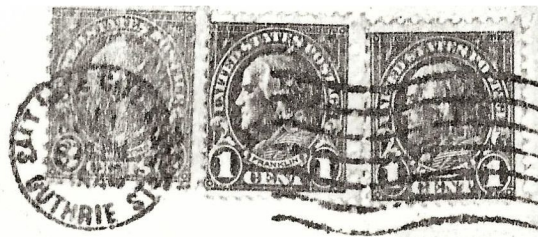


*Jacob's Mission
to Turkey
Sent by Andrew Jensen*



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JACOB SPORI'S MISSION TO TURKEY.

In 1884, Elder John Henry Smith, who was presiding over the European Mission, received a letter from a Mr. H.T.Vartooguan, of Constantinople, asking him to send some one to that city to introduce the Gospel into Turkey. Accordingly, in December, 1884, President John Henry Smith appointed Elders Jacob Spori and George C. Naegle for this mission. Elder Naegle had been laboring as a missionary in the Swiss and German Mission for some months, while Elder Spori had but recently arrived in England from Utah.

In obedience to this call Elders Spori and Naegle started for Turkey and traveled together as far as Genoa, Italy, but finding they had not sufficient means to take both to Constantinople, Elder Naegle returned to his former field of labor and Bro. Spori proceeded to Turkey alone, arriving in Constantinople in the morning of Dec. 30, 1884.

(Millennial Star Vol. 47, pages 43,47)

Elder Spori found the home of Mr. Vartooguan after some hunting and was kindly received, his host offering coffee and cigarettes and seeming very much astonished that Elder Spori asked to be excused for not accepting them. Mr. Vartooguan was an Armenian who spoke the Turkish and Armenian languages fluently, pretty good English and some French. He seemed to be well posted in history and the different religious denominations of the world. Mr. Vartooguan found a suitable room for Elder Spori to live, into which he moved on New Year's day, 1885. It was located in Pera, in Stamboul (Constantinople) in the center of the Armenian quarters. The price was two francs per day; food also was quite expensive.

Elder Spori writes: "I had a straight talk with Mr. Vartocguian, telling him that during the summer I was a wood-chopper, and at the time of speaking a humble man sent to preach the Gospel." Soon afterwards Mr. Vartooguan

and his wife and six children moved into a somewhat larger house, and Elder Spori boarded with them. Soon afterwards Mr. V. and his family were baptized

Elder Spori wrote from Constantinople under date of March 14, 1885:

"The 'Stamboul Gazette' published a letter of mine, and David Whitmer's last testimony. The reverends of the American Bible Society published a most slanderous article in their paper, to which, for the present, I have only answered with a polite letter, asking for an interview to clear up some of the mistakes. I have had several occasions to explain the Gospel and some talk about baptism after a while."

After this Elder Spori was introduced to several people, many of them doctors, priests, etc., many appearing much interested. Among these was a Dr. Mavian, who invited his relatives and friends, acting as translator for Elder Spori.

On the 8th of April, after having labored much during the past month with the German speaking people in Constantinople, Elder Spori went to visit an Armenian family and found the grandmother, aged over seventy years, very sick. He was asked to pray for her, which he did and returning a few days later, found the old lady much better.

On the 9th of April Bro. Vertooguian left Constantinople for Alexandria, Egypt, to accept a position as interpreter. This brother later apostatized.

On April 13th, Elder Spori visited the old lady mentioned above, and found that her recovery had caused "a veritable Turkish astonishment". A doctor called to see her, in order to convince himself of her recovery, and to him she bore testimony of her healing by the power of God.

On the 16th of April, Elder Spori, who was giving German lessons to assist his expenses, was visited by a wealthy young Armenian, who had been educated in England, and who was astonished that Elder Spori had learned to read the Turkish language in three months.

Under date of Aug. 29, 1885, Elder Spori wrote that he was taking

lessons in Turkish which he was able to read and understand with considerable ease. He had loaned several copies of the Book of Mormon in English and in the German languages. He gave lessons in English, German and French, in many cases, making no charge for the lessons as they gave him an opportunity for conversing upon the principles of the Gospel.

