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*“Visiting the Hafiz Ahmed Agha Library was an unexpected highlight of my holiday and research visit in Rhodes in 2025. I have been working on material related to this chapter since starting my PhD 25 years ago and still find there is so much to learn about the intercultural connections and legacies in the ‘Levant’. I also work in a library that is similarly having a conversation with many people about its past to build for the future. Manchester made its profits from enslaved people and underpaid workers and was the motor of the industrial revolution (and so climate change). The Portico Library was built from those profits and opened in 1806. It was founded to be a tolerant institution of learning and sharing of knowledge, but only for those male and wealthy enough to join it. Libraries are not silent places but hold the voices of those who have used them and those that couldn’t use them. By listening to both sets of voices and trying to understand them, I believe we can make libraries usable for all people. I hope that by contributing to this book, at the kind invitation of Tarık Tüten, I am promoting that belief and contributing to this **Conversation**.”*

Debbie Challis

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Portraying People and Rhodes

Mary Severn Newton and Gertrude Jekyll on holiday in 1863

‘It was such a pleasure to me to sit out in the open garden and paint.’

Mary Severn Newton to Claudia Gale, Letter, 24 November 1863¹

The skyline of Rhodes Town in Greece has domes of Ottoman (Turkish) mosques and minarets poking out from behind the medieval walls of the Frankish (Western European) Knights of St John. The snow topped mountains of Karia and Lycia in Turkey can be seen clearly across the sea from this Greek island in the East Aegean. Looking at the skyline of the Old Town and then out over the sea in April 2025, the views reminded me that the formation of national boundaries is complex and that people, with their own complex lives, are often caught by geopolitical tensions. I was visiting Rhodes with my family, both for a holiday and for research as I was on the trail of two female artists and an archaeologist, who had themselves holidayed in the island for two weeks in November 1863. On the surface the fortified town has changed little since the fifteenth century, but for the occasional minaret and monument. This superficial air of unchanging history is why so many tourists, such as myself and my family, visit and enormous cruise ships park in the harbour, from which hundreds disembark daily to gaze at the town for a few hours. Yet, thinking about the different names, changing empires and nation states needed to contextualise that view underlines how different visiting the island is in 2025 compared to visiting in 1863.

In 1863 Rhodes was part of the Ottoman Empire and had been so since 1522, when the Ottomans conquered the Western European Catholic Knights of the St John, who had used the island as a fortress to support the later crusades and enable pilgrims to get to Jerusalem. They also used it as a place from which to raid for Muslim slaves. The archaeologist Charles Thomas Newton, the artists Mary Severn Newton and Gertrude Jekyll crossed from Smyrna [Izmir] now in Turkey to Rhodes, now in Greece, and back again before moving onto Constantinople [Istanbul] – all part of the Ottoman Empire.² The Island of Rhodes was (and is) very much part of the ‘imagined political (and literary) space’ of the Levant, which, though there is general agreement that it stretches across the Eastern Mediterranean, is hard to physically quantify.³ Newton’s book *Travels and Discoveries in the Levant* (1865) uses the Levant to describe his time as vice-consul in Mitylene on Lesbos, acting consul on Rhodes and his time excavating in Bodrom, towards Didyma and Knidos. This elastic term is historical but leaves a legacy of contested pasts, presents and futures today.⁴

In 1863 Newton was Keeper of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum and returned to the Eastern Mediterranean to inspect excavations in Ephesus and elsewhere, though he also added details into the first volume of his travel journal. Accompanying

1 Birkenhead Collection – Severn Family Archive: Private Collections. With thanks to the descendants of Eleanor Furneaux.

2 The names used will be Newton for Charles Thomas Newton, Severn Newton for Ann Mary Severn Newton (she is known by a mixture of all those names) and Jekyll for Gertrude Jekyll. I will use the place names used by these nineteenth-century British travellers with the modern name in [] on first use.

3 John Darwin (2016), ‘The Levant as a Middle Ground’, in A. Yiangou, G. Kazamias & R. Holland (eds.) (2016), *The Greeks and the British in the Levant, 1800 – 1960. Between Empires and Nations*, Abington: Routledge, 11 – 24: 11

4 Robert Holland (2016), ‘Why the Levant?’. Yiangou et al., 25-38: 36-37.

him was his wife Mary Severn Newton, who was an accomplished professional artist and part of a family of artists – her father was John Severn, who is best known today for being with the poet John Keats when he died in Rome. They had met in 1859 when Newton commissioned her to draw the sculptures he had excavated at the British Museum and married in May 1861. The couple were part of a well-connected group of middle-class professionals working in the arts and (what we might call today) heritage. Severn Newton was friends with Gertrude Jekyll, who later became a garden designer and botanist but at that point was studying at the National School of Art in South Kensington. Newton was an ‘old friend of her father’ and Severn Newton asked Jekyll to accompany her and Newton to the Levant to be her companion. Jekyll accepted as Severn Newton was ‘one of the best and kindest friends I ever had’ and they kept a journal ‘illustrated by the two friends’.⁵ Social commonplace books and journals were a typical way of organising knowledge and solidifying friendships during the Victorian period.⁶

Journaling the Journey: Image and Words

Jekyll’s travel journal was reprinted in her nephew Francis’ posthumous memoir of her, published in 1934, which used some of Mary’s sketches as illustrations. However, I found a fuller account of the journal in the Severn Family Archive (Birkenhead Collection) as well as a letter on her time in Rhodes from Severn Newton to her older sister Claudia Gale as well as many sketches of their travels (FIGURE 1). The sketches Mary made of the travel were not landscapes or ‘typical’ oriental scenes but, reflecting her background as a portrait artist, of the party travelling, the people around them and domestic scenes. The drawings she made for her husband’s book were of antiquities, mainly drawn in the British Museum where they met, and one portrait. While scenes of Rhodes Town were etched for Newton’s book by her brothers Walter Severn and Arthur Severn from photographs by Dominic Ellis Colnaghi, who had accompanied Newton to Lesbos and Rhodes in the 1850s. Colnaghi was a pioneering photographer and the son of the art dealer Paul Colnaghi, who had commissioned Mary to copy pictures from 1853 onwards. This account of a holiday to Rhodes is therefore comprised from Jekyll’s journal, Severn Newton’s letter and sketches with an occasional reference to Newton’s book. This combination shows the differences in what the two women did and where they could go, in comparison to Newton and his male diplomatic and archaeological colleagues.

