

**Oxford DNB: September 2020**

Welcome to the sixty-sixth update of the *Oxford DNB*, which comprises seventeen new articles, containing sixteen newly-added lives and two revisited lives, accompanied by three portrait likenesses. The new articles have a special focus on lives of Britons connected with the Middle East and the mainland of Europe.

From September 2020, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford DNB)* offers biographies of 63,798 men and women who have shaped the British past, contained in 61,489 articles. 11,803 biographies include a portrait image of the subject – researched in partnership with the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Most public libraries across the UK subscribe to the *Oxford DNB*, which means you can access the complete dictionary for free via your local library. Libraries offer 'remote access' that enables you to log in at any time at home (or anywhere you have internet access). Elsewhere, the *Oxford DNB* is available online in schools, colleges, universities, and other institutions worldwide. Full details of participating British

public libraries, and how to gain access to the complete dictionary, are available [here](#).

### **September 2020: summary of newly-added content**

Four of the newly-added biographies record lives spent in promoting British interests in the Middle East and within the Ottoman empire. The London-born merchant **Samuel Briggs (1776-1868)** was the Levant Company's consul in Alexandria until 1810, and continued after then to develop relations between Britain and the Ottoman governor of Egypt, Mehmet Ali, who in turn gave Briggs's firm the right of sale of Egyptian cotton in Britain. The Briggs firm remained the best-connected and most influential merchants in Egypt, and secured the building of St Mark's church in Alexandria, the first Anglican church in the Ottoman empire outside consular property. An officer in the East India Company service, **Robert Taylor (1788-1852)** was attached to the British residency in the Persian Gulf at Bushehr, where he married an Armenian woman, before becoming in 1819 the Company's agent in Basra, moving the residency to Baghdad in order to cultivate the Ottoman pasha. His residency building in Baghdad was second only in grandeur to the pasha's palace. He developed steam navigation on the Mesopotamian rivers, facilitating commercial connections with India. He collected

oriental manuscripts, which were later acquired by the British Museum, as was the clay tablet, later known as the Taylor Prism, which proved a major aid to the decipherment of cuneiform. The son of a London silk merchant, **James Brant (1789-1861)** joined to the Smyrna branch of the merchant business of his uncles, and saw the opportunities for trade with Persia from Trebizond (Trabzon) on the Black Sea. He established a British consulate there in 1830, and went on to encourage the establishment of British consulates in the Ottoman provinces close to the borders with Russia. In 1837 he became consul at Erzurum in Eastern Anatolia, acting as a point of information for the British government on Russian threat to the Ottoman empire. In 1857 he moved to the Damascus consulate where he protected Christian Maronites from attacks by the Druze. Born into a Scottish landowning family, the army officer **James Henry Skene (1812-1886)** married a Greek woman, settled in Greece, and travelled in the Balkans and Anatolia, becoming in 1852 British vice consul in Constantinople with responsibility for commercial interests, and in 1857 became consul in Aleppo, where he reported on Ottoman rule, but was decreasingly assiduous. He retired, bankrupt, in 1879, going on to write a much-cited, but unreliable book based on his experience in Constantinople during the Crimean war.

In 1838 the Prussian-born Jewish convert to Protestant Christianity, who in 1847 became the first Jewish ordinand of the Church of Scotland, **Nathan Davis (1819-1882)** joined a Christian mission to the Jews of the Ottoman province of Tunis, where he gained the confidence of the future ruling bey, and came to enjoy privileged knowledge of the country. His mission ended in 1849 in the face of Jewish opposition in Tunis and the hostility of the British consul. With the bey's permission, he returned to Tunis in 1856 where he undertook archaeological excavations at Carthage until 1859, sending three shipments of finds to the British Museum. More is now known of his origins and work, and he is among the revisited lives included in this release. British communications in North Africa were strengthened by **Margaret Susan Creswell (1847-1936)**, who succeeded her father as postmistress of Gibraltar in 1877. She expanded the British postal service in Morocco from a single postal agency in Tangier to create a network of nine agencies, all of which used Gibraltar postage stamps and which, until 1892, were the service of choice for expatriate communities of all nationalities in Morocco. Her responsibilities in Gibraltar included superintendence of the government telegraph and of a savings bank, and she was the first colonial postmaster to see and approve stamp designs prior to printing. After her retirement in 1907 she retired to

the family property in Campamento across the border in Spain. A Briton who settled in Spain at the end of the twentieth century, **Michael Charles Jacobs (1952-2014)** described the village that he made his home in his 2003 novel, *The Factory of Light*. Born in Genoa, of Irish, Jewish, and Sicilian ancestry, he was brought up in Hampstead and abandoned his early academic aspirations in the field of art history and turned to travel writing.

