dr. Ines Grigorescu for these references.

³² Robinson & Smith, 1841, III, p. 451 n. 1.

³³ Zacharia von Lingenthal, 1840. Cf. Fischer, 1898.

³⁴ Zacharia von Lingenthal, 1840, 322–334.

description of the city and its surroundings, and its vulnerability for attack from sea. Early in the morning of the 15th they reached the mouth of the Danube, from the Russian-Ottoman war, which ended in the treaty of Adrianople, belonging to the Russians. Consequently, they were now controlling the trade in the Lower Danube. Here, Zachariä supplies a description of the river and its directions, mentions Trajan and his canal, and expresses the need for a canal or train that will combine Rasova and the lower Danube until the harbor city of Constanța.

They passed by the Russian cannon into the mouth of the Sulina river, along a flat land full of marshes, while the stream twists flowing slowly in unending curves. He describes the Russian fleet, as well as the various birds in the marshes. So, they sail by the Turkish city Tulcea, spotted the Russian city and fortress Izmayil on their right, and in the evening landed at the Moldavian city Galati. Resting for the night and the next morning, they sailed in the evening to the close Brăila, which belonged to Walachia. Both small cities suffered a lot in the last war. They could not visit them, as they came from the plague-stricken Constantinople and needed to be quarantined. The long and unused breaks were unpleasant and tiresome, and it was impossible to think about a night rest due to the troubling flies that bit through the clothes, and even the nets could not help. The only way to avoid the flies and mosquitoes was to put on a coat and walk the whole night smoking on the ship's deck. To this one must also consider, that the night air of the Danube has the worst influence. So, after the first night everybody felt extremely bad, a feeling which needed took some days surmount.

In Brăila they changed with English travelers that came with the steamboat *Pannonia* from the upper Danube. They entered the new ship on Saturday, August 18, and it was aimed to bring them all the way to Orșova. The *Pannonia* was a good boat, but its steam machines were weak and could push it only extremely slowly. This was very unpleasant for the passengers, and the sailing and the landscape on both sides were quite boring. On the 19th they came early to Sinistria, probably Silistra, a city holding an insignificant fortress. On the next morning they passed by Rutschuk (Pyce, Ruse), and later the friendly Sistowa, Svishtov, a relative important trading city with the ruins of a castle on a nearby hill. A partially readable writing on a wall of the castle, so Zacharia, the expert, determined that this might have been a Roman settlement.

Early on August 21 they were by Nikopolis, Nikopol in Bulgaria, and on Wednesday the 22 noon they reached Vidin, a big rich city, one of the most significant fortresses of the Turkish Empire. The travelers even had the opportunity to meet with the then famous Ottoman commander, Hussein

(Hüseyn) Pasha, who had been deported there after being defeated by the Russians. On the next morning, they could already see the Carpathian Mountains in the north, the Serbian ones in the south, between which the riverbed of the Danube gets narrower. Passed by the ruins of an old Roman bridge built by Trajan, at noon they reached the Serbian village Gladowa, today Kladovo. The load was here transferred to a lighter, flat boat, on which they had to pass the rest of the days of their travel through the notorious Iron Gates to Orşova. They were forced to walk a big part of the way along the shore, accompanied by a Serbian sanitary guard, while the boat being dragged through the strengthening stream by more than twenty oxen. A rocky reef that extends here to the whole width of the river, is the cause for shallow and falls, that cause anxiety to the sailors. On the Serbian side, a canal was built to bypass the dangerous place, and it could have been used, but the Austro-Hungarian sanitary institutions put on the way obstacles that could not be exceeded.

On the other side of the Iron Gates they passed by the Turkish border-position New Orşova on an island in the middle of the stream. Landing at noon on the stairs by the Austrian small border city of Orşova, they were taken immediately to the quarantine of Shupaneh, in a nice valley a bit far from the Danube. Here comes a long description of the site, its buildings and life.

They were free again on September 3, and after a thorough check of their belonging and tax-supervision they went to Orşova, some even could still go to observe a near site of Roman ruins. Now, the one possibility was to continue sailing upstream, though the mountains make it narrow and dangerous, this should have been regularly done by lighter boats. But they preferred the land road, which turned out to be easier and quicker, a nice road built along the left bank, in light chart, all the way to Drencova. Here comes a description of Trajan and his road, of what can still be interpreted from the inscription, Trajan's road constructing system is praised as much superior to what is accepted in their times.