Travel writing has become notable as a ‘way of seeing’ with the stress on visual descriptions in what is a multi-sensory experience.⁷ I had this in mind when putting together Severn Newton’s words and images with Jekyll’s journal in my exhibition *Holiday Sketches: Two artists and an archaeologist go on holiday in 1863*, which was displayed at the Combined Classics Library, Senate House, University of London and then the Portico Library in Manchester in 2025, as well as a zine of their travels. I attempted to create a multi-sensory experience which on the one hand reflects the humorous domesticity of their travel and the other an act of cultural survival. Women’s travel writing ‘is not as rare as once thought’ but what is rare here and has survived is that personal details are kept and jokes about themselves and their fellow travellers included.⁸ The direct voices of the Greek and

Turkish people are absent, but Jekyll’s account and Severn Newton’s drawings put them back in the narrative, albeit indirectly and through the observation of two British female artists – a survival of sorts.

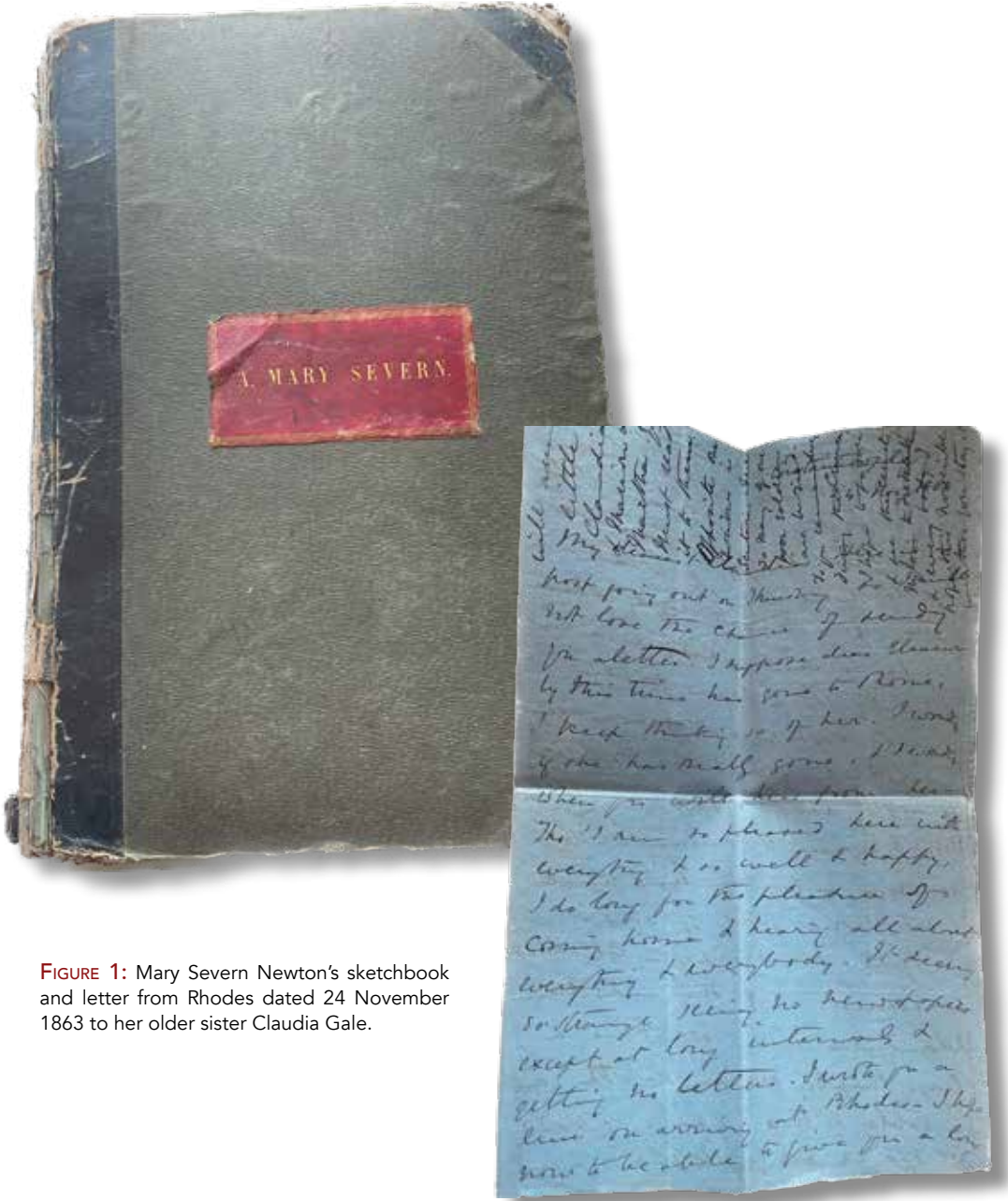


FIGURE 1: Mary Severn Newton’s sketchbook and letter from Rhodes dated 24 November 1863 to her older sister Claudia Gale.

5 Jekyll, Francis (1934), *Gertrude Jekyll. A Memoir*, London.

6 Hess, J.M. (2022), *How Romantics and Victorians Organized Information: Commonplace Books, Scrapbooks, and Albums*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

7 Ali, G., & Hill, S. P. (2018). The travelling eye: reading the visual in travel narratives. *Studies in Travel Writing*, 22(1), 1–15.

8 Mills, S. (1993). *Discourses of difference: an analysis of women’s travel writing and colonialism*, Abingdon: Routledge, 32.

