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Faculty of Theology and Religion

The Reception of Maimonides in 17th Century England

Abigail Hayton

St. John's College



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בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁנָּתַן מִחַכְמָתוֹ לְבָשָׂר וָדָם

Blessed are you our Lord God, who has given from his wisdom to flesh and blood.

For my Dad, Thomas Clive Hayton.

I wish you were here to see it.

A disclaimer

Si forte errantem, venia indignum non censeo, quod, non gloriae, lucri, contentions, aut novandi studio ductus, laboris hujusce molestiam tulerim. Sola veritatis investigatio, nostri pretiumque et causa laboris. Et si quid mihi scripsisse contigerit, unde Reipublicae Literariae census auctior, vel aliqua Scripturae loca clariora fiant, me operae legibus illis insumptae, mihi licet inutilis, nunquam poenitebit.¹

Should I perchance be found in error, I do not deem myself worthy of pardon, for I undertook the burden of this labour not out of a desire for glory, profit, controversy, or novelty, but solely from a commitment to the pursuit of truth, which is both the value and the purpose of my endeavour. And if it should happen that I have written anything that enlarges the treasury of the Republic of Letters, or renders some passages of Scripture clearer, I shall never regret the effort devoted to these studies, even though it may bring me no personal benefit.

¹ John Spencer, *De Legibus hebraeorum et ritualibus et earum rationibus libri tres primo, fuse agitur de rationibus legum Judaicarum generalibus* (Cambridge, 1685), sig. A4v.

Short Abstract

This thesis argues that Maimonides's reception was critical to the development of the historical-contextual scholarship of the New Testament and a new 'anthropological' approach to the Old Testament. It traces the reception of the writings of Moses Maimonides in seventeenth century England through the writings of several key scholars, chief amongst them Henry Ainsworth, John Selden, John Lightfoot, Edward Pococke and John Spencer. It argues that Maimonides was particularly significant for this period because he gave Christians access both to the contents of the Law and to its pre-history. These were subjects of significant contemporary confessional concern through the rise of Laudianism and its contestation, the vicissitudes of the Civil War and inter-regnum periods and then the Restoration of the monarchy and the national Church in 1660 on explicitly anti-Puritan grounds. Maimonides is shown to have been significant both for New Testament scholarship prior to and during the Civil War and inter-regnum period and for Old Testament scholarship in the post-Restoration era. His reception is argued to have proceeded in three stages – firstly through a limited readership in Latin, and to a lesser extent in Hebrew in the sixteenth century, followed by an 'Hebraic' reception in the first half of the seventeenth century which continued to develop and evolve alongside a 'multilingual' Judeo-Arabic reception which emerges thanks to advances in Oriental scholarship in the 1650s. Maimonides's particular appeal to these scholars is found to be twofold. Firstly, his legal digest, the *Mishneh Torah* is shown to have been particularly popular on account of the infrequency of its references to the much-maligned Talmud. Secondly Maimonides's philosophical classic, the *Moreh Nebukhim* is shown to have offered an account of the historical context within which was understood to justify its non-observance by Christians.

Long Abstract

This thesis argues that Maimonides's reception was critical to the development of the historical-contextual scholarship of the New Testament and to a new 'anthropological' approach to the Old Testament.

Maimonides's legal digest, the *Mishneh Torah* is shown to have been particularly significant for the development of New Testament scholarship on account of its clear delineation of the Mosaic Law. The significance of the Law for New Testament scholarship was twofold. Firstly, Jesus and his disciples lived their entire lives within a cultural context governed by the Law. They had observed the Sabbath, circumcised their sons and celebrated Passover. In order to understand their lives, the Law was essential. It had a further significance, however, which was typological. The Law was understood to prefigure Christ's ministry, death and resurrection. The study of the Law was therefore essential to the binding together of the Old and New Testaments.

Maimonides's philosophical classic, the *Moreh Nebukhim* is found to have an altogether different, and more radical, reception. Whilst this work had been studied by Christians for centuries prior such studies had tended to emphasise its theological content. From mid-century on, Christians, especially in England grew fascinated with the third book of the *Moreh* which offers what I have termed a 'pre-history' of the Law, or what Jews usually referred to as *Ta'amei Hamitzvot* (טעמײַ הַמִּצְוֹת), an account of the reasons for the commandments. This book explained the Law in terms of a mysterious people called the Sabeans, whose idolatrous practices the ancient Hebrews needed to be coaxed out of. The Law was the form this 'coaxing out' took. This account of the Law's origins was taken especially seriously by mid-century Christians who, thanks to advances in Oriental scholarship, had access to historical materials by which Maimonides's account of the Law could be verified, expounded upon and used to discover the Old Testament anew. That the

Old Testament was to be revisited in this way was on account of both the threat posed by new scholarly discoveries to the historicity of the biblical narrative and the particularly English concern with establishing the proper place of ritual within the recently Restored national church.

Both of the facets of Maimonides's *oeuvre* which appealed particularly to seventeenth century English scholars, his very clear and precise account of the Law and his innovative reading of its pre-history, had been the cause of significant controversy within the Jewish world. The *Mishneh Torah* had been criticised for the marked absence of Talmudic references therein and the historical part of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, which had made the Law a mere conduit for the expurgation of idolatry, had been widely rejected. Whilst Maimonides's first English readers had presumed him to have been rejected by his native community on this account, later readers of both the Hebraic and multilingual Maimonideses understood this was not the case. Mindful, to varying degrees, of intra-Jewish controversy, they consistently chose to centre Maimonides as the most authoritative exponent of Jewish law and philosophy.

This thesis proceeds through the careful analysis of the work of five English scholars for whom the writings of Maimonides were central. These are Henry Ainsworth, John Selden, John Lightfoot, Edward Pococke and John Spencer. Ainsworth is shown to have used the *Mishneh Torah* in order to develop a densely typological reading of the Old Testament. This finding refutes the account of Richard Muller who has presented Ainsworth as a 'literal-grammatical scholar' who neither emphasised typological readings nor dogmatic concerns. John Lightfoot on the other hand is shown to have used the *Mishneh Torah* in a much more nuanced way, as a typological manual of sorts, as Ainsworth had, but also as an historical account of the Law as it would have applied during the Second Temple period. John Selden, much like Lightfoot, is revealed to have used the *Mishneh Torah* very much as an historical source, though, unlike Lightfoot, he distinguished sharply between typology and history, resulting in a number of very

thoroughly researched works of Jewish legal history, the most significant of which is his *De Jure Naturali*, a reassessment of the natural law concept resulting from his studies of Jewish law via the *Mishneh Torah*. Edward Pococke, in many ways, stands at the heart of this thesis, for it was through Pococke that the sources by which Maimonides's 'multilingual' reception were made available to the English scholarly public. Pococke, this thesis also reveals, was a profoundly different figure from that which recent work in the history of scholarship has led us to expect. His was a more pugnacious and more contemporary persona than his conventional intellectual-historical role as 'pioneering Arabist' has accustomed us to. He was a harsh critic of the Catholic Church, and, more pertinently the Cromwellian establishment whom he charged with hostility to scholarship. Pococke thoroughly embraced Maimonides as the most authentic source of Jewish tradition by which the authenticity of other sources could be adjudged. The final figure whose work is considered by this thesis is John Spencer, who has been characterised as a closet-Socinian, pioneering comparativist and as a paragon of the Restored Anglican establishment. None of these characterisations, this thesis argues is accurate. Spencer was, in fact, a critic of Socinianism though he certainly wasn't a straightforward establishment figure either. Spencer's reading of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, the thesis argues, led him to attempt to do for Christianity what Maimonides had done for Judaism, to put it on an entirely rational footing so that those for whom reason was paramount could embrace it readily. In each of these five cases Maimonides provided theological and/or historical resources by which theological missteps could be accounted for and thus corrected. He was a trusted Jew whose clear and precise account of the Law was deemed far superior to the confusions of the Talmud and whose pre-history of the Law, though controversial, would prove deeply compelling to Restoration-era scholars, in particular.

Maimonides's seventeenth century English reception is shown to have emerged in two phases, the first, his Hebraic reception and the second, his multilingual reception. The reception of the

Hebraic Maimonides began in earnest with the study of Hebrew literature in the early years of the seventeenth century by English exiles to the Netherlands. There, access to the Maimonidean corpus was plentiful and it is thus in the Netherlands that Ainsworth's biblical commentaries, which relied very heavily on the *Mishneh Torah* was born. This phase of Maimonides's reception was given a new impetus in 1629 by the publication in Latin of Samuel Ibn Tibbon's translation of the *Moreh Nebukhim*. This work inspired a flurry of further translations of Maimonides, one of which, Dionysius Vossius's *De Idololatria* would ignite particular interest in England. The success of this publication and of subsequent works inspired by it was fundamental to great enthusiasm by which Pococke's *Specimen historiae arabum* was received. This work, which revealed Maimonides to have been just as famous amongst Muslims as he was amongst Jews and provided some interesting hints as to the documentary evidence for the Sabeans, greatly inspired the scholarly pursuit of Maimonides's theory, which would remain influential well into the nineteenth century. The Maimonides that arose from these inter-related publications is termed the multilingual, both because he himself was a speaker of many languages and because the pursuit of his personal history and the recovery of his scholarship required skills in these.

The great authority granted to the Hebraic Maimonides was on account of his situating himself within the rabbinic tradition, as an heir to its self-verifying transmission which extended back to Mount Sinai. In a scholarly world in which Roman jurists were granted authority in a very similar manner, Maimonides was deemed a reliable historical source. He was trusted to have transmitted this tradition faithfully having excluded the many 'fables' for which the Talmud was infamous. The multilingual Maimonides was trusted as an historian on account of the extent to which his purported history of the Law could be corroborated. That Maimonides had been so highly praised by two of the greatest minds of the previous generation, Isaac Casaubon and Joseph Scaliger, was also absolutely central to his ready acceptance.

Both the Hebraic and the multilingual Maimonideses are shown to have had long afterlives, the Hebraic through the hugely successful biblical commentaries of John Lightfoot which cited him on almost every page and the multilingual through the work of John Spencer, which would be debated with great intensity through much of the succeeding century. The two receptions, though they interacted, are shown to have been quite separate, with the Hebraic Maimonides having had significant implications for the study of the New Testament and the multilingual Maimonides having emerged as more significant for the study of the Old Testament.

This thesis ultimately concludes that Maimonides played a hugely significant and yet strangely underemphasised role on the development of biblical scholarship in early modern England. It reveals his reputation to have been a particular outgrowth of English Hebraism which grew far beyond the Hebraic enterprise, making Maimonides a mainstay of the college library for centuries to come. Maimonides is shown to have facilitated the development of New Testament commentaries of unprecedented sophistication, a novel theory of natural law and spawned a new, and hugely influential, approach to the study of the Old Testament.

Introduction

‘Protestants had no equivalent of St. Thomas Aquinas. St. Thomas they could not accept or convert. Maimonides for the seventeenth century perhaps, became their St. Thomas.’

Richard Popkin²

This thesis represents the first comprehensive treatment of the impact of the writings of Moses Maimonides (1138-1204) on seventeenth-century English scholarship. That Maimonides’s influence warrants such a treatment has been long recognised. Cecil Roth, in a short piece entitled ‘Maimonides in England’, which was published as part of a companion volume celebrating what would have been Maimonides’s eight-hundredth birthday, claimed that on the eve of the readmission of the Jews ‘every savant in England’ knew Maimonides to have been ‘the representative scholar and authoritative exponent of Judaism’.³ The Reverend S. Levy, in 1942, noted the dearth of scholarly treatments of Maimonides’ English readers. He wrote on this subject in the *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* in the hope of inspiring a large-scale study of Maimonides’ reception on these shores.⁴ J.L. Teicher would repeat this call just three years later in that very same journal.⁵ That their calls went unanswered is to be demonstrated by a remarkably similar article by Jacob Dienstag, author of a list of Latin editions of the *Mishneh Torah*, which was published in the same journal in the year 1985.⁶ Perhaps the

² Richard Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Brill, 1992), p. 192.

³ Cecil Roth, ‘Maimonides and England’ in Isidore Epstein, *Moses Maimonides 1135-1204; Anglo-Jewish Papers in Connection with the Eighth Centenary of his Birth* (The Soncino Press, 1935), pp. 209-214, p. 212.

⁴ S. Levy, ‘English Students of Maimonides’, *Miscellanies (Jewish Historical Society of England)*, 4 (1942), pp. 61-84.

⁵ J.L. Teicher, ‘Maimonides and England’, *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, Vol. 16 (1945-51), pp. 97-100.

⁶ Jacob I. Dienstag, ‘Maimonides in English Christian Thought and Scholarship: an Alphabetical Survey’, *Hebrew Studies* 26, No. 2 (1985), pp. 249-299; Jacob I. Dienstag, ‘Christian Translators of the *Mishneh Torah* into Latin; A Bio-Biographical Survey’, in Saul Lieberman & Arthur Hyman (eds.), *Salo Wittmayer Baron Jubilee Volume; On the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday* (Columbia University Press, 1974), Vol I, pp. 287-309.

problem that these scholars were coming up against was the limited reach of the house organ of the *Jewish Historical Society of England*. In order to make the case for Maimonides's 'vast' significance for 'English civilisation', a more mainstream venue was required.⁷ The development of the history of early modern scholarship as a significant sub-field by the turn of the 21st century means that there is today a very significant audience for the kind of work that Levy, Teicher and then Deinstag were calling out for in the previous century.

Prior to the emergence of this sub-field, however, significant steps were taken towards the development of the history of Maimonides's early modern reception. Aaron Katchen's magisterial work, *Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis*, which explores the significance of the *Mishneh Torah* Latin, was published in 1984.⁸ Two years later, Amos Funkenstein's path-breaking *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* would point to the outsized influence of Maimonides's *Moreh Nebukhim* on early modern learning, highlighting, in particular, its role in the scholarly career of John Spencer.⁹ Come 1992 and Richard Popkin would remark that 'study of the role of Maimonides in Latin is in its infancy', the work of Katchen, the only tiller in this field he saw fit to name, having 'just scratched the surface.'¹⁰ This sorry state of affairs, Popkin noted, was likely on account of Jewish scholars having very little interest in or knowledge of ecclesiastical history and ecclesiastical historians having very little interest in or knowledge of Jewish history.¹¹ Matt Goldish, a student of Popkin's, would go on to produce a doctoral thesis and subsequent monograph on Isaac Newton's debt to Jewish sources. This work, published in 1998, revealed Newton to have been a beneficiary of the great advances in Maimonidean scholarship which had taken place in mid-century.¹² He had ready access to a large proportion of the *Mishneh Torah* in

⁷ Teicher, Maimonides', p. 249.

⁸ Aaron L. Katchen, *Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis* (HUP, 1984).

⁹ Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (PUP, 2018), pp. 245-247.

¹⁰ Popkin, *Third Force*, p. 192.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹² Matt Goldish, *Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton* (Kluwer Academic, 1998).

Latin translation. Fascinatingly, Goldish's thesis refutes the suggestion of John Maynard Keynes, which Popkin had picked up in the 1990s, that Newton had been 'a Judaic monotheist of the Maimonidean school'.¹³ Newton's engagement with Maimonides, Goldish shows, was primarily through translations of the *Mishneh Torah*. He did not even seem to have read the *Moreh Nebukhim*, which Keynes, Popkin and Jose Faur had suggested he was likely influenced by.¹⁴ Whilst Goldish's thesis tells us a great deal about Newton, the question as to how so many translations of Maimonides's writings had been made available in England, some of them with royal sanction, remained open.

In the early 2010s, Guy Stroumsa would echo Popkin's remarks of the 1990s, noting that Maimonides's significance for European scholarship remained 'under-recognised'.¹⁵ By this time, however, the emergence of the history of scholarship as its own, highly significant field of scholarly endeavour was well underway. The evolution of the field over the past twenty years provides us with a far stronger basis than the *JHSE*'s twentieth-century writers ever had for demonstrating the intellectual-historical significance of Maimonides for seventeenth-century England. His influence is traceable, albeit in a rather piecemeal fashion, through several studies of his keenest English readers. Jason Rosenblatt and Gerald Toomer have demonstrated the depths of John Selden's debts to Maimonides.¹⁶ An edited volume on early modern European readings of the Mishnah has revealed the importance of that work for the development of seventeenth century scholarship and something of the role Maimonides played in the scholarly careers of Edward Pococke, Humphrey Prideaux and Guilielmus Surenhusius, amongst others.¹⁷

¹³ John Maynard Keynes, 'Newton the Man', *Newton Tercentenary Celebrations* (CUP, 1947), pp. 27-9.

¹⁴ Jose Faur, 'Newton, Maimonidean', *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* (2003), pp. 215-249.

¹⁵ Guy Stroumsa, 'John Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry', *History of Religions* 41, no. 1 (2002), pp. 1-23, pp. 17-18; Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in The Age of Reason* (HUP, 2010), p. 94.

¹⁶ G.J. Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth Century England* (OUP, 1996); G.J. Toomer, *John Selden*, 2 Vols. (OUP, 2009); Jason Rosenblatt, *Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi John Selden* (OUP, 2006); Jason Rosenblatt, *John Selden: Scholar, Statesman, Advocate for Milton's Muse*, (OUP, 2021).

¹⁷ Kirsten Macfarlane, Joanna Weinberg & Piet van Boxel, *The Mishnaic Moment: Jewish law among Jews and Christians in early modern Europe* (OUP, 2022).

Dmitri Levitin's expositions of the ancient historians of the period too have highlighted the surprising number of ways in which Maimonides was looked to as an historical authority. Beyond an increasing awareness of Maimonides's seventeenth-century reception, the emergence of the history of early modern scholarship has given rise to a wealth of information as to the context within which this reception took place. Anthony Grafton has, across a multitude of works, exposed the extent to which the Jewish origins of Christianity took on a new significance for early modern scholars, for whom rabbinical sources came to elucidate much of the history of the Early Church.¹⁸ Levitin has gone on to demonstrate the ways in which this renewed interest in the evolution of rabbinic Judaism would form part of a much broader pursuit of the cultural context in which the Bible had been written.¹⁹ Toomer, Alexander Bevilacqua, Simon Mills, Daniel Stolzenberg, Jan Loop, Mordechai Feingold, Nabil Matar, Martin Mulsow and Noel Malcolm have powerfully demonstrated the significance of the study of languages believed to be cognates of Hebrew in this period.²⁰ The publication of the London Polyglot in 1657, which

¹⁸ Anthony Grafton, 'Christian Hebraism and the Rediscovery of Hellenistic Judaism' in Richard I. Cohen, Natalie B. Dohrmann, Adam Shear & Elchanan Reiner, *Jewish Culture in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honor of David B. Ruderman* (Hebrew Union College, 2014), pp.169-180; Anthony Grafton, *What was history? The art of history in early modern Europe* (CUP, 2012); Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: a study in the history of classical scholarship*, 2. Vols. (OUP, 1993); Anthony Grafton, 'Joseph Scaliger et l'histoire du judaïsme hellénistique,' in Chantal Grell & Francois Laplanche, *La République des lettres et l'histoire du judaïsme antique: XVIe–XVIIIe siècles* (Presse de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1992), pp. 51-63; Anthony Grafton, 'Christianity's Jewish Origins Rediscovered: The Roles of Comparison in Early Modern Ecclesiastical Scholarship', *Erudition and the Republic of Letters* 1 (2016), pp. 13-42.

¹⁹ Dmitri Levitin, *Ancient wisdom in the age of the new science: histories of philosophy in England, 1640-1700* (CUP, 2015); Dmitri Levitin, *The Kingdom of Darkness: Bayle, Newton, and the Emancipation of the European Mind from Philosophy* (CUP, 2022); Dmitri Levitin & Nicholas Hardy, *Confessionalisation and erudition in early modern Europe: an episode in the history of the humanities* (OUP, 2021); Dmitri Levitin, 'Egyptology, the limits of antiquarianism, and the origins of conjectural history, 1680-1740: new sources and perspectives', *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 41. 6 (2015), pp. 699-727; Dmitri Levitin, 'Rethinking English Physico-theology: Samuel Parker's Tentamina de Deo (1665)', *Early Science and Medicine*, 2014, Vol. 19 (1), pp. 28-75; Dmitri Levitin, 'John Spencer's De legibus Hebraeorum (1683-85) and 'Enlightened' Sacred History: A New Interpretation', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 76.1 (2013), pp. 49-92; Dmitri Levitin, 'From Sacred History to the History of Religion: Paganism, Judaism, and Christianity in European Historiography from Reformation to Enlightenment', *The Historical Journal*, December 2012, Vol. 55, No. 4 (December, 2012), pp. 1117-1160.

²⁰ Simon Mills, *A Commerce of Knowledge: Trade, Religion and Scholarship between England and the Ottoman Empire* (OUP, 2020); Mordechai Feingold, 'Learning Arabic in Early Modern England' in 'The Teaching and Learning of Arabic in Early Modern Europe', *The History of Oriental Studies*, Vol. 3 (Brill, 2017), pp. 35-56; Daniel Stolzenberg, 'John Spencer and the Perils of Sacred Philology', *Past and Present*, (February 2012), pp. 129-163; Jan Loop, *Johann Heinrich Hottinger: Arabic and Islamic studies in the seventeenth century* (OUP, 2013); Alexander Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (HUP, 2020); Nabil Matar, *Europe Through Arab Eyes, 1578-1727* (CUP, 2008); Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, (1558-1685)* (CUP, 2009); Noel Malcolm, *Useful enemies: Islam and the Ottoman Empire in western Europe 1450-1750*, (OUP, 2019); Martin Mulsow, 'Orientalistik im Kontext der sozinianischen und deistischen Debatten um 1700; Spencer, Crell, Locke und Newton', *Scientia Poetica* 2, (1998), pp. 27-57.

featured biblical texts in Latin, Greek, Aramaic, Samaritan, Hebrew, Syriac, Persian, Arabic and Ethiopic represents the culmination of this tremendous advance in what became known as ‘oriental scholarship’. Jean-Louis Quantin has made us aware of the significance of the decline of patristic scholarship, in the second quarter of the seventeenth century, and then, its revitalisation following the restoration of 1660.²¹ Scott Mandelbrote has vastly expanded our knowledge of the early modern reception of both classical texts and religious texts.²² Chad van Dixhoorn has made the minutes of the Westminster Assembly and the diaries of John Lightfoot available to scholars, which has allowed Kirsten Macfarlane to reveal something of the contribution those debates made to the evolution of Lightfoot’s scholarship alongside her path-breaking work on the scholarly career of Hugh Broughton and his vast reception.²³ Joanna Weinberg and Grafton have painstakingly reconstructed the learning of Isaac Casaubon, and now Johannes Buxtorf Senior, in greatly illuminating works.²⁴ Both Timothy Twining and Nicholas Hardy have traced the history of the evolution of biblical criticism through myriad confessional controversies.²⁵ This growing corpus of scholarship on varying aspects of seventeenth-century erudition has led to a fairly widely-held consensus as to the much earlier vintage of many of the innovations traditionally associated with the so-called ‘Enlightenment’. This is especially the case in the realms of religious

²¹ Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian antiquity: the construction of a confessional identity in the 17th century* (OUP, 2009).

²² Scott Mandelbrote, ‘The Letter of Aristeas: Three Phases in the readership of a Jewish Text’ in Scott Mandelbrote & Joanna Weinberg, *Jewish books and their Readers; Aspects of the Intellectual Life of Christians and Jews in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 13-44; Scott Mandelbrote, ‘A Family Bible? The Henrys and Dissenting Readings of the Bible, 1650-1750’, in Scott Mandelbrote & Michael Ledger-Lomas, *Dissent and the Bible in Britain, 1650-1950* (OUP, 2013), pp. 37-56, Scott Mandelbrote, ‘Isaac Vossius and the Septuagint’ in Eric Jorink and Dirk van Miert, *Isaac Vossius (1618-1689) between Science and Scholarship* (Brill, 2012), pp. 85-117.

²³ Chad van Dixhoorn & David Wright (eds.), *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652*, Vol II (OUP, 2013); Chad van Dixhoorn, *John Lightfoot’s Journal of the Westminster Assembly* (OUP, 2023), Kirsten Macfarlane, ‘John Lightfoot (1602-1675), the Westminster Assembly, and the Horae Hebraice et Talmudicae’, *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 2023, Vol. 53 (1), pp. 87-116; Kirsten Macfarlane, ‘Gospel Harmonies and the Genres of Biblical Scholarship in Early Modern Europe’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 76.3 (Fall, 2023), pp. 1027-1067; Kirsten Macfarlane, *Biblical scholarship in an age of controversy: The polemical world of Hugh Broughton (1549-1612)* (OUP, 2021); Kirsten Macfarlane, *Lay Learning and the Bible in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World* (OUP, 2025).

²⁴ Joanna Weinberg and Anthony Grafton, *I have always loved the Holy Tongue: Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a Forgotten Chapter in Renaissance Scholarship* (HUP, 2011); Joanna Weinberg and Anthony Grafton, *Johann Buxtorf, Impresario of Hebrew and Jewish Books* (PIMS, 2025).

²⁵ Nicholas Hardy, *Criticism and Confession; The Bible and the Seventeenth Century Republic of Letters* (OUP, 2017); Timothy Twining, ‘The Early Modern Debate over the Age of the Hebrew Vowel Points: Biblical Criticism and Hebrew Scholarship in the Confessional Republic of Letters’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 2020, Vol. 81 (3), pp. 337-358; Timothy Twining, *The Limits of Erudition* (CUP, 2024).

scholarship within which the seventeenth century with its polyglot bibles and comparative chronologies saw real concrete gains, which the scholarship of the subsequent century would only succeed in consolidating.

This transformed scholarly landscape means the time is now ripe to accept the challenge laid down by the Reverend Levy all those years ago and to investigate the early modern English debt to Moses Maimonides. Popkin argued in the 1990s that Maimonides's significance for seventeenth-century scholarship had been underappreciated on account of the lack of communication between scholars of Judaism and scholars of seventeenth century Christianity.²⁶ I think that whilst this might still be the case, recent developments in the history of early modern scholarship have given rise to an audience to whom this work speaks very directly. It is my hope that this thesis will clearly address this evolving audience, whilst also bringing into its folds those very historians of Judaism and of Christianity, who as Popkin pointed out have a great deal to learn from each other.

Moses Ben Maimon 'From Moses to Moses there arose none like Moses' (ממשה עד משה לא קם כמשה)

The old adage which graces the tomb in Tiberias, where Moses Maimonides is most likely not buried is one which will appear many times in this thesis. In order to convey just how significant Maimonides was for the Jews, Christian scholars often reached for this expression, which loses none of its power by the frequency of its repetition. To this very day, Maimonides is the *sine qua non* of Jewish intellectual achievement. His name graces schools, a major hospital and many an institute of Jewish studies. He is, by common consent, the most significant thinker in post-biblical Jewish history.

²⁶ Popkin, *Third Force*, p. 193.

Maimonides's maiden intellectual project, which he completed in his early twenties, was the first complete commentary on the Mishnah, Rabbi Judah the Prince's summation of the oral law, compiled between the second and third centuries CE. This commentary would quickly assume canonical status across the Jewish world.²⁷ Around the same time he would write a short treatise on logic, in the name of Rabbi Simeon, though some have supposed this to have been the work of another.²⁸ Maimonides would also produce a series of medical writings, which reveal him to have been a close follower of Galen, though his second great intellectual project, which would be completed in 1180 was his compendium of Jewish law, the *Mishneh Torah*.²⁹

The literal meaning of the title of the words 'Mishneh Torah' is 'the review of the Torah', and as Maimonides clearly stated in the preface to this work, this was its intended function. The *Mishneh Torah* was written for those for whom the written Torah, the Pentateuch, was already familiar, that they might 'comprehend the entire oral law by it', obviating the need for 'any other text'.³⁰

Whilst such a statement strikes one as rather audacious given the vast array of sources of the oral law mentioned by Maimonides himself in the preceding paragraphs, an appreciation of the context in which he was living might help ground the impetus for the project. It was Maimonides's own claim that during his own lifetime 'severe disasters keep following one another' leading to a severe decline in general capacity for Jewish scholarship and he had every reason to believe that this was the case. Maimonides himself had experienced displacement and likely a forced conversion to Islam as a young man.³¹ During his lifetime, the general standard of Jewish learning was both declining and fragmenting and Karaism continued to pose 'a persistent

²⁷ See Kirsten Macfarlane, Piet van Boxel, and Joanna Weinberg, 'The Mishnah between Jews and Christians in Early Modern Europe' in Piet van Boxel, Kirsten Macfarlane and Joanna Weinberg (eds.), *The Mishnaic Moment: Jewish Law among Jews and Christians in Early Modern Europe* (OUP, 2022).

²⁸ See Herbert Davidson, *Moses Maimonides: The Man and his Works* (OUP, 2004), pp. 313-322.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 429-482.

³⁰ *Mishneh Torah, Transmission of the Oral Law* 42).