They reached Drencova in the evening, a small hamlet with only a few buildings of the companies of the Danube sailing. Here waited for them the *Zrinyi*, a nice boat, with an engine of 80 horsepower, but not that comfortable as the *Pannonia* or the *Ferdinand*. Embarking it on September 5, it had to take them to Pest. On the way they collected passengers, while the river turned out to be very meandric on its way through the Hungarian plain. They passed by some historical places, as Belgrad, arriving in Pest at noon of September 9. On the 11 they continued on a steamboat to Vienna, though some of the passengers were already too sick and stayed in Pest. Others fell sick in Vienna,

as the fog of the Danube affected everybody. It took two more days of rough weather sailing, and on September 13 in the evening, 32 days after leaving Constantinople, they landed in Vienna.

This is the end of Zachariä's description. A document in Smith's archive (Houghton Library, Harvard), titled *Sanitäts-Fehde für Personen* (rules of health for persons), issued by the Imperial Quarantine Office in Orşova for Eli Smith, details his description (36 years-old, average stature, brown hair, beard and eyebrows, gray eyes) and lists everything he carried with him *en route*, cloths, writing material, ten packets of manuscripts and thirteen books.³⁵

Illness and miraculous recovery in Vienna

But this was not the end of the Odyssey. "Among the immense marshes which stretch along the Danube in this quarter", wrote Robinson, "I probably inhaled the poison of an intermittent fever". Yes, he did reach Vienna, but "here my disorder, after a few days, assumed a new and alarming form, and brought me speedily to the borders of the grave".³⁶ For the two travelers, what had been intended to be a short stop in Vienna, turned into a long and rather difficult ordeal. As for Talvj, she decided to wait for Robinson in Dresden, a bit closer to Vienna than Halle. On September 26 and 27, two weeks after reaching the Austrian capital, Smith sent her two very alarming letters to Dresden, one of them still exists in Robinson's papers, in which he wrote: "you will suffer nothing to delay your coming as speedily as possible. – Sympathizing with you most deeply in the feelings this Sickness of your excellent husband must occasion you, & praying that our fears may not be realized."³⁷ The address at which the letters were initially received was Dresden; yet on the second letter's envelope it was crossed off and changed to Vienna. Talvj, as will become clear, was already on her way to the Austrian capital!

Smith detailed the illness in an exhaustive, 19-page letter to Robinson written after he recovered and before they left Vienna, another highly interesting document:

"My Dear Sir, your request that I would draw up a brief act of your late sickness, clearing the days of which you have no recollection, enforces upon me a painful duty; but a duty far less painful, than I expected to be called upon

³⁵ ESP, ABC 60 (1837).

³⁶ Robinson & Smith, 1841, III, pp. 450–451.

³⁷ Smith to Talvj, Vienna, 27.9.1838, ERP, H. 2, cited also by Weigel Williams, 2007, pp. 106–107.

to perform, when I took the few notes, which now furnish me the data for this communication.”³⁸

Robinson’s fever worsened and he entered a state of “an almost constant drowsiness.” A local physician was called who did write some prescriptions. In the evening, Robinson’s fever was still very high, and he Smith was unable to find a servant. So, the latter once again cared for Robinson during the night. The next day, the attending physician “seemed to flatter himself that he had again got the better of the disease, & said that a nurse was no longer necessary.” But when the local physician returned on his daily visit, “he found you unable to converse, & helpless, & the fever ever higher than yesterday. He now seemed to apprehend the worst & it was the first time he had intimated to me that there was danger.’ Smith summoned three physicians, ‘& then they called me in to make known their conclusion.” Smith once again attended to Robinson throughout the night,

“...such a night I hope never again to pass. I felt that I was a stranger in a strange place, & the only peace I had, helpless & deprived of reason by disease, which would soon bring Mine to the grave. (...) But in the morning the good providence of God made my way plain (...).”

On Thursday, the fourth day of the illness, Robinson was “entirely helpless” and in the evening “the fever was now higher than last evening, & the coma worse. You could not be induced to open your mouth, in order to show your tongue, or to take medicine, or even to spit (...).” On Friday morning, the physician informed Smith:

“I must profuse myself for your departure; & seemed pleased when I told him that I had had religious connection, & had prayed with you. I had already spoken to the consul to make arrangements for the farewell, in case our fear was realized; & he had informed me, that he must also take an inventory of your effects.”

“Painful as it is in the extreme,” Smith adds, “I believe there is hardly anything as profitable to the Christian, as to wait at the bedside of a dying friend.” But in the afternoon, they started noticing the first signs of improvement.

³⁸ Smith to Robinson, Vienna, 11.10.1838, ESP, ABC 60 (105/9). Smith used to keep the letters he received, as well as copies of those he sent. The following citations are also from this document.