Jekyll's account, unlike Newton's book, was not meant for publication. Neither were Mary's sketches or letters – the overall sketchbook in the archive shows a strong family and personal tradition of making sketches and sharing them as accounts together. There is a sense of immediacy in both the diary and the sketches as well as of domesticity – we don't have observations on the history of the places visited for example. What we do have is a sense of the nature of travel, which was rapidly changing, as they get on cramped train carriages through Germany and Italy. They left London on 13 October 1863 travelling via train through Paris, Stuttgart, Munich and Vienna reaching Trieste via the Semmering Pass on 20 October. Newton was tall and Mary's drawings of their travels via train captured the cramped conditions and his long legs, that had nowhere to go (FIGURE 2). The rapid expansion of railways in Europe and steamers through the Levant from Italy and France meant that the party benefitted from the mid-century growth of tourism.⁹



FIGURE 2: Charles Newton and Mary Severn on the train from London to Trieste on October 1863. Drawing by Mary Severn Newton.

They travelled with a steamer from the Austro-Hungarian shipping company. Jekyll recalls passing through Corfu as English troops are preparing to leave after a vote of unification with the Hellenic state by the Greek people. The islands had been under British occupation since the defeat of the French in 1815 and joined Greece in 1864. The party then boarded another steamer to Smyrna on 24 October and spent their time drawing – for example, on 29 October 1863 (FIGURE 3):

After breakfast the Captain got a group of Cretans to sit to us; they sat quite still and seemed to think it good fun. Early in the afternoon we got to Smyrna. The approach is beautiful, up a great arm of the sea, the southern shore especially fine – bold mountains plunging straight down into the sea.¹⁰



FIGURE 3: On the steamer to Smyrna drawing Cretans, October 1863.

The development of steamships 'revolutionised travel on the Mediterranean and the construction of railroad lines between oriental cities' for western European travellers leading to greater travel.¹¹ In fact, the women jointly recorded that this form of travel is changing the western edges of the Ottoman Empire:

There is a railway just opened from Smyrna to Aidin and worked by an English company. At the station we had a light breakfast of coffee and bread sprinkled with sesame. Two stations on we were joined by Mr. Wood, who is conducting some excavations at Ephesus. The plain where he is at work is two miles from the station and is so unhealthy that no one can live there. It is rather a shock when an English porter opens the carriage door and says 'Ephesus' (FIGURE 5).¹²

The well-known concept of 'contact zones' (in part) describes the way in which the observations made by travellers always tell us more about the travellers than those observed.¹³ Their observations on Jewish people in Smyrna and the tensions with Christians in Rhodes came during a time of great transition in the Ottoman Empire – the reforming Tanzimat period – with a focus and western European scrutiny on the rights of religious and ethnic minorities (or in the case of Rhodes, majorities as the Greek Orthodox population was a majority). During a few days in Smyrna, Severn Newton draws Jekyll being 'escorted through Smyrna by a poor relation of the Rothchild family' (FIGURE 4).

⁹ Pemble, John. (1987). *The Mediterranean passion: Victorians and Edwardians in the South*. Clarendon Press, 48

¹⁰ Jekyll (1863).

¹¹ Behdad, A. (1994). *Belated travelers. Orientalism in the age of colonial dissolution* Duke University Press, 35-36.

¹² Jekyll (1863).

¹³ Pratt, M. L. (2003). *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (2nd Edition). Taylor and Francis, 4.



FIGURE 4: Gertrude Jekyll in Smyrna, October 1863.
Drawing by Severn Newton.

This reference to the Jewish banking family denotes the man as Jewish and the picture shows him trying to sell fabric. The Anti-Semitic inference is that all Jewish people are the same, whether rich bankers or impoverished traders, whether in London or Smyrna. This gives us an insight into Severn Newton's view of Jewish people, not of those in the Ottoman Empire. Attitudes are shaped, as Aslı Çırakman puts it, 'by the immediate reality of the authors and travellers, the events of their time and different sorts of encounters with the Orient'.¹⁴ The thriving trade port city of Smyrna had the largest non-Muslim population in Turkey with quarters for Orthodox Christians, Armenians and Jews.

14 Çırakman, A. (2002). *From the "terror of the world" to the "sick man of Europe": European images of Ottoman empire and society from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth*, P. Lang, 31.

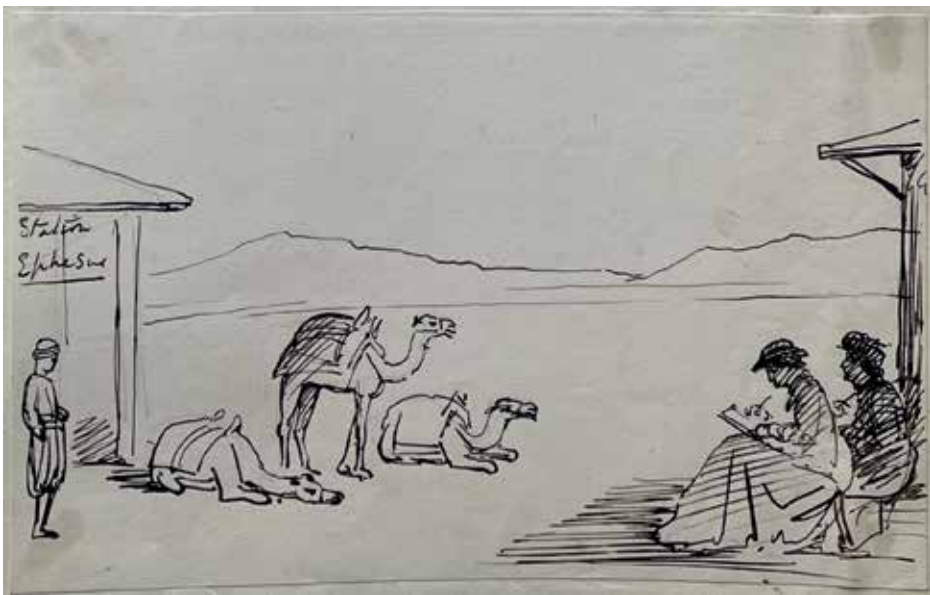


FIGURE 5: Ephesus, October 1863.
Drawing by Severn Newton.