³¹ *Mishneh Torah, Transmission of the Oral Law* 8; See Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in his World* (PUP, 2009), p. 16.

challenge' to the legitimacy of rabbinic Judaism.³² Isadore Twersky has further suggested that Maimonides ascribed to the Talmudic conception of 'generational decline' (ירידת הדורות), whereby each subsequent generation is objectively intellectually inferior to all preceding generations.³³ Whilst this is conceivable given the assent granted to this theory of history both by Maimonides's predecessors and his successors, it is quite telling that Maimonides himself never explicitly endorsed it. What is more likely is that Maimonides perceived his own contemporaries to be particularly intellectually lacking. Works once judged 'easily intelligible' were now only accessible to 'a mere few'.³⁴ The 'glory' of Spain had been 'brought down by exile'.³⁵ The learning of once elite scholarly communities had been degraded as their members wandered 'from city to city and from kingdom to kingdom'.³⁶ As was the case with Judah the Prince before him, for Maimonides codification or indeed, compilation, was judged essential in the face of the threat of annihilation.

Whilst the *Mishneh Torah* might have been a necessary remedy for the perceived evils of a turbulent age, it was not met with unfailing acceptance across the Jewish world. Maimonides's refusal to cite his sources, gave the impression of a disregard for prior authorities, which was not helped by his expressed disregard for minority opinions.³⁷ This is highly significant for our purposes, for as shall be seen, whilst Jewish readers may have been disturbed by the distinct lack of Talmudic references in the *Mishneh Torah*, it was on this basis that it would be granted such wide acceptance amongst Christians.

³² See Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (YUP, 1980), pp. 61-64.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 71; See *BT Shabbat* 112b & *BT Yoma* 9b.

³⁴ *Mishneh Torah, Transmission of the Oral Law* 8.

³⁵ Moses Maimonides, *Moses Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen: the Arabic original and the three Hebrew versions* (American Academy for Jewish Research, 1952), p. iii.

³⁶ *Ibid.*,

³⁷ See 'Moses Maimonides to Rabbi Phinehas the judge' in Moses Maimonides, *Igrot ha-Rambam* (Hotsa'at Ma'aliyot le-Yad Yeshivat Birkat Mosheh Ma'aleh Adumim, 1988), pp. 444-445; *Sefer HaMitzvot, Introduction*.

Subsequent to his legal magnum opus Maimonides produced his philosophical magnum opus, which he entitled the *Moreh Nebukhim*, usually rendered *Guide to the Perplexed*. The intended audience for this work was Jewish students of philosophy who were ‘perplexed’ by what Maimonides insisted were the ‘figurative expressions’ with which the Scriptures were replete.³⁸ It is a thoroughly Aristotelian articulation of the Jewish tradition, which has struck many Jews, down to the present day, as problematic.³⁹ Indeed, the *Guide* met with such a negative response in the Jewish community of Provence that the leading rabbis had all available copies of it condemned to the flames.⁴⁰ This work, by which Maimonides’s reputation among Christians would be made, is so different from the *Mishneh Torah* that some have questioned whether they could possibly have been written by the same author.⁴¹ It is on the basis of his comparative reading of these two works that Leo Strauss formulated his conception of esoteric versus exoteric reading.⁴² The last half century of Maimonides scholarship has been constituted largely by refutations of the Straussian hypothesis. Scholars of the *Mishneh Torah* have sought to emphasise its philosophical contents in order to disrupt what they perceive to be Strauss’s false distinction between Maimonides’s esoteric philosophical core and his exoteric legalistic presentation.⁴³

³⁸ *Moreh Nebukhim*, Prefatory Remarks.

³⁹ See Jose Faur, ‘Anti-Maimonidean Demons’, *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 6 no. 1 (2003), pp. 3-52; James T. Robinson ‘On or above the Ladder? Maimonidean and anti-Maimonidean Readings of Jacob’s Ladder in Charles H. Manekin and Daniel Davies (eds.), *Interpreting Maimonides: Critical Essays* (CUP, 2018), pp. 85-98; Dov Schwartz, ‘Changing Fonts in the Controversies over Philosophy in Medieval Spain and Provence’, *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 7, no. 1 (1997), pp. 61-82.

⁴⁰ See Idit-Dobbs-Weinstein, ‘The Maimonidean Controversy’, *History of Jewish Philosophy*, Vol. 2 (1997), pp. 275-291.

⁴¹ See David Gillis, *Reading Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah* (Littmann Library, 2015), pp. 53-54.

⁴² Leo Strauss, ‘The Literary Character of the *Guide for the Perplexed* in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁴³ Isadore Twersky, ‘Some Non-Halakhic Aspects of the Mishneh Torah in Alexander Altmann (ed.), *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (HUP, 1967), pp. 95-118; Menchem Kellner, ‘The Literary Character of the Mishneh Torah: On the Art of Writing in Maimonides’ Halakhic Works’, *Science in the Bet Midrash* (2019), pp. 45-62.

Seventeenth century English Hebraism – Scholarship in historical context

‘Hebraism’, by which is meant the study of Jewish languages and texts by non-Jews has been described, in its early modern iteration, as an ‘offshoot of Renaissance humanism’.⁴⁴ As such, its progenitors were Italians, many of whom were living in close proximity to thriving communities of Jews for whom Judaism was a living religion.⁴⁵

That Hebraic scholarship should have emerged as an important dimension of seventeenth-century English intellectual life is the result of two accidents of history, the first, Henry VIII’s desperate attempts to identify a biblical basis for his divorce from Catherine of Aragon, and the second, Johannes Buxtorf. The significance for English Hebraism of the ‘King’s Great Matter’ is well-established.⁴⁶ It was in this context that trilingual scholarship was put on a proper institutional footing in England with the creation of the first Regius Professorship in Hebrew.⁴⁷ English Hebraists were at a distinct disadvantage, however, as compared to their continental counterparts in that they did not have any Jews at all, save for the occasional convert, who could instruct them in the rudiments of Hebrew grammar and vocabulary. Thus, despite the institutional support for Hebraic scholarship it would have been all but impossible for large numbers of Englishmen to have learnt Hebrew in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were it not for the work of one man, Johannes Buxtorf the elder (1564-1629). Buxtorf set himself the ambitious goal of obviating the need for Jewish language teachers through the

⁴⁴ Stephen Burnett, *from Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564-1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century* (Brill, 1996), p. 1.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Adams and Cordelia Hess ‘Jewish Life and books under Scrutiny: Ethnography, Polemics and converts’ in Jonathan Adams and Cordelia Hess (eds.), *Revealing the Secrets of the Jews: Johannes Pfefferkorn and Christian Writings about Jewish Life and Literature in Early Modern Europe* (De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 3-6.

⁴⁶ Gareth Lloyd-Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language* (MUP, 1983), pp. 86-114; Matt Goldish, *Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton* (Kluwer Academic, 1998), p. 20; David S. Katz, *The Jews in the History of England 1485-1850* (OUP, 1996).

⁴⁷ See James P. Carley and Charles Burnett (eds.), *Hebraism in sixteenth-century England: Robert and Thomas Wakefield* (Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2023).

production of Hebrew grammars, manuals, bibliographies, and dictionaries.⁴⁸ In England, where Jewish language teachers were not even an option, these works would prove particularly popular. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that were it not for Buxtorf, Maimonides's seventeenth-century English reception would have been very limited indeed.

Whilst some authors have stressed the significance of the readmission of the Jews in 1656 for English Hebraism, as Matt Goldish has pointed out, the seventeenth-century's greatest Hebraists John Selden, John Lightfoot, Edward Pococke and John Spencer, had all come to this field of study, many years prior.⁴⁹ Selden, who studied Greek and Latin at Oxford, seems to have learnt Hebrew largely independently.⁵⁰ The same is true of John Spencer, who never achieved fluency. John Lightfoot taught himself Hebrew whilst living in the household of Hugh Broughton's student, Rowland Cotton. Edward Pococke was certainly the beneficiary of extensive contacts with Jews, though these occurred whilst abroad. In short, the scholars who constituted the 'golden age of English Hebraism', to which the reception of Maimonides was absolutely central, owed far more to Buxtorf's *Lexicon* than they did to the readmission of the Jews.

Seventeenth century England's Maimonidean Moment – a thesis

The particular appeal of Maimonides to seventeenth century English Christians centred on both the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Moreh Nebukhim*, as well as the commentary on the *Mishnah* and a number his letters. In both the case of the *Mishneh Torah* and that of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, that which had aroused the suspicions of Maimonides's Jewish readers, secured his popularity amongst Christians. The *Mishneh Torah*'s emphasis on the law itself, as opposed to its derivation,

⁴⁸ See Burnett, *Christian Hebraism*, pp. 3-4; Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg, *Johanna Buxtof, Impresario of Hebrew and Jewish Books* (Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2025).

⁴⁹ David S. Katz, 'The Abendana Brothers and the Christian Hebraists of Seventeenth Century England' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 40. 1 (January 1989), p. 51; Goldish, *Judaism*, p. 21.

⁵⁰ G.J. Toomer, *John Selden: a life in Scholarship* (OUP, 2023), V.1, pp. 3-4.

sat uncomfortably within a Jewish tradition that understood itself as a continuous chain of sages and disciples.⁵¹ For Christian scholars, however, Maimonides's authoritative rendering of the law without reference to the tedious debates of the Talmud, was fundamental to his appeal. The *Moreh Nebukhim*'s popularity in seventeenth-century England would be secured by the thesis which underlies its third book, that the Mosaic law was designed to undermine the idolatrous practices that the Israelites had absorbed during their centuries-long sojourn in Egypt. This thesis, judged 'highly controversial' by most of Maimonides's successors, would prove particularly attractive to English scholars who sought desperately after evidence as to the lifeworld of ancient Israel.⁵²

As Aaron Katchen has argued, medieval Christian scholars were far more likely to come across the *Moreh Nebukhim* than the *Mishneh Torah*, though this started to change in the 1630s, as Reformed scholars, mostly in the Netherlands began to develop significant interests in normative Judaism.⁵³ I wish to argue in this thesis that Katchen is right to trace the growing interest in the *Mishneh Torah* to the 1630s to an emergent curiosity about rabbinic Judaism but that that curiosity was stimulated by the publication of Johannes Buxtorf's much-lauded translation of the *Moreh Nebukhim* in 1629.⁵⁴ This work aroused a great deal of interest in Maimonides, which resulted in the exploration of his other writings by Dutch Christians, who were uniquely positioned to transform this burgeoning fascination into new translations. The evidence for this claim is straightforward. The translations of Maimonides which appeared in the Netherlands and in England in the 1630s and 40s all trace their inspiration to this seminal publication and offer thanks to Jewish teachers who helped bring these works to fruition.

⁵¹ See Gillis, *Mishneh Torah*, pp. 14-15.

⁵² See Twersky, *Mishneh Torah*, p. 189.

⁵³ Katchen, *Dutch Rabbis*, p. vii.

⁵⁴ Moses Maimonides, *Doctor Perplexorum* (Basle, 1629).

Katchen further claims on the basis of the copious evidence he draws from the 1630s and 1640s that Maimonides's influence on the gentile world was ultimately felt much more through the *Mishneh Torah* than the *Moreh Nebukhim*, despite the latter having been consumed by them over a much longer period.⁵⁵ This claim too is contentious, not least because, as this thesis will reveal, whilst Dutch and, indeed, English enthusiasm for the *Mishneh Torah*, would rise dramatically in the second quarter of the seventeenth century, this was not necessarily at the expense of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, which would continue to merit serious scholarly attention well into the 1690s. It is also worth noting here that the enduring significance of the *Mishneh Torah* into the eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries probably owes much more to its ubiquity in the hugely popular 'Talmudic' New Testament commentary of John Lightfoot than to the enduring appeal of the still very influential, Dutch translations of the early-to-mid seventeenth century.

Maimonides's English reception will be traced in three phases. The first phase is that of the 'Latin Maimonides' who was introduced to the English scholarly public primarily through Agostino Giustiniani's 1520 Paris edition of the *Moreh Nebukhim*.⁵⁶ In this phase, Maimonides was read by a small number of Englishmen as both a theologian and an exegete. Whilst he was certainly Jewish, after all - Giustiniani referred to him as 'Rabbi Moses Aegyptius', he was also an outsider to the Jewish community, a heretic within their midst, who had come too close to Christianity to be widely accepted as a rabbinic authority. Whatever the truths or falsehoods of this version of Maimonides, it would remain dominant until English Hebraists then living in the Dutch Republic gained access to the *Mishneh Torah*, which gave rise to an entirely new Maimonides, whom I term, 'the Hebraic'. This Maimonides, often referred to by his Hebrew name, Moses Ben Maimon or the acronym Rambam (Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon), was nothing like the old 'Latin Maimonides'. He spoke in Hebrew from the perspective of the unbroken

⁵⁵ Katchen, *Dutch Rabbis*, pp. viii-ix.

⁵⁶ Moses Maimonides, *Rabi Mossei Aegyptij Dux seu director dubitantium aut perplexorum in tres libros divisus* (Paris, 1520).

Jewish tradition which stretched back to the giving of the law at Sinai. Unlike the Rabbis of the Talmud, Moses Ben Maimon did not confuse his readers with endless debates and innumerable stories. He was clear, digestible, and uniquely authoritative. His consistent refusal to cite his rabbinic sources, which had so badly limited his audience in the Jewish world, turned out to be the key to his ultimately very broad Christian readership.

The 'Hebraic Maimonides' was introduced to the English scholarly and popular publics primarily through the writings of the Hugh Broughton and Henry Ainsworth, both of whom would attain significant influence in the 1620s and 1630s when English Puritanism would begin to define itself in opposition to patristic authority. The *Misbneh Torah* by which the entire Mosaic law could be authoritatively explained, turned out to be a very useful tool for the further displacement of the Fathers, whose knowledge of biblical languages was now judged to have been quite inferior to that of many a contemporary scholar.⁵⁷ In this context Maimonides became an essential exegetical resource for his clear explanations of the rites referred to in the Bible. This anti-patristic turn in England coincided with the appearance of a new authoritative edition of the *Moreh Nebukhim* in Basel in 1629. This publication, which confirmed Maimonides's scholarly reputation stimulated a further flurry of translations of Maimonides's writings, mostly by Dutch scholars who had access both to Hebrew teachers and a Hebrew printing press. These translations, Guilelmus Vorstius's *De Fundamentis Legis*, George Gentius's *Canones Ethici* and, most importantly, Dionysius Vossius's *De Idololatria* would be met with great enthusiasm in Interregnum England where the 'Hebraic Maimonides' had by now been well established as a uniquely important scholarly resource.⁵⁸ It was within this uniquely English context that Edward

⁵⁷ See Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the 17th Century* (OUP, 2009) pp. 166-187.

⁵⁸ Moses Maimonides, *Canones Ethici R. Moseh Meimonidis, hebraeorum sapientissimi, sive Canones ethici R. moseh Meimonidis, hebraeorum sapientissimi* (Amsterdam, 1640); Moses Maimonides, *Canones poenitentiae Hebraice a R. Mose AEGYPTIO descripti* (London, 1631); Moses Maimonides, *Constitutiones De Fundamentis Legis rabbi Mosis F. Maimon* (Amsterdam, 1638); Moses Maimonides, *R. Mosis Maimonida de idololatria liber* (Amsterdam, 1641).

Pococke's *Specimen historiae arabum* (1649) and *Porta Mosis* (1655) put the study of Maimonides's writings on an entirely new footing. Pococke's Maimonides is 'the multilingual'.⁵⁹ He spoke Hebrew, of course, but most of his writings were in Arabic. He was a rabbi, but he had spent his entire life in the Islamic world. He was the familiar rendered strange, by which the exotic world of medieval Arabic letters might be made familiar to the English scholarly public, or so Pococke hoped.

Pococke's 'multilingual Maimonides' would take on a life of his own. An expert in pre-Islamic Arabia, he could provide fresh insights into the very Near-Eastern context in which Judaism and then Christianity had taken shape. He was a window into another world, which European scholars had only just begun to explore. Whilst this Maimonides would endure for centuries, largely thanks to John Spencer's extensive development (and warping!) of his ideas, so would his Hebraic predecessor.⁶⁰ Even as the 'multilingual Maimonides' came into view, the sheer utility of the *Mishneh Torah*, established by John Lightfoot's *Horae Hebraicae*, had made it an indispensable tool of Reformed exegesis for centuries to come.⁶¹ Maimonides's reception will thus be traced with an eye to these three distinct versions of Maimonides, which do occasionally overlap.

Maimonides between Renaissance and Enlightenment

Funkenstein's *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* posited the birth of the historical method in the principle of divine accommodation.⁶² This principle, which is best encapsulated by the Talmudic

⁵⁹ Edward Pococke, *Specimen Historiae Arabum, Sive Gregorii Abul Farajii Malatiensis, De Origine & Moribus Arabum, succincta Narratio, in linguam Latinam conversa, Notisque e probatissimis apud Ipsos Authoribus, fusius illustrate* (Oxford, 1650); Moses Maimonides, *Bab Mūsi: Porta Mosis, sive, Dissertationes aliquot a R. Mose Maimonide, suis in varias Mishnaioth, sive textus Talmudici partes, Commentariis praemissae, quae ad universam fere Judaeorum disciplinam aditum aperiunt* (Oxford, 1655).

⁶⁰ See John Spencer, *De legibus Hebraeorum et ritualibus* (Cambridge, 1683-5).

⁶¹ On the long endurance of the *Horae*'s authority see Bruce Chilton, 'Jesus within Judaism' in Jacob Neusner (ed.), *Judaism in late Antiquity 2. Historical Syntheses*, 1994, pp. 262-284, pp. 262-263.

⁶² See Funkenstein, *Theology*, pp. 222-23.

dictum ‘the law speaks in the language of man’ (דברה תורה כלשון בני אדם), emerged as fundamental to exegesis in the medieval period.⁶³ It would be most powerfully expressed, Funkenstein repeatedly argued, in Maimonides’s Sabeian theory, which understood not only the language of the Torah, but its dictates as having been precisely accommodated to the idolatrous religious habits of those Israelites who first received it.⁶⁴ According to this theory, the law emerged out of the ‘cunning of God’, in Arabic תלטה אלאלאה and in Hebrew ערמת האלוה. The Arabic word for cunning (תלטה), which Maimonides originally used, is attributed to God by the Quran.⁶⁵ Maimonides’s notion of the ‘cunning of God’, for Funkenstein, anticipated Hegel’s notion of the ‘cunning of reason’.⁶⁶ It would first be fully realised, however, in Vico’s conception of providence as the orderly unfolding of the historical process.⁶⁷ Funkenstein thus traced the principle of divine accommodation through Maimonides’s Sabeian theory to its early modern, and then its modern recipients. Divine accommodation was, for him, the throughline from medieval exegesis to modern historicism.

Funkenstein’s tying together of the medieval and the modern in this way represents an early manifestation of the reassessment of the relationship between Renaissance and Enlightenment that the rise of the history of scholarship has wrought. In recent years a flurry of scholars has sought to identify the many points of continuity between the early modern and the modern, leading to a broad reconceptualisation of the latter as a development upon, rather than a break with, the former.⁶⁸ As Noel Malcolm has brilliantly shown, however, many of the religious ideas that would be strongly identified with Enlightenment radicalism originated in developments

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 213-214.

⁶⁴ Samuel Moyn, ‘Amos Funkenstein on the Theological origins of Historicism’ in Robert S. Westman and David Biale (eds.), *Thinking Impossibilities: The Intellectual Legacy of Amos Funkenstein* (ACUP, 2008), pp. 143-160; This thesis is affirmed in Carlo Ginzburg, *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance* (Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 155.

⁶⁵ *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.32; see Ignaz Goldziher, *Vorlesungen über den Islam* (Heidelberg, 1925), p. 23.

⁶⁶ Funkenstein, *Theology*, pp. 243-250.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 232.

⁶⁸ See William J. Bulman ‘From Renaissance to Enlightenment’ in Nicholas Popper and Ann Blair (eds.), *New Horizons for Early Modern European Scholarship* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021).

within ‘mainstream’ biblical scholarship.⁶⁹ The blurring of the boundaries between Renaissance Humanism and the Enlightenment has been pursued in two different directions. Some have sought to set the dawning of the ‘age of Enlightenment’ back fifty years, rooting its most important insights in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as opposed to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁷⁰ These scholars have emphasised the secularising tendencies of humanist scholarly practice so as to recast the Enlightenment as a period of scholarly consolidations as opposed to one of great leaps forward. Still others have demonstrated the endurance of humanist scholarly practices well into the eighteenth century.⁷¹ Thus the intellectual histories of the early modern and the modern are being brought ever closer together, both through the identification of the radical potential implicit within Renaissance humanism and through downplaying the apparent originality of much of what has previously been taken to constitute early Enlightenment heterodoxy.

Moses Maimonides’s seventeenth-century reception has been approached from both of these perspectives. John Spencer’s influential reading of *Moreh Nebukhim* has seen him lionised, on the one hand, as the initiator of the modern academic discipline of comparative religion and, on the other, as a brilliant, but conventional, inheritor of Renaissance humanist scholarly practice.⁷²

⁶⁹ Noel Malcolm, ‘Hobbes, Ezra and the Bible: The History of a Subversive Idea’ in *Aspects of Hobbes* (OUP, 2004), pp. 317-431.

⁷⁰ See Dmitri Levitin, ‘Introduction: Confessionalisation and Erudition in Modern Europe: A Comparative Overview of a Neglected Episode in the History of the Humanities’ in Dmitri Levitin and Nicholas Hardy (eds.), *Confessionalisation and Erudition in Early Modern Europe: An Episode in the History of the Humanities* (OUP, 2019); Dmitri Levitin, ‘What Was the Comparative History of Religions in 17th-Century Europe (and Beyond)? Pagan Monotheism/Pagan Animism, from *T’ien* to Tylor’ in Renaud Gagne, Simon Goldhill & Geoffrey Lloyd, *Regimes of Comparatism in History, Religion and Anthropology*, (Brill 2018), pp. 49-115.

⁷¹ Twining, *Limits*, pp. 1-3; Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the text: the traditions of scholarship in an age of science, 1450-1800* (HUP, 1991); Bulman, ‘Renaissance to Enlightenment’; Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: translation, scholarship, culture* (PUP, 2007).

⁷² See Guy G. Stroumsa, ‘John Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry’, *History of Religions*, 2001, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Aug, 2001), pp. 1-23; Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science: the discovery of religion in the Age of Reason* (HUP, 2010); Levitin, ‘John Spencer’; Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964); Fausto Parente, ‘Spencer, Maimonides and the History of Religion; Spencer’s *De Legibus Hebraeorum* and its Modern Evaluation’ in Christopher Ligota and Jean-Louis Quantin, *A Selection of Papers from the seminar on the History of Scholarship Held Annually at the Warburg Institute* (OUP, 2006) pp. 277-304; Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, (HUP, 1998); Funkenstein, *Theology*; Jan Loop, *Johan Heinrich Hottinger; Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Seventeenth Century*, (OUP, 2013).

Edward Pococke has been credited with the development of ‘Arabic studies’ as an ‘independent’ discipline, free from confessional concerns, though recent scholarship by Simon Mills, which is developed herein, reveals the dependence of such claims upon ‘the projection of modern disciplinary boundaries onto seventeenth-century scholarly practice’.⁷³ The fascination with Maimonides’s writings which is characteristic of this period has thus been conceived both as a radical step towards a ‘secular’ engagement with religious scholarship and as a development upon Renaissance-era Christian Hebraism.

Situating my study of Maimonides’s seventeenth-century reception within this emergent discussion is further complicated by the emergence of divergent responses to ‘Christian Hebraism’. Whilst many who have studied this phenomenon, have disputed the use of this term, we have yet to find an adequate replacement.⁷⁴ The problems besetting the conceptualisation of ‘Christian Hebraism’ mirror those faced by its best practitioners, for whom it was often an ambiguous endeavour. The study of Jewish texts by supposedly committed Christians, was often met with accusations of ‘Judaizing’.⁷⁵ Whilst this language is not used by modern scholarship, that of ‘philosemitism’, with its similar implications often is.⁷⁶ I wish to argue that whilst so-called Christian Hebraists often had straightforwardly religious motives, usually tied to the interpretation of the Bible, they were just as often guided by antiquarian and intellectual interests which are less easy to categorise. This ambiguity is particularly pertinent in the case of

⁷³ G.J. Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth-Century England* (OUP, 1996); pp. 116-126, Mordechai Feingold, ‘Oriental Studies’ in Nicholas Tyacke, *The History of the University of Oxford, Vol. 4: Seventeenth Century Oxford* (OUP, 1997), pp. 449-503; Nabil Matar, ‘Edward Pococke’ in David Thomas and John A. Chesworth (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Biographical History*, Vol. 8, *Northern and Eastern Europe (1600-1700)* (Brill, 2016), pp. 445-458; Mills, ‘Edward Pococke’.

⁷⁴ See Scott Mandelbrote & Joanna Weinberg, *Jewish Books and their Readers: Aspects of the Intellectual Lives of Christians and Jews in Early Modern Europe*, (Brill, 2016); Adam Sutcliffe, ‘Hebrew Texts and Protestant Readers: Christian Hebraism and Denominational Self-Determination’, *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 200, Vol. 7, No. 4 (2000), pp. 319 – 337, p. 319; Stephen G. Burnett, *Christian Hebraism in the Reformation Era: Authors, Books, and the Transmission of Jewish Learning*, (Brill, 2012), p. 2; David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The History of a Way of Thinking*, (Zeus, 2013), p. 319; Theodor Dunkelgrun, ‘The Christian Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe in Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Vol. VII, pp. 316-348.

⁷⁵ See David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: the history of a way of thinking* (Head of Zeus, 2013).

⁷⁶ See David S. Katz, *Philosemitism and the readmission of the Jews to England, 1603-1655* (OUP, 1982); Eliane Glaser, *Judaism without Jews: philosemitism and Christian polemic in early modern England* (Palgrave, 2007).

Maimonides's reception, for his acceptability was so often predicated on the perception that he stood outside of the broader Jewish tradition, which Christians broadly rejected.

In this thesis I do argue for the presence of both philosemitic feeling and secularising impulses in the seventeenth-century reception of Maimonides's writings, though neither of these are taken to be the driving forces behind it. The object of my study who comes closest to philosemitism is John Selden, who put the study of Jewish law on a par with that of Roman law and by it developed a novel natural law theory.⁷⁷ Where I have judged secularising impulses to be at work, in the orientalist and antiquarian researches that were prompted by the third chapter of *Moreh Nebukhim*, these are perhaps better characterised as non-religious than anti-religious. Even in these cases, however, the wide readership that such scholarship garnered, was, I argue, on account of its relevance to contemporary confessional concerns, whatever the intentions that lay behind it were. I determine therefore that whilst we cannot explain the entirety of Maimonides's early modern reception in terms of theological scholarship alone, this was certainly the arena within which its impact is best observed. The receptions of Maimonides that this thesis centres can only be understood within the context of the vicissitudes of broadly European, and often, narrowly English, confessional controversies, which Maimonides's uniquely brilliant and uniquely accessible writings repeatedly had the power to speak to. Philosemitism too will be shown to have been pretty marginal to the vast consequences of Maimonides's early modern English reception, which was largely divorced, perhaps surprisingly, from contemporary conversations about Jews and Judaism. Maimonides's significance in this period will be primarily attributed to the scholarly resources he provided by which the history of Christianity and Judaism, could be retraced in order to identify and thus correct for missteps that had ultimately led to heresy.

⁷⁷ See Anthony Grafton, 'Pandects of the Jews': A French, Swiss and Italian Prelude to John Selden' in Scott Mandelbrote & Joanna Weinberg, *Jewish Books and their Readers; Aspects of the Intellectual History of Jews and Christians in Early Modern Europe* (Brill, 2016), pp. 169-180, pp. 169-170.

This thesis will argue that the new receptions of Maimonides in his Hebrew and multilingual forms were driven by perceived threats to Christian orthodoxy. The reception of the Hebraic Maimonides was driven by the dawning realisation of the limitations of patristic sources. The great advances made by Reformed Hebraists gave them access to the *Mishneh Torah*, which contained far more information as to ancient Israelite ritual than would have been available to the Fathers. As the works of Henry Ainsworth, John Lightfoot and John Selden will show, Maimonides was seen to represent the best available source of extra-biblical data, by which both Old and New Testaments could be understood. In deferring to him in this way, these scholars were able to reconstruct the lifeworld of ancient Israel without reference to patristic sources, which they mostly ignored and sometimes flatly contradicted. Maimonides served for them as an alternative to prior historical sources which had since been shown to be unreliable. He was therefore used to correct for mistakes made in the development of the Christian tradition and was thus a resource by which it could be brought closer to its primitive wholeness.

The multilingual Maimonides, brought to life by Edward Pococke, also served as a useful corrective to the missteps taken by both Reformed Christianity and the Catholic Church. Whilst Pococke was certainly no critic of the Fathers, he was quick to identify the many ways in which the contemporary church had been derailed by poor scholarship, intellectual overconfidence and censoriousness. He identified amongst his fellow Protestants a certain smugness in their engagement with Jewish biblical interpretations, which left them vulnerable to penetrating critiques. He also identified a certain ignorance as to where exactly Judaism and Christianity had diverged which had, in his own day, given rise to a regrettable millenarian fervour. It was his contention that Maimonides's unmatched clarity as to the theological claims of the Jewish faith made it possible to distinguish sharply between Law and Gospel, which was vital to the integrity of the Christian faith. His own original, unredacted manuscript copies of much of Maimonides's

oeuvre also convinced him of the great damage the Catholic Church had wrought upon Christian orthodoxy by its various censorship campaigns. In removing references to the anti-Christian biblical interpretations contained within Hebrew manuscripts, they had robbed Christians of the ability to refute these and created the entirely false impression that much of what had become Christian theology had no basis in the Old Testament, thus unintentionally aiding the cause of the anti-Trinitarians. Pococke's deep study of the writings of Maimonides, proved influential because, like the work of Lightfoot and Ainsworth, it had important implications for the buttressing of Christian orthodoxy.