(Mill.Star Vol. 47: p.605)

Elder Spori wrote under date of Nov. 4, 1885, that there was a great mixing of different languages with the Turks. Some spoke half Turkish and half Armenian or Greek, and often two persons were heard talking together, one using Turkish and the other Armenian, or another tongue." Elder Spori adds: "Some Greeks are thinking and reading, and in the last few weeks some very intelligent Germans got interested in the work of God and are not only studying for themselves, but distributing tracts and declaring aloud: 'This Gospel makes an end of those churches that keep man in bondage ignorance and continual hatred'. A German who left for the Euphrates Valley wanted to take pamphlets with him as he has some friends there.*** Some time ago a young man from Roumania asked for pamphlets." Elder Spori, in the same letter, spoke of a Russian family, very educated people who, having been expelled from Russia, were giving French, Russian, German and music lessons in Constantinople. The husband said: "If my wife wants to be baptized, she has my consent", but she was in hopes that her husband would join her in the ordinance.

Some smart fellows, finding that the "Mormon" Elder could draw a crowd, commenced to preach, representing themselves as "Mormons" but this Russian gentleman, being present, said to the people: "These cannot be Mormons; there is only one here and he asks no alms.", which led to many calling on Elder Spori. (Mill.Star 47: 764)

On Sunday, Dec. 6, 1885, Elder Joseph M. Tanner, who had been called to labor with Elder Spori, arrived in Constantinople. Elder Tanner wrote:

"I find here that Bro. Spori has been very energetic in his labors, both in acquiring the Turkish language and promulgating the principles of the Gospel. The prospects so far as I can judge, are very good. He has settled in the German part of the city and has made many warm friends among the Germans, who are investigating earnestly the principles of the Gospel." (Mill.Star 48: 29)

Under date of Jan. 8, 1886, Elder Joseph M. Tanner wrote as follows:

"First of all we (Bro. Spori and himself) have secured a room where we can hold small meetings and receive calls from many who come to inquire about the 'Mormons', either for curiosity's sake, or for information, and it is rare that a day passes when we do not have from one to half a dozen callers. At present we are located in the German part of Pera and the most of our labors are conducted in German; then we frequently have missionary work in English and many opportunities are offered Bro. Spori for bearing his testimony in French. Missionary labor has not been extended as much in the Turkish language as we hope to have it in the not distant future.

Writing under date of Feb. 3, 1886, Elder Jacob Spori spoke of a large meeting which they had recently held in the hall of the German Working Men's Union. They had 200 invitations printed besides advertising in the newspapers. They had a large attendance at the meeting. (Mill.Star 48:108)

On Monday, March 8, 1886, Elder Francis M. Lyman jun. arrived in Constantinople to assist Elder Spori. (Mill.Star 48: 252)

On July 29, 1886, Elder Jacob Spori left Constantinople for Haifa, Palestine, at the suggestion of President Daniel H. Wells, in a letter recently received, and during the month of August following ^{Elder Spori} ~~he~~ arrived in Palestine as a Latter-day Saint missionary to that land. On Sunday, Aug 29th, he baptized and confirmed Johan George Grau, a German from Wurttemberg at Haifa, and three weeks later baptized Bro. Grau's wife, Magdalena Grau at the same place. (Haifa Record) (Jenson's Field Notes) (Mill.Star 48:555)

These were the first persons baptized by divine authority in Palestine.

Writing from Jaffa, Palestine, under date of Dec. 13, 1886, Elder Spori said: "The Gospel is gaining favor and some believers in different parts of this land." (Mill.Star 49: 14)

On Monday, Jan. 3, 1887, Elder Jacob Spori baptized and confirmed Maria Siebel at Haifa. She was born in Wurttemberg, Germany. (Haifa Record)

On Monday, Jan. 31, 1887, Elder Jacob Spori arrived in Constantinople from Palestine, where he had been laboring for some time and with considerable success among the German colonies; he had baptized three persons in Palestine.

On Wednesday, March 23, 1887, Elder Jacob Spori left Constantinople for Aion, expecting to spend some time in Switzerland en route.

Elder Jacob Spori was the pioneer of missionary work in Turkey and especially Syria, his work being largely among the German speaking people of the country. The number of persons baptized by Elder Spori is not on record but he made a number of friends who were helpful to Elders who followed him and who later raised up branches among the Armenian people in Syria.