SECTION II
DEMOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFUSION
THE JEWISH POPULATION OF IRAN IN THE YEAR 1868, ACCORDING TO A REPORT SUBMITTED BY THE BRITISH LEGATION IN TEHRAN ON APRIL 28, 1868

Introduction

The task of determining or even cautiously estimating the size of the Jewish population of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century confronts the researcher with major objective difficulties. The obstacles and difficulties involved result both from a lack of appropriate sources as well as insufficient research and studies in the field. As far as the first half of the nineteenth century is concerned, our sources of information consist primarily of partial accounts and estimates provided mostly by Jewish travelers, Christian missionaries and some European visitors and officials (mainly British), who had visited some, but not all of the Jewish communities and settlements of Iran. The latter travelers and officials have provided us with information with regard to the number of Jewish individuals (or the number of Jewish families and houses) they found in the localities they visited.

Similar to other areas and subjects of research concerning the internal lives and communal organization of the Iranian Jews during the entire length of the nineteenth century, we do not possess any communal registers or records that might provide us with figures and data concerning the Jews living in the various communities and settlements across Iran’s vast territories. Due to the absence of such communal records, and given the lack or inaccessibility of state archives and registers relevant to the Jews (including the fact that throughout the nineteenth century no complete population census was conducted by Iran’s central government), the researcher is compelled to rely mainly on the accounts and testimonies of foreign sources. As it was already pointed out in the notes and explanations accompanying some of the previous sources and documents in this book, the foreign and particularly Jewish-European sources relevant to the Jewish communities of Iran grew considerably and progressively during the second half of the nineteenth century. This important body of foreign and European sources increased particularly