William Owtram, like Pococke, was deeply concerned by the rise of Socinian scepticism. He identified in the writings of Faustus Socinus and his followers, a total ignorance of the typological dimensions of the sacrificial cult, by which Christ's expiatory sacrifice could be grounded. Owtram discovered in the *Mishneh Torah* a complete picture of the operations of the temple in Jerusalem, which for him provided unassailable proof of the legitimacy of the entire Christological-typological enterprise. For Owtram as for Pococke, the morphing threat of Socinianism demanded the identification of new scholarly resources, by which it could be combated. These would be found in the legal writings of Moses Maimonides.

Similarly, John Spencer found in the *Moreh Nebukhim* a theory of the law by which he was able to refute both the biblicist excesses of popular Puritanism and the ultra-rationalism of the apparently ascendent Socinians. His deep engagement with Maimonides allowed him to see that successive generations of Christians had failed to grasp the true meaning of the law, with dire consequences for orthodoxy. Like the Jews of Maimonides's time, Spencer's contemporaries were falling prey to new intellectual movements, to which an unprepared orthodoxy was especially vulnerable. Spencer adopted a Maimonidean reading of the Mosaic precepts as part of a broader project by which he sought to place Christianity on a rational footing. In doing so, he

sought to do for Christianity what Maimonides had done for Judaism. Spencer's study of the *Moreh Nebukhim* and much of the *Mishneh Torah* was motivated by his sincere conviction that contained therein were copious scholarly resources which could be used to correct for the errors of generations past.

In other words, Maimonides's Christian readers then were consistently motivated by contingent confessional concerns. Whilst this thesis will certainly showcase examples of singular scholarly obsessions, which might be either philosemitic or entirely secular in nature, the broad trends it observes are not towards heterodoxy but rather towards its refutation. This thesis thereby accords nicely with William Bulman's account of the Enlightenment as a period of intellectual consolidation, rather than rupture, but with one caveat.⁷⁸ The key criteria for inclusion in this thesis is access to the writings of Moses Maimonides, which in most cases, at the very least meant a university affiliation. One consequence of this is, therefore, a bias towards the English intellectual establishment, even as that establishment waxed and waned through the vicissitudes of Laudianism, Presbyterianism, the Civil Wars and interregnum and then the Restoration. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that its findings largely affirm the claims of Noel Malcolm as to the supreme importance that must be attributed to 'mainstream critics' in the tracing of the origins of the Enlightenment.⁷⁹ Maimonides's most influential English readers were members of the ecclesiastical and academic establishments of their day. In their hands, Maimonides became an establishment voice, used to defend, rather than to challenge the status quo. The implications of his being employed thus would have dramatic consequences for the Christian study of Judaism, and thus of Christianity itself, whose effects are felt down to the present day.

⁷⁸ Bulman, 'Renaissance to Enlightenment'.

⁷⁹ Malcolm, 'Ezra'.

Outline of the thesis

In a masterful historiographical survey of 2012, Dmitri Levitin pointed to two factors that contributed to the emergence of ‘the history of religion’ out of ‘sacred history’. The first factor, ‘Scaligerian chronology’, gave birth to the historicisation of the Bible, in the sense that it revealed the role played by historical contingency in its transmission of the text, and the second, ‘Maimonidean rationalism’, furthered this cause by revealing the historical specificity of the Law. This thesis both adopts and expands Levitin’s claim by disaggregating the intellectual historical legacies of the two different versions of Maimonides which were received by early moderns.⁸⁰ The first, the Hebraic, who revealed the historical specificity of the Law, and the second, the multilingual, who transformed this insight into a lens through which the Ancient Near-East could be reconstructed.

Chapter one introduces us to these two different ‘Maimonideses’, and to their predecessor, whom I term ‘the Latin Maimonides’, a little-known figure accessed only in translation. It offers a diachronic account of Maimonides’s English reception, beginning with the reception of the first complete Latin translation of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, published in 1520 and culminating in the widespread scholarly application of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, *Mishneh Torah* and commentary on the Mishnah by the end of the seventeenth century.

Chapter two centres the reception of Maimonides in Hebrew. It reveals this reception to have served a very conservative function for Puritan Hebraists who sought to root their already-established typological approach to the Bible in its Hebrew original as opposed to in the patristic scholarship by which it had been traditionally justified. These scholars focused particularly on the

⁸⁰ Levitin, ‘Sacred History’, pp. 1125-1133.

Mishneh Torah, which gives an incredibly detailed, yet surprisingly accessible account of the Law in all its facets. Their application of Maimonides's legal scholarship to New Testament exegesis would prove so successful that later scholars, even those who did not share their scepticism of the Fathers saw fit to integrate it. This chapter reveals the *Mishneh Torah* to have both performed an historicising function, through its grounding of Jesus's ministry in its Jewish historical context, and, at the same time, to have served to buttress the entirely ahistorical Reformed commitment to the typological reading of Scripture. It attributes the significance of the reception of Maimonides's legal scholarship in England to the recognition, widespread by the 1620s, that rabbinic sources, of which the fathers were largely ignorant, might be the best means by which the lifeworld of biblical Israel could be reconstructed. This chapter centres the figure of John Lightfoot, who developed this insight to its fullest degree in his 'Talmudic' New Testament commentary, the *Horae Hebraicae*. This source, above all others, rendered the 'Hebraic Maimonides' a vital historical resource for generations of Christian scholars who would return to him, time and again, in their attempts to recover the meanings and mores of biblical antiquity.

Chapter three centres Edward Pococke, who put the study of Maimonides's writings on an entirely new footing in mid-century through the recovery of his 'multilingual' Spanish, Jewish, Moroccan and Egyptian historical contexts. Pococke revealed Maimonides to have been just as significant a figure in the Islamic world as he was in the Jewish, and now Christian, worlds. Often seen as a relatively quietist figure, without a confessional axe to grind, this chapter offers a reconceptualisation of Pococke as a fierce opponent of both Millenarianism and Socinianism, who believed sincerely that a proper appreciation of the Jewish tradition, which Maimonides could supply, would inoculate contemporary Christians against both.

Chapter four traces the development of Pococke's 'multilingual' Maimonides through the scholarship on idolatry that had become rooted in the Sabeian theory, which he had pioneered in

the third book of the *Moreh Nebukhim*. It centres the figure of John Spencer with whom this theory would later be identified. Spencer, much like Pococke will be revealed to have found in Judaism, which he had access to via Maimonides, solutions to the problems of both contemporary religious enthusiasm and the emergent threat of Socinian scepticism.

Maimonides's influence upon seventeenth century scholarship then, was twofold. He was not, as Levitin has suggested, primarily a rationalising force. Maimonides's early seventeenth century English readers found in his legal writings strong support for their traditional ahistorical modes of analysis as well as a new historicised perspective, which grew out of the writings of John Selden and, to a lesser extent, John Lightfoot. His import would be transformed, however, by the publication in Latin of the *Moreh Nebukhim* in 1629, out of which his rationalising influence would be most strongly felt. The historicising influence of this work was so strongly felt on account of Edward Pococke's thorough contextualisation of Maimonides and the scholarly resources of which he likely availed himself. This new reception of Maimonides's writings in mid-century, however, did little to undermine the still-powerful influence of the older 'Hebraic Maimonides', who served primarily to substantiate and to endorse a traditional typological approach to the decoding of the scriptures.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הֵנָּה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַנּוֹתֵן לַיָּעִף כֹּחַ

Blessed are you our Lord God, who gives strength to the weary.

Chapter 1 - The Many Maimonideses

The first students of Sion College, opened for the purposes of clerical education by Charles I in 1624, could expect to encounter a vast array of Jewish texts. From Arias Montano's Antwerp polyglot to Daniel Bomberg's Babylonian Talmud, the new institution opened up the Jewish tradition to a generation of English Hebraists, most of whom, unlike their continental cousins, would never benefit from the tutelage of living Jews.⁸¹ As students wrestled with the Hebrew alphabet and then its unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar, they might also avail themselves of a range of Jewish texts in Latin translation. Amongst these were the writings of three Jewish authors, some of whose works had been helpfully translated into Latin in recent years; Rabbi Shimon, the logician, Rabbi Moses Aegyptius, the philosopher and Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon, codifier of Jewish law, whose *Mishneh Torah* had recently arrived from Venice.⁸² These three scholars, it would later, transpire, were one and the same. Rabbi Moses, the son of Rabbi Maimon (1138-1204), one-time Chief Rabbi of Egypt, hence Moses Aegyptius, had penned a short work on logic as a teenager, under the pseudonym of Rabbi Shimon.

For Maimonides's early seventeenth-century English readers, he was a virtual unknown. Richard Hooker's *On the Ecclesiastical Politie of the Law* (1597) which cites Maimonides code of Jewish Law, the *Mishneh Torah* and his philosophical classic, the *Moreh Nebukhim*, on a number of occasions, furnishes us with a typical, and very important example, of Maimonides's reputation in this period. Whilst recent historians have seen in this work evidence of Hooker's impressive grasp of rabbinic literature, the evidence points in an entirely different direction. Hooker's closest engagement with Maimonides is on the subject of repentance. There, his *Hilkhot Teshuva* is the

⁸¹ These works were amongst the first received by the library in 1629. See Sion College Donors Book LPL Sion L40.2/E64, p. 1-5.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

only specific work cited, in what Hooker claimed was a series of extracts from the ‘sundry traditional Writings set down by their great interpreters and scribes’, giving no indication at all that Hooker had any particular interest in or knowledge of Maimonides.⁸³ Further evidence of Hooker’s ignorance of Maimonides is provided by his citations of two sections of the third book of the *Mishneh Torah*, *Sefer Zemanim*, as part of his explication of the Jewish notion of twenty-five hour fast. Somewhat curiously these citations are accompanied by a host of New Testament references and the Latin words ‘qui est de tempore’, which can only be taken to mean that Hooker presumed the aforesaid ‘R. Mos’, author of the ‘Misne. Tora’ to have lived during the Second Temple period.⁸⁴ Further still, where the *More Nebukhim* is cited, in Latin, out of Agostino Giustiniani’s 1520 translation, it is in the name of *Moses AEgypt*, giving every indication that Hooker presumed Moses of Egypt and Rabbi Moses to have been two entirely different authors.⁸⁵ Despite this, recent historians have sought to present Hooker as a close student of Maimonides, which obscures the meteoric rise of Maimonidean scholarship in the century following Hooker’s death, which is the subject of this thesis.⁸⁶

The Maimonides

But first, a pre-history. Maimonides was born in Cordoba in 1138, hence he is often referred to in the medieval literature as ‘Moses Cordubiensis’. His father, one Maimon Ben Joseph, hence, Moshe Ben Maimon or Maimonides, was a rabbinic judge or dayan. In the year 1168, following a sojourn through Morocco and Palestine, Maimonides and his family settled in Egypt, where he

⁸³ Richard Hooker, *The works of Mr. Richard Hooker (that learned and judicious divine), in eight books of ecclesiastical polity* (London, 1666), p. 353.

⁸⁴ See Hooker, *Works*, p. 282, fn. h.

⁸⁵ See *Ibid.*, p. 149, fn. a.

⁸⁶ See for example A.S. McGrade, ‘Classical, Patristic, and Medieval Sources’ in Torrance Kirby, *A Companion to Richard Hooker* (Brill, 2008), pp. 51-87, pp. 52-53; Polly Ha ‘Who Owns the Hebrew Doctors? Oriental Scholarship, Historical Proportionality, and the ‘Invention of Avant-Garde Conformity’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 53, No. 1, pp. 55-80.

wrote many of the works for which he became famous, hence ‘Moses Aegyptius’. Moritz Steinscheider has identified 22 unique texts as authentically Maimonidean, and a further 27 which have been claimed as such, not to mention his 600 surviving letters.⁸⁷ The range and depth of Maimonides’s literary output has given rise to a tremendous diversity of receptions, starting in his own lifetime, when despite his standing as the eventual head of his adopted Jewish community in Egypt, he was frequently criticised and ultimately, tarred with serious accusations of heresy.⁸⁸ This thesis will centre the reception of Maimonides’s commentary on the Mishnah (1168), composed in his early twenties, his codification of the law, the *Mishneh Torah* (1180) and his philosophical opus, the *Moreh Nebukhim* (1190).

Maimonides wrote mostly in Arabic, often transcribed in Hebrew characters. Whilst the *Mishneh Torah* was originally composed in Hebrew, the Hebrew editions of his other works are translations. This is where our story begins. The first translations of Maimonides, from Arabic into Hebrew, were produced by Yehuda Al-Harizi on behalf of various patrons in Spain and France, in the 1190s.⁸⁹ Approximately ten years later, his *Treatise on the Resurrection* would be translated into Hebrew by Samuel Ibn Tibbon of Provence, who would later translate his philosophical classic, *Guide of the Perplexed*.⁹⁰ Ibn Tibbon’s translations of the *Guide*, whilst faithful to the Maimonidean original, proved almost incomprehensible to many a European reader. Al-Harizi would produce a further translation in a more familiar Hebraic style.⁹¹

Maimonides’s thirteenth-century Jewish readers, most of whom would not have read the Judeo-

⁸⁷ Moritz Steinscheider, *Die arabische Literatur der Juden* (Frankfurt, 1902), Vol. 1, pp. 199-218.

⁸⁸ On anti-Maimonidean and its refutations see Michah Gottlieb ‘Counter-Enlightenment in a Jewish Key: Anti-Maimonidean in Nineteenth-Century Orthodoxy’ in James T. Robinson (ed.), *The Cultures of Maimonidean: new approaches to the history of Jewish Thought* (Brill, 2009), pp. 259-287; Abraham Socher ‘The Spectre of Maimonidean Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century’ in *Ibid.*, pp. 245-258; Yaacob Dweck, ‘Maimonidean in Leon Modena’s *Ari Nohem*’ in *Ibid.*, pp. 211-244; Daniel Jeremy Silver, *Maimonidean criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy 1180-1240* (Brill, 1965).

⁸⁹ See Raymond Scheindlin, ‘Al-Harizi’s Translation of the Guide of the Perplexed in Its Cultural Moment’ in Josef Stern, James T. Robinson & Yonatan Shemesh (eds.), *Maimonides Guide of the perplexed in translation: a history from the thirteenth century to the twentieth* (OUP, 2020), pp. 55-80, pp. 57-59.

⁹⁰ See *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-64.

Arabic original, could thus access the *Guide* in one of two translations, with Ibn Tibbon's proving more popular in Provence and Italy, and Al-Harizi's predominating in Spain.⁹²

For reasons that are not entirely clear, both translations would soon come to the attention of Christian scholars, who would re-translate them into Latin. The first of these translations was the *Liber de Parabola*, a collection of extracts from Part III of the *Guide*.⁹³ This work, whose primary purpose was the explication of the 613 Mosaic laws, contains no references to the Talmud at all and thus was almost certainly written for an exclusively Christian audience.⁹⁴ The second translation, the *Liber de uno deo benedicto*, consists in the introduction to and first chapter of Part II of the *Guide*.⁹⁵ The identity of the translator or translators in both cases remains unknown.⁹⁶

Some years later, though no later than the mid-1240s, scholars are agreed, a full translation of Al-Harizi's rendering of the *Guide*, entitled *Dux neutrorum* appeared in Europe.⁹⁷ The precise origins of this translation have not been clearly established, with some scholars attributing it to the court of Frederick II, where Jews and Christians worked together, whilst others have argued that it more likely emerged in France in the context of the Maimonidean controversy.⁹⁸ The most recent work on this translation, by Diana Di Segni has revealed that it is most likely a Latin language rendering of a Spanish or Italian translation of the original Hebrew.⁹⁹ The translation survives in thirteen manuscript copies, and in Agostino Giustiniani's *Dux seu director dubitantium*,

⁹² See Caterina Rigo, 'Dux neutrorum and the Jewish Tradition of the Guide of the Perplexed' in Stern, Robinson & Shemesh (eds.), *Guide of the Perplexed in Translation*, pp. 81-140, pp. 93-103.

⁹³ Wolfgang von Kluxen, 'Maimonides und die Hochscholastik', *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* (1955), pp. 151-165.

⁹⁴ See Lesley Smith, *Fragments of a World: William of Auvergne and his Medieval Life* (Chicago University Press, 2023), pp. 105-106.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Rigo, 'Dux neutrorum', pp. 82-84.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 83.

⁹⁸ George Hassellhoff, 'The Translations and the Reception of the Medical Doctor Maimonides in the Christian medicine of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries' in Georges Tamar, *The Trias of Maimonides: Jewish, Arabic and Ancient Culture of Knowledge* (De Gruyter, 2005), pp. 395-410, p. 396.

⁹⁹ Diana Di Segni, 'Traces of a vernacular Language in the Latin Translation of Maimonides' Guide of the perplexed', *Recherches de theologie et philosophie medievales*, 83.1 (2016), pp. 21-38.

published in Paris in 1520.¹⁰⁰ The various medieval translations of the *Guide* seem to have met with a flurry of Christian readers, especially among the Dominicans, including Thomas Aquinas.¹⁰¹

Giustiniani's edition of the *Guide* would have a long afterlife. Whilst a further translation of the work was made in England in the middle of the fourteenth century by one Thomas Allen, it is evident that most sixteenth century Europeans who encountered Maimonides did so via Giustiniani or through the rather more piecemeal efforts of Sebastien Munster, whose work functioned primarily as an aid to language learning, as annotated copies in various college libraries attest.¹⁰² There is also some evidence of engagement with a letter of Maimonides's to the Jews of Marseilles, published in 1555 in Cologne by a convert from Judaism, Johannes Isaac Levita and with his medical aphorisms, published as in 1579 as *Aphorismi*.¹⁰³ Giustiniani's *Dux*, however, would remain the most important guide to Maimonides's thinking until Johannes Buxtorf the younger would publish his translation of the Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew rendering of the *Guide* in 1629.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ See Yossef Schwartz, 'Persecution and the Art of Translation: Some New Evidence Concerning the Latin Translation of Maimonides's Guide of the Perplexed', *Yod; Revue des Etudes Hebraïques et Juives* 22, No. 22 (2019), pp. 49-70.

¹⁰¹ See Diana Di Segni, 'Early Quotations from Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed in the Latin Middle Ages' in Charles H. Manekin and Daniel Davies (eds.), *Interpreting Maimonides: Critical Essays* (CUP, 2018), pp. 190-207; Georg Hasselhoff, 'Maimonides in the Latin Middle Ages: An Introductory Survey', *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 9 (2002), pp. 1-20; Jacob Guttman, 'Guillaum d'Auvergne et la literature juive', *Revue des etudes juives* 18 (1889), pp. 243-255.

¹⁰² MS Bodl. 437, *Ductor Neutorum* (circa. 1350); Moses Maimonides, *Logica Sapientis Rabbi Simeoni של החכם רבי שמעון* (Basle, 1527) in Christchurch College, Oxford (Allestree - b.6.9 & Special Collections - MD.8.7), Lincoln College, Oxford (Senior Library - N.3.37(1), St. John's College, Cambridge- Adams, M164); Moses Maimonides, *Shelosh esreb iḳarim, divre ha-bayit ha-sbeni, eser geliyot Yisrael tredicim Articuli fidei Iudaeorum, item, Compendium elegans historiarum Iosephi, complectens: Acta LXX, Interpretum: Gesta Machabeorum: Facta Herodum: Excidium Hierosolymitanum, item, decem captivitates Iudaeorum Haec per Sebastianum Munsterum & Hebraeis & Latinis legenda exarantur* (Worms, 1529).

¹⁰³ Moses Maimonides, *De Astrologia Rabbi Mosis Filii Meimon Epistola elegans, & cum Christiana religione congruens* (Cologne, 1555) in Queens College, Cambridge (Or F III 4 2); Moses Maimonides, *Aphorismi, Rabi Moysis medici antiquissimi ac celeberrimi, ex Galeno medicorum principe collecti: nunc uerò ad usum studiosorum medicinae ab interitu uindicati, & iam primum in lucem editi. Item, locorum quorundam apud Galenum sibijpsis contradicentem castigatio & notatione* (Basle, 1579) in St. John's College, Cambridge (Mm.6.54), Trinity College, Cambridge (S.21.38.).

¹⁰⁴ Moses Maimonides, *Doctor perplexorum: Moreh Nevukhim* (Basle, 1629).

Maimonides's legal classic, the *Mishneh Torah* would receive far less attention from Christians than did the *Guide* in the medieval period. Condemnations of it, however, indicate that, at the very least, Christians were aware of it. The anti-Jewish polemics of Abner of Burgos and Raymond Martini made sure of that. There was at least one attempt at a full translation, in Spain, in 1383, but this appears to have come to naught. So, in short, Aaron Katchen was quite right to claim that until the end of the sixteenth century, the *Guide* was far better known among Christians than was the *Mishneh Torah*, though this was about to change.¹⁰⁵

The Latin Maimonides

A perusal of the annotated copies of Giustiniani's *Dux*, which remain in English libraries gives us some clues as to Maimonides's early reception on these shores. One important observation jumps out; interest in Maimonides in this period should not necessarily be equated with interest in Judaism more broadly. Whilst Munster's translations of Maimonides's *Logica* and his *Thirteen Principles* were often used as guides to the Hebrew language, this work contains almost no Hebrew and when Johannes Buxtorf the younger attempted to read it alongside the 1553 edition of Samuel Ibn-Tibbon's translation, he found very little correspondence between the two texts, which suggests that he did not know that Giustiniani was working from a translation of the Al-Harizi translation.¹⁰⁶ Whilst Giustiniani certainly aimed to improve upon the prior translation, this was with a view to producing 'a more elegant rendering' of the text as opposed to a more faithful one.¹⁰⁷ The value of the *Guide* for Giustiniani was twofold. It was, on the one

¹⁰⁵ See Aaron Katchen, *Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis* (HUP, 1984), pp. 1-14.

¹⁰⁶ Buxtorf, *Doctor perplexorum*, sig. *** 3v.: ex collatione cum Hebraeo nos consecuturos speraremus, tantam & obscuritatem & pravitatem ab initio statim deprehendimus.

¹⁰⁷ Agostino Giustiniani, *Rabi Mossei Aegyptij Dux seu director dubita[n]tium aut perplexorum in tres libros divisus* (Paris, 1520), sig. i.r: "in nostrum sermonem versum constat ab interprete: cui magis curae fuit (ut illis temporibus) sententias utcumque exprimere, quam verba reddere eleganter."

hand, a philosophical classic, and, on the other, a profound work of exegesis.¹⁰⁸ Its author was of a uniquely ‘philosophical’ bent, ever ‘devoted to truth’, which stood him in stark contrast with the rest of the ‘modern Jews’ and their ‘superstitions’.¹⁰⁹ So much so, Giustiniani pointed out, that ‘all the Jews in France conspired together to consign the book to the flames’.¹¹⁰ This hostile act, he argued, should be taken as evidence of Maimonides’s proximity to Christianity, which is what really motivated his co-religionists to turn against him.¹¹¹ As one reader of John Whitgift’s copy of the *Dux*, held today in the library of Lambeth Palace noted, the work’s poor reputation in Jewish circles should have given rise to a more enthusiastic Christian reception.¹¹² Giustiniani’s characterisation of Maimonides as a sort of crypto-Christian, which came just shy of three-hundred years after his fellow Jews allegedly facilitated the burning of his writings, would prove popular in Protestant Europe.¹¹³ This motif would recur for years to come, despite a distinct lack of evidence in its favour. Whilst there was virulent anti-Maimonidean sentiment within the Provençal Jewish community, in particular, this was justified in terms of Maimonides’s affinity with Greek philosophy, not with Christianity, which his critics never so much as mentioned.¹¹⁴ The *Guide*, in fact, says virtually nothing on the subject of Christianity and the *Mishneh Torah*, which was at then only available in Hebrew makes it abundantly clear that Maimonides credited Christ, only as he credited Mohammed, with promoting the cause of monotheism and thus further preparing the way for the eventual coming of the Jewish Messiah (*Hilkhoh Melakhim* 11.7.).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.: “opus sane recondite & minime trivialis doctrinae, in quo multa rationibus demonstrantur philosophicis: plurima adducuntur, quae mire conducunt & faciunt ad intelligentiam sacrorum librorum.”

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.: “in quo multa rationibus demonstrantur philosophicis (...) plus certe veritati addictus quae neniis importunis neotericorum Iudeorum.”

¹¹⁰ Ibid.: “quo factum est Iudaei omnes Galli (sunt. n. Iudei sicut et Christiani, Galli, Hispani, Germani, Itali, Asiani, Africani) in unum conspirarint, librumque incendio devoverint.”

¹¹¹ Ibid.: quod sibi videretur nimium faveri Christianorum haeresi.

¹¹² Lambeth Palace, Main Collection SR3 (B545.G5) – note reads: “Dissertatio notatim olim igni cremata ex Gallia orta erat, sed quod minimum favorem apud liberos Christianos (sp.).”

¹¹³ The historical details of this event remain murky. Yossef Schwartz has convincingly argued that it did not, in fact, take place, and was rather invented as part of a pro-Maimonides propaganda campaign. See Schwartz, *Persecution and the Art of Translation?*

¹¹⁴ The best account of the anti-Maimonidean position is a letter from Jehudah Ben Joseph Alphacar to David Kimchi where *The Guide* is described as מופת חכמה יונית, an exemplar of Greek wisdom. See ‘Letter X’ Johann Buxtorf, *Instituto Epistolaris Hebraica* (Basle, 1629), pp. 396-398.

Despite a lack of evidence, Giustiniani's characterisation of Maimonides as a crypto-Christian, seemed to stick. At the same time Munster was making an entirely different argument for Maimonides's significance, portraying him as a bridge between Christianity and Judaism. Maimonides's *Thirteen Principles*, he argued in his 1529 preface to that work revealed many areas of agreement between Jews and Christians.¹¹⁵ In 1555, the former Rabbi Isaac Levita, advanced the same argument, subtitled his published version of a famous letter of Maimonides's to the Jewish community of Marseilles, *Christiana religione congruens*. The work, Levita alleged, 'comes remarkably close to the Christian religion' with which it must be judged 'highly compatible'.¹¹⁶ Whether or not Maimonides enjoyed a peculiar closeness to Christianity, his enthusiastic reception by sixteenth-century European Christians was made possible by a widespread belief that he did. Whilst for Giustiniani, this set him apart from his co-religionists, for both Munster and Levita, it was suggested that the two religions were not quite so incompatible as many believed.

Moses Aegyptius?

For Giustiniani and hence for most of his readers, the specific details of Maimonides's personal life were unknown. He was known to them, in Latin translation, by the name Moses Aegyptius. That he was from Egypt, appears to have been particularly important to them. An interesting annotation of Whitgift's copy of the *Dux* bears this out. Where Giustiniani had noted that Maimonides was of Egyptian origin (he does not appear to have known of his Spanish roots), one reader has written 'quis in Aegypto natura ut opinor', 'whose nature, I think, is Egyptian', indicating that he understood, as per Giustiniani's preface, that Maimonides was essentially

¹¹⁵ *Shelosh esreb ikkarim*, sig. a3 : "qua in multis Iudaei nobiscum consentient."

¹¹⁶ Levita, *Astrologia*, sig. A7-A8: "In quibus admodum prope ad Christianam religionem accedit."

Egyptian, as opposed to essentially Jewish.¹¹⁷ Indeed, the entire reception of the *Dux* is notable for its failure to reckon with Maimonides's Jewishness. As with the writings of Philo and Josephus, sixteenth century scholars often referenced the *Guide* as they might a patristic source so much so that the uninitiated might presume 'Moses Aegyptus' to have been a lesser known figure of the Early Church.¹¹⁸ More scholar than Jew, Maimonides was frequently cited out of the *Dux* alongside such 'doctors of the Church' as Basil, Origen and Augustine, often on the subject of the Tetragrammaton, where his assessments were considered authoritative.¹¹⁹ One sixteenth-century reference, by Michael Neander, a German medic, even went so far as to claim Maimonides's analysis of the tetragrammaton supported the Christian belief in the triune God.¹²⁰

References to Maimonides in sixteenth-century English texts are less frequent, though at least one scholar, Robert Wakefield (1493/5-1537), seems to have been very familiar with Samuel Ibn Tibbon's translation of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, the introduction to which he playfully paraphrased in his *Oratio de laudibus et utilitate trium linguarum* (1524).¹²¹ Unfortunately, we do not know how Wakefield accessed this text, which was in print from 1473-4.¹²² The annotations of Thomas

¹¹⁷ LP SR3 (B545.G5).

¹¹⁸ On sixteenth century references to Philo and Josephus see Jan Machielsen 'Sacrificing Josephus to save Philo: Cesare Baronio and the Jewish Origins of Christian Monasticism', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, Vol. 23, No. 1, (2016) pp. 239-245; C. Phillip E. Northaft 'Josephus and New Testament Chronology in the Work of Joseph Scaliger', *IJCT*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (2016) pp. 246-251; Theodor Duklegrun, 'The "Testimonium Flavianum Canonicum": Josephus as a Witness to the Biblical Canon, 1566-1823', *IJCT*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (2016) pp. 252-267.