A Holiday in Rhodes

On 31 October 1863, the party left Smyrna for Rhodes, after purchasing all they needed 'as it is difficult to get anything in Rhodes' and arrived the next day. While on the boat they received 'an invitation from the Pasha's daughter to make drawings in their enclosure', the two female artists went and found the Turkish women 'lying about on mattresses' with the daughter 'in her finest clothes'.¹⁵ Severn Newton wrote to her sister that:

I cannot tell you how we enjoyed ourselves. . . Charles was so right to take us there [Rhodes] for it was the only place we have been where we could get subjects to draw from easily & where we were quite at liberty and had no Franks to bother us, or pay us visits. Now Smyrna and Constantinople are more (in the Frankish quarters) like Paris, full of shops, people and noise. At Rhodes, it seemed as if the whole island was ours.¹⁶

Severn Newton, Newton and Jekyll stayed in the former Swedish Consulate in the Old Town of Rhodes in 1863. Gertrude describes walking around the fortifications and meeting a 'Bimbashi' – a senior military commander – who showed them inside some of the stores. The presence of military denotes an occupation, though a lengthy one that had been in place since 1522. The Bimbashi (Binbaşî or Major), who showed the artists around, was *Topçu Miralayı* (Colonel) Süleyman Bey who had spent time in England before taking the position in Rhodes.¹⁷ He was in charge in Rhodes in 1863 under the Ottoman Governor (and historian) Tayyazâde Atâ.

15 Jekyll (1863)
16 Mary Severn Newton to Claudia Gale, Letter, 24 November 1863,
17 With thanks to Tarik Tuten for this information.



FIGURE 6: Mary Severn Newton and Gertrude Jekyll in Rhodes port with earthquake stricken de Naillac Tower on the right, November 1863.



FIGURE 7: Mary Severn Newton and Gertrude Jekyll drawing a patient sitter in the garden, November 1863.

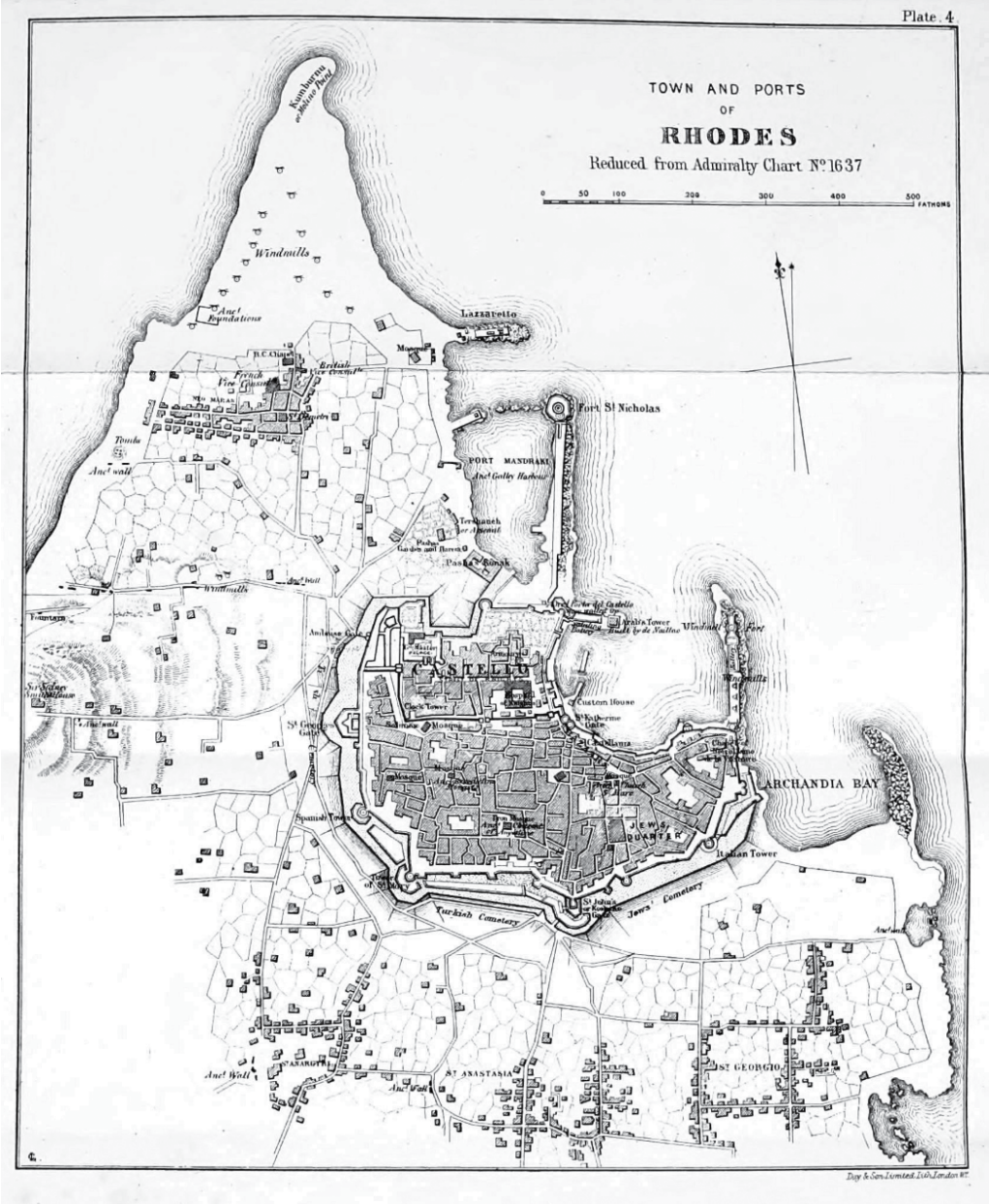


FIGURE 8: Map of RhodesTown, Plate 4 from *Travels & Discoveries in the Levant* by C. T. Newton, Day & Son, London, 1865