Monday, the physician "announced the victory gained." The healing was quick and "every symptom of this kind entirely disappeared".

"I cannot close, without assuring you, how heartily I join with you in thankfulness to God for your recovery. (...) allow me to say that I thanked God, during your sickness, that I was with you, & could do anything to assist you. (...) my prayer is, that I may have, at least, one kind & faithful friend by my bedside. Such a friend as I would wish for myself, I have tried to be to you. Your life has been spared."

Smith summarized the whole event also in a letter to his superior Rufus Anderson, Secretary of the ABCFM:

"We were strangers, in a hotel, in a strange place. I was his only friend, & I devoted myself to him night & day. God helped me, in procuring physicians & nurses, & raised up a friend, & gave affect to medicine. So that when his wife arrived, for whom I had written, when no one had any expectation of his living, I had the unspeakable pleasure of presenting him to her, not only better, out of danger."³⁹

What exactly was the nature of Robinson's illness? Prof. Dr. Eran Dolev, a leading Israeli expert in the history of medicine and internal diseases, has suggested that Robinson most probably suffered from malaria. The Delta of the Danube was a well-known source of the disease, which existed in Hungary until the 1950's. Clinically, it was a severe, remittent fever malady, where the fever is followed by a stupor.⁴⁰

Robinson was neither the only victim of such a disease within a Danube sailing, nor the only American. Following a long and adventurous excursion in Egypt, young Philip Rhinelander (born 1815) and his New York friends left Constantinople for Vienna on July 1, 1839, arriving there on August 5th. Letters of his companions describe the same symptoms. Rhinelander passed away on August 11 and was buried in Vienna.⁴¹

The information concerning Talvj's involvement in her husband's recovery is based primarily on a letter she sent on September 21 from Dresden to Smith in Vienna, and on a short recollection of her side of the experience that she wrote in March 1840, beginning "some months after I had the pleasure to

³⁹ Smith to Anderson, 1.11.1838, ESP, ABC 60 (105\5).

⁴⁰ For a contemporary study cf. Ellioston, 1839, Lecture xxxi: Treatment of fevers; lecture xxxii: Remittent fever. My deepest gratitude to Prof. Dolev.

⁴¹ Oliver, 2014, pp. 285–304.

welcome you [], a storm-wind cast me away to Vienna.”⁴² The recipient was her close friend Jacob Grimm (1785–1863), the leading German philologist. Talvj wrote that while no immediate danger seemed apparent, her instinct was otherwise: “I cannot deny myself, that, as my husband’s complaint had been for some time increasing, there was reason to fear that it would become dangerous, or at least result in a protracted illness.” She relays her decision to go immediately to Vienna with her children and their caretaker, a difficult four-day coach journey, but hoping that “may God be so gracious as to make this journey unnecessary! And may He give me strength to bear it, if it must be made!” Talvj arrived in Vienna on September 27, the day that Smith sent his letter to Dresden, which she naturally never received. She arrived after the major crisis subsided and was more than happy to be able to help with Robinson’s care, noting how painful the meeting was after a full year of separation. Robinson’s recovery, which took six weeks, delayed them in their plan to leave Vienna to Germany.

Concluding remarks

The description, in detail as much as possible, of the events during the month of travel from Constantinople to Vienna, the critical sickness period there and the miraculous recovery, were the main issues of this paper. Naturally, it had been necessary to present some information concerning Robinson and his companion, Smith, their background, travels and achievements, and their extreme significance for the study of the history of scientific revealing of the Holy Land in the 19th century. These, as background to the narratives of the one-month travel from Constantinople to Vienna, of Robinson’s illness and his recovery, probably more than anything else due to his physical strength and Smith’s unprecedented care. Of course, the use of travelers’ accounts for the study of the past sailing up the Danube in different times, can add much to any modern study of the river as a transportation route, as a border, its region and the famous Iron Gates.

⁴² Theresa Robinson to Smith, Dresden, 21.9.1838, ESP, ABC 60 (63); Talvj to Grimm, Berlin, 16.3.1840, in Schubert & Krause, 2001, 269–271. The original letter in Grimm’s legacy, National Library, Berlin.