¹¹⁹ See for example Giglio Gregorio Giraldi, *Operam quae extant omnium*, v. 2 (Basle, 1580), p. 3; Girolamo Zanchi, *De Natura Dei, Seu De Divinis Attributis, Libri V* (Neustadt, 1598), p. 34; Wolfgang Musculus, *Loci Communes sacrae Theologiae: iam recens recogniti & emendati* (Basle, 1564), p. 698; Michael Neander, *Sanctae linguae hebraeae erotemata* (Basle, 1556), p. 318; Jean Bodin, *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (Paris, 1566), pp. 495-496.

¹²⁰ Neander, *Sanctae linguae*, p. 318; Rabbi Moses Aegyptius, in cap. 61. primae partis libri More, claris verbis asserit, quod veteres Hebraei nomen (Jehovah) semper legerint atque exposuerint per nomen Patris, Filii atque; spiritus sancti. Sunt autem haec ipsius verba.

¹²¹ Ibn Tibbon had written "וידוע אני ומכיר במיעוט שלימותי בשתי הלשונות העברית והערבית, וכל שכן בלשון הערבית שידיעת" "כי לא גדלתי בין אנשיה ובארצותיה (I know and recognize my imperfect grasp of both languages, Hebrew and Arabic, and even more so in the Arabic language, for I did not grow up among her people or in her lands)." Wakefield paraphrased him this, in English characters "[l]o] gidalti bein anshehen uveartsotehan aph hal pi bathi hadh techonotchen (I did not grow up among men who speak them or in their lands, but none the less, I have mastered their characteristics)" in Robert Wakefield, *Oratio de laudibus utilitate trium linguarum Arabicae Chaldaicae & Hebraicae atque idomatibus hebraicis quae in utroque testament inveniantur* (London, 1528) sig. ciiv; See Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, 'My Silent Teachers': Hebrew Manuscripts as the Source of Robert Wakefield's Hebraism' in James P. Carley and Charles Burnett, *Hebraism in Sixteenth-Century England: Robert and Thomas Wakefield* (PIMS, 2023), pp. 132-166, pp. 137-138.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 138.

Allen's *Ductor Neutorum*, however, do suggest that many Englishmen of the late medieval period did have access to this work in translation. It appears to have been of particular interest to those seeking explanations as to the names of God. One reader, for example, has scrawled 'Elohim esse nomen' next to the opening lines of 1.2, which give an expanded definition of the Holy name of God, 'Elohim' as referring not just to the Lord himself but to 'angels, judges and rulers'.¹²³ That same reader, some pages later, notes, next to a discussion of Divine names which are not pronounced, 'Nomen plerumque tetragrammaton non... permittitur'.¹²⁴ This does therefore suggest that late medieval English readers of Maimonides differed little from their continental counterparts. He was accessible to them in Latin translation and of particular significance for theological questions which turned upon the meanings of Hebrew words.

Following the Reformation and the rise of English Hebraism, a different Maimonides emerged in England. This Maimonides was certainly no Christian, nor was he even particularly Egyptian. He was instead an authority on 'the Law', 'known' some four hundred plus years prior as 'Maymonides' or indeed 'Rambam', in 'Spaine, Egypt, & Arabia'.¹²⁵ In one work of 1597, he was referred to as 'Moshe filius Maimon doctor in Israel' with no reference at all to his country of origin or even the years in which he had lived.¹²⁶ His function was simply that of an accessible 'rabbin'.¹²⁷ I therefore think of him as the 'Hebraic Maimonides', a very different figure from his Latin, potentially crypto-Christian forebear. He had rendered the Republic of Letters a great service by rearranging 'the Ierusalem Thalmud and the Bablyonian into an easier order & translated what he bringeth into familiar Ebrew'.¹²⁸ This compilation, known as the *Mishneh Torah* or *Yad Hachazakah*, exemplified the Jewish tradition for Christian readers like none before.

¹²³ MS Bodl. 437, 4v.

¹²⁴ Ibid., sig. 24 v.

¹²⁵ Hugh Broughton, *An Advertisement of Corruption* (Middelburg, 1604), p. 51.

¹²⁶ Philip Ferdinand, *Praecepta in Monte Sinai* (Cambridge, 1597), sig. E4r.

¹²⁷ Hugh Broughton, *A Comment upon Cobeletb* (Amsterdam, 1605), p. 31.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Demonstrating for all to see, in the words of renowned Hebraist, Hugh Broughton, that the Jews ‘miseth extreamly of Christ, the end of the law, though in tongue, they agreed with the Apostles’.¹²⁹

The Hebraic Maimonides, better known as Rambam

Broughton’s ‘Maymony’ bore very little relation to Giustiniani’s ‘Moses Aegyptius’. As Protestant England, in concert with her close colleagues in the Netherlands, advanced a culture of Hebrew scholarship, a small coterie of churchman began to look to Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah*, which was as then only available in the original Hebrew, for explanations as to Jewish belief and practice. Broughton himself would even translate a small section of the *Mishneh Torah* into English in his *Comment on Cobelet*, with a view to offering his readers ‘a censure upon the Jew Rambam, whose *Hilkhot Melakhim* ‘marketh little’, the biblical prophecies, which, for Broughton, pointed to Jesus. Maimonides, intent on eluding evidence for Christ’s Messiahship sought to entrap his hypothetical Christian interlocuters ‘in the web of the spider’ with highly technical explanations as to the criteria that had to be met in order for the Messiah to come.¹³⁰ Ultimately, Broughton concluded, Maimonides’s words revealed ‘that their Messiah is but vanity’ and that Jewish prayers for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem were therefore ‘senseless’.¹³¹

Philip Ferdinand (1555-1598), a convert from Judaism, who would spend several years at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, before taking up a position at Leiden at the behest of Joseph Scaliger, would produce a translation of Maimonides’s thirteen principles of faith in 1597 as part of a broader collection of rabbinic translations.¹³² These offered as a gift ‘to the most

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 43.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 43; Hugh Broughton, *A require of agreement to the groundes of divinitie studie wherein great scholars falling, & being caught of Iewes disgrace the Gospel: & trap them to destruction* (Middleburg, 1611), p.73.

¹³² See Alistair Hamilton, ‘Philip Ferdinand’, ODNB.

distinguished scholars of both universities’, to whom he had taught Hebrew and Arabic.¹³³ The thirteen principles, he made it very clear, were ‘contrary to the Gospel and the Church of Christ’ and should therefore be studied as an artefact of ‘Jewish history’ and not as articles of faith.¹³⁴

Broughton’s reading of *Hilkhot Melakhim* and Ferdinand’s reading of the thirteen principles as incompatible with Christianity contrasts sharply with Giustiniani’s conception of the *Guide* as favouring the cause of ‘Christian heresy’.¹³⁵ It is important to note, however, that despite their disagreements with Maimonides’s theological claims, the Hebraists of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, both in England and the Netherlands were very close students of the *Mishneh Torah*, which they revered as the very apogee of Jewish learning. Henry Ainsworth, for example, an old sparring partner of Broughton’s, wrote in the preface to his biblical commentaries, which cite the *Mishneh Torah* on almost every page, that this abridged version of ‘the Talmuds’ served as the prime example of ‘the best’ of Jewish learning and was therefore essential to a proper understanding of the New Testament.¹³⁶ From ‘the phylacteries which the Pharisees wore’ to ‘the Passover which Christ kept’, all of ancient Jewish practice was outlined therein, making this a vital resource for biblical scholarship, albeit one which remained inaccessible to the vast majority of scholars.¹³⁷

Ralph Skynner, an early seventeenth-century clergymen, has provided us with a very powerful example of the kinds of studies access to printed editions of the *Mishneh Torah* from Venice, might facilitate for those with sufficient Hebrew.¹³⁸ In a letter to James Ussher, which Kirsten

¹³³ Ferdinand, *Praecepta*, sig. q3r-v: affluentibus utrisque academiae studiosis.

¹³⁴ Ibid., sig. E4r: contra Evangelium et Ecclesiam Christi... iudaica historico... fundamentum.

¹³⁵ Giustiniani, *Dux*, sig. ir: Christianorum haeresi.

¹³⁶ On the relationship between Broughton and Ainsworth see Kirsten Macfarlane, *Biblical Scholarship in an Age of Controversy* (OUP, 2021), pp. 129-130; Henry Ainsworth, ‘Preface’, *Annotations upon the five Books of Moses, the booke of the Psalmes, and the Song of Songs* (London, 1639).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Successive editions appeared in Venice in 1524, 1550-51 and 1574.

Macfarlane has shown to have been written early in 1625, Skynner evidenced a remarkably learned engagement with the *Mishneh Torah*, the first section of which he had translated for Ussher's benefit.¹³⁹ The work, for Skynner, represented the entirety of 'the ocean of Jewish learning', though, there was, of course, 'some dross' mixed in.¹⁴⁰ For this reason, Skynner listed for his more illustrious reader exactly where he believed Maimonides to have erred before proceeding to outline how reading him might profit the Christian scholar.¹⁴¹ The first benefit identified by Skynner was Maimonides's liberal use of 'Hebraisms' and 'Talmudical sentences and phrases', the comprehension of which would allow for the better 'expounding of the New Testament'.¹⁴² Such phrases as 'The God who is blessed for ever', which appears frequently in the Epistles of St. Paul, is equivalent to the Hebrew expression **הוא הקדוש ברוך הוא** often represented by the acronym **הקבה**.¹⁴³ Knowledge of such 'Hebraisms', for Skynner, would allow for the more accurate rendering of the New Testament. The second benefit was Maimonides's frequent citing of *Pirke Avoth*, 'the wise sentences of the Rabbies', which Skynner marked with a hand in the margin.¹⁴⁴ The third stated benefit was access to Maimonides's own expositions of Scripture, which contradicted those of such contemporary luminaries as 'Munster, Tremellius and Junius'.¹⁴⁵ Further to these, Skynner also suggested that the *Mishneh Torah* might help elucidate 'the judicial laws and punishments inflicted by the Sanhedrin' which he would deal with 'in the next' place, implying that a further translation of the *Mishneh Torah*, likely of *Sefer Shoftim*, wherein such subjects are discussed, was forthcoming.¹⁴⁶ This translation, if it was ever produced, has never, to my knowledge, seen the light of day.

¹³⁹ The letter survives in manuscript in the library of Trinity College Dublin MS 227, fols. 12r-21v; On the dating of the letter see Kirsten Macfarlane, *Lay Learning and the Bible in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World* (OUP, 2024), pp. 63-67.

¹⁴⁰ TCD MSS 227, 12r.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 12r-21v.

¹⁴² Ibid., 13v.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 16v.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 13v.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 13v; Ibid., 21.v.

Skygger's letter to Ussher and subsequent translation of *Sefer Madda* reveals much about how Maimonides was accessed, if at all, by Reformed Protestants in England in the first few decades of the seventeenth century. That Skygger produced this work in the first place and in the manner that he did is in itself an indication of Maimonides's renown, or lack thereof, in the English scholarly mainstream. Skygger's failure to mention the *Guide* is telling, given just how well known that text was on the continent at this time. Even in England, Isaac Casaubon, who had died just ten years prior to the sending of this letter, devoted significant scholarly energies to the decoding of this work as his personal notebooks attest.¹⁴⁷ Much like his Catholic contemporaries, Casaubon was particularly interested in what Maimonides had to say about the letters of the Divine name.¹⁴⁸ He also seems to have taken at face value Giustiniani's claim that Maimonides's works were burned on account of his proximity to Christianity.¹⁴⁹ Casaubon, who, by his own admission, read the *Guide* only in Giustiniani's Latin translation, considered it the 'divine work' of a 'great master'.¹⁵⁰ Casaubon's high regard for Maimonides's philosophical magnum opus, whilst cultivated through constant study whilst in England, places him within a continental scholarly milieu within which the *Guide* was a well-known and very authoritative source. This is borne out in his usage of that work to critique the papal claim to apostolic succession via Matthew 16.18, 'Upon this rock I will build my Church', where Casaubon cited Ibn 'Ibbon's translation of the *Guide* 1.16 to express Maimonides's authoritative translation of the Hebrew for rock, צור. This word referred to the Almighty. It implied that 'he is the origin and cause of all besides himself (סבה הפועלת לכל אשר זולתו) and therefore approximated the Tetragrammaton, a

¹⁴⁷ Bodleian MS Casaubon 4; For a detailed examination of Casaubon's engagement with Maimonides see Anthony Grafton & Joanna Weinberg (eds.), *I have always loved the holy tongue: Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a forgotten chapter in Renaissance scholarship* (HUP, 2011), pp. 110-120.

¹⁴⁸ See Bod MS Casaubon 4, 32r where Casaubon writes: "O legant ista ἀπολόγηται et οἱ τὰ ῥήματα θειάζοντες."

¹⁴⁹ Bod MS Casaubon 4, 30r: "Itaque scripta illius RR. conati sunt extinguere ut hominis qui faveret dogmati Christianorum."

¹⁵⁰ See Bodleian MS Casaubon 4, 30r: "Dolumus autem persaepe in percurrendo hoc libro, quod textum Hebraicum non haberemus; nam ita versus est ut mentem auctoris assequi multis locis non potuerimus"; Isaac Casaubon, *De rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis exercitationes XVI. Ad Cardinilis Baronii Prolegomena in Annales, et primam eorum partem, de Domini Nostri Iesu Christi nativitate, vita, passione, assumptione* (London, 1614), p. 406: "Locum explicans ait Maimonides in divino opere More Nebukim"; Isaac Casaubon, *Epistolae* (Rotterdam, 1709), p. 138: "Magni Illius Magistri."

subject on which continental scholars, both Catholic and Protestant, took Maimonides to be an authority.¹⁵¹

John Selden, too, in his *De Diis Syris* of 1617, cited the *Guide* on numerous occasions. For Selden, Maimonides was ‘Rabbinorum doctissimus’, the most learned of the Rabbis and a particular authority on the ancient idolatries which were the subject of this work.¹⁵² Like Casaubon, Selden was reliant upon the translation of Giustiniani, which was a source of great frustration to him given its many mistakes and corruptions.¹⁵³ Selden’s second edition of the *Diis*, published in 1629, indicates that he was by then in possession of the Hebrew 1551 edition of the *Guide*, which had been published in Venice. Selden used the Hebrew text to correct Giustiniani’s Latin, though he still longed to one day read the work in Maimonides’s Judeo-Arabic original.¹⁵⁴

Whilst copies of both the *Guide* and the *Mishneh Torah* were evidently available in England in the first decades of the seventeenth century, most interested scholars would only have had access to the former, which, until 1629, as far as I have been able to establish, would only have been available in Latin translation. Indeed, the only edition of Maimonides listed in the Bodleian

¹⁵¹ Casaubon, *Ad Cardinilis Baronii*, p. 407: “De usufructu. Alibi in libris Iuris vocantur venae saxorum. Deum vero appellari Tzur Petram, quia ipse est principium et causa, per quam facta sunt omnia praeter ipsum. Non dicit Maimonides Deum appellari Petram, quia dominetur omnibus rebus creatis; nam, etsi verum est Deum immortalem rerum omnium creaturarum dominum esse et absolutissimum monarcham, haec tamen metaphora non adhibetur ad exprimendam dominationem, sed ad indicandam originem rerum et causam existentiae. Robur etiam significat ac potentiam et aeternam durationem. Denique Petra, cum metaphorice de Deo dicitur, habito respectu ad naturam et proprietatem verae rupis aut saxi alicuius durissimi, ad significationem nominis Tetragrammati proxime accedit. Quod nomen aeternum et perpetuum Dei esse, quum designet צור (sive Petram), durationem notat, quae est continuatio τὸ εἶναι (to einai) et causam existendi in creaturas collatam.”

¹⁵² John Selden, *De diis Syris syntagmata II. Adversaria nempe de numinibus commentitij in vetere instrumento memoratis. accedunt quae sunt reliqua Syrorum. Prisca porro Arabum, Aegyptiorum, Persarum, Afrorum, Europaeorum item theologia subinde illustrata* (London, 1617), p. xxxix.

¹⁵³ Selden, *De diis* (1617), p. 42: “Ille primum ab Autore est Arabice conscriptus, & Ebraice postea a Samuele Aben Tybbon versus”; Casaubon, *Epistolae*, p. 138: “Didici ex literis tuis, opus Rambanii *Moreh Nebukhim* Arabice ab Autore fuisse scriptum: quod nos, cum Latinum interpretem ante multos menses legeremus”; Selden, *De diis* (1617), p. 88: “Depravatus nimium videtur latinus codex”; *Ibid.*, p. 240: “Fallit Latinus Codex... Ebraeum hactenus non potuimus.”

¹⁵⁴ Selden, *De diis Syris syntagmata II: Adversaria nempe de numinibus commentitij in veteri instrumento memoratis. Accedunt fere quae sunt reliqua Syrorum. Prisca porro Arabum, Aegyptiorum, Persarum, Afrorum, Europaeorum item theologia* (London, 1629), p. 282: “Neque enim codicem arabicum vidisse mihi hactenus contigit”.

Library catalogue for 1613 is the ‘Ductor Dubiorum’, which I can only assume corresponds with Thomas Allen’s ‘Ductor Neutorum’, which was gifted in 1601.¹⁵⁵ The subsequent catalogue, of 1620, reveals that no new editions had been purchased in the intervening period, hence Skynner’s attempts to ‘introduce’ Maimonides to Ussher.¹⁵⁶ His was not a famous name in England. Despite Maimonides’s outsized significance for such dedicated Hebraists as Broughton and Ainsworth, until the publication of the 1629 Latin edition of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, few Englishmen would have known his name. Both Selden and Casaubon had read the *Guide* in England before that, though only in Giustiniani’s translation, as this was the only edition of it available to them, as their letters make clear. The *Mishneh Torah*, however, seems to have been accessible to both in the original Hebrew, even if few consulted it, with Selden quoting from it frequently in the first edition of *De Diis* and Casaubon indicating that he had studied it in great depth in his youth in Geneva and Lyon and then later in London.¹⁵⁷

Perhaps the best evidence that neither the *Guide* nor the *Mishneh Torah* were particularly well known in England in the early years of the seventeenth century, despite the best efforts of Selden, Skynner, Ainsworth, and Broughton is John Lightfoot’s *Erubbin*, a 1629 summary of all the Jewish texts, which that most enthusiastic of Hebraists had studied to date. The name of Maimonides does not appear at all in this work, only that of Rabbi Simon, author of a short treatise on logic. That the work contained a record of the thoughts of ‘our Rabbi Mosche, the son of the honorable Rabbi Maimon of blessed memory’ on the subject in question, went unremarked by Lightfoot, indicating that that name meant little, if anything at all, to him.¹⁵⁸ This

¹⁵⁵ Autograph catalogue of the Bodleian (vol. I), 1613, Bodleian Library records e273, fol 327v; Bodleian Library MS. Bodl. 437.

¹⁵⁶ *Catalogus universalis librorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana omnium librorum, linguarum, et scientiarum genere refertissima sic compositus; ut non solum publicis per Europam universam bibliothecis* (Oxford, 1620), p. 309.

¹⁵⁷ Bod MS Casaubon 4, sig. 30r: “Vidimus et nos eum librum et multa in eo legimus Genevae et Lugduni; Ibid., 30r-34v: Percurrebam Londini librum Mosis ben Maimon Jad inscriptum. Liber editus est Venetiis cum superbo frontispicio more Hebraeorum.”

¹⁵⁸ John Lightfoot, *Erubbin, or Miscellanies Christian and Iudaicall* (London, 1629), pp. 80-81; Moses Maimonides, *Milot habigayon shebiber haRambam* (Cremona, 1566), p. 1; “Rabi noster Mosche, filius honorati Rabi Maimon bonae memoriae (sp.)”

is particularly notable given that a 1553 Sabionneta edition of the *Moreh Nebukhim* and a Venice edition of the *Mishneh Torah*, complete with the indices of Samuel Athia and the commentary of Abraham di Boton would arrive in Sion College library later that year.¹⁵⁹ Had Lightfoot written his *Erubbin*, a year later, it is likely that the writings of Maimonides would have featured prominently therein.

The first phase of the reception of the Hebraic Maimonides in England, which began with Philip Ferdinand's publication of the thirteen principles of faith in 1597 concluded with the arrival in 1629 of Johannes Buxtorf the younger's new Latin translation of the *Moreh Nebukhim*. This edition, which, like its predecessor, the *Dux*, rendered the *Guide* in Latin to those with no Hebrew at all, would prove very popular in England. Following its publication, that a scholar of Ussher's profile could possibly never have heard of Maimonides, would be inconceivable. The success of this edition is not only testified to by its presence in all major libraries but also its being accompanied by often very well-thumbed copies of the further translations of Maimonides's writings that would follow in its wake.

From the *Guide* to the *Mishneh Torah*: a flurry of translations – the Hebraic Maimonides in Latin translation

In his landmark work of 1984, Aaron Katchen, argued that the seventeenth century saw a divergence in scholarly approaches to Maimonides, from a particular fascination with the *Guide* to a still deeper fascination with the *Mishneh Torah*.¹⁶⁰ I wish to argue, however, that it was through Buxtorf's translation of the *Guide* that large numbers of scholars were directed towards the *Mishneh Torah*. It is no coincidence that it was in the decade following the publication of

¹⁵⁹ Sion College Donors Book LPL Sion LA0.2/E64, p. 5. Further details on these items might be found in Julian Roberts & G.J. Toomer, 'The Featherstone Catalogue of Hebrew Books', *Bodleian Library Record* 19, No. 1 (2006) 19.1, pp. 48-78.

¹⁶⁰ Aaron Katchen, *Christian Hebraists and Dutch rabbis: seventeenth century apologetics and the study of Maimonides's Mishneh Torah*, pp. 4-5.

Buxtorf's *Guide* that translations of *Hilkhot Teshuva*, *Hilkhot Yesodai Hatorah*, *Hilkhot Avodah Zarah* and *Hilkhot Deot*, the four of which, taken together, constitute *Sefer Madda* (minus *Hilkhot Talmud Torah*), were published in Europe.¹⁶¹ It is worth noting at this juncture that in the 1620s, Skynner had failed to find a publisher for his *Sefer Madda*. Buxtorf's *Guide* had not only rendered the Hebraic Maimonides in a highly readable Latin but had introduced him to a new generation of Protestant scholars who would go on to produce their own translations of his works with a view to 'presenting the basic elements of the Jewish religion' to a Christian readership.¹⁶²

The year 1629 is central to our story. Not only is it the year in which the Buxtorf edition of the *Moreh* went to the presses, but it is also the year in which Sion College Library, which would emerge as the major centre of Reformed scholarship in the 1640s and 1650s received its first major shipment of Hebrew books.¹⁶³ These were the books by which Lightfoot, and through him so many others, would get to know Maimonides. This year marks a new phase in the English reception of the Hebraic Maimonides, within which his reputation would reach new heights. His writings were no longer only accessible to the small coterie of Hebraists, whose knowledge of him was drawn, in large part, from continental contacts but could now be accessed with increasing ease in both Hebrew and Latin.

Buxtorf's interest in producing a new translation of the *Moreh* had been piqued in 1622, when he set about studying Giustiniani's version alongside the 1553 Sabionetta edition of the same, in Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew. What he discovered shocked him. The Latin translation was so 'obscure and corrupt' that its relationship to the Hebrew was barely discernible and so, spurred on by his love

¹⁶¹ Moses Maimonides, *Canones poenitentiae Hebraice a R. Mose Aegyptio descripti* (London, 1631); Moses Maimonides, *Constitutiones De Fundamentis Legis rabbi Mosis F. Maimon* (Amsterdam, 1638); Moses Maimonides, *Canones Ethici R. Moseh Meimonidis, hebraeorum sapientissimi, sive Canones ethici R. moseh Meimonidis, hebraeorum sapientissimi* (Amsterdam, 1640); Moses Maimonides, *R. Mosis Maimonida de idololatria liber* (Amsterdam, 1641).

¹⁶² Maimonides, *Fundamentis Legis*, sig. A2.: 'Idem animo versans, consultius judicavi potius obvia Iudaicae religionis promere elementa.'

¹⁶³ See Roberts & Toomer, 'Featherstone Catalogue'.

of Semitic languages, the twenty-three-year-old Buxtorf committed himself to producing a new translation of the work.¹⁶⁴

This was no simple task, for, as Buxtorf discovered, the *Guide* deals with an array of complex subjects and the language of the Sabionetta edition itself represented a difficult balance, as translations often do, between faithfulness to the original and comprehensibility.¹⁶⁵ He was aided in his endeavours by senior colleagues, both in person and in print and by a manuscript copy of Ibn Tibbon's translation, using which he was able to account for printing errors he encountered in the 1553 edition.¹⁶⁶ The results are astounding. Buxtorf's *Guide* is highly readable. Its introduction is exhaustive, outlining all that was then known about Maimonides's personal history, his family background and his upbringing in Cordoba, his migration to Egypt and his emergence as a scholar of global renown. It gives extensive details of the available source material on Maimonides's medical and political careers, and, perhaps most significantly for Buxtorf's audience, his disdain for traditional Talmudic scholarship.¹⁶⁷ Importantly, Buxtorf gave this as the reason for the burning of Maimonides's books in France. Whilst he stops short of refuting Giustiniani's claim that Maimonides was repudiated by his own community for his proximity to Christianity, even quoting Giustiniani on this point, he was careful to outline the fruits of his careful research into this episode which had led him to believe that the *Guide* proved controversial on account of its reliance upon 'Scripture itself, philosophy and sound reasoning'

¹⁶⁴ Johannes Buxtorf, *Doctor perplexorum: Moreh nevukhim* (Basle, 1629), sig. ***3v.: "Tantum et obscuritatem et pravitatem ab initio statim deprehendimus, ut non solum nullum fere ex illo sensum assequi, sed vix Hebraei codicis vestigia deprehendere potuerimus; Ibid.,: linguis amore feror."

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.: "Nam praeter materiae difficultatem (sunt enim Philosophica inter Hebraeos intellectu difficillima) & stylus vere perplexus est: cujus rei causam hanc esse arbitror, quod illum ad Exemplar Arabicum eamque, linguam Auctor attemperavit. Unde factum ut et novas Voces, et Phrases in hebraeum idioma introduxerit."

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., sig. ***4r: "At vero tum adminiculis, quae ad manus errant, adjutus, tum Virorum doctorum judicis & monitis in proposito confirmatus, tandem Divina assistente gratia ad finem opus perduxit. Usus enim sum Exemplari tum impresso, tum in pergameno manuscripto."

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., sig. *3v: "Theologiae in sua Religione et fide Doctor fuit insignis, ac (quae laus ipsi tribuenda est) fabulis et traditionibus Talmudicis minime addictus. Sic enim scribit in epistola ad R. Josephum discipulum suum: Cave, ne tempus tuum teras in expositione et operosa consideratione Gemarae; ego enim in illis multum temporis perdidit, et parum utilitatis hausi."

as opposed to the ‘Talmudic fables’ to which Jews were accustomed.¹⁶⁸ To those wishing to explore the controversy in greater depth, Buxtorf recommended the latest edition of his father’s *Instituto Epistolaris* which contains a treasure trove of epistolary evidence as to the ‘malicious individuals’ who anathematised Maimonides, none of whom cited his proximity to Christianity as the basis for their decision to ‘slander’, ‘defame, reject’ and ‘condemn to the flames’ the *Guide*.¹⁶⁹ Maimonides, whom Buxtorf referred to here as ‘our Rabbi Moses’, was the victim of ‘hatred and envy’ not sincere heresy-hunting, quite the opposite, in fact, one of the chief agitators against him would ‘eventually defect from Judaism’.¹⁷⁰ Buxtorf thus very subtly repudiated Giustiniani’s influential conception of Maimonides as crypto-Christian, perpetuating an entirely different conception of him as a ‘distinguished Doctor in Theology within his religion and faith’.¹⁷¹

Maimonides became known in England then, as an exemplary Jew, whose life story could be reconstructed through a vast array of Jewish sources, including his very own letters. The Latin Maimonides, who had achieved such great renown on the continent through the citations of the scholastics, had thus been surpassed in England by the Hebraic, long before his reputation had even been established. For most English readers of Buxtorf’s *Moreh Nebukhim*, this was their first introduction to the work, which came with the sincere recommendations of such luminaries as Joseph Scaliger, Isaac Casaubon and indeed, Buxtorf himself. Until the introduction of Pococke’s multilingual Maimonides in 1650, it would be through this edition, above all others, that Maimonides was best-known in England.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., sig. ***r.: “Nam cum illi Philosophiae ignari et Talmudicis fabulis nimis addicti essent, illum novum quid in hoc libro moliri existimarunt, atque adeo pro haeretico esse habuerunt.”

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., sig. ***v.: “Variis calumniis eum lacerando, et omnis generis occasionibus ad librum hunc diffamandum, rejiciendum, adeoque flammis devovendum.”

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.: “Qui tandem a Judaica religione, ut scribunt, defecit.”

