

Yaakov Saphir and his acquaintanceship with the sages of Central Yemen

Aharon Gaimani

Rabbi Yaakov Saphir Halevi was born in the Vilna district of Lithuania, and as a child in 1832, his family immigrated to the land of Israel, where they belonged to the Perushim circle of students of the Vilna HaGaon. Rabbi Saphir visited the various communities in central Yemen in 1859 and stayed there for approximately eight and a half months, at great risk to himself. He documented his visits in his book *Even Sapir*, printed in 1866. This book earned him great publicity, and through it the Jews of the world became acquainted with the lifestyles of the Jews in Yemen.

Rabbi Saphir showed a special interest in the great Yemenite sages, chronicling their lifestyles, leadership, and their spiritual heritage, which he bore witness to in the numerous communities he visited in central Yemen, admiring the rich and ancient spiritual heritage of the Yemenite Jews. For example, when he met the rabbi of the community Jarrah, Rabbi Yosef ben Said, he admired their way of life, combining Torah and work, as well as Rabbi ben Said's knowledge in the Talmud and its commentators, as found among the other great sages of Israel. Furthermore, when he met the Av Beit Din (the Chief Justice) of the Yemenite Community, Rabbi Suleiman Kara, who resided in the capital of Sana'a, he was impressed by the way he led the community, his prodigious wisdom, and his rich library of important manuscripts.

In this article, the author reveals glosses written by Rabbi Shalom Alsich Halevi, one of the great Yemenite sages, in the issues of Rabbi Yaakov Saphir's book, which was initially published in 1866 in the city of Lyck in Prussia.