Picture 1, Edward Robinson



Picture 2, Eli Smith

Source: Eli Smith Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard

References

Archives

- ERP – Edward Robinson Papers, Hamilton College, Burke Library, Special Collections, Clinton, NY
- ESP – Eli Smith Papers, 1819–1869 (ABC 60), Harvard University, Houghton Library, Cambridge, MA

Books

- Anderson, R., 1863. *Memorial Volume of the First Fifty Years of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*. Boston, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.
- Anderson, R., 1872. *History of the Missions of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the Oriental Churches*, I–II. Boston, Congregational Publ. Society.
- Auji, H., 2016. *Printing Arab Modernity: Book Culture and the American Press in Nineteenth-Century Beirut*. Leiden, Brill.
- Ayalon, A., 2016. *The Arabic Revolution: Cultural Production and Mass Readership*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Ben-Arieh, Y., 1979. *The Rediscovery of the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century*. Jerusalem & Detroit, The Magness Press/The Hebrew University, Israel Exploration Society, Wayne State University Press.
- Benzinger, I., 1903. "Researchers in Palestine," in Hilprecht, H.V. (ed.), *Explorations in bible lands during the 19th century*. Philadelphia, Holman, pp. 581–622.
- Bliss, F.J., 1907. *The Development of Palestine Exploration*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Coakley, J.F., 2003. "Homan Hallock, Punchcutter," in *Printing History*, 45/1, pp. 18–41.
- Cotoi, C., 2016. "Cholera, Health for All, Nation-Building, and Racial Degeneration in Nineteenth-Century Romania," in *East Central Europe* 43, pp. 161–187.
- Dearman, A., 1979–1980. "Some Observations on Early Hebrew Works and Teachers in America: 1726–1823," in *Hebrew Studies* 20–21, pp. 195–199.
- Dearman, J.A., 1991. "Edward Robinson: Scholar and Presbyterian Educator," in *American Presbyterians* 69/3, pp. 163–174
- Ellioston, J., 1839. *Lectures on the theory and practice of medicine, delivered in the University College, London*, eds. Cooke, J.C. & Thompson, T.G., London.
- Farah, C.E., 2000. *The Politics of Interventionism in Ottoman Lebanon, 1830–1861*. Oxford, London & New York, Centre for Lebanese Studies.
- Fischer, W., 1898. "Zachariae: Karl Eduard Z. von Lingenthal," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, 44, pp. 653–657 ([https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118772120.html# adbcontent](https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118772120.html#adbcontent)).

- Giltner, J.H., 1988. *Moses Stuart: The Father of Biblical Science in America* (Biblical Scholarship in North America, 14). Atlanta, GA, Scholars Press.
- Glass, D., 1997. *Malta, Beirut, Leipzig and Beirut Again: Eli Smith, the American Syria Mission and the Spread of Arabic Typography in 19th Century Lebanon*. Beirut, Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft.
- Goren, H., 2003. „Zieht hin und erforscht das Land“. *Die deutsche Palästinaforschung im 19. Jahrhundert* (Schriftenreihe des Instituts für Deutsche Geschichte der Universität Tel Aviv; 23), trsl. Naujoks, A.C. Göttingen, Wallstein.
- Goren, H., 2011. *Dead Sea Level: Science, Exploration and Imperial Interests in the Near East* (Tauris Historical Geography Series, 6). London, I.B. Tauris.
- Goren, H., 2014. “Edward Robinson – Father of the Scientific Study of Eretz Israel,” in Schiller, E. & Barka’ai, G. (eds.), *Wonderful Land: Jerusalem and Eretz Israel, Papers and Studies* (Ariel 206–207). Jerusalem, Ariel, pp. 64–74 [Heb.].
- Goren, H., 2017. “Edward Robinson, Eli Smith and the Cartography of Berghaus and Kiepert,” in Goren, H., Faehndrich, J., & Schelhaas, B. (with Weigel, P.), *Mapping the Holy Land: The Foundation of a Scientific Cartography of Palestine* (Tauris Historical Geography Series). London & New York, IB Tauris, pp. 5–53.
- Goren, H., 2020. “The loss of a minute is just so much loss of life”. *Edward Robinson and Eli Smith in the Holy Land* (Studia Traditionis Theologiae, 39). Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols.
- Goren, H., 2022. “Whose Arch is it? The Discussion Concerning Robinson’s Arch: Identification and Function,” *Cathedra* 180, pp. 45–68.
- Hallock, H., 1929. *The new Arabic Type*. New York, Privately Printed.
- Kawerau, P., 1958. *Amerika und die orientalischen Kirchen: Ursprung und Anfang der amerikanischen Mission unter den Nationalkirchen Westasiens* (Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte, 31). Berlin, Walter de Gruyter.
- Kitto, J. 1853. “Moses Stuart,” *Journal of Sacred Literature and Biblical Record* 3/6, pp. 308–328.
- Krause, F., Dobrašinić, G., 2001. “Verzeichnis der Veröffentlichungen von und über Therese von Jakob-Robinson (Talvj) 1820–1999,” in Schubert, G., & Krause, F. (eds.), *Talvj Therese Albertine Luise von Jakob-Robinson (1797–1870). Aus Liebe zu Goethe: Mittlerin der Balkanslawen*. Weimar, Verl. und Datenbank fuer Geisteswissenschaft, pp. 321–337.
- Leavy, M.R., 1992. “Looking for the Armenians: Eli Smith’s Missionary Adventure, 1830–1831,” in *Transactions the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences* 50/3, pp. 189–275.
- Macalister, R.A.S., 1925. *A Century of Excavation in Palestine*. London, Religious Tract Society.
- Oliver, A., 2014. *American Travelers on the Nile: Early U.S. Visitors to Egypt, 1774–1839*, Cairo & New York, The American University in Cairo Press.
- Promitzer, C., 2011. “Stimulating the Hidden Dispositions of South-Eastern Europe. The Plague in the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–29 and the Introduction of