¹⁷¹ Ibid., sig. *3v.: “Doctor theologiae in sua religione et fide fuit insignis.”

Inspired by Buxtorf, the translators of Maimonides who set to work in the following decades bore no illusions as to his religious allegiances. As G.N. (thought to be William of Norwich) pointed out in the introduction to his translation of *Hilkhot Teshuva*, Buxtorf had made it clear that Maimonides's works were 'in keeping' with the 'common' errors 'of his people'.¹⁷² G.N.'s *Canones poenitentiae* was in fact approved by the censor on the grounds that where Maimonides 'fell into error', he did so as a 'Jew' and so his false teachings should come as 'no surprise' to the judicious Christian reader.¹⁷³ This is a very different Maimonides from the figure introduced to us in 1520 by Giustiniani. He had much to offer the faithful Christian and yet, it was not to be denied that he 'spoke according to the opinions of the Jews'.¹⁷⁴

Whilst the publication of Buxtorf's *Guide* in 1629 was certainly impactful on account of its excellence, it was also well timed. Just three years prior, a Hebrew printing press had been established in Amsterdam, that archetypal melting pot, from which three out of the four translations of the *Mishneh Torah* published in the succeeding decade would arise. Just as Broughton and Ainsworth a half-century prior were far in advance of most of their English colleagues when it came to rabbinic scholarship on account of their Dutch contacts, these authors were living amongst living, breathing, Jews, whose learning they were eager to share in. Chief amongst these was one Menasseh ben Israel, founder of that very printing press and teacher to our three Dutch translators, Willem Vorstius, George Gentius and Dionysius Vossius.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² His identity has been confirmed by S. Levy. See S. Levy, 'English Students of Maimonides', *Miscellanies (Jewish historical Society of England)* Vol. 4 (1942), pp. 61-84, p. 66; G.N., *Canones poenitentiae Hebraice a R. Mose Aegyptio descripti* (London, 1631), sig. 1A.: "Monitionem passim in eo libro habes, et praecipue ad marginem pag. 380. Hisce verbis, NB Quod author ex comuni gentis suae errore liberum arbitrium statuat."

¹⁷³ G.N., *Canones poenitentiae*, sig. 1B: "Nec mirum est hominem Judaeum in ejusmodi errores incidere."

¹⁷⁴ George Gentius, *Canones Ethici R. Moseh Meimonidis, hebraeorum sapientissimi, sive Canones ethici R. moseh Meimonidis, hebraeorum sapientissimi* (Amsterdam, 1640), p. 129.: "ex Judaeorum sententia dixisse."

¹⁷⁵ See Katchen, *Dutch Rabbis*, pp. 161-255.

Of these, the work of the third, Dionysius Vossius, would prove most influential in England. This was no coincidence. Dionysius, son of the famed historian, G.J. Vossius, had chosen to dedicate the work to ‘the renowned academies of England [Oxford and Cambridge], the illustrious alma maters, twin sisters, flourishing in every branch of learning and celebrated throughout the world’ on the recommendation of his brother, Isaac.¹⁷⁶ Ties to the English universities would prove crucial in the Vossius family’s marketing of the work. From 1632 when the project commenced, G.J. Vossius took care to regularly update the incoming Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud as to its progress, informing him in November of 1634 that the work was almost complete, writing again when it finally was in July of 1636 and yet again a few days later to let him know that it was now with the printers.¹⁷⁷ Laud was, in fact, the work’s original dedicatee, but for the intervention of his political and personal demise by 1641, when it was eventually published.¹⁷⁸ The final product reached the Archbishop in September of 1637, following which it was sent to James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, Brian Duppa, then tutor to royal princes, John Prideaux, Pro-chancellor of the University of Oxford, Edward Pococke, who held chairs in both Hebrew and Arabic at the same university, Richard Steward, Dean of the Chapel Royal, Meric Casaubon, son of Isaac, Patrick Young, royal librarian and to John Selden.¹⁷⁹ A further eighteen copies were then sent to Laud on the understanding that he would distribute these to further scholars to whom the work might prove of interest.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Moses Maimonides, *De idololatria liber cum interpretatione Latina & notis Dionysii Vossii* (Amsterdam, 1642), sig. *1: “Inclytis Angliae Academiis, Almis Matribus, geminis Sororibus, omni doctrinarum genere florentissimis, ac universe orbe celebrimis”; G.J. Vossius to James Ussher, 12th December 1641.

¹⁷⁷ G.J. Vossius to William Laud, 7 Nov. 1634, Bod MS Rawl. letters 83 fols. 96-97; G.J. Vossius to William Laud, 5 Jul. 1636, Bod MS Rawl. letters 83 fol. 81; G. J. Vossius to William Laud, Jul. 1636, Bod MS Rawl. Letters 83. Fol. 82.

¹⁷⁸ G.J. Vossius to William Laud, 26 Nov. 1632 in G.J. Vossius, *Epistolae* (Amsterdam, 1690), pp. 208-209.

¹⁷⁹ G.J. Vossius to William Laud, 30th Sep 1637; Bod MS Rawl. Letters fol. 79; G.J. Vossius to James Ussher, Bod MS Rawl. Letters 84f fol. 159; G.J. Vossius to Brian Duppa, 12th December 1641, Bod MS Rawl. Letters 84c fol. 3; G.J. Vossius to John Prideaux, 10th December 1641, Bod MS Rawl. Letters 84f fol. 162; G.J. Vossius to Edward Pococke, 9 December 1641, Bod MS Rawl. Letters 84f fol. 154; G.J. Vossius to Richard Steward, 6 Dec 1641, Bod MS Rawl. Letters 84f fol. 155; G.J. Vossius to Meric Casaubon, 6 December 1641, Bod MS. Rawl. Letters 84f fol. 160; G.J. Vossius to Patrick Young, 5th December 1641, Bod MS Rawl. Letters 84f fol. 161; G.J. Vossius to John Selden 4th December 1641, Bod MS Rawl. Letters 84f fol. 164

¹⁸⁰ G.J. Vossius to William Laud, 9 Dec. 1641, Bod MS Rawl. Letters 84f fol. 157.

This marketing campaign proved wildly successful. Dionysius's *De Idololatria* soon became a staple of the college library and would serve to inspire a flurry of writings on the subject of idolatry, including his father's *De theologia Gentili*, with which it would be published once again in 1668.¹⁸¹ In England, in particular, in the years following publication of this work, Henry Hammond set about writing his *Of Idolatry*, which relies heavily upon *De Idololatria* as an historical source.¹⁸² The publication of this work in 1642 was fortuitous, for only two years prior, the reputation of Maimonides had been given even further impetus in England, by the publication of John Selden's magnum opus, *De Jure Naturali*.¹⁸³ This work, which offers a reconceptualisation of the very concept of natural law was rooted in the *Mishneh Torah*'s treatment of the distinction between Jews and non-Jews in Jewish Law.

Grotius's *De Jure Belli*, Selden's *De Jure Naturali* and the Noahide Laws

The Hebraic Maimonides, I argue, was not a secularising force, though his influence upon John Selden's *De Jure Naturali* has seen him characterised as such. Maimonides's outsized role in the development of Selden's conception of natural law has led historians to cast Maimonides in the role of seculariser. For Levitin, the 'greatest import' of the Noachide precepts as they were articulated by Maimonides was their 'making the Mosaic dispensation more contingent and stripping it of any universalist elements'.¹⁸⁴ The principal argument articulated by Selden's *De Jure Naturali*, however, is that natural law is rooted in the Word of God, as it has been interpreted by the rabbis. This is not the articulation of a secular conception of natural law, but its opposite. In *De Jure Naturali* Selden provided a thorough account of 'what the Hebrews called the Law of the

¹⁸¹ G.J. Vossius, *De theologia gentili, et physiologia Christiana; sive De origine ac progressu idololatriae: deque naturae mirandis, quibus homo adducitur ad Deum libri IX* (Amsterdam, 1668).

¹⁸² Henry Hammond, *Of Idolatry* (London, 1646).

¹⁸³ John Selden, *De Jure Naturali & gentium: juxta disciplinam Ebraeorum, libri septem* (London, 1640).

¹⁸⁴ Levitin, 'Sacred History', pp. 1129-1131; See also Klaus Müller, *Tora für die Völker: Die noachidischen Gebote und Ansätze zu ihrer Rezeption im Christentum* (Berlin, 1994).

Noahides’, which was a conception of natural law, which could not be rooted either in human history or abstract reason, but only in Scripture.¹⁸⁵ Selden’s study of Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah*, far from providing him with a secularised conception of the law led him to an essentially religious approach, whereby ‘natural law’, which is God-given and applies universally is distinguished from ‘the law of nations’, which, whilst God-given in the specific case of the Mosaic law, applies to one particular people, the Hebrews. He approved the refusal of the Hebrews to ground natural law in ‘the correct use of reason’, as human reason is often experienced as ‘uncertain and inconsistent with itself’ and instead to locate it in the Word of God.¹⁸⁶ Selden’s *De Jure* did not give rise to a secular conception of natural law, but rather a rabbinic conception of it, albeit a peculiarly Maimonidean one. Maimonides’s conception of the Mosaic law as having a particular function for the Hebrews, raised the possibility of other ‘intervening’ laws, which could be designed to serve the needs of particular peoples.¹⁸⁷

The express purpose of *De Jure Naturali* was to articulate the distinction between ‘Natural Law and the Law of Nations’ on the basis of ‘Hebrew teaching’, by which this distinction was grounded in the Word of God.¹⁸⁸ The Hebrew conception of natural law, Selden argued was premised upon that which is expressed in the ‘Talmudic’ dictum ‘the righteous among the nations have a share in the world to come’ (חסידי אומות העולם, יש להם חלק לעולם הבא).¹⁸⁹ The Talmudic sources out of which Selden cited this saying were *Hilkhot Teshuba*, Obadia Bartenora’s comments upon chapter 10 of the Mishnah in *Sanhedrin*, where these are echoed by Maimonides’s comments on the same and Menasseh ben Israel’s *De Resurrectione Mortuorum*, where it is cited in the name of Maimonides.¹⁹⁰ We thus have here a typical example of Selden’s

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., sig. ar: “quod Noachidarum Ebraeis dicitur.”

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 87: “ex recto Rationis”; Ibid., p. 86: “incertus est et sibi inconstans.”

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 209: “ex interveniente.”

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., sig. ar: “De Jure Naturali et Gentium... Disciplinam Ebraeorum.”

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 32: Pii e Gentibus mundi, sors in future seculo.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 32; See Menasseh ben Israel, *De Resurrectione Mortuorum* (Amsterdam, 1636), p. 183.

presenting something out of ‘the books of the Talmud’, which he most likely first encountered in the *Mishneh Torah*.¹⁹¹ This Jewish notion of universal salvation, for Selden, provided a proper basis upon which a durable conception of natural law could be grounded. If all could be saved, then all could be obligated. This was the purpose of the Noachide laws, the excavation of which constitutes the bulk of the content of *De Jure Naturali*.

To fully explain the significance of *De Jure Naturali*, however, we must first turn to the work to which it constitutes a response, Hugo Grotius’s *De Jure Belli* (1625). This work, represented, in the words of Richard Tuck, ‘a manifesto for a new science of morality’.¹⁹² It formalised Grotius’s supposed break with Aristotelianism, which he had only previously hinted at, inaugurating a new, ‘minimalist approach to the laws of nature’.¹⁹³ As Jean Barbeyrac put it, it was Grotius who ‘first broke the ice’ after the long winter of Aristotelianism.¹⁹⁴ Where exactly Grotius broke with his scholastic predecessors has long been a subject of debate, however.¹⁹⁵ Many have focused on his ‘impious statement’ in the *Prolegomena* to *De Jure Belli* in which Grotius asserted that natural law constituted those obligations which ‘would have a degree of validity even if we should concede that which cannot be conceded without the utmost wickedness, that there is no God, or that the affairs of men are of no concern to him.’¹⁹⁶ However, Grotius, as Selden made clear in his *De Jure*

¹⁹¹ Selden, *Jure Naturali*, p. 32: libris Talmudicis.

¹⁹² Richard Tuck, ‘Grotius and Selden’ in J.H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1550-1700* (CUP, 2008), pp. 499- 529, p. 520.

¹⁹³ Ibid., pp. 518-19; Ibid., p. 513.

¹⁹⁴ Jean Barbeyrac, ‘An Historical and Critical Account of the Science of Morality’ in Samuel Pufendorf, *The law of nature and nations: or, a general system of the most important principles of morality, jurisprudence, and politics* (London, 1749), p. 67.

¹⁹⁵ See Knud Haakonsen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy; From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (CUP, 1996), p. 15; Richard Tuck, ‘The “modern” theory of natural law’ in Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe* (CUP, 1987), pp. 99-119; Meirav Jones, ‘Natural Law as True Law in Randall Lesaffer and Janne E. Nijman (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hugo Grotius* (CUP, 2021), pp. 138-156; Johann P. Sommerville, ‘Selden, Grotius, and the Seventeenth-Century Intellectual revolution in Moral and Political Theory’ in Victoria Hahn and Lorna Hutson (eds.), *Rhetoric and Law in Early Modern Europe* (YUP, 2001), pp. 318-344.

¹⁹⁶ Hugo Grotius, *De jure belli ac pacis* (Amsterdam, 1625), sig. a vjv-e: Et haec quidem quae iam diximus, locum habent etiamsi daremus, quod sine summo scelere dari nequit, non esse Deum, ut non curare ab eo negotia humana; On Grotius’s ‘secularism’ see A.P. D’Entreves, *Natural Law; An Introduction to Legal Philosophy* (transaction Publishers, 1994), p. 55; J.B. Schneewinnd, ‘Locke’s Moral Philosophy, in Vere Chappell (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Locke* (CUP, 1994), pp. 199-225, pp. 209-211; Haakonsen, *Natural Law*, p. 29; Richard Tuck, *Philosophy*

Naturali was not novel for his secularism, but for his reliance upon Hebraic sources for the elucidation of the concept of natural law.¹⁹⁷ Now, Grotius, who was certainly no Hebraist, nonetheless, proposed in the *DJB* that the Talmudic concept of the Noachide laws; the seven laws given to all humanity by God, constituted ‘divine positive law’ by which all are bound.¹⁹⁸ Whilst in the second edition of *De Jure Belli* he did attempt to cite this concept out of the Talmud itself, Grotius proved unable to do so, mistakenly referring his readers to a non-existent tractate by ‘the title of the King’.¹⁹⁹ This tractate was, in fact, *Hilkebot Melakhim*, the section of the *Mishneh Torah* which deals with governance, within which the relationship of the Noahide laws to the Mosaic law is properly spelled out.

Grotius had thus inexpertly introduced the concept of the Noachide Laws to the European scholarly public. Selden would develop this notion, implicit in Grotius, into a full-blown theory of natural law. The Noachide laws, Selden explained, were given ‘to all mankind’ that they might worship the one God, establish courts of law and refrain from incest, murder, idol worship and stealing.²⁰⁰ They had previously been ‘summarised by Christian writers’, such as Grotius, though such summaries were ‘nowhere explicitly detailed’ and where they were, ‘gross errors’ were present.²⁰¹ Unlike Grotius, Selden did not distinguish between ‘natural law’ and ‘divine positive law’. He did not believe, as the ‘majority of writers’ preceding him did that ‘nature itself can

and Government, 1572-1651 (CUP, 1993) p. 94; Richard Tuck, ‘The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain* (CUP, 1993), pp. 120-130, p. 130.

¹⁹⁷ Selden, *De jure*, pp. 34-35: “Atque in horum primariis habendus est Hugo Grotius, qui in eximiis illis de Jure Belli ac Pacis libris... ipsam Ebraeorum quam exhibituri sumus disciplinam e Talmudicis tangit.”

¹⁹⁸ Grotius, *De jure*, pp. 10-11: “Jus voluntarium divinum quod sit, satis ex ipso vocum sono intelligimus, nimirum quod ex voluntate divina ortum habet, quo discrimine a iure naturali, quod item divinum dici posse diximus, internoscitur. In hoc iure locum habere potest quod nimium indistincte Anaxarchus, non ideo id Deum velle quia iustum est, sed iustem esse, id est iure debitum, quia Deus voluit. Hoc autem ius aut datum est humano generi, aut populo uni. Humano generi ius datum a Deo reperimus: statim post hominem conditum, iterum in restauratione humani generis post diluvium, postremo in sublimiori restauratione per Christum. Tria haec iura haud dubie omnes homines obligant ex quo quantum satis sit ad eorum notitiam pervenerunt.”

¹⁹⁹ Hugo Grotius, *De jure belli ac pacis* (Amsterdam, 1631), p. 9: “Ut legitur titulo Thalmudico de Rege.”

²⁰⁰ Grotius, *De jure*, p. 141: “Has autem leges, & ne fratres sororibus miscerentur, ipsi Adamo censent datas Hebraei simul cum lege de Deo colendo, jure dicendo, non fundendo sanguine, non colendis Diis falsis, non rapienda re aliena.”

²⁰¹ Selden, *De jure*, sig. a: “Scriptoribus Christianis subinde habes, sed nec sine crassissimo subinde errore generatim memorata. Nullibi autem explicata.”

distinguish between justice and injustice'.²⁰² The term 'natural' as he was using it in *De Jure Naturali* referred simply to 'what was considered the Law of the World, common to all humanity' by 'the Hebrews'.²⁰³ His primary Hebrew source, however, was Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah*. Far from merely developing Grotius's ideas, as Selden is often said to have done, *De Jure Naturali*, to a much greater extent than *De Jure Belli* breaks with the scholastic natural law tradition, offering a novel interpretation of natural law that is rooted entirely in the Scriptures as they have been interpreted by the Rabbis, chief amongst them, Maimonides.²⁰⁴ Whilst Selden was criticised, both in his own day and by subsequent scholars, for offering a purely descriptive account of the Jewish legal system that contributed little to the discussion as to how 'natural law' should be defined, the text of *De Jure Naturali* itself makes it abundantly clear that Selden was, in fact, making a very powerful intervention in that discussion.²⁰⁵

Following Maimonides's account of the Noachide laws, Selden distinguished between 'Jus Naturale', the laws which pertain to all and 'Jus Gentium', the laws which only pertain to particular peoples.²⁰⁶ This was not a distinction which could be arrived at by reason alone for three reasons: firstly, reason could be used, and, indeed, had been used, to justify the unreasonable; secondly, as the operation of civil law across societies reveals, laws are subject to differing interpretations and thirdly, even if reason could lead every human mind to the same conclusion as to the dictates of natural law, reason itself does not have the authority to ground obligation.²⁰⁷ Having established the limitations of reason alone as a basis for natural law, Selden

²⁰² Ibid., sig. ar.: "Plerique Scriptorum... nec natura potest Justo discernere iniquum."

²⁰³ Ibid., sig. a2r.: "Iam vero Naturalis vocabulum, in Titulo, id tantum indicat quod, ex Ebraeorum... pro Iure Mundi seu omnium Hominum omnimodarmque tum Gentium."

²⁰⁴ See Tuck, *Natural Rights*, pp. 175-176; Richard Tuck, 'Grotius and Selden' in J.H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1550-1700* (CUP, 1991, pp. 499-529, p. 499; Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, pp. 214-215.

²⁰⁵ See for example Samuel Pufendorf, *Eris Scandica, Qua adversus libros de jure naturali et gentium objecta diluuntur* (Frankfurt, 1686), pp. 201-201; Samuel Pufendorf, *De jure naturae et gentium libri octo*, (Clarendon, 1934) 2. vols, Vol. I, p. vi.

²⁰⁶ Selden, *De jure*, sig. a.: "Jus Naturale ita significat heic quod Jus Mundi seu Universale; Gentium Ius, id quod Gentibus aliquot peculiare."

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 90: "Quid quod nonnullis etiam majorum gentium Philosophis adeo singularis heic erat ratio ejusque usus ac dictata (nam de pravitate, locus hic non est dicendi) ut quaedam certe raro apud homines non pro Juri

noted that some sought to get around this problem by grounding natural law in the observed 'behaviour of other living creatures' or 'the customs common to all or most nations'.²⁰⁸ Neither, for Selden would suffice. The behaviour of 'other living creatures', Grotius himself had recognised, was never taken as an appropriate standard for the judgement of human behaviour. Thus, in the ancient world, parricides, on account of their perceived 'beastliness'; were thrown into the sea.²⁰⁹ Common custom, too, on account of the vast differences, moral as well as philosophical, between peoples, was just as improper a grounds for natural law as animal behaviour and thus 'the Hebrews had prudently given no regard to the customs and institutions of all or most nations when designating Natural Law'.²¹⁰

Grotius's aspiration to identify a minimal set of laws which would apply regardless of the Divine's legitimation of them, Selden noted, appeared in the writings of the Rabbis too, as the 'commandments of knowledge' (מצוות הדעת), which are not unknown to anyone who reflects properly.²¹¹ These commandments, however, as with the commandments more broadly, had to be commanded in order to be categorised as such. It was only by the will of 'the universal King' that the precepts of natural law could be universally agreed upon.²¹²

Naturali plane adversis haberentur"; Ibid., p. 91: "Sive a Principibus sive ab aliis qui rebus praesunt conscripta habentur, in his inibi etiam videmus non sine ingenti Ratione, tametsi habeat ea ibi palam quo subnitatur et dirigaturque, usus discrimine in alias atque alias, imo creberrime in contrarias discedere"; Ibid., p. 94: "Simul Omnes etiam se obligari quaecumque ratione velint, eo pariter et Omnes se solvere erite posse nemo non videt, nisi etiam superior aliqua hominis auctoritas ipsos ita velit manere obligatos."

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 43: "Ex aliorum Animantium actibus ac usu Jura hominibus aliquot naturalia petunt... alii Juris Naturalis Corpus ex Moribus omnium seu plurimarum gentium communibus... alii Naturae adeoque naturalis rationis parentis."

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 59: "ex jure Romanorum (L. poena 9. D. De lege Pompeia de Parricidiis ac Instit. Tit. De publicis Iudiciis S. Alia deinde veteri, sum parricida (quia ei similimi (Theophilus citato loco Institut.) errant) insuti in mare.

²¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 82-82: non imprudenter fatum merito forfan dixit ab Ebraeis dum in Juris Naturalis designatione, Omnium seu Plurium Gentium morum seu institutionum rationem habent nullam."

²¹¹ Ibid., pp. 121-122: "Praecepta scientiae suae nemini recte intuenti ignota appellant; Midrash Lekach Tov on Genesis 2.12: "כי כל אלה הן מצוות הדעת. שאפ"י לא נתנה תורה לישראל נוהגין היו בהם הדורות לשמרן מדעתן."

²¹² Selden, *De jure*, p. 122: "Secundi vero generis res quarum ratio non est alia praeter decretum regum... non quod genus utrumque non ex decreto regis universi id est Numinis pendere voluerint."

The Noachide laws were thus, for Selden, the definitive ‘minimal legal code’ and it was on this basis that he devoted his greatest work to the enumeration of them. In order to do so, he leaned heavily upon Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah*, where these precepts were explored in the greatest depth.²¹³ Selden’s *De Jure Naturali* is thus particularly striking for our purposes because of its very great debt to the Hebraic Maimonides, who served in this case, not as a secularising influence, but rather as a counter to the rationalising and historicising impulses that had taken hold in the realm of natural law. Further to this Selden’s *De Jure* represents a remarkable attempt to tie together Maimonides’s philosophical and legal writings through his rooting of the legal in the philosophical. The differences between the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Moreh Nebukhim* are so great that some have suggested that the same Rambam could not possibly have written both.²¹⁴ Over the course of seven volumes, Selden developed a masterful synthesis of the two, and, in doing so, introduced a new chapter in Maimonides’s European reception. Selden argued, following the *Moreh Nebukhim* that the primary purpose of the Mosaic Law, which was given to the Jews alone, was the eradication of ‘foreign worship’. This is the subject of the third and final book of the *Moreh*, which would, following the publication of both *De Idololatria* and *De Jure Naturali* within a year of each other, become the most cited of the three on the European continent. The conception of the Mosaic law, as per the *Guide*, as ‘an intervening law’, which came between the Israelites and the idolatrous customs of the surrounding peoples, stimulated a great deal of interest in who those surrounding peoples were, for knowledge of them would provide us with ‘a gateway to the reasons behind the commandments’.²¹⁵ In this one work Selden brought together the study of the *Guide*, which provided a framework for the concept of differing legal

²¹³ Ibid., p. 128: “Ex his (quemadmodum in Seder Olam cap. 5 et apud R. Mosem in *Iad a-Hazaquua* legimus) sex praecepta Adamo data sunt: Nimirum ut abstineret ab idololatria, 2. maledictione nominis divini, 3. caede, 4. adulterio, 5. furto, 6. ut iudices institueret, quorum esset curare ut illa praecepta observarentur. Super haec Noacho septimum additum fuit, ne membrum vivo animali amputatum comederet, his verbis: Carnem cum anima et sanguine suo ne comedas.”

²¹⁴ This was the claim of Rabbi Jacob Emden. See Jacob Joseph Schachter, ‘Rabbi Jacob Emden: Life and Major Works’, PhD Thesis, Harvard University, 1988, pp. 506-507.

²¹⁵ Selden, *De jure*, p. 212: “Cognitio disciplinae in eis contentae rituumque juxta eam solemniorum, porta magna est seu impense facit ad reddendas praeceptorum causas... ex Jure Interveniante.”

jurisdictions with the study of the *Mishneh Torah*, which detailed the ways in which this conception of overlapping jurisdictions had been applied in Ancient Israel and he stimulated a great deal of interest in the Ancient Israelite historical context. Both scholarly innovations would have tremendous implications for the later reception of Maimonides's writings in England and beyond.

Entering the *Porta Mosis* – encountering the multilingual Maimonides

Selden's decision to situate the development of the Law in its Ancient Near-Eastern context would greatly inspire the work of a younger scholar to whom I attribute the reception of the 'multilingual Maimonides', Edward Pococke. G.J. Toomer has speculated that the two men may first have met in the late 1620s at the home of William Bedwell, Pococke's Arabic tutor.²¹⁶ The first evidence we have as to their relationship, however, comes in the form of a letter of 1632 from John Wandesford, consul at Aleppo, to Selden, in which the former extolled the virtues of the then chaplain to the Levant Company, Edward Pococke.²¹⁷ The younger man's facility with Arabic greatly impressed the elder, leading to two decades of fruitful scholarly collaboration, which culminated in Pococke's completion of Selden's translation of Eutychius of Alexandria's *Nazm-al-Jawbar* (*A String of Jewels*), a work which would soon emerge as absolutely vital to the reception of the 'multilingual Maimonides'.²¹⁸

It is impossible to say when Edward Pococke first encountered Moses Maimonides. Ordained a priest in the Church of England in 1629, a year later, he would set sail for Aleppo, where he would spend most of the succeeding decade.²¹⁹ Had Pococke chosen to remain at Oxford in

²¹⁶ G.J. Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth Century England* (OUP, 1996), p. 117.

²¹⁷ See 'John Wandesford to John Selden, 26 November 1632, MS Bodleian Selden supra 108, f25r.

²¹⁸ Eutychius, *Nazm al Jawbar = Contextio gemmarum, sive, Eutychiei Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales* (London, 1642).

²¹⁹ On Pococke's time in Aleppo see Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom*, pp. 116-126; Simon Mills, *A Commerce of Knowledge: Trade, Religion, and Scholarship between England and the Ottoman Empire, 1600-1760* (OUP, 2020), pp. 71-95.

pursuit of a traditional academic career, as might have been expected, he would likely have encountered him gradually through a growing library of Latin translations, of the *Moreh Nebukhim* and then of the *Mishneh Torah*. Instead, encouraged in no small measure by John Selden, to whom he would dedicate his first major work, the *Specimen historiae Arabum* (1650), Pococke learnt Arabic from the Arabs and Hebrew from the Jews.²²⁰ He sought to understand both Judaism and Islam on their own terms, identifying the most eloquent exponents of each and purchasing as many copies of their works, often in manuscript form, as was humanly possible.²²¹ Pococke would go on to acquire the entirety of Maimonides's commentary on the Mishnah including a working copy of his commentaries on tractates *Nezikin* and *Kedoshim*, which were said to have been preserved by succeeding generations of the Maimon family.²²² As his *Specimen* bears witness, by the time Pococke returned to Oxford, he also had in his possession a complete set of the multi-volume *Mishneh Torah* in manuscript form, in the Hebrew original and two manuscript copies of the *Moreh Nebukhim* in their Arabic original. He had also chased down several references to Maimonides in the Arabic literature, providing the scholarly public with a far broader view of the man than even Buxtorf had, and all this in the notes accompanying his translation of another scholar.²²³ The burying of brilliance in notes and addenda will emerge as a peculiarly Pockocian form of obfuscation, as we shall soon discover. Pococke was a very unconventional scholar, whose intellectual interests often defied convention. As an undergraduate, having learned the rudiments of Arabic under the tutelage of Matthias Pasor, he sought further training outside of the University, at the home of William Bedwell, then in

²²⁰ Edward Pococke, *Specimen Historiae Arabum, Sive Gregorii Abul Farajii Malatiensis, De Origine & Moribus Arabum, succincta Narratio, in linguam Latinam conversa, Notisque e probatissimis apud Ipsos Authoribus, fusius illustrate* (Oxford, 1650).