Severn Newton and Jekyll drew many different people, though they tended to socialise with the Turkish elite and the British Consul Alfred Biliotti and his family. Severn Newton wrote:

We sat in the open air all day, in the shade for the sun was very hot and we had to wear muslin scarf over our hats for our heat. In his [Panni] garden we painted Arabs, Turks, Turkish ladies, priests . . . It was such a pleasure to me to sit out in the open garden and paint.¹⁸

An Ottoman census carried out in 1884-6 records a population of 30,000 on Rhodes, with 20,711 Christians, 6,487 Muslims, 2690 Jews and 738 foreigners.¹⁹ The sorting of people by religion is historically linked to the rights accorded to different religious communities and the millet system, under which different religious groups organised their own laws. After the Ottoman conquest, the Turks took control of the main city, the Greeks lived outside the walls and the Jewish population lived in a quarter of the Old Town on the East. There had been Jewish people in Rhodes since the Roman period, though many of these left the Catholic controlled island after 1502 due to the persecution by the Iberian Inquisition. The inquisition led to many Spanish and Portugese Jews (Sephardic) leaving for the Ottoman Empire and the relative freedom and autonomy they had there. After 1522 they were encouraged to settle in Rhodes and became a vital part of the community. The map (FIGURE 8) - Plate 4 in Newton's *Travels and Discoveries* (1865) - shows Rhodes Town with the different millet areas marked.

Signor Panni was an Italian artisan who had been a soldier in the Bersaglieri Corps, so it is likely he had fought in the war for the Italian unification. By 1863 he lived in the former consulate and looked after them by finding them sitters and servants. Mary wrote to her sister Claudia that:

We had an old Greek woman to cook for us and a Jew man servant belonging to Signor Panni who waited on us. This good Jew Mordecai was perfect and Signor Panni, an old friend of Charles, gave up his whole time to us. He went with us to buy things and found people to sit to us. He was everything to us and Rhodes without Panni would be nothing.²⁰ (FIGURE 9)

Jekyll recorded the petty feuds between Maria, their Greek servant, and Mordecai – observing that Maria called him ‘that Hebrew’. There was tension between Greek and Jewish people, in part as the Jewish community got enhanced privileges, and in part due to Anti-Semitism. Generally, tensions were minor, but a ‘blood libel’ in 1840 led to a severe risk of violence against the Jewish community as a Greek boy went missing on the island. There were rumours that his blood had been drunk in a ceremony - the so-called ‘Blood Libel’.²¹ A serious uprising in Damascus had occurred at the same time over the same Anti-Semitic rumours but in the case of Rhodes both the Ottoman Government and Chief Rabbi in Constantinople intervened before extensive violence took hold. Their trusted servant Mordecai was Sephardic and spoke Spanish/Hebrew – Ladino. Jekyll recorded the family as having red hair and Mordecai and his family sat to be drawn for both artists.

18 Severn Newton (1863).

19 Kaurinkoski, Kira (2012), ‘The Muslim Communities in Kos and Rhodes: Reflections on Social Organization and Collective Identities in Contemporary Greece’, *Slavica Helingiensia* 41, Jouko Lindstedt & Max Wahlstrom (eds.), *Balkan Encounters - Old and New Identities in South-Eastern Europe*, Helsinki.

20 Severn Newton (1863).

21 Borovaya, O. (2021) ‘The Rhodes Blood Libel of 1840: Episode in the History of Ottoman Reforms’, *Jewish Social Studies*, 26 (3), 35–63. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2979/JEWISOCISTUD.26.3.02>.



FIGURE 9: Mary Severn Newton and Gertrude Jekyll at dinner at the Swedish Consulate in Rhodes with Maria, the Greek cook and Mordecai, the Jewish servant, November 1863.

Jekyll and Severn Newton had access to domestic spaces on the edges of the Ottoman Empire that men did not, notably the women's quarters or harem. For example, on 3 November they play a visit 'to a native family who are our near neighbours; a mother with three pretty daughters, Ermine, Zuleika and Fatma. Their faces are much painted, the eyebrows painted to meet between the eyes and their nails and finger tips stained red with henna.' (FIGURE 10)²²



FIGURE 10: Visit to a local Turkish family in Rhodes Town, 3 November 1863

22 Jekyll (1863).



FIGURE 11: Mary Severn Newton, Gertrude Jekyll and C. T. Newton visiting Hadji Hafiz' house in Rhodes Town. Women's quarter (*Harem*), above, with Ottoman architectural features that can still be seen in mansions like Topçubaşı and Hasan Paşa in Rhodes today, and Newton smoking with the Hadji, below.

These visits to the women's part of the houses are not eroticised encounters but cultural ones. On 11 November they visit 'the house of a rich Turk, Hadji Hafiz, while Mr. Newton sat and smoked with him, Mary and I visited his wife.' Jekyll described the women's quarter, where at one end some women were 'grinding corn and cooking', and at the other there was a divan with a wooden partition looking into a garden of orange trees (FIGURES 6-7). The way she describes their activities (or lack of them) contrasts the work and relative freedom to travel of Severn Newton and herself with their 'idleness' and position in the house. This indicated the tension between the supposed freedoms of European women and the pre-existing stereotypes about women in the Orient:²³

One must pity these poor women. They have no education and are perfectly idle; they do nothing but eat and chatter, dress and undress themselves, and paint their faces. They have no furniture except the divan. A small room at the side used for sleeping has also no furniture, only a pile of mattresses and quilts that are unrolled at night.²⁴

The women's quarter is segregated and the contrast between the ideal romantic monogamy of male-female couples, arguably at its height in the 1860s in Victorian Britain, clear. Erturkman-Aksay describes similar reactions from the visits of royals to harems in Istanbul in 1869:

European women approached the local women as victims who lead a life imprisoned in the harems and who have no daily activities other than lying and smoking on the sofas with their Oriental clothes.²⁵

Jekyll's journal is not a sexualised description, such as those often found in accounts by men or visual depictions, but a domestic one. The image shows the two artists sketching with another two women in European clothes, presumably the wives of the Biliotti brothers, talking to the Turkish women. Yet, the women, even elite women, were not idle as both Greek and Turkish women would be responsible for the clothes and textiles of their family.²⁶ The different styles of embroidery that varied from island to island and even town to town fascinated both the women. Severn-Newton describes being on the boat to Constantinople from Smyrna and doing embroidery:

On board our steamers we often have found Turkish Harems & I like the people. [...] They saw me working & I let them try the stitch & I was surprised to see how easily they learnt. They sat on their heels all around me. You would have laughed to have seen me teaching them how to do my slippers. I gave them needles and silk & they said they would try to do some like mine at Constantinople.²⁷

Jekyll described Madame Biliotti bringing 'a Greek peasant women' to show them how they made the silk lace from raw silk.

23 Graham-Brown (1988) 4.

24 Jekyll (1863).

25 B. S. Ertürkmen-Aksoy (2023). European women's gaze on both Ottoman Istanbul and the(ir) other. *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*: 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2023.2232562>

26 Helen Angelomatis-Tsougarakis (2016), 'Maidens and matrons, ladies and labourers: tradition and innovation in Greek women's lives in the Longue Durée', Anastasia Yiangou, George Kazamias and Robert Holland (eds.), *The Greeks and the British in the Levant, 1800-1960s: between empires and nations*, 63-79: 66.

27 Severn Newton (1863).

On 13 November the Archimandrite Nikandros, who was an old friend of Newton's, visited the holiday party in Rhodes Old Town. The drawing Severn Newton made of him is the only portrait included in her husband's *Travels and Researches* – Volume 1, Plate 12. In the book, Newton recorded going to visit the monastery on 4 May 1853, where he found him to be educated man, persecuted for trying to teach, writing that:

The classical purity of his Greek forms a striking contrast with the patois of the peasants round him. He has a small library of ancient authors, with which he appeared to be well acquainted.²⁸

Newton's contrast between the peasants and the educated priest is typical of his writing and owed much to his own class and religious bias. Severn Newton made a sketch of her drawing the Archimandrite with Newton earnestly speaking to him which, unlike Newton's book, placed them all in Rhodes in 1863 (FIGURE 12).



FIGURE 12: Newton talking to Archimandrite Nikandros while Severn Newton and Jekyll are drawing, 13 November 1863.

On 14 November they draw Mr Biliotti's Turkish canvass, then a 'young Negro' who had asked Biliotti (the English Consul) for 600 piastres 'to buy his freedom' so would do him favours, including being drawn by the two women. They were visited by the Pasha (Tayyarzâde Atâ) a few days later,

28 Newton, C. T. (1865), *Travels and Discoveries in the Levant*, London: Day & Son Limited, 152.

who asked that they draw some of his entourage. This was their last full day on Rhodes and Gertrude got up 'the root of some kind of Iris' in the cemetery: It shall go home with me and I shall hope to make it grow. Jekyll is best known today for becoming a professional garden designer and botanist, who used plants found and observed on her travels – she later travelled a great deal to France, Italy and Algeria. On 19 November they returned to Smyrna and Mary wrote:

We were sorry to leave Rhodes but Charles' holidays would not let us stay any longer.

From Smyrna they went to Constantinople, now Istanbul, where Newton carried out work and research for the British Museum, then to Athens, where they visited the former philhellenic fighter and historian George Finlay. Finlay wrote an account of the modern history of Greece and included an account of the conquest of Rhodes, in which he was sympathetic to the Ottoman colonisation of the island due to the slave raids of the Knights of St John. He had visited Newton when he was on Rhodes in 1855. They returned to Britain on a steamer via Messina in Sicily then to Marseilles in France and from there to Paris by train and boat and train to London on 26 December 1863.



FIGURE 13: Greek man in Rhodes, watercolour, Mary Severn Newton, November 1863

Severn-Newton died in January 1866 and very little of her work is in public galleries. There has been an often-cited assumption that she gave up her work as an artist on marriage and took to copying antiquities for her husband.²⁹ This could be because most of her work that is accessible is in her husband's book as her portraits before her marriage were for private clients or copying art works for studios. Only a month after her death, two of her watercolour sketches of a 'Levantine Lady' and a 'Jewess of Smyrna' made during this 1863 trip were displayed among 676 watercolours at the Dudley Gallery in the Egyptian Hall London. The Dudley Gallery had been founded in 1865 for the purpose of displaying watercolours and Severn Newton's elder brother Walter Severn

was the secretary.³⁰ It is clear that her work was going in a different direction. A tantalising glimpse of Severn Newton's work can be seen in her husband's Will, which he made in 1888 and updated a year later. There are many from the 1863 trip, as well as from visits to Rome and Naples and elsewhere

29 Nunn, P. Gerrish. (1987). *Victorian women artists*. Women's Press, 36.

30 Hopkinson, M. (2014). Drawings in the Dudley Gallery 'Black and white' exhibitions. *The British Art Journal*, 15, 16–24.

that they made in their short-married life together. One of which from Rhodes – their Jewish servant Mordecai and his family – is recorded as being in Newton’s front drawing room. Others from Rhodes include a ‘bearded Turk in Rhodes’, Tower of de Naillac after the earthquake, the mountains of Lycia from Rhodes, Three Turkish women, The Town Crier (formerly Executioner at Algiers), A Jewess, sketch in oil of three Turkish women in Cemetery and sketch in oil Greek women seated among Cypress Trees. The only colour picture I have so far seen, which happens to be a watercolour is this one from Rhodes, which is in a sketchbook in the family archive (FIGURE 13)