- Quarantine on the Lower Danube," in Sechel, D.T. (ed.), *Medicine Within and Between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, 18th-19th Centuries* (The Eighteenth Century and The Habsburg Monarchy, International Series, 2/2). Bochum, Winkler, pp. 79–107.
- Robinson, E., 1856. *Later Biblical Researches in Palestine and the adjacent Regions: a journal of travels in the year 1852*. London, J. Murray [1857 in German].
- Robinson, E., 1865. *Physical Geography of the Holy Land*, ed. Robinson, T. London, J. Murray.
- Robinson, E., Smith, E., 1841. *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petraea. A Journal of travels in the year 1838*, I–III, Boston, Crocker & Brewster [Published simultaneously also in London and Halle in German].
- Robinson, M.A. 1862–1864, "Edward Robinson," in *Memorial Biographies of the New England Historic Genealogical Society*, V, pp. 146–161 [copied as: *Memoir of the Rev. Edward Robinson, D.D., L.L.D.*, Cambridge 1895].
- Roper, G., 1998. "The Beginning of Arabic Printing by the ABCFM, 1822–1841," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 9/1, pp. 50–68.
- Schubert, G., Krause, F., eds., 2001. *Talvj Therese Albertine Luise von Jakob-Robinson (1797–1870). Aus Liebe zu Goethe: Mittlerin der Balkanslawen*, Weimar, Verl. und Datenbank für Geisteswiss.
- Schwarz, H. 1924. *Karl Christoph Traugott Tauchnitz: Buchhändler, Buchdrucker und Schriftgiesser zu Leipzig. Geboren 29. October 1761 Gestorben 14. Januar 1836: Ein Lebensbild*. Leipzig, H. Bertold A.-G.
- Sechel, D.T. 2011. "Contagion Theories in the Habsburg Monarchy (1770–1830)," in idem (ed.), *Medicine Within and Between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, 18th-19th Centuries* (The Eighteenth Century and The Habsburg Monarchy, International Series, 2/2). Bochum, Winkler: 55–77.
- Smith, H.B., Hitchcock, R.D., 1863. *The life, writings and character of Edward Robinson*. New York, A.D.F. Randolph (Reprint New York 1977).
- Soler, R., 2014. *Edward Robinson (1794–1863) et l'émergence de l'archéologie biblique*, Paris, Geuthner,
- Stoddard, R., 2009. "The Rev. Eli Smith, 1801–1857: Evangelical Orientalist in the Levant," *Theological Review* 30/2, pp. 202–222.
- Vogel, L.I., 1993. *To see a promised land. Americans and the Holy Land in the nineteenth century*, University Park, Penn., Pennsylvania State Univ. Press.
- Weigel Williams, H., 2007. *Therese Von Jakob: A Biographical Portrait*. New York, London & Shanghai, iUniverse.
- Williams, J.G., 1997. *The Education of Edward Robinson* (Burke Library Occasional Publication, 4). New York, Union Theological Seminary, Friends. Clinton, Hamilton College, Department of Religious Studies.
- Williams, J.G., 1999. *The Times and Life of Edward Robinson: Connecticut Yankee in King Solomon's Court* (Biblical Scholarship in North America, 19). Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature.

Zacharia von Lingenthal, (C.)E., 1840. *Dr. E. Zachariä's Reise in den Orient in den Jahren 1837 und 1838, ueber Wien, Venedig, Florenz, Rom, Neapel, Malta, Sicilien und Griechenland nach Saloniki, dem Berg Athos, Konstantinopel und Trapezunt.* Heidelberg, Mohr.

Zeuge-Buberl, U., 2017. *The Mission of the American Board in Syria: Implications of a Transcultural Dialogue.* Stuttgart, Franz Steiner.