²²¹ Pococke expounds this as a central principle, instilled in him by Jacob Romano, in the *Porta Mosis*. See Edward Pococke, 'Miscellaneous notes' in Moses Maimonides, *Bāb Mūsī: Porta Mosis, sive, Dissertationes aliquot a R. Mose Maimonide, suis in varias Mishnaioth, sive textus Talmudici partes, Commentariis praemissae, quae ad universam fere Judaeorum disciplinam aditum aperiunt* (Oxford, 1655), p. 160: "Jac. Romano accepisse me memini, ut si quid ut a Judaeis dictum aut assertum referre vellemus, illos sequeremur auctores qui alicujus apud suos notae, et fidei haberentur."

²²² See Bodleian Ms. Pococke 295; This claim is made in Solomon D. Sasoon, 'Introduction' in *Maimonidis commentaries in mishnam, e codicibus Hunt. 117 et Pococke 295 in bibliotheca Bodleiana Oxoniensi servatis et 72-73 bibliotheca Sasooniensis Letchworth*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen, 1956-66).

²²³ Pococke, *Specimen*, p. 366.

London.²²⁴ Instead of seeking a preferment in the national Church or at Oxford, he spent his formative years in the Middle East, learning Hebrew and Arabic and amassing one of the greatest collections of Oriental manuscripts ever seen in Europe. When he did return to Oxford, this was to take up the newly established Laudian Professorship of Arabic, though within a year, he would set sail once again, this time for Constantinople, where he would study Hebrew under the tutelage of Rabbi Jacob Roman for another three years before finally returning home to dispense his duties at the urging of his Oxford colleagues.²²⁵ When he left Oxford for his hometown of Childrey upon the outbreak of the English Civil War, he entered into parish ministry, which would prove so difficult, on account of the Parliamentary sympathies of many of his parishioners that he contemplated returning to the East once again. Whilst many English Maimonideans may have been inspired by Buxtorf, who was, in turn, inspired by the poverty of the 1520 edition of the much-lauded *More Nebukhim*, Pococke was inspired by his travels, by the Jews and Arabs he met along the way and ‘the hidden treasures’ he encountered there from ‘every branch of literature’.²²⁶

Maimonides’s comments on the Mishnah, only ever published in Hebrew were one such treasure. Pococke’s specific interest in Maimonides, stemmed from his specific interest in Arabic, the predominant language of the Sephardic Medieval diaspora. Pococke’s passion for Arabic knew no bounds. As a collector in the Levant, he was known to hoard manuscripts, not even allowing fellow collectors to peruse them.²²⁷ In a letter to Selden of 1632, Wandesford referred to the language as Pococke’s ‘mistresse’ with whom he enjoyed an ‘amorous’ relationship.²²⁸ A

²²⁴ Leonard Twells, ‘Life of Edward Pococke’ in Edward Pococke, *The theological works of Dr. Pocock, sometime professor of the Hebrew and Arabick tongues, in the University of Oxford and Canon of Christchurch* (London, 1740), pp. 1-84, p. 2.

²²⁵ Twells, ‘Edward Pococke’, pp. 11-18. On Jacob Roman see M. Kayserling, ‘Richelieu, Buxtorf père et fils, Jacob Roman’, *Revue des études juives* (1884), pp. 8-15.

²²⁶ Pococke ‘Preface’, *Specimen*, sig. A2: Sunt enim Arabibus, in omni literarum genere, gazae nondum reclusae, quibus eruendis manum admovere.

²²⁷ Wandesford to Selden, 26 November 1632.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*,

deeply religious motive underlay this amorousness, however, as the preface to the *Porta Mosis* makes clear. It was Pococke's firm conviction that through thus promoting the study of 'Arabic and Rabbinic literature', he was furthering his ultimate goal of 'interpreting the genuine meaning of Holy Scriptures', a 'significant obstacle' to which was a lack of languages.²²⁹ As is explained in the introduction to the Arabic section of the London Polyglott, the Hebrew vocabulary of the Old Testament was then believed to represent only a 'small portion' of the riches of that language, much of which had been preserved only in Arabic.²³⁰ Pococke was thus highly motivated to promote the study of Arabic, which he firmly believed would 'give light to some difficult places of Holy Scripture'.²³¹ In Maimonides's comments on the Mishnah, which he built up a complete collection of in manuscript form, he found a vital example of Judeo-Arabic literature, which he determined to share with the broader Republic of Letters in the form of Oxford's first ever work in Hebrew type, the *Porta Mosis* or *Bab Musi* (בב מוסי). It would serve, Pococke hoped, both as entryway, into both the Arabic language, and the rabbinic tradition. He thus made a point of publishing as much of the commentary on the *Mishnah* as was feasible, for to publish the entire work would be a task of 'greater magnitude' than his 'leisure allowed', 'in Hebrew characters' so as 'to provide a useful guide to scholars' such that they might 'become accustomed to the same method of writing that almost all Jews who have written in Arabic, both now and in the past, seem to have used.'²³²

²²⁹ Pococke, 'Praefatio', *Porta Mosis*, Sig. xxx 3: "Ad hunc fere scopum collimant omnia ut studiorum Rabbinicorum et Arabicorum in genuina S. Scripturarum sensu eruendo, iisque explicandis usum, prolatis exemplis, ostendant, et commendatiorem reddant. Quod vel bonarum literarum amantioribus persuasum dare, forsan non adeo facile erit; multo minus illis, quibus vel quid ultra vernaculam sepe, iis rite interpretandis maximum statuatur impedimentum."

²³⁰ Brian Walton, 'De Lingua Arabica & Scriptura Versionibus Arabicis', *Biblia Sacra polyglotta: complectentia textus originales, Hebraicum, cum Pentateucho Samaritano, Chaldaicum, Graecum; versionumque antiquarum, Samaritanae, Graeca lxxii. Interp., Chaldaica, Syriaca, Arabica, Aethiopica, Persica, Vulg. Lat. quicquid comparari poterat*, (London, 1655), p. 94: "Lingua vero Hebraea, licet olim vocabulis copiosior, hodie sola mutila et exigua sua parte in Vet. Test. extat; ex Arabica, quam integram habemus, suppleri et explicari debet."

²³¹ Twells, 'Edward Pococke', p. 5.

²³² Pococke, *Porta Mosis*, sig. xxx3v: "Opus universum majoris est molis quam cui manum admovere nostum permetteret otium; Ibid.: "Quod etiam characteribus Hebraicis imprimendum curavimus, Arabica autem in hac re auctorum ipsorum exempla imitati sumus; idque consilio, quod, si recte sentiam, studiosis non inutile erit, ut ita scribendi rationi assuescant, qua fere omnes ex Iudaeis, qui Arabice scripserunt, usi sunt, sicut nunc solent atque olim soliti sunt."

The *Porta Mosis* represents the first ever publication of Maimonides's comments on the Mishnah in their original Judeo-Arabic. As Pococke informed us in the preface to the work, these comments had only ever been published in Hebrew, never in Arabic, a language, which, unfortunately, 'had fallen into disuse among the Jews' some centuries prior.²³³ For Pococke the value of Maimonides's comments lay not only in their capacity to 'so clearly elucidate the rationale and history of the entire Talmud', which was recommendation enough, but they also represented an important example of the excellencies of the Arabic language, whose study he was keen to promote.²³⁴ Indeed, he hoped that future readers would compare the Judeo-Arabic text he had reproduced 'with the Hebrew versions' translated by 'learned Jews' in order to determine which 'interpretation aligns most with the truth'.²³⁵ This was, of course, rather a tall order for anyone outside the small coterie of European Arabists, amongst whom, by this time, Pococke enjoyed pride of place.

Whilst there is some evidence of the *Porta Mosis*'s having been used as an Arabic teaching tool, this was not be its primary function. First and foremost, the *Porta Mosis* served as a translation of extracts from Maimonides's commentary on the Mishnah, which had previously been available only to those with sufficient Hebrew. Now, Maimonides's discourse on ethics, which accompanied *Pirke Avot* and his discussion of the future state, *perek chelek*, which comes in his introduction to the tenth chapter of Sanhedrin, were available to the broader scholarly public. These had previously been only glimpsed at through references Maimonides had made to them in the *More Nebukhim*.²³⁶ Subsequent to the publication of the *Porta Mosis*, they garnered

²³³ Ibid.: "Lingua Arabica apud Iudaeos in desuetudinem abiicit."

²³⁴ Ibid.: "Totius operis talmudici rationem & historiam tam dilucide alibi enucleavit."

²³⁵ Ibid., sig. xx2r: "Si quis interim eadem cum *Hebraicis* conferens, me a doctis istis *Judaeis*, qui in eam linguam ipsa veterunt, in non paucis discrepare viderit, antequam vel in hanc vel alteram partem statuatur, utramque cum auctoris (quae hic dedimus) Arabicis diligenter conferat."

²³⁶ A translation of Maimonides's comments on *Avot* had been published at Bologna in 1526 by Jacob Mantino. It does not appear to have reached England, however. See Moses Maimonides, *Praefatio Rabi Moysis Maimonidis in*

significant interest, especially *perek chelek*, which would be cited in many works concerning the nature of the soul, a particularly vexed topic in an era of mortalist panic.²³⁷ John Owen quoted both extensively in his mammoth commentary on Hebrews, which he published in 1668.²³⁸ Further to the translations themselves, Pococke's *Miscellaneous Notes* upon the same did much to promote his particular brand of comparative philological textual analysis. Arguments drawn from these notes reappeared across a vast range of sermons, pamphlets and commentaries in the decades following their publication.²³⁹ Henry Hammond, in particular, seems to have relied upon them quite heavily.²⁴⁰ The work, therefore, whilst not quite achieving Pococke's vision for it as an entry-way into Judeo-Arabic scholarship, was certainly read by many, and was perhaps cited by many more, furthering the import of Maimonidean scholarship across Europe. Pococke did not just further the great name of Maimonides, however. He fundamentally transformed its scholarly

aeditionem moralem seniorum Massebeth Avoth apud Hebreos nuncupatam octoque amplectens capita (Bologna, 1526). Extracts from the Introduction to chapter ten of Sanhedrin had been translated and published both by Munster and Gilbert Générard. See Moses Maimonides, *Shelosh esreh iḳarim, divre ba-bayit ba-sbeni, eser geliyot Yisra'el tredicim Articuli fidei Iudaeorum* (Worms, 1529); Gilbert Générard, *Symbolum fidei Iudaeorum è R. Mose Aegyptio* (Paris, 1569).

²³⁷ See for example Robert Sharrock, *De finibus virtutis Christinae. The ends of Christian religion: which are to avoid eternall wrath from God, to enjoy eternall happinesse from God/justified in several discours* (London, 1673), p. 89; William Lloyd, *A Sermon preached before the King at White-Hall, on Decemb. 1, M.DC.LXVII, being the first Sunday in Advent* (London, 1668), p. 13; Humphrey Hody, *The Resurrection of the Same Body Asserted, from the traditions of the beathens and ancient Jews* (London, 1694), p. 74; E.W., *No praexistence, or, A brief dissertation against the hypotbesis of humane souls* (London, 1667), p. 79. On late seventeenth century mortalism see Michelle Pfeffer, 'The Pentateuch and Immortality in England and the Dutch Republic: The Confessionalisation of a Claim' in Dmitri Levitin and Ian Maclean (eds.), *The World of Knowledge and the Classical Tradition in the Early Modern Age* (Brill, 2021), pp. 142-176; Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time and the History of Nations* (Chicago University Press, 1984), p. 238; Frank E. Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism through Christian Eyes* (HUP, 1992), pp. 185-186; Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian* (HUP, 1998); Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (OUP, 2001), p. 611; John Gascoigne, 'The Wisdom of the Egyptians and the Secularisation of History in the Age of Newton' in Stephen Gaukroger (ed.), *The Uses of Antiquity: The Scientific Revolution and the Classical Tradition* (Kluwer Academic, 1991), p. 143; Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (CUP, 2010), pp. 60-62, p. 141, p. 180; Stephen Snobelen, 'Isaac Newton, Socinianism and "The One Supreme God"' in Martin Mulrow and Jan Rohls (eds.), *Socinianism and Arminianism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth Century Europe*, pp. 241-298.

²³⁸ John Owen, *Exercitationes on the Epistle to the Hebrews: Also concerning the Messiah. Wherein the promises concerning him to be a spiritual redeemer of mankind, are explained and vindicated. His coming, and accomplishment of his work according to the promises, is proved and confirmed. The person, or who he is, is declared* (London, 1668).

²³⁹ See for example John Spencer, *A Discourse Concerning Vulgar Prophecies*, (London, 1665), p. 62; p. 527, Simon Patrick, *Jesus and the Resurrection justified by witnesses I heaven and in earth* (London, 1677); William Walker, *Baptism didache, the doctrine of baptisms, or, A discourse of dipping and sprinkling where is shewed the lawfulness of other ways of baptism* (London, 1678), p. 21, p. 55; Gabriel Towerson, *Of the sacrament of baptism in pursuance of an explication of the catechism* (London, 1687); Edward Leigh, *Foelix consortium, or, A fit conjuncture of religion and learning* (London, 1663), p. 139; Thomas Long, *An exercitation concerning the frequent use of our Lords Prayer in the publick worship of God and a view of what been said by Owen concerning that subject* (London, 1658).

²⁴⁰ Henry Hammond, *Deuterai Phrontides, or, a review of the paraphrase & annotation on all the books of the New Testament* (London, 1665), p. 14, p. 19, p. 29, p. 136, pp. 229-230.

import. Whereas the first generation of Early Modern English Maimonideans, such as they were, knew Maimonides as ‘Moses Aegyptius’, author of the *Daux*, the second generation, into which Pococke emerged, knew him as ‘Moshe Ben Maimon’, the clearest expositor of the Jewish tradition. Whereas ‘Moses Aegyptius’ was a theologian and a philosopher, ‘Moshe Ben Maimon’, was a Jew, whose code of Jewish Law could be helpfully applied to the project of biblical interpretation. Pococke’s Maimonides had multiple identities. He was ‘Moses the prince’, or indeed, ‘the Phoenix’, as Saladin himself knew him.²⁴¹ His own people called him ‘the light of Israel (נר ישראל) and אור מזרח ומערב חכם and the ‘light of the East and the West, a sage of Hebrew and Arabic’ (אור מזרח ומערב חכם עבר וערב).²⁴² Pococke’s Maimonides was as much an Arab as he was a Hebrew. Indeed, he had been a Muslim in his youth and had only escaped the charge of apostatising from that faith thanks to ‘the aid and influence’ of the eminent Islamic Judge Al Kadi Abdirrahim.²⁴³ Far from the crypto-Christian of Giustiniani’s imagination, Pococke’s Maimonides was far closer to Islam than he was to Christianity. He spent most of his life in Egypt, where he lived and worked in Arabic, alongside a whole host of other Judeo-Arabic scholars.²⁴⁴ In order to understand Maimonides, one had to understand his multi-lingual world, which was increasingly difficult even for his fellow Jews, who no longer spoke its language.

²⁴¹ Pococke, *Porta Mosis*, sig. x2v: “Necminus apud Mohammedanos; apud quos, teste authore historiae Medicorum) Moses Princeps audit quod scilicet. Iudaeis in Aegypto degentibus aliquando praefuerit, cum esset ex eorum doctissimis et praestantissimis, idemque non solum Iuris Iudaici peritissimus, sed et saeculi sui in arte medica, eaque facienda, Phoenix (quo nomine et Regi Salohodino (sp.) ejusque filio Ali).”

²⁴² Ibid.: “נר ישראל” Lucerna Israelis, אור מזרח ומערב חכם עבר וערב, Lumen Orientis & occidentis, Hebraeorum & Arabum Sapiens.”

²⁴³ Ibid. sig. x2v-x3r: “a quorum ipsum tamquam religionis *Moham*-meticae, quam aliquando simulaverat, desertorem accusantium calumniis una (*Judicis praestantis*) *Al Kadi Abdirrahimi* fidi amici ope & gratia (referente *Gregorio AbilFarajio*) liberatus est.”

²⁴⁴ Ibid., sig. xxx1v: “Non solum Autor noster omnia fere quae composuit, except Yad (qui tamen in linguam Arabicam tractus est) uti diximus, Arabice scripsit... Abu Valid marun, Ebn Iannahi, grammaticorum princeps, eadem inter scribendum usi sunt; quorum hic & Grammaticam & librum Radicem edidit... R. Abraham ben Dior, referente authore iuchasin, librum qui Arabice vocatur *Fides excelsa*, composuit ... R. Samuel Levita granatensis, Isaac Al Fesi, R. Isaac Ben Giath, R. Joseph Hallevi ben Megash, & alii fere innumeri quorum omnium interpretamenta, & responsa magna ex parte Arabice reperis.”

The legacy of the multi-lingual Maimonides

In the decades that followed the publication of the *Porta Mosis*, the study of Maimonides's work proceeded in two divergent directions. On the one hand, traditional biblical commentaries which differed little from those of Henry Ainsworth in style, would emerge. The most important of these would be John Lightfoot's *Horae Hebraicae*, a 'Talmudic' Old Testament commentary, which would remain in print even into the twentieth century.²⁴⁵ This work, which quotes Maimonides on almost every page, was guided by a surprisingly radical conception of the New Testament as a fundamentally Jewish text. For Lightfoot, given that the New Testament authors were themselves Jews who were writing first and foremost for their fellow Jews, readers of the New Testament could not truly make sense of it without this Jewish context.²⁴⁶ Whilst Lightfoot himself as the supreme example of the Christian 'Talmudic' biblical commentator read all of Maimonides's writings in Hebrew, other authors of this period such as John Owen, Henry Hammond and Patrick Simon, would have had access to much of the *Mishneh Torah* in Latin, thanks especially to the translations of Louis Compiegne de Veil and possibly, Isaac Abendana.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ William Horbury, 'Keeping Up with Recent Studies: V. Rabbinics', *The Expository Times* 91 (1980), pp. 233-240; Bruce Chilton, 'Jesus within Judaism' in Jacob Neusner (ed.), *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, vol. 2 (Brill, 1994), pp. 262-284; Kirsten Macfarlane, 'John Lightfoot (1602-1675), the Westminster Assembly, and the *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae*', *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 2023-01, Vo. 53 (1), pp. 87-116, p. 98; Jace R. Broadhurst, *What is the Literal Sense? Considering the Hermeneutic of John Lightfoot* (Wipf, 2012), pp. 9-18.

²⁴⁶ John Lightfoot, 'Epistle Dedicatory', *Horae hebraicae et talmudicae impensae: I. in chorographiam aliquam terrae israeliticae, II. in Evangelium S. Matthae* (London, 1658), sig. A3: "Cum omnes libri Novi Testamenti a Judaeis sint scripti, atque inter, et ad Judaeos; cumque omnes orationes in eo habitae a Judaeis pariter, atque ad, et apud Judaeos fuerint habitae: proinde indubitissima hoc mihi semper persuasum fuit, non posse istud Testamentum, non Judaeorum stylum, idioma, loquendi formam normamque, sapere ubique, et retinere."

²⁴⁷ See Moses Maimonides, *De Cultu Divino* (Paris, 1678); Moses Maimonides, *De Sacrificiis liber* (London, 1683); Moses Maimonides, *Tractatus de Consecratione calendarum et de Ratione intercalandi ex opera cui titulus: Manus fortis* (Paris, 1669); Moses Maimonides, *Hebraeorum de connubiis ius civile et pontificium seu ex R. Mosis Majemonidae secundae legis sive manus fortis eo libro, qui est de re uxoria tractatus primus* (Paris, 1673); Abendana translated *Hilkhot Kelei Mikdash* as he indicated in a letter of 1673 to Edward Bernard. See 'Isaac Abendana to Edward Bernard', October 9th, 1673, Bodleian MS Smith 8, fol. 95r: "Paravi nupperime versionem 'keli bet hamikdash' Maymonidis, atque notis satis amplis illustravi; eam libentis typis darem, sed hic desunt characteres hebr. Quod si in vestra Academia commode fieri posset, experire ego amicorum meorum favorem u team meis sumptibus divulgarem." He has also been identified by Theodor Dunkelgrun as the author of a translation of *Hilkhot Parah Adumah* which is to be found today in Lambeth Palace Library. See 'Tractatus celeberrimi apud Judaeos R. Moysis Filii Maymonidis de Vacca Rufa MS 787, fols. 9-46. See Marcello Cattaneo 'Between Law and Antiquarianism; The Christian Study of Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah* in Seventeenth Century Europe' in Kirsten Macfarlane, Joanna Weinberg & Piet van Boxel, *The Mishnaic Moment* (OUP, 2022), pp. 237-254, p. 247, fn. 31.

Maimonides's introduction to *Zeraim*, as translated by Pococke would also be published anew as a precursor to William Guise's Latin rendering of that tractate.²⁴⁸ By the 1690s scholars who had never read Maimonides in the original, could thus quote him at length. On the other hand, much more innovative works were now being written by the like of Thomas Stanley, Edward Stillingfleet and, ultimately, John Spencer, which developed Maimonides's historical thinking thanks to the Arabic language resources which Pococke in England and concurrently, Hottinger, in Switzerland were making available in translation.²⁴⁹ These works, far from simply contextualising and elucidating the New Testament, attempted to reach back into the Old Testament in order to reconstruct the lifeworld that had given rise to it. They would have far-reaching consequences, both scholarly and theological, in the latter decades of the seventeenth century as is shown in chapter 4.

A new generation of scholars, amply supported by the works of Pococke and Hottinger, granted the multi-lingual Maimonides the ultimate historical authority. His theory of the aetiology of the law, which conceptualised the Mosaic precepts in terms of the repudiation of the idolatrous practices of the 'Sabeian' people was widely agreed to be 'in alignment with the Greek historical accounts'.²⁵⁰ Whilst some would question this, most notably, Richard Simon, who admitted that Maimonides's theories could not really be proved, its influence would endure well into the eighteenth-century and beyond.²⁵¹ Occasional attempts to displace the Maimonidean hypothesis as the best available explanation for the particular shape the Law had taken, such as John

²⁴⁸ William Guise, *Misnae pars: ordinis primi Zeraim tituli septem* (Oxford, 1690).

²⁴⁹ Thomas Stanley, *The history of the Chaldaick philosophy* (London, 1662); Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines sacrae, or, A rational account of the grounds of Christian faith, as to the truth and divine authority of the Scriptures* (London, 1662); John Spencer, *De legibus Hebraeorum et ritualibus* (Cambridge, 1683-5); On Hottinger see Jan Loop, *Johann Heinrich Hottinger: Arabic and Islamic studies in the seventeenth century* (OUP, 2013).

²⁵⁰ Claude Saumaise, *De annis climacteric et antiqua astrologia diatribae* (Leiden, 1648), sig. C6v: "Quod de Zabiis Maimonides dicit, hac Graecorum Historiae de Chaldaeis narrant."

²⁵¹ Richard Simon, *Histoire Critique de Vieux Testament; Nouvelle edition* (Rotterdam, 1685), p. 545.

Turner's *Boaz and Ruth*, which boldly claimed to have 'given a deadly blow to the Rabbinical learning', would not prove particularly influential.²⁵²

Pococke's 'multilingual Maimonides' did play a secularising role in the history of early modern scholarship. The insights into the Old Testament that he provided would be judged far more credible than the laboured typological analogies that had been developed in concert with the 'Hebraic Maimonides'. Whilst Pococke certainly did not see himself as a seculariser, his provision of historical sources by which Maimonides's account of 'the history of idolatry' could be verified produced discourse within sacred history, much more akin to modern historicism than anything that had gone before.

The impact of the 'Pocockian turn' in Maimonidean scholarship in Europe was such that Pococke himself seems to have been highly motivated to produce a new translation of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, the very work from which Maimonides's most influential theories were drawn. This translation, which appeared in a 1672 list of publications forthcoming from the Oxford University Press, never saw the light of day.²⁵³ That interest in the work and not just the theories developed out of it remained strong is demonstrated by Thomas Hyde's *Proposal for an edition* (1690), where he argued that the Buxtorf translation, which was now sixty years old, was insufficient as it had been produced without reference to 'the original Arabic text', meaning that most European readers of the *Moreh Nebukhim* had the work 'handed down to us by a third party (and somewhat imperfectly at that)'.²⁵⁴ Further to this, even the 1629 edition, according to Hyde, had proved so popular that procuring a copy would now prove almost impossible. It had 'been

²⁵² John Turner, 'Epistle Dedicatory', *Boaz and Ruth* (London, 1685).

²⁵³ MS All Souls 239, fo.241.

²⁵⁴ Thomas Hyde, *Proposal for an edition of Maimonides More nebukhim* (Oxford, 1690): "Quamvis Clarissimi Buxtorffii Versio Latina (si modo haberi posset) maxima ex parte sit accurata, alicubi tamen est iusto laxior, et alibi aliquando Virum Doctissimum fefellit Linguae Hebraicae amphibolia, cum non esset originalem Textum Arabicum consulendo... cum itaque Doctrinam dicto libro contentam a tertia tantum manu (idque aliquantulum imperfecte) traditam esse."

completely sold out' and was 'unavailable at any price'.²⁵⁵ Sadly, Hyde's proposal never amounted to anything more than that, for the delegates of the Press refused to fund it.²⁵⁶ Despite the obvious popularity of Buxtorf's translation from the Hebrew of Samuel Ibn Tibbon, a translation from the Arabic manuscripts, which remain in the Bodleian, was never made.²⁵⁷ Of course, later editions of the work would make use of these manuscripts, as is the case with Michael Friedlander's English language edition of *The Guide*, which he published in 1885. Significantly, for our purposes, however, nothing in the manner of the proposed Hyde translation would ever come to fruition.²⁵⁸ Thus our Maimonidean moment comes to a close.

The Closing of the Maimonidean moment

The end of the English Maimonidean moment, was not necessarily the end of Maimonides in England, however. He would remain a vital resource for Old Testament interpretations, perhaps a resource more often cited than studied, however. With Clavering's 1705 translations of *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* and *Hilkhot Teshuva*, a notable exception, no major works either of Maimonides's or about Maimonides would emerge in Latin in England, though the influence of works already published would remain strong.²⁵⁹ We might thus think of the Hyde translation as a road not taken, for to look at the prospectus for the work, it would have been a very significant contribution indeed, especially if he had followed Edward Bernard's advice and published the

²⁵⁵ Ibid.: "Latina editione Buxtorfiana ante multos annos prorsus distracta et absumpta, iste Liber (ad explicandas S. Scripturas apprime utilis) hodie quovis pretio non est redimendus."

²⁵⁶ MS Smith 50, p. 225.

²⁵⁷ See Bodleian Library MS. Pococke 239 & MS. Pococke 212.

²⁵⁸ Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed of Maimonides, translated and annotated by M. Friedlander* (London, 1881-5). See also Warren Zev Harvey, 'Michael Friedlander's Pioneering English Translation of the Guide' in Josef Stern, James T. Robinson, Yonatan Shemesh, *Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed in translation: A History from the Thirteenth Century to the Twentieth* (University of Chicago Press, 2019), pp. 209-224.

²⁵⁹ See Thomas Barlow, *Autoschediasmata theologiae, or, Directions for the choice of books in the study of Divinity* (London, 1697), pp. 9-10. He also recommends Ainsworth or the Pentateuch as 'second to none', p. 10; Moses Maimonides, *Hilkot Talmud torah u-teshubab: Tractatus duo* (Oxford, 1705).

Hebrew with Buxorf's translation of the same alongside the original Judeo-Arabic and its Latin translation.²⁶⁰

Hyde was a victim of changes in scholarly fashions. The study of Arabic, in particular, such an important factor in the interest in Maimonides which Pococke had exploited in 1655, had, by the final decades of the seventeenth century, declined precipitously. The reasons for this are plentiful, though perhaps chief amongst them is that of the publication of the last of the great Polyglots in 1657. The London Polyglot allowed scholars to lean on the Arabic language expertise of prior generations in order to derive philological comments on the Bible.²⁶¹ The tremendous efforts that Pococke and his students had expunged upon Arabic grammar and lexicography were no longer necessary in so far as scholars were motivated by exegetical concerns.²⁶² According to Leonard Twells the writing was on the wall for Pococke in 1663 when his *Abu 'l-Faraj* failed to arouse the kind of rapturous response which the *Specimen* of 1650 seemed to have merited.²⁶³ It is therefore likely that a new edition of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, whose unique selling point was its basis in Pococke's Arabic manuscripts, would not have generated anything like the level of enthusiasm that Buxorf's edition had merited all those years earlier. Whilst the influence of the 'multilingual Maimonides' would endure for some decades, demand for access to his writings had, by 1655, largely been satiated.

²⁶⁰ See Thomas Smith to Edward Bernard, 7 the February 1691, MS Smith 57, p. 189.

²⁶¹ See G.J. Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth Century England* (OUP, 1996), pp. 269-305.

²⁶² Mordechai Feingold, 'Oriental Studies' in Nicolas Tyacke (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume IV Seventeenth Century Oxford* (OUP, 1997), pp. 449-503, p. 498.

²⁶³ Leonard Twells, 'The Life of Edward Pococke', pp. 254-256.