Tracing the 1863 holiday to Rhodes during a holiday in 2025

I decided last year that our family holiday would be in Rhodes so I could combine research with sunshine and relaxation. Last year my son and daughter requested to go to Athens to see why I loved the Eastern Mediterranean so much. Fortunately, they liked the city (and the nearby beaches) and wanted to see more of Greece and Turkey, as long as beaches and stopping for long breaks at laid back cafes was involved. I could promise all that at Rhodes and the snorkelling gear took up far more room in the suitcase than my books did. My intention was not just to go to the places that the 1863 tourists did but to trace the different communities of people in the architectural fabric and things they left behind. I was aware that Rhodes had been part of a different Empire before becoming part of Greece in 1947. The geopolitics of changing Empires and States as well as two world wars and their aftermath obviously had an impact on the people who lived there. Despite Rhodes being majority Greek in terms of population, Severn Newton and Jekyll mainly wrote about the Jewish and Turkish people they met, mainly as they were staying in the Old Town where those communities lived. The vulnerability of minorities associated with the old colonial power of the Ottoman Empire is clearly seen in Rhodes and no community was more vulnerable than the Jewish people in the 1930s and 40s.³¹

Rhodes remained part of the Ottoman Empire until 1912, when the Italians occupied the Dodecanese during the Italian-Ottoman War 1911-12 and added these islands to the Italian Empire. This occupation was only internationally ratified in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, in part as the Italians fought alongside the winning Allies in World War One (1914-18). The Art Deco buildings around the ‘new town’ of Rhodes and near Mandraki harbour are evidence of this occupation – the aquarian is perhaps the prettiest and most colourful. Under the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini (dictator of Italy 1922-43), the Italian occupation of the island gradually became a serious problem for the Jewish community. In 1938 Racial Laws, based on those in Germany, stripped Jews of their assets, banned them from working in most professions and prohibited sexual relations with non-Jewish people. The arrival of Cesare Mariade de Vecchi, a hardline fascist and friend of Mussolini, as governor in 1936 meant increased persecution of Jewish people on the island, including the removal of Jewish gravestones from mixed cemeteries. Less seriously, de Vecchi also rebuilt the Grand Master’s Palace with Roman mosaics from neighbouring Kos and crude grandiose architecture and furnishings for a visit by Mussolini that never happened.

Italy entered the Second World War in 1940 on the side of Germany and invaded Greece. After Italian surrender to the Allies in 1943, Germans and hardline Italian fascists occupied Rhodes and won a vicious war against the Italian army in the Battle of Rhodes. On 23 July 1944, the SS rounded

Jewish people up in a square on the edge of the former Jewish quarter of the Old Town and deported them to Athens and from there to Auschwitz. Of the 1,604 people deported, only 150 survived.³² The square is now called the Square of the Hebrew Martyrs and a sombre black memorial inscribed in different languages stands under the shade of gnarled trees that seem knotted together. In the last remaining synagogue in use on Rhodes, the Kahal Shalom Synagogue, a memorial lists the names of all those deported – entire families and all ages. I did not know their servant Mordecai’s second name so could not trace whether descendants of his family, whom Severn Newton had painted, were among those deported or whether, like many others, they had emigrated. The adjoining museum did give me a sense of Mordecai’s life in Rhodes through a well interpreted display of clothes, objects and papers relating to Jewish people.

The formation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 meant many Muslim Turkish people emigrated from Rhodes to the neighbouring mainland of Turkey during the Italian occupation of the island. A monument to the Allied troops who fought the occupying German army stands in Mandraki, near to the Greek Orthodox Cathedral. The German occupation of Rhodes in 1944-45 was brutal: the civilian population was starved and the island was used to house Italian (and other) Prisoners of War. Glimpses of the plight of the starving people on Rhodes are found in Lawrence Durrell’s *Reflections of a Marine Venus* (1953/1960), an account of his time in Rhodes as part of the British army in 1945-47 and his life in Villa Cleobolus, a picturesque yellow villa opposite an Ottoman cemetery. The British governed the island after World War Two until 1947, when Rhodes became part of the Greek State. The conflict in Cyprus in 1974 and various incidents between Greece and Turkey since 1948 have added to further emigration by Muslim Turks from Rhodes. However, there is still a significant Muslim population, which has been added to by refugees from the Syrian conflict as well as a rise in tourism and foreign residents.

There are many obvious traces of the Ottomans around Rhodes Old Town, whether mosques, baths, houses or additional fortifications on the walls. However, it was a recent (in terms of the Ottoman Empire) building that caught my attention. The Hafiz Ahmed Aga Library is opposite the Suleiman Mosque and had been opened in 1793, roughly 10 years before my current place of work the Portico Library in Manchester. This closeness in dates struck me as the way in which historic libraries – particularly those from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – are often described in Britain as a Western European expression of the Enlightenment with their role in gathering and sharing of knowledge. My children were more interested in the fluffy black and white cat, who was guarding the entrance of this ripe peach coloured building. We visited on our last day in Rhodes and found a fruitful oasis of greenery and calm, filled with loquat, lemon, orange, mandarin, banana and date trees. The similarity between stepping away from the busy streets of Rhodes with entering the calmness of the Portico amid the bustling streets of Manchester also struck me.

The main building houses a cool white study room with a dome, decorated by yellow stars on white with sky blue in the centre. Ottoman maps of Rhodes are displayed on the walls and behind the glass at the back are the 1256 books of Islamic learning, hand-written in Arabic and bound in with gorgeous calligraphy on the covers. A fountain is inscribed to the founder Hafiz Ahmed Aga, who was born in Rhodes and became a senior official in the Ottoman Empire. He established the library for use by those who could read Arabic as well as for classes teaching Muslim Turkish children and adults Arabic. The library has a great many religious texts, unlike the Portico, but also

31 Yiangou, A., Kazamias, G., & Holland, R. (2016), ‘Introduction’, in A. Yiangou, G. Kazamias & R. Holland, R. (eds.) (2016), *The Greeks and the British in the Levant, 1800 – 1960. Between Empires and Nations*, Abington: Routledge, 1-7.

32 This matches the awful statistic that 90 % of all Jewish people from Greece were murdered, with the vast majority sent to the Gas Chambers on arrival. Mazower, M. (1993), *Inside Hitler’s Greece: the experience of occupation, 1941-44*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Arabic texts of science and literature. Like the Portico, this library also had a connection to slavery but rather than being funded by the profits of enslaved labour, the founder left money for the rescue and purchase of Muslim people who were enslaved by the Knights of St John on Malta. (The Knights made money from selling people or using their labour and took them in raids on North Africa.) The Ottoman Empire did, of course, have and use enslaved people but they were not allowed to enslave people who were (already) Muslim.



FIGURE 14: Hafiz Ahmed Agha Library, the family enjoying the shade of the original classroom, loquat tree and the water well while patiently waiting for the author, April 2025.

Returning to Manchester, I looked at the books I had chosen for the new version of my exhibition Holiday Sketches that I was updating for display at the Portico Library, which was to be informed by my holiday to Rhodes. There are many books about the Ottoman Empire in the Portico – no surprise given the political and economic interest in the Levant during the long nineteenth century. Manchester grew its cotton exports to Smyrna threefold from 1800 to 1830. Newton's own book *Travels and Researches* is in the collection, as are all those on Greek and Ottoman history by his friend George Finlay. My favourite, though, is one on women in the Ottoman empire by Lucy Garnett and John Stuart-Glennie (1891), *The women of Turkey and their Folklore: with concluding chapters on the origins of matriarchy; the Jewish and Moslem women*. Lucy Mary Jane Garnett was a folklorist and expert on the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire, and travelled across the Middle East and Greece, sometimes with Scottish folklorist John Stuart-Glennie. Like Mary and Gertrude, almost thirty years earlier, Garnett took advantage of her access as a woman to female only spaces and recorded how Turkish, Jewish, Kurdish and traveller women lived. She observed that for most travellers in the Ottoman Empire, 'women seem not to have existed'. Displaying this book with Severn Newton's images and Jekyll's text puts the women back into existence.



FIGURE 15: Turkish women in Rhodes, Mary Severn Newton, November 1863

Reflecting on this use of books and the similarities (and differences) between the Portico Library and that of the Hafiz Ahmed Agha Library makes me value the conversations we can have across libraries. Conversations in the library are important and so are those between them as these are where connections between different ways of thinking, cultures and people are made and can lead to greater understanding and empathy.

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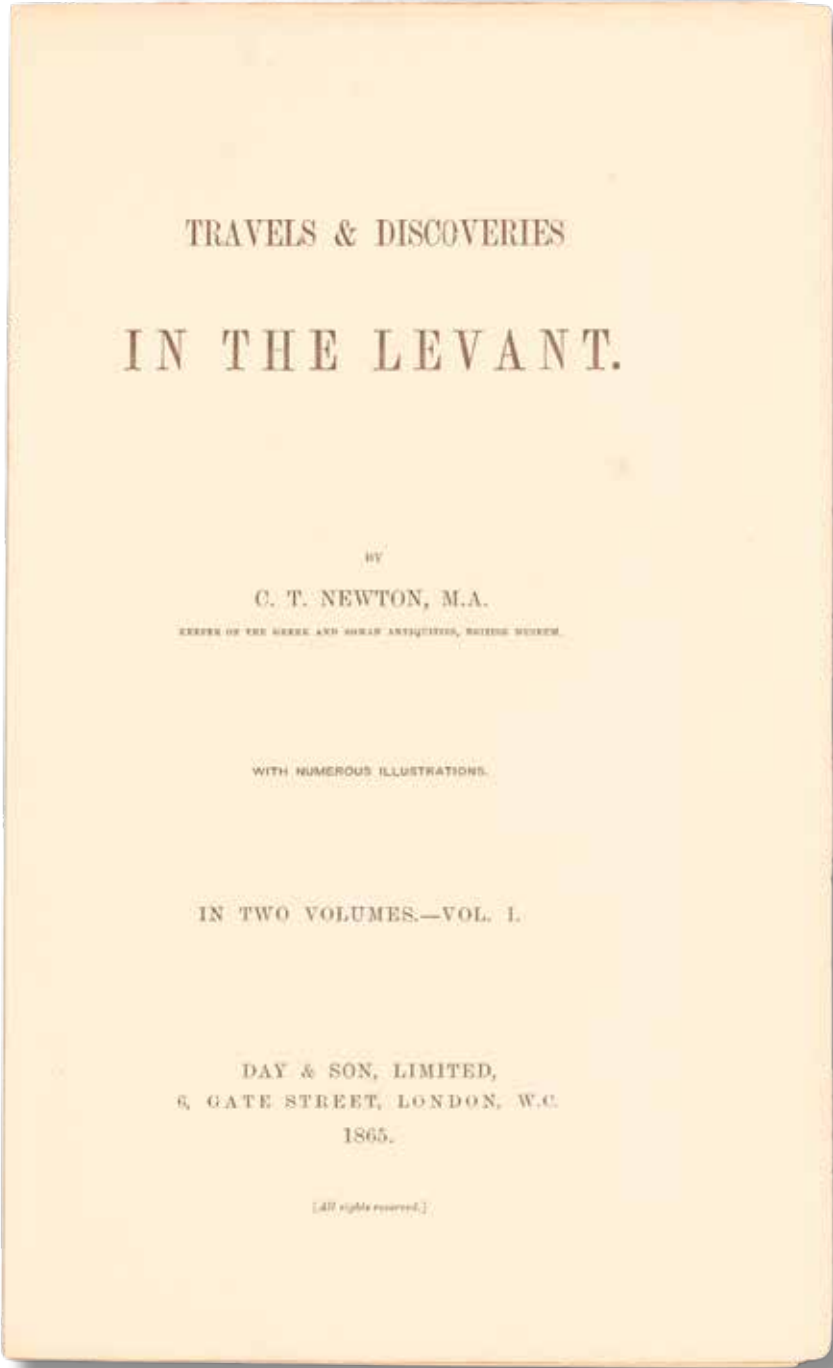


FIGURE 16: Cover of Charles Thomas Newton's 1865 book in two volumes, *Travels & Discoveries in the Levant*, published by Day & Son in London.