Four biographies describe the work of compilers and writers. The translator and language teacher **John Eliot (fl. 1562?-1593)** appears in 1589 as the translator into English of a set of French political pamphlets for the London printer John Wolfe. Among the ensuing flurry of publications, he wrote *The Survey or Topographical Description of France* (1592), a guide to the geography and topography of France. His best-known work, was *Otho-Epia Gallica* (1593), a manual for English learners of French, which referred to the tensions between the English and French immigrant teachers of French in London. It gives clues to Eliot's otherwise shadowy background, suggesting that he had been in Rome and studied and taught in France. His birth and death dates are unknown. The Italian inventor, librarian, and former priest **Andrea Crestadoro (1808-1879)**, whose life is also reassessed in this update, came to England in 1849 to promote

his mechanical inventions, but in the following decade found greater success in compiling book catalogues, using the innovation of keyword indexing in his bibliographies. He produced for the Manchester Free Libraries Committee the printed catalogue of its reference library with 57,000 entries in under two years. On the strength of it he was appointed chief librarian at the Manchester library, ‘the British Museum library of the north’. Another energetic compiler was the German-born orientalist and lexicographer **Francis Joseph Steingass (1825-1902)** who arrived in Britain in 1873 and taught in Birmingham before becoming a lecturer at the Oriental Institute, Woking. During the course of a decade he compiled three dictionaries, an *English-Arabic dictionary* (1882), an *Arabic-English dictionary* (1884), and his best-known work, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* (1892). Running to 1,539 pages, its importance reflected both the language’s privileged status in South Asia and its value for civil servants in India, as well as the contemporary fascination with Persian literature. It was not a profitable venture and in later life he was reliant on grants from the Royal Literary Fund. Born in Breslev, Poland, the son of a rabbi and ritual slaughterer, **Chaim Icyk Bermant (1929-1998)** spent his early childhood in Latvia before, aged eight, he moved with his family to Glasgow, where he rapidly

learned English in addition to the Russian, Yiddish, and Latvian of his early life. In 1961 he became a feature writer on the *Jewish Chronicle*, where he became established as a commentator on Anglo-Jewry, and also wrote twenty-five novels.

Transnational organizations in Europe form the themes of three of the newly-added lives. In 1238 **Elerius (d. in or after 1264)**, a Benedictine monk of the Norman abbey of Fécamp, and probably himself born in France, was installed as head of Cogges priory, Oxfordshire, and acted as bailiff for Fécamp's estates in England. An able administrator, he was recruited by Henry III to oversee surveys of royal estates and maximize the king's revenues. In 1251 he became abbot of Pershore, Worcestershire, a Benedictine monastery whose interests he effectively advanced. One of his acts as abbot was to arrange in 1258 for a mutual grant of confraternity by Pershore and Fécamp, with each house undertaking to celebrate masses for the souls of the abbots and monks of the other. Born in Prussia, **Sir Max Leonard Waechter (1827-1924)** settled in England in 1859, entering business as an import and export merchant in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and London, his partnership becoming sole agent for the distribution in the UK of petroleum from the Caspian oil fields. After his retirement from business in the early

twentieth century, he promoted philanthropic projects, for which he was knighted in 1902. Having seen the growth of anti-British sentiment in his native Germany he embarked on a campaign to promote European federation as a means to preserve peace. His scheme for a United States of Europe was widely promoted on the eve of the First World War. His son **Sir Harry Sedan Waechter, first baronet (1871-1929)** was created a baronet in 1911 in recognition of his support for military reserve forces, and was also a benefactor of the Museum of London. Intelligence officer **Harold Taplin (Shergy) Shergold (1915-2000)** joined the Secret Intelligence Service in 1947 following distinguished war service with the 8th Army. In charge of agent networks operating in the former Baltic states, he found them penetrated by the KGB, and the remaining British networks in eastern Europe were shut down. As controller of Sovbloc, in charge of SIS operations against the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, Shergold created the tradecraft to run individual agents securely behind the iron curtain, and proved that important and reliable evidence could be obtained from such sources. Three future heads of the SIS served under him, and his methods were included in the service's basic training courses. Finally, this update adds the lives of three fellows of the British Academy who undertook archaeological work in the

Middle East. After studying Sumerian in 1919, **Cyril John Gadd (1893-1969)** was appointed to an assistant keepership in the Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities at the British Museum, where he remained until 1955, latterly as keeper. He copied and published editions of the museum's cuneiform inscriptions, his 1923 edition of a Babylonian chronicle fixing the date of the fall of Nineveh (612 bc). He took part in British excavations at Ur and Al-Ubaid in southern Iraq (1923) and at Alalakh in southern Turkey (1946), and the Assyrian city of Nimrud, Iraq (1952). Trained as an architect, **Seton Howard Frederick Lloyd (1902-1996)** became an archaeologist in 1929, and spent twenty years on excavations by the Chicago Oriental Institute in the Dyala region east of Baghdad, recording the structure of Sennacherib's aqueduct at Jerwan, and co-authoring excavation reports. From 1939 to 1949 he was adviser to the directorate of antiquities in Baghdad, and from 1949 to 1960 was director of the new British Institute of Archaeology in Turkey. **(Edward Ernest) David Michael Oates (1927-2004)** studied classics at Cambridge before switching to archaeology and anthropology, moving to the British School at Rome where he worked on Roman Tripolitania. From 1955 he worked at Nimrud, where he worked with his wife, an American archaeologist, with whom he wrote *The Rise of*

*Civilisation* (1976), a popular account of Mesopotamia down to 3000 bc. He became joint director of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq, excavating at Rimah, an Assyrian site of the second millennium bc, and then at Brak, in Syria, a city by the fifth millennium bc.

Likenesses have been added to accompany three existing articles: the puppeteers **Vlasta Dalibor (1921-2016)** and **Jan Dalibor (1921-2013)**, who had escaped Soviet-controlled Czechoslovakia and found refuge in England where they developed the highly popular puppet piglets, Pinky and Perky; the Victorian genre and historical painter, best known for his trilogy depicting marital breakdown, *Past and Present*, **Leopold Augustus Egg (1816-1863)**, the son of an immigrant from Alsace and who died in Algiers; and the electrical engineer and suffragist, **Hertha Ayrton (1854-1923)**, whose father had come to England from Poland to escape anti-Jewish pogroms.