The Death of the Latin Maimonides and the survival of his Hebraic and Multilingual Descendants

This thesis argues that the seventeenth-century reception of Maimonides, in both his Hebraic and multilingual iterations would have far-reaching intellectual historical consequences. Whilst the Latin Maimonides, the first to enter into the English intellectual consciousness, had been a construct, both his Hebraic and Multilingual successors, emerged on account of scholarly attempts to engage with the legacy of the man himself. The Latin Maimonides was almost conjured up as the antithesis of the ‘mystical rabbi’, who conformed to the low intellectual standards of his religious tradition. He was a ‘straightforward’ thinker, ‘not at all superstitious’ who, in his very straightforwardness, appeared ‘favourable to Christian heresy’ in the eyes of his fellow Jews.²⁶⁴ His writings could be used to demonstrate the surprising synergies between Judaism, rightly understood, and Christianity.²⁶⁵ This Maimonides ‘came close to the Christian religion’ and so could be cited alongside other such luminaries as Augustine and Basil without his inclusion having to be justified at all.²⁶⁶ The 1629 edition of the *Moreh Nebukhim* and the new edition of the elder Buxtorf’s *Instituto Epistolaris*, which accompanied it, put paid to this flattened Maimonides, though he would reappear, occasionally, in George Gentius’s *Canones Ethici* (1640), for example, where *Hilkhot Deot* was judged particularly valuable to Christians on account of it ‘containing certain things approved by us’ which were ‘displeasing’ and even ‘offensive’ to the Jews.²⁶⁷ Louis Compiegne de Veil, a convert from Judaism, would reintroduce this character in the introduction to his 1673 translation of *Hilkhot Isbut*, where he claimed that that the *Mishneh Torah* had ‘repudiated the entire Jewish tradition’ in its dismissal of Talmudic ‘legends’.²⁶⁸ This

²⁶⁴ Giustiniani, *Dux*, sig. i.r: “iste candidus, minimeq; superstitiosus.”

²⁶⁵ Moses Maimonides, *Shelosh esreb ikkarim* (Worms, 1529), sig. A2: “in multis Iudaei nobiscum consentient.”

²⁶⁶ Moses Maimonides, *De Astrologia; Epistola elegans, & cum Christiana religione congruens, Hebraea* (Cologne, 1555), sig. A7-A8: “Prope ad Christianam religione accredit”; See for example Bodin, *Methodus*, p. 491: “Basilius vero, Ambrosius, Augustinus, ac Moses Aegyptius.”

²⁶⁷ Moses Maimonides, *Canones*, sig. 4v: “cum quaedam haberet nobis Christianis probata, quibusdam ingrata Iudaeis.”

²⁶⁸ Moses Maimonides, *de Connubiis*, sig. avv: “Judaeorum traditionem repudiatet rejectisque fabulis.”

hyperbole perhaps reveals more about de Veil's personal interest in currying favour with a regime that was not always hospitable to Jewish interests than it does about his reading of Maimonides. For, in fact, it was the widespread conception of the *Mishneh Torah* as the definitive guide to the Jewish tradition that rendered his translations and indeed those of Gentius, relevant. As de Veil went on to point out in that self-same introduction, *Hilkhot Isbut* provided a 'detailed' outline of the laws concerning Jewish marriage, vital for establishing 'the lineage of the Virgin Mary'.²⁶⁹ Maimonides's significance for Christians rested upon his being part of a continuous legal tradition which had not been altered since before Christ's birth. Had Maimonides entirely repudiated his predecessors, his legal opinion would have no relevance to the Christian exegete.

The 'Hebraic Maimonides', who succeeded the Latin, in the form of legal works and biblical commentaries which sought to incorporate insights from 'Jewish antiquity' occupied somewhat of a dual role in the mid-century English scholarly imaginary. He was, on the one hand, credited with 'happily restoring the entire Jewish law, which had been almost entirely absorbed and utterly submerged by 'Talmudic barbarism', whilst on the other, he was part of a chain of tradition stretching back to the 'constitutions of the Prophets', which 'like the rescripts of emperors and the responses of legal experts in Roman civil law', could be trusted on account of its historical continuity.²⁷⁰ This contradiction, according to some, would threaten the entire enterprise of European Maimonidean scholarship, for surely, Maimonides, who relied upon 'Talmudic sources, could not be trusted if those self-same sources were indeed mere 'Jewish fables'.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ Ibid., sig 6v: "Itaque Mariae Virginis genus praeclare ostenditur ostenso genere conjugis."

²⁷⁰ Humphrey Prideaux, *De Iure*, sig. A3r-v: "Defudavit successu, ut totum jus Iudaicum barbarie & sentina Talmudica prius fere absorptum et penitus demersum adeo feliciter restituerit...sed cum ad omnes particulares actiones ita applicari non potuissent, ut universas, quae oriebantur, propalam dirimerent controversias, hinc in subsidium venerunt Constitutiones Prophetarum et Sapientum, Decreta Synedrii, Decisiones Judicum, et Interpretationes Doctorum, quae juri Iudaico, sicut rescripta Imperatorum et responsa Prudentum juri civili Romano, uti data erat occasio, continuo addebantur, eamque partem illius, quam vocant legem oralem, constituebant."

²⁷¹ Benjamin Keach, *Pedo-baptism disproved, an answer to two papers* (London, 1692), p. 3.

Over the course of the seventeenth century, access to Jewish sources in general, increased exponentially. As Thomas Hyde was putting pen to paper, it looked like soon enough the entirety of the *Mishneh Torah* would be available in Latin and, by the end of the century, a complete Latin translation of the Mishnah, accompanied by Maimonides's commentary in Latin translation, would be made available thanks to the gargantuan efforts of the Dutchman, Willem Surenhuis. This work, which has been well documented by a recent edited volume, was the outcome of a 'Mishnaic moment' at the end of the seventeenth century, within which significant numbers of Christians invested their copious scholarly energies in the translation and explication of the apodictic core of the Talmud.²⁷² Whilst this flurry of scholarly activity was certainly motivated by a very deep appreciation of the Jewish legal tradition, it also fuelled a certain scepticism of it, as has been particularly well-documented by Marcello Cattaneo's contribution to the aforementioned volume.²⁷³

As Cattaneo demonstrates attitudes towards Maimonides had shifted by the 1690s, along with broader intellectual currents. If Maimonides was to be trusted on the same grounds that 'the responses of Roman legal experts' were trusted, as Humphrey Prideaux had claimed in the 1670s, then what would happen when Roman legal experts fell out of favour?²⁷⁴ For, as the correspondence between Gabriel Groddeck, who had studied under Isaac Abendana and Edward Bernard at Oxford and his German colleague, Johann Albert Fabricius reveals, a burgeoning scepticism as to the reliability of classical authors, in general, and as to that of the Church Fathers and 'the more ancient jurists', in particular, could easily give way to a scepticism

²⁷² Macfarlane, Weinberg, and van Boxel (eds.), *Mishnaic Moment*.

²⁷³ Marcello Cattaneo, 'Between Law and Antiquarianism: The Christian Study of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah in Late Seventeenth Century Europe' in Macfarlane, Weinberg, and van Boxel (eds.), *Mishnaic Moment*, pp. 237-254.

²⁷⁴ Moses Maimonides, *De jure pauperis et peregrini apud Judaeos* (Oxford, 1679), sig. A3r-v: "Quae juri Judaico, sicut rescripta Imperatorum et responsa Prudentum juri civili Romano, uti data erat occasio, continuo addebantur, eamque partem illius, quam vocant legem oralem, constituebant."

of Jewish authors, Maimonides included.²⁷⁵ This was not to say that Maimonides's authority was undermined overnight, however. On the contrary, Groddeck himself was of the view that the *Mishneh Torah* was an 'incomparable work' which 'shed much light on the ceremonies described in the Gospel' as 'Lightfoot had demonstrated long ago'. He did, however, dispute his 'claim to have received' the Law 'from Moses in an unbroken succession'.²⁷⁶ This, in fact, as Lightfoot's eighteenth-century editor, Johann Christian Schöttgen, would argue in a particularly pointed critique of Blasio Ugolino's *Thesaurus Antiquitatem*, was not even Maimonides's own view. His *Mishneh Torah* was a body of law, not of history, and, as a body of law, its rulings were informed by the most recent cases, not the most ancient.²⁷⁷ That Schöttgen felt the need to make this point in 1750, however, speaks to the long endurance of the authority of the 'Hebraic Maimonides', who, a century on from his European heyday, was still the most cited authority in the field of biblical antiquities.²⁷⁸ This was, to a large extent, the outcome of the irrepressible enthusiasm for Lightfoot's *Horae Hebraicae*, which cited the *Mishneh Torah* on almost every page. Schöttgen himself had made his name as the editor of a new edition of this masterwork in the second quarter of the eighteenth-century, which would secure its influence for another hundred years.

²⁷⁵ Johann Albert Fabricius to Gabriel Groddeck, 25th December 1693, in Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Nachlass Groddeck, fol. 112r: "Et quamvis ad antiquiores autores Talmudhici provocent, & viri quidam docti ideo non minus illis quam Justiniano ad antiquiores Juris Consultos provocanti fidem haberi velint, non desunt tamen alii non minus in Ebraicis versati literis viri qui Judaeos numquam magis mentiri observant, quam ubi traditionum suarum genealogias texunt aut Historicos agunt. Ex quibus unum jam placet nominare Maimonidem."

²⁷⁶ Groddeck to Fabricius, January 1694: "Maimonide in incomparabili suo Jad Chaseka pertractatum esse argumentum... multum lucis afferri posset cerimonijs in Evangelio et reliquo novi foederis libris descriptis, quod de frustra dubitas, si verum est, Christum ritus suos ex antiquis Judaeorum cerimonijs desumpsisse, eosdemque saltem paulatim aliter immutasse, quod ex Maimonide non minus quam ex Talmude ostendit iam olim Lightfootus passim in suis scriptis, meo quidem iudicio haud infeliciter; Gabriel Groddeck, *Hilkhot Lulav, b.e. Caeremonia Palmarum apud Judaeos in festo tabernaculorum solennis ex antiquitate Judaica philologice explanata* (Leipzig, 1694–5), pp. 17–18, n. 52: Et quantumvis ad Traditiones suas hic Judaei provocent, quas continuo successu se a Mose accepisse jactitant, numquam tamen magis Judaeos mentiri observant eruditi, quam ubi Traditionum suarum genealogies texunt aut Historicos agunt."

²⁷⁷ Johann Christian Schöttgen, *De fide R. Mosi Maimonidae in astrvendis antiquitatibus hebraicis* (Dresden, 1750), pp. 5–6: "quod omnem Maimonidae circa antiquitates fidem evertat, quia scilicet ille non tanquam scriptor rituum antiquorum, sed tantum ut Doctor Juris Judaeorum Canonici, est considerandus. Ipse nos hoc doceat. Omnes operis Jad chasakah Tractatus an ipso inscribuntur 'hilkhot'. Jam vero notum est, 'halakha' nihil aliud denotare, quam Constitutionem Juris Judaici... judicis officium est, sequi Constitutiones principium novissimas, non vero antiquates."

²⁷⁸ Johann Christian Schöttgen, *Horae hebraicae et Talmudicae*, 2 vols (Dresden and Leipzig, 1733–42), Vol. II, pp. 809–810: "Et tamen viri docti secure illos in consilium adhibuerunt, & nullum sere est Antiquitatum Hebraicarum volume, quod non horum traditionibus contaminatum sit. Imo pleraque Maimonidae in latinum sermonem conversa & commentariis illustrata sunt, ut juvenes sic mature a via veritatis abducti fuerint."

Whilst Grodeck and then Schöttgen revealed a new scepticism as to the historical authority of the Hebraic Maimonides, as the contents of many a nineteenth century theological journal attest, this did little to undermine his influence.²⁷⁹ The ‘multilingual Maimonides’ too, would also survive well into the eighteenth-century, largely thanks to his immortalisation in John Spencer’s *De legibus hebraeorum et ritualibus* (1683-5), though Spencer himself would become so closely identified with Maimonides’s ‘Sabeian theory’ that many eighteenth-century respondents to it, understood themselves to be responding to Spencer, as opposed to Maimonides himself.

The multi-lingual Maimonides would be attacked from the same quarters as his Hebraic alter-ego. Thomas Burnet, natural philosopher and long-time master of Charterhouse, who had studied under William Owtram and John Tillotson at Cambridge, felt, as Grodeck did, that Maimonides’s historical authority had been greatly exaggerated.²⁸⁰ This was not to say that he attributed no authority to Maimonides. Like Grodeck, he regarded him as ‘the most discerning of the Rabbis’ and followed him very closely in all matters of Old Testament interpretation.²⁸¹ His aetiology of the law, however, for Burnet, was a matter upon which little could be said. Maimonides had claimed to have based his theory upon long-forgotten sources. Such claims, Burnet pointed out, could not be verified ‘with certainty’.²⁸² In the absence of supporting evidence, which, he noted, might be found in the ‘Oriental Library of Hottinger’, Maimonides’s arguments could not be accepted.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ See for example Josiah Pratt ‘On the Last Passover’, *Journal of Sacred Literature* 9, no. 17 (1866), pp. 200-205; C.R. Conder, ‘The High Sanctuary at Jerusalem’, *Good words*, Vol. 22 (Dec 1881), pp. 698-703.

²⁸⁰ Scott Mandelbrote, ‘Thomas Burnet’, *ODNB*.

²⁸¹ Thomas Burnet, *Archeologica Philosophica* (London, 1692), p. 61: “Rabbinorum cordatissimis, Moses Maimonides.

²⁸² *Ibid.*: Sed quoad Zabios suos, eorumque antiquitatem, cum de istac gente tantillum supersit apud alios authores, nihil dicendum habeo.”

²⁸³ *Ibid.* p.38: “Nisi enim pertigerint ad tempora Mosaica, & religionem ritusque retulerint Mosi coevos aut antiquiores, his superstructae interpretationes carent fundamento... Caetera scripta Arabica quaerenda sunt in Bibliotheca orientali Hottingeri.”

Burnet's arguments, whilst compelling, did little to undermine the popularity of Maimonides's aetiology of the law, the pursuit of which would emerge as crucial for the development of modern anthropology.²⁸⁴ Thanks largely to Spencer, arguably the first scholar of comparative religion, who developed a comprehensive theory of the Law's origins on the basis of the purported world history of the third book of the *Guide*, the notion that the 'Sabeans' were central to the origins of Israelite culture would guide Oriental scholarship for centuries to come.²⁸⁵ Whilst as Jonathan Elukin has pointed out, the dominance of Maimonides's 'Sabeian theory' would be undermined by the rise of higher criticism in Germany, as Daniel Chwolson has shown, its influence would be felt in both England and France long after its apparent supersession by modern biblical scholarship.²⁸⁶ It was only with Chwolson's 1859 survey of all the available scholarship on Sabeianism that Maimonides's conception of a coherent Sabeian population whose norms were inverted by the Law, was finally put to bed.²⁸⁷

The multilingual Maimonides thus enjoyed a strange afterlife as an important historical authority in the pursuit of evidence as to the most ancient religious beliefs. Spencer had put forward the view, first articulated by Hottinger that the term 'Sabeian' implied religious deviance and that, as per the researches of Pierre-Daniel Huet, the term was still used in that way by the Mandeans of Persia.²⁸⁸ The French linguist, Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838), maintained that this was indeed the case but that the Mandaean term for 'deviants' was not what Maimonides had in mind when he referred to the ancestors of the Israelite religion as 'Sabeans'.²⁸⁹ That de Sacy, a noted scholar of oriental languages, felt the need to argue for the limits of Maimonides's historical authority, in

²⁸⁴ See Daniel Avraamovich Chwolson, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus* (St Petersburg, 1856).

²⁸⁵ On Spencer as pioneer of 'comparative religion' see Daniel Stolzenberg, 'John Spencer and the Perils of Sacred Philology', *Past & Present* 214, pp. 129-163, p. 131; W. Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites: the Fundamental Institutions* (New York, 1957), p. 6; Guy Stroumsa, 'John Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry', *History of Religions*, 2001-08, Vol. 41 (1), pp. 1-23; H. Pinard de La Boullaye, *L'Étude comparée des religions: essai critique*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1922-25).

²⁸⁶ Jonathan Elukin 'Maimonides and the Rise and Fall of the Sabians; Explaining the Mosaic Laws and the Limits of Scholarship', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2001) pp. 619-637; p. 613; Chwolson, *Ssabismus*, pp. 69-70, pp. 89-90.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-90.

²⁸⁸ John Spencer, *De legibus Hebraeorum ritualibus et earum rationibus, libri tres*, (Cambridge, 1685), pp. 237-238.

²⁸⁹ Silvestre de Sacy 'der Norberg'schen Ausgabe des Liber Adami' *Journal ses Savans* (1819), pp. 347-349, p. 663.

1817, is testament to its long endurance in the scholarly consciousness. Friedrich Munter, a Danish orientalist, cited Maimonides's descriptions of Sabean temples, his 1827 account of Babylonian religion, as those of the historical 'Arabian Sabeans'.²⁹⁰ Historian of religion, Peter Feddersen Stuhr, was still citing the third book of the *Guide* as an ancient historical authority in 1836.²⁹¹ The ideas stimulated by the multi-lingual Maimonides then, long survived his demise. Pococke's development of the 'Sabean theory', the most provocative element of the *Moreh Nebukhim* for seventeenth century readers, in the *Specimen* of 1650, proved so influential that centuries later, despite the apparent decline of European Arabic scholarship, it was still referred to as an authoritative historical account.

The legacy of the Maimonidean Moment

The Maimonidean moment as it has been described herein began with the publication of Buxtorf's 1629 translation of the *Moreh Nebukhim*. This work transformed the reputation of the Rambam in England from that of the little-known author of a complex theological tract, Rabbi Moses Aegyptius, to the leading expert in Jewish law, Moses Maimonides.²⁹² Where Rabbi Moses Aegyptius was hated by his fellow Jews, Buxtorf's Maimonides could not have been more loved. Fantastical stories were told of his feats of heroism, of his saving the life of Saladin, before proceeding to isolate himself in a cave for twelve years to write the *Mishneh Torah*.²⁹³ The truth of these tall tales, which Buxtorf cited in remarkable detail in his preface, he 'would leave it to the

²⁹⁰ Friedrich Munter, *Religionen der Babylonier* (Copenhagen, 1827), pp. 14-16, p. 19.

²⁹¹ Peter Feddersen Stuhr, *Die Religionsysteme der heidnischen Völker des Orients* (Berlin, 1836), p. 361, p. 382.

²⁹² Maimonides, *Moreh Nebukhim* (1629), sig. *3r: "Jurisprudentiae Judaicae nullum peritorem fuisse."

²⁹³ Ibid., sig. *4r: "Rambam trium dierum spatium ad deliberandum poscit. Re interea cum discipulis suis communicata, significat eis, se hoc electurum, ut Medici Regis venas ipsi undiquaque aperirent, omnemque sanguinem extrahant; sic enim futurum, ut anima placide exeat. At vero ipsi medicamento instructi essent, quod eos parere jusserat, ut fluente sanguine ipsi porrigerent. Fuisse enim venam quondam in corde, quam a Medicis vulgo ignorari, et intactam mansuram sibi certo persuasum erat. Factum est ita, & successu prospero in vita conservatus fuit. R. Moses surgens & prodiens, occultavit se in spelunca quadam, in qua per duodecim annos delituit, & ibi ingens Opus suum, quod *Jad* vocavit, (propterea quod in quatuordecim libros esset divisum) conscripsit."

reader to judge'.²⁹⁴ Whether or not Maimonides surpassed all Egypt across all seven liberal arts, as his followers claimed, Buxtorf regarded his *Moreh Nebukhim* as an absolutely essential work on the basis of the learned opinions of his intellectual heroes, Joseph Scaliger and Isaac Casaubon.²⁹⁵ Whereas Scaliger had highlighted the theological significance of the *Moreh*, following the publication of Buxtorf's edition of the same, it was to the *Mishneh Torah* that many of his readers would turn, with a view to expanding access to the 'Hebraic Maimonides', whose significance lay in his clear presentation of 'the basic elements of Judaism'.²⁹⁶ That Christians required access to 'the basic elements of Judaism' was a function of the increasingly competitive confessional context of the early sixteenth-century Netherlands. The emergence therein of Arminianism, which would soon spread to England, raised the stakes of biblical hermeneutics to unprecedented heights and it was within this context that the reliability of the Church Fathers would come into question.²⁹⁷ As Renaissance-era philological scholarship advanced, the evident limitations of the fathers, none of whom were fluent in all three biblical languages, fuelled a return to the Jewish sources, which, for reasons of both reputation and accessibility included the *Mishneh Torah* of Moses Maimonides.²⁹⁸ This work was then translated, piecemeal, by a new generation of Hebraists, many of whom had benefitted from the generosity of Jewish teachers. The Maimonidean moment, in which the *Mishneh Torah* would prove vital for the advancement of biblical scholarship was thus born. The 'Hebraic Maimonides' had emerged as somewhat of a bridge figure between Judaism and Christianity and thus between antiquity and theology. He rendered Judaism, and thus the origins of Christianity, legible to Christians.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., sig. *4v: "De quibus iudicium Lectori relinquimus."

²⁹⁵ Ibid., sig. xxx3v: "Clarissimus Scaliger in Epistola quadam ad Stephanum Ubertum huic Libro dedit testimonium; More Nevochim, inquit, Arabice a R. Mose ben Majemon conscriptus, literis Judaicis nondum editus, cujus Hebraicum quoque interpretationem habemus, Liber plenus bonae frugis, abstrusae eruditionis, et Theologis Christianis apprime necessarius... Isaacus Casaubonus in Exercitationibus suis contra Baronium, Exercit. 15. N. 13: Moses Majemon in More Nebukim admirandae doctrinae scripto."

²⁹⁶ Maimonides, *Fundamentis Legis* (Amsterdam, 1638), sig. A2r: "potius obvia Iudaicae religionis promere elementa."

²⁹⁷ Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity* (OUP, 2011), pp. 203-251.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 166.

The rise of Arabic scholarship, however, would complicate this portrayal of Maimonides. As Pococke's preface to his *Porta Mosis* revealed, the Rambam had lived within a particular Judeo-Arabic milieu. He wrote primarily in Arabic as opposed to Hebrew and had even, at one point, converted to Islam.²⁹⁹ He could thus serve, as bridge, not just to Judaism but to the Arab world, which was the real cradle of biblical antiquity. Pococke was an almost uniquely ambitious scholar, who sought, from his chair at Oxford, to revitalise the Arabic language, through publishing its greatest works in Latin translation.³⁰⁰ Maimonides's comments on the Mishnah, of which he had prepared just a small selection for publication, were amongst these and it was his great hope that in making them available to the Republic of Letters he would enable scholars to 'become accustomed' to Judeo-Arabic such that they too would then have access to its many treasures.³⁰¹

Pococke's *Porta Mosis* represented the zenith of the Maimonidean moment. It connected up the growing body of literature borne of access to Arabic source material with the growing field of biblical antiquities. Whilst the audience for Pococke's particular blend of Arabic and Rabbinics would not turn out to be very substantial, it would prove hugely influential for the development of sacred history for the succeeding half-century and beyond. Whereas the 'Hebraic Maimonides', opened up the field of Jewish law for Christian audiences, Pococke's 'multilingual Maimonides' opened up its complex pre-history for a new generation of sacred historians.

Pococke's successors did not require his philological talents. Unlike him, they were content to study the writings of Maimonides in translation and so, the Maimonidean moment, in its closing stages, consisted in the production of new translations by Louis Compiegene de Veil, Humphrey

²⁹⁹ Maimonides, *Porta Mosis*, sig *2v: "religionis Mohammedicae, quam aliquando simulaverat"

³⁰⁰ Ibid., sig. xx3v-xx4r.

³⁰¹ Ibid., sig. xx4rv: "quo ita ei scribendi rationi assuescant, qua quotquot fere e Iudaeis Arabice scripserunt usi... Illi vero nec pauci nec eruditione vel dignitate caeteris inferiores, qui vel Sanctas Scripturas, vel Talmud, Arabice interpretati sunt."

Prideaux, and later, Robert Clavering and in the citing of older translations as stale authorities. The legacy of the moment then was the preponderance of both translations of the *Mishneh Torah*, and of biblical commentaries which were reliant upon such translations. It was the very dominance of these translations, Schöttgen had argued in 1742, that prevented the advancement of Christian rabbinic scholarship, which he believed could only be achieved through the study of the Talmud itself. The ‘Hebraic Maimonides’ then, in Latin translation offered easy access to a simplified and thus historically suspect ancient Judaism. He lacked the complexity of Pococke’s ‘multilingual Maimonides’ and yet, he was entirely distinct from the flattened ‘Latin Maimonides’ of Giustiniani, who was more Christian than Jew. The ‘Hebraic Maimonides’ must be defined by his primary function, ‘the illumination of the antiquities of the Hebrews’.³⁰² The ‘Hebraic Maimonides’, despite the emergence of the much more contextualised ‘multilingual Maimonides’ would thus remain for centuries as both an historian of the ancient world and as legal theorist. Importantly, however, he was read primarily in Latin translation and not in the original Hebrew and/or Judeo-Arabic.

The Maimonidean moment, as we have seen, saw the twofold transformation of Maimonides’s reputation in England. In 1520, he had been an exceptional Jew, rejected by his co-religionists for his proximity to Christianity. By 1650, an entirely different Maimonides had emerged. This Maimonides was not exceptional, but exemplary. In his writings were preserved both the greatest virtues and the lowliest vices of the Jewish tradition. The ‘Latin Maimonides’, who had been recast as a Hebrew by Reformed scholars desperately seeking access to ancient Israel, had, despite Pococke’s very thorough contextualisation of him, been decontextualised once again by the 1670s. This Maimonides, by the century’s end, functioned much as he had at its beginning, as a stand-in for the Talmud. The ‘Hebraic Maimonides’ survived in spite of, not instead of, his ‘multilingual’ alter ego. He would continue to serve as a repository of exegetically essential extra biblical data for centuries to come. Meanwhile, the

³⁰² Basil Ugolini, *Thesaurus Antiquarum Sacrarum* (Venice, 1744), Vol. II., p. 11: “Opuscula, quibus Antiquitates Hebraeorum generaliter illustrantur, edenda susciperemus.”

‘multilingual Maimonides’ would go on to inform future generations of sacred historians, legal theorists and anthropologists.

Whilst we begun this chapter with ‘many Maimonideses’, we have ended it with just two, the ‘Hebraic’ and the ‘multilingual’. Both figures were rendered essential by secondary works of the late seventeenth century, the ‘Hebraic’ by John Lightfoot’s *Horae Hebraicae* and the ‘multilingual’, by John Spencer’s *De Legibus Hebraeorum*. Lightfoot’s ‘Hebraic Maimonides’ would prove vital to New Testament exegesis whereas Spencer’s ‘multilingual Maimonides’ advanced a novel approach to the Old Testament. In both, the transformative effect of Moses Maimonides’s influence upon seventeenth century biblical scholarship is made manifest.

Chapter 2 - The role of the *Mishneh Torah* in advancing the study of the New Testament in England 1616-1678

Introduction

The use of rabbinic sources by Early Modern Protestant scholars, especially those of the ‘puritanical’ variety, is often read in terms of their co-optation of rabbinic methodologies. John Lightfoot has been credited with charting ‘a middle course between protestant orthodoxy and Jewish learning.’³⁰³ Henry Ainsworth supposedly evidenced ‘a consistent attempt to engage the rabbis as dialogue partners.’³⁰⁴ These scholars, who, in their own lifetimes, met with frequent accusations of ‘judaising’, are today understood to have been ‘philosemites’, who betrayed a particular appreciation for the Jewish tradition. Indeed Puritan ‘biblicism’, in general, with its consistent emphasis on the Old Testament has frequently been associated with ‘philosemitism’.³⁰⁵ It is important to distinguish, however, between a reliance upon ancient or even medieval Jewish sources, especially where these were read Christologically, and an appreciation for Judaism as a living tradition. Purportedly ‘philosemitic’ scholarship has been named as such on account of two of its most prominent features; the first, an emphasis on ‘the oldest available sources’, which included ‘the Targums’ and ‘the Talmud and Midrash’ and the second, an avoidance of ‘traditional Christian polemics against Jewish interpretation.’³⁰⁶ This chapter, which showcases the outsized role played by Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah* in first Puritan and later, Restored episcopalian, exegesis, reveals the extent to which Puritans did indeed

³⁰³ Jace Broadhurst, *What is the Literal sense? Considering the Hermeneutic of John Lightfoot*, (Pickwick Publications, 2012), p. 18.

³⁰⁴ Richard Muller, *After Calvin* (OUP, 2003), p. 173.

³⁰⁵ Polly Ha ‘Who Owns the Hebrew Doctors? Oriental Scholarship, Historical Proportionality, and the ‘Invention of Avant-Garde Conformity’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 53, No. 1, pp. 55-80, p. 58; Stephen G. Burnett, *Christian Hebraism in the Reformation Era (1500-1600): Authors, Books and the Transmission of Jewish Learning* (Brill, 2006), pp. 108-120, pp. 131-132; Elaine Glaser, *Judaism without Jews: Philosemitism and Christian Polemic in Early Modern England* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 30-49; David Katz, *Philo-semitism and the readmission of the Jews to England, 1603-1655* (OUP, 1982); Jonathan Karp & Adam Sutcliffe (eds.), *Philosemitism in History* (OUP, 2011).

³⁰⁶ Muller, *After Calvin*, p. 173.

consciously seek out Jewish, in place of patristic, interpretations. It also reveals, however, the extent to which rabbinic scholarship was marshalled in the service of ‘typological readings’, which would allow scholars of the Restoration era such as William Owtram and John Spencer to purport to show surprising levels of agreement between rabbinic and patristic exegesis. The reception of Maimonides which the chapter centres is that of the Hebraic Maimonides, who served to reaffirm, rather than to undermine, the religious certainties of his readers.

This chapter will reveal the ways in which Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah* was read as an historical source which could help elucidate the Gospel by Henry Ainsworth, John Selden, John Lightfoot and William Owtram. For Ainsworth, Lightfoot and Owtram, Maimonides’s explanations of the law upheld the Reformed typological framework of the same. It is important to stress here that whilst typology might strike the modern reader as a very old-fashioned, ahistorical mode of exegesis, this was not how its best practitioners saw it. As Nicholas Hardy demonstrates convincingly, typology was understood to be rooted both in history and in the literal sense of scripture and was therefore no less valid an approach than philology.³⁰⁷ The *Mishneh Torah* then, as an historical source which shed light on the particulars of scripture, could then be used to buttress typological readings. Whilst Maimonides was certainly a new source, he was thus often used for very old ends, his explanations of particular laws excavated in order to justify scriptural readings of which he would have had no knowledge at all. For Selden, however, such an approach was deemed illegitimate. Uniquely for his times, he made what Hardy has called ‘an invidious distinction’ between history and typology, criticising those, both episcopalian and presbyterian, who manipulated Jewish sources ‘for their own advantage’.³⁰⁸ For him, the *Mishneh Torah* was an historical source, whose chief function was the elucidation of the ancient Israelite judicial system. As it was not written for a Christian audience, a Christian interpretive framework

³⁰⁷ N.J.S. Hardy, *Criticism and Confession; The Bible in the Seventeenth-Century Republic of Letters* (OUP, 2018), pp. 170-174.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 170; John Selden, *De Synedriis et praefecturis iuridicis veterum Ebraeorum* (London, 1650), sig. A3r: “in rem suam.”

was not useful here. What was more useful, for Selden, were the Talmudic sources upon which the *Mishneh Torah* was based, the vigorous arguments, preserved within the pages of the Gemara, which revealed the multiplicity of options inherent within the *halakhic* system, that the *Mishneh Torah* had elided.

Whilst observing this broad rise in the popularity of the *Mishneh Torah* among English Reformed Protestants in the first half of the seventeenth century, it is important to draw attention to the ways in which scholarly approaches to this text differed. For Ainsworth, it served to reaffirm the biblical interpretations of the English separatists, a fringe Puritan group within which he was an important leader. For both Selden and Lightfoot, it served to resolve difficulties within the New Testament text, which the Fathers, on account of their inferior Hebrew, did not have the authority to decide upon. And for Owtram, the *Mishneh Torah* confirmed the patristic conception of Christ's death on the cross as an expiatory sacrifice, a mainstay of the temple cult.

Whilst there is no one explanation for the increasing emphasis placed on the *Mishneh Torah* as a tool of biblical interpretation over the course of our period, we can point to several intellectual trends by which it was rendered particularly useful. The first is the rising tide of Hebraic scholarship in England which had made the consumption of rabbinic literature by a broad spectrum of university-men a very real possibility by mid-century. The second is the particular utility of the *Mishneh Torah* as the Talmud 'abridged' for an audience with little interest in the Talmud itself, both on account of its supposedly anti-Christian contents and the high barriers to entry that the terse Aramaic and peculiar logic of the Gemara posed.³⁰⁹ The third is the growing realisation that rabbinic literature could help elucidate 'many of the legal rites' referred to in the

³⁰⁹ Henry Ainsworth, *Annotations Upon the First Book of Moses called Genesis Wherein the Hebrew Words and Sentences, are Compared with, & explained by the Ancient Greek and Chaldee Versions; but Chiefly by Conference with the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1622), p. iii.

New Testament, which had never before been explained.³¹⁰ That the *Mishneh Torah* was put to these usages was thanks firstly to the Anglo-Dutch book trade which had put various editions in the hands of English readers and then, only later, to the works of various translators who brought it to audiences with no Hebrew at all.

In the *Mishneh Torah* English scholars discovered a treasure trove of extra-biblical data which could be understood both theologically and historically. It was, to those with sufficient Hebrew, a highly readable guide to Jewish law and practice, whose scholarly significance was quickly established, first by Selden, and then by Lightfoot. Happily, it came with none of the baggage that weighed down the Talmud, the worst received legal text in Western Christendom, ‘pilloried as a mountain of irreligious filth’ and ‘denounced over and over again’.³¹¹ Indeed the peculiar esteem owed to Maimonides was due, at least in part, to his perceived distance from ‘the myths and traditions of the Talmud’, which he had personally refuted.³¹² Whilst the *Mishneh Torah*’s first English readers were certainly in the Puritan camp, its demonstrable utility ultimately secured its ubiquity as a vital resource of New Testament interpretation, whose significance would endure throughout the seventeenth-century and beyond.

Typology and History

For seventeenth-century scholars, scriptural interpretation was a high-stakes, ever-evolving game. As knowledge of Hebrew increased all over the confessional map, the deficiencies of patristic exegesis came to the fore, especially for Reformed Protestants, who deemed Calvin ‘the best’

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Anthony Grafton, ‘Comparisons Compared: A Study in the Early Modern Roots of Cultural History’ in Renaud Gagne, Simon Goldhill and Geoffrey Lloyd (eds.), *Regime of Comparatism: Frameworks of Comparison in History, Religion and Anthropology* (Brill, 2018), pp. 18 – 48, pp. 42-43; Amos Funkenstein, ‘Reflections on Medieval Anti-Judaism, 3. Basic Types of Christian Anti-Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Later Middle Ages’, *Viator* 2 (1972), pp. 373-382.

³¹² Johann Buxtorf, *Liber Moreh Nebukhim* (Basle, 1629), sig. *3v: “Fabulis & Traditionibus Talmudicis.”

exegete 'since the Apostles'.³¹³ This meant that confessional controversies could not be resolved by patristic sources alone, rendering rabbinic sources, even if these were not entirely to be trusted, absolutely vital. After all, no one could accuse the rabbis of insufficient Hebrew. This new understanding of the value of rabbinic scholarship resulted in a veritable scholarly confessional arms race, which, beginning in the Netherlands where the Calvinist-Arminian controversy, would, under James I, that most scholarly of kings, start to make inroads into the English Church too. The rise to power of Archbishop Laud, who would invest particularly in his *alma mater* of Oxford, greatly exacerbated this trend, raising the status of both Arabic and Hebrew scholarship, thus ensuring that those given to this work would be able to pursue it in perpetuity.³¹⁴ New scholarly resources did not necessarily mean new scholarly methods or even new perspectives, however, and great advances in philological and rabbinic learning were just as likely to buttress the positions of the orthodox as the heterodox. Whilst some scholars, most notably John Selden, were transformed by their encounters with rabbinic literature, others would use it, not to undermine traditional readings, but to further embellish these.³¹⁵

Reformed Protestants, proclaiming *sola scriptura*, were faced with the unenviable task of identifying within the Bible itself every single one of the doctrines to which they held firm. The Trinity, Christ's eternal sonship, infant baptism - all had to be located within Scripture. The extent to which this was or was not possible was the subject of continual debate within the Early Modern period, leading to various fracturings and departures from orthodoxy on the part of Baptists, Socinians and Unitarians in their turn.³¹⁶ One departure after the next from Reformed orthodoxy was guided by the conviction that some central dogma did not, in fact, appear in the

³¹³ John Preston, 'A Pattern of Wholesome Words or, Paul's Charge to Timothy, in a Treatise on 2 Tim 1.13 being the sum of sundry Sermons', in *Riches of Mercy to men in Misery* (London, 1658), pp. 318-320.

³¹⁴ Dmitri Levitin, 'Introduction', in N.J.S. Hardy and Dmitri Levitin (eds.), *Confessionalisation and erudition in early modern Europe: an episode in the history of the humanities* (OUP, 2020), pp. 70-72.

³¹⁵ On John Selden's critical engagement with typology see N.J.S. Hardy, *Criticism and Confession; The Bible in the Seventeenth-Century Republic of Letters* (OUP, 2018), pp. 172-174.

³¹⁶ Broadhurst, *Literal Sense*, pp. 39-47.

Scriptures. In order to defend the integrity of the *sensus literalis*, the Reformed depended upon an expansive definition of ‘the literal’ which allowed for, and indeed, insisted upon, figurative readings, especially of the Old Testament, which was understood to contain ‘types’ and ‘shadows’ of the later unfolding of salvation history.³¹⁷ This chapter reveals the ways in which the *Mishneh Torah*, as a source first deployed by Christians at the beginning of the seventeenth century, was used both to help uncover the ‘types’ and ‘shadows’ lurking within the Old Testament and to give vital context to the key events of the New. In this way, the Puritan penchant for rabbinic sources, far from evidencing a new ‘philosemitism’, reveals the Reformed, for the most part, to have been profoundly committed to the Augustinian conception of the Jews as effective ‘librarians’ to the Christians, serving only to preserve the scriptures on their behalf.³¹⁸

Typology like allegory and prophecy is a means of fastening together the Old and New Testaments. Whilst Catholic scholars relied heavily on allegory, the Reformed relied on typology. Historically, these two heuristics were closely related. As Tibor Fabiny has demonstrated, the language of typology was not entirely distinct from that of allegory in the patristic period. For early modern protestants, however, it was used specifically to refer to the connecting up of historical realities.³¹⁹ Indeed, as Hardy has shown, it was the very grounding of typology in historical and theological evidence that granted it such a high status in the centres of Reformed scholarship.³²⁰ It was not the derivation of hidden meanings buried in the biblical text. Indeed, as the plethora of Reformed ‘typological manuals’ proves, this was a mode of exegesis that was, at

³¹⁷ See Alison Knight, *The Dark Bible: Cultures of Interpretation in Early Modern England* (OUP, 2022), pp. 228-270; Broadhurst, *Literal Sense*, pp. 19-17.

³¹⁸ Augustine, *Ennarationes in Psalmos* (Antwerp, 1667), p. 56; Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana, On Christian Teaching* (OUP, 1997), pp. 72-75.

³¹⁹ Tibor Fabiny, ‘Edwards and Biblical Typology’, *Understanding Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to America’s Theologian* (OUP, 2009), pp. 91-108, p. 97.

³²⁰ Hardy, *Criticism and Confession*, pp. 170-173.

least in theory, accessible to all.³²¹ The apparent incongruity between the Old and New Testaments was, for Lightfoot, a function of their having been written at different times and in different languages. The new was ‘veiled in the old’, as the old in the new; all it took was an historically sensitive translator to reveal that these spoke ‘both to one purpose’.³²²

Henry Ainsworth – the *Mishneh Torah* as typological resource

Henry Ainsworth discovered Maimonides in exile. A sometime student at Cambridge, he travelled to Amsterdam in 1597, having been arrested for his ‘Brownism’ one too many times. Ainsworth would divide his time on the continent between ministering to his small separatist congregation, writing his biblical commentaries and selling books. By 1616, when he published his commentary on Genesis, he had amassed a vast knowledge of the *Mishneh Torah*. Ainsworth took great care to emphasise the unambitious nature of his exegetical approach, situating it entirely within the typological mainstream. His use of Jewish texts was justified on the grounds that these could ‘approve the New Testament’ and how better to do so than with the ‘testimony of an adversary?’³²³ Whilst Ainsworth is known to posterity as ‘the Rabbi of his age’, his ‘rabbinism’, he made pains to assert in his commentaries, served only to allow for the ‘uncovering the mysteries of godliness’ implicit in the text of the Old Testament.³²⁴ ‘The things

³²¹ See for example William Guild, *Moses Unveiled: or Figures which Served unto the Pattern and Shadow of Heavenly Things. Pointing out the Messiah Christ Jesus Briefly Explained* (London, 1620); Thomas Taylor, *Christ Revealed or the Old Testament Explained, a Treatise of the Types and Shadows of our Saviour Contained throughout the Whole Scripture. All opened and Made Useful for the Benefit of the Church* (London, 1635); Samuel Mather, *The Figure or Types of the Old Testaments by which Christ and the Heavenly Things of the Gospel were Preached to the People of God of Old* (London, 1683); Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia, a Key to open Scripture Metaphors* (London, 1682).

³²² John Lightfoot, *Erubbin or Miscellanies Christian and Judaicall, and others Penned for recreation at vacant hours* (London, 1629), pp. 114-115.

³²³ Henry Ainsworth, *Annotations upon the five bookes of Moses, the booke of the Psalmes, and the Song of Songs, or, Canticles Wherein the Hebrew words and sentences, are compared with, and explained by the ancient Greeke and Chaldee versions, and other records and monuments of the Hebrewes: but chiefly by conference with the holy Scriptures, Moses his words, lawes and ordinances, the sacrifices, and other legall ceremonies heretofore commanded by God to the Church of Israel, are explained. With an advertisement touching some objections made against the sinceritie of the Hebrew text, and allegation of the Rabbines in these annotations. As also tables directing unto such principall things as are observed in the annotations upon each severall booke*, (London, 1639), p. i-iv.

³²⁴ Daniel Neal, *Neal’s history of the Puritans: or, The rise, principles and sufferings of the Protestant dissenters, to the glorious aera of the revolution*, (Longman, 1811), p. 284, Ainsworth, ‘Preface’, *Annotations*, p. 1.

which Moses wrote', he boldly declared, 'were not his owne; but the Law of the Lord by his hand' and 'all that he spake and wrote: what he said was the commandment of God; and what God spake unto him, the same is spoken unto us: him therefore we are willed to heare'.³²⁵ This was as a clear a statement as any of Ainsworth's commitment to a typological reading of the Old Testament. Far from being superseded by the New, the 'dark and figurative speeches' of the Hebrew Scriptures might be revealed when 'compared' with it, that 'mysteries of godliness therein implied' might 'be opened'.³²⁶

Ainsworth was a remarkable, if not a particularly sophisticated reader of Maimonides. In the *Mishneh Torah*, he uncovered a wealth of material by which he could recognise the 'types' implicit in the Old Testament, material that was only available to him on account of his knowledge of Hebrew. Whilst Ainsworth never critiqued the interpretations of the Fathers, he tended to sidestep these, on the grounds that they were 'cited by other expositors abundantly'.³²⁷ He believed that to really understand the Old Testament, one needed to understand the 'literall sense of Moses Hebrew'.³²⁸ The 'figures and properties of speech' particular to ancient Hebrew could reveal the 'natural meaning of Scripture'.³²⁹ Typology for Ainsworth was not at all an esoteric mode of reading. It was implicit in the 'literall sense' of Scripture, which was replete with 'mysteries of godliness'.³³⁰ Typology as much as philology was a means of getting at the historical reality conveyed by the text.

Ainsworth's interpretations of 'Moses Hebrew' which relied heavily on the *Mishneh Torah*, seemed time and time again to accord with the central theological claims of his particular faction

³²⁵ Ainsworth, Annotations, p. i.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid., p. v.

³²⁸ Ibid., p. i.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

of England's Puritan minority. Ainsworth's mining of Maimonides, typological manual in hand will be shown to have allowed him to identify arguments for separation from the English national church, strict Sabbath observance and salvation by faith. That these claims could be uncovered within the Old Testament itself, made them *iure divino* and thus of the upmost religious significance. In this respect, whilst distinctive for his separatism, Ainsworth's reading of Maimonides was emblematic of the early seventeenth-century reception of the Hebraic Maimonides. His emphasis on the ways in which Maimonides could support his particular confessional claims bears emphasis for it problematises Funkenstein's conception of Maimonides as an essential historicising influence upon seventeenth-century England.³³¹

Ainsworth wished to show that the argument for separation from the national church was rooted in the very text of the Bible itself. Strangely enough, the *Mishneh Torah* helped him to make this claim. Ainsworth's comments on the twenty-second chapter of Deuteronomy revealed that the separation between reprobate and elect, which he had insisted upon at great personal cost, was mandated by the text of the Old Testament itself.³³² This was therefore not a second order issue upon which the church could decide. It was fundamental to the pursuit of 'godliness', which was the mandate of the Church.³³³ That the national church of England failed to recognise this was on account of its having been veiled in the 'dark and figurative speeches' of the Hebrew scriptures.³³⁴ Ainsworth could uncover the truth of this matter thanks to 'the evidence brought from the learned Jews', amongst whom the most learned of all was 'Maimony', 'who abridged the Talmuds'.³³⁵

³³¹ Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (PUP, 2018), pp. 234-243.

³³² Ainsworth, 'Deuteronomy', *Annotations*, pp. 93-94.

³³³ Ainsworth, *Annotations*, p. i.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. iv.

Whilst the distinction between ‘elect’ and ‘reprobate’ is not present in the Old Testament, the Hebrew scriptures do contain lots of distinctions, between Gentiles and Israelites, between Levites and Israelites, and between clean and unclean. This last distinction, between clean and unclean, Ainsworth insisted, was typological. It referred to ‘the servants of Christ’, who were ‘cleane’ and those of ‘Antichrist’, who were not. Ainsworth took up Maimonides’s claim that the reason why oxen and asses couldn’t be yoked together was because oxen were fit for sacrifice, whereas asses were not. This turned out to be very important for his purposes because it hinted at the essential separateness of the elect from the reprobate. For Ainsworth, the subjecting of ploughing itself contained typological resonances as per Luke 9.62: ‘no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God’, where the word ‘plough’ had been taken by ‘the Ministers in the Church’ as a type of ‘the ministry of his word’.³³⁶ Ainsworth thus understood this commandment to pertain to Christian ministry, which could not ‘be mixed of cleane and uncleane’.³³⁷ The use of the word ‘yoke’ was instructive here too, for it alerted Ainsworth to the possibility that 2 Corinthians 6.14, ‘be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?’, corresponded with this verse, which thus strengthened his argument as to the impossibility of a truly national church. Whereas the prohibition against yoking an ox with an ass, ‘bindeth not us now’, a typological reading of the same, which could only be derived from ‘the evidence brought forth from the learned of the Jews’, revealed its enduring significance.³³⁸

The separatist commitment to Sabbatarianism too, Ainsworth proved, derived from the Old Testament. Whereas James I’s *Book of Sports* (1618), attributed the strict observance of the Sabbath to ‘some puritans and precise people’ bent on disrupting ‘lawfull recreations, and honest exercises upon Sundayes and other holy dayes’, Ainsworth was able to show, thanks to his

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ainsworth, ‘Deuteronomy’, *Annotations*, pp. 93-94.

³³⁸ Ainsworth, *Annotations*, p. i.

reading of the *Mishneh Torah*, that such ‘precise people’ were in fact, fulfilling ‘the Law of the Lord’.³³⁹

Throughout his biblical commentaries, Ainsworth took great pains to demonstrate the virtues of a precise, and, to his critics, ‘puritanical’, commitment to Sabbath observance, noting that the Chaldee paraphrast rendered Exodus 31.17 ‘Between my Word and the sonnes of Israel, the ‘word’ here typifying Christ as per Hebrews 4, indicating that it is through him that ‘the Sabbath is truly sanctified to his Church.’³⁴⁰ Maimonides’s insistence, however, on the peculiarly Jewish nature of Sabbath observance was, he believed, unsupported by Maimonides’s own arguments. As Ainsworth noted on Exodus 20.8 ‘Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy’, Maimonides, in his ‘treat of the Sabbath’, had outlined two reasons for Sabbath observance, the first, ‘for a remembrance of the creation of the world’ and the second, ‘a remembrance of the coming out of Egypt’.³⁴¹ He referred back to the first of these reasons in two later comments (on Exodus 20.10 & Exodus 31.17) in order to dispute Maimonides’s claim that the Sabbath was to be observed by the Jews alone, pointing out that it had its origins in ‘the creation’ and therefore from the perspective of ‘God’s Law’ and ‘God’s Will’ should have ‘given to all the world’ rather than reserved for the Jews alone.³⁴² This manipulation of the *Mishneh Torah* against itself in order to lend succour to his particular theological cause is typical of Ainsworth’s broader approach to the Old Testament text. As he explained in the preface to his *Annotations*, rabbinic sources constituted ‘the testimony of the adversary’, which, when marshalled ‘against himself, helpeth our faith’.³⁴³

³³⁹ ‘The Book of Sports, 1618’ in Kenneth Fincham, *Visitation Articles, and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church 1603-1625* (Boydell & Brewer, 1994), pp. 149-151.

³⁴⁰ Ainsworth, ‘Exodus’, *Annotations*, p. 132.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

³⁴² *Hilkhot Shabbat* 24.5 & 2.1; Ainsworth, ‘Exodus’, *Annotations*. p. 75, p. 132.

³⁴³ Ainsworth, ‘Preface’, *Annotations*.

Faith is not a subject upon which the Hebrew Bible, at least to the naked eye, has much to say. For Ainsworth, however, the informed reader, could identify ‘types’ and ‘shadows’ of salvific faith across its vast corpus. Whilst to the uninitiated, the text of the Old Testament might appear to consist in a ‘history of things past’, its true significance lay in its prophecies of further grace to come, which is now exhibited by Jesus Christ’, which only those who had studied the ‘figures and properties’ of the Hebrew language and the writings of ‘the learned Jews’ could reveal.³⁴⁴ Each of the Books of the Pentateuch, when understood thus, implied ‘mysteries of godliness’ of which most contemporary Christians were painfully unaware.³⁴⁵

The ostensible subject of the book of Genesis, for example, was ‘the generation of the heavens and the earth and of mankind’.³⁴⁶ Therein was ‘implied’, however, ‘natural man, fallen from God.’³⁴⁷ Also ‘implied’ therein, according to Ainsworth, was the inheritance due to ‘Christian believers’, who constituted the spiritual descendants of Abraham.³⁴⁸ He was able to derive this typological sense of the Book of Genesis with the help of material mined from the *Mishneh Torah*, which he used to contextualise many of the verses contained therein. According to Ainsworth the *Mishneh Torah* proved that Abraham’s spiritual seed, as opposed to his biological descendants, would inherit the kingdom of heaven. To support this claim, he cited *Hilkebot Teshuva* 3.5 ‘the land for ever, this land is a parable, as if he should say, the land of the living, and this is the world to come’.³⁴⁹ This, for him, represented proof that ‘the Hebrew Doctors’ themselves ‘acknowledged’ that the land of Canaan was part of the spiritual, as opposed to merely the material, inheritance due to Abraham’s children. The verse, therefore, when read ‘with unveiled faces’, told of a ‘figure of a heavenly country’ which was to be ‘promised to Abram’s seed’.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.,

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p. i.

³⁴⁶ Ainsworth, ‘Genesis’, *Annotations*, pp. 65-66.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.,

³⁴⁸ Ibid.,

³⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

Ainsworth, in his comment on 17. 4, ‘thou shalt be a father of many nations’, noted that Abraham’s children included ‘besides his natural posterity, all Christian beleevers in the world’. In support of this ostensibly contentious definition Ainsworth turned to *Hilkhot Bikkurim* 4.3, where ‘Maimony’ was cited as referring to Abraham as the ‘father of all the world, which shall be gathered under the Kings of the Majesty of God’.³⁵⁰ This seeming recognition by the ‘Hebrew Canons’ of the legitimacy of Abraham’s spiritual progeny as well as his ‘natural posterity’, affirmed for Ainsworth the status of Abraham as ‘the father of us all’, with whom the ‘covenant of grace’, through which ‘the justice that is by faith, and blessedness accompanying the same’ was contracted.³⁵¹ The Genesis narrative then, on Ainsworth’s retelling, which was aided in no small measure by the *Mishneh Torah*, was ‘witnessed’ to the spiritual nature, of both Abraham’s inheritance and his heirs.³⁵²

Exodus too, could be understood on two levels. On the one hand, it recounted ‘the departure of Israel out of Egypt, with the covenant that God plighted with them, the same yeere that they went out’. On the other hand, however, ‘veiled’ therein was a more important story, that of ‘our regeneration, and state renewed by Jesus Christ.’³⁵³ To draw out this message of regeneration and renewal, Ainsworth identified its ‘shadows’ lurking. Frequently looking to the *Mishneh Torah*, he sought in the ‘Hebrew Canons’ legitimations for his typological explications of the verses contained therein. These allowed him to identify, within the book of Exodus, ‘shadows’ of the preaching of the Gospel, the election of the saints and the substitutionary atonement of Christ.

The preaching of the Gospel was derived typologically from 12.9 wherein the preparations for the Passover sacrifice are outlined. These preparations, which, as per Maimonides’s explications

³⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 65-66.

³⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 64-65.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid.

involved a thorough roasting of the lamb, for Ainsworth might ‘figure a full and due preparation, by the preaching of the Gospel and shewing forth of Christs death’.³⁵⁴ The election of the saints was identified in 13.13 ‘the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem’, a commandment which is explained in *Hilkebot Bikkeurim* 11.2,5 in terms of a father’s duty to thank God for the safe delivery of his first son. Ainsworth saw in this *halakha*, an analogy with Hebrews 12.23, ‘the Church of the first-borne which are written in heaven’.³⁵⁵ This analogous verse, taken together with the cited *halakha*, led Ainsworth to believe that the description of the redemption of the first-borns, at its essence, was a type ‘of the redemption of Gods elect’, who, like the first born who is safely delivered, are saved from the second death: ‘for in respect of the first death, no man can give any ransom to God.’³⁵⁶ Penal substitutionary atonement then was veiled in 29.10. This verse describes the sin offering which formed part of the consecration of the priests. Maimonides’s explanation of this rite which involves the laying of hands upon the beast about to be slaughtered was deemed analogous with the death of ‘Christ, killed for our sins’.³⁵⁷ The confession recited over the sin offering, which the *Mishneh Torah* outlines was ‘a figure’ of the laying upon Christ of ‘the iniquity of us all’.³⁵⁸ We thus have within the book of Exodus types of evangelism, of predestination and of Christ as expiatory sacrifice. In short, the entire process of regeneration and renewal appeared here in typological form. In order to derive these analogies, Ainsworth had to rely on more than just the text of the Old Testament itself but on the text as contextualised by the *Mishneh Torah*, which provided him with a wealth of material within which to locate analogies with the New Testament.

As with both Genesis and Exodus, Leviticus too, which concerns the ‘Levitical priesthood’, functioned, for Ainsworth, as a ‘witness’ to the ‘grace and truth come by Jesus Christ’, whose

³⁵⁴ *Hilkebot Pesach* 8.6; Ainsworth, ‘Exodus’, *Annotations*, p. 48.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ *Hilkebot Korbanot* 3.11; Ainsworth, ‘Exodus’, *Annotations*, p. 122.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

‘mortification’ is figured therein. Here typological analogies abounded. The high priest, for example, was plainly a figure of Christ. Ainsworth noted out of the *Mishneh Torah* that even a high priest would offer up a guilt offering, if it turned out that he had unintentionally sinned before his appointment.³⁵⁹ This humanity of the high priest, Ainsworth noted, distinguished him in kind from ‘our High priest, Christ Jesus’, who ‘was holy, harmlesse, undefiled, separate from sinner and made higher than the heavens’, which, for him, indicated that ‘the legal priesthood’, could not be ‘perpetuall’ but a mere ‘figure for the time, till the coming of our Lord.’³⁶⁰

The book of Numbers provided Ainsworth with further salvific types. The ostensible subject of the book is ‘the journies from Egypt to Canaan’, though for Ainsworth, its true significance is as ‘a figure of our spiritual warfare’.³⁶¹ Central to this ‘good fight of faith’, was a very peculiar ‘figure’ of purification, the red heifer (פרה אדומה) to which an entire section of *Sefer Tabarah*, the tenth book of the *Mishneh Torah* is dedicated. Numbers 19.2 outlines very clearly the conditions a heifer must meet in order to qualify for this special role.³⁶² These were clarified in 1.7 of this section, which Ainsworth quoted in his comment on the verse cited.³⁶³ For him, Maimonides’s account of the features of the red heifer ‘in special figured’ Christ.³⁶⁴ ‘Red’, her colour, figured Christ’s ‘humane nature and participation of our afflictions’, by analogy with Isaiah 63.2 (‘art thou red in thine apparel’) and Hebrews 2.18 (‘the children are partakers of flesh and blood’). The requirement that she be unblemished too figured Christ ‘both in his nature and actions’ by analogy with 1 Peter 1.19 (‘the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot’) and 2.22 (‘did no sin’) as did her never having been yoked, which as Maimonides explained, meant that even the mere wearing of a yoke disqualified such a heifer, which figured

³⁵⁹ *Hilkebot Sheggagot* 15.10

³⁶⁰ Ainsworth, ‘Leviticus’, *Annotations*, p. 14.

³⁶¹ Ainsworth, ‘Numbers’, *Annotations*, p. 117.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

total freedom ‘from the bondage of sin corruption, and from the servitude to the ordinarie of men of religion’.³⁶⁵ Having established the utility of the *Mishneh Torah* in characterising in great detail the criteria which a red heifer must meet, such that a figure of Jesus could be clearly identified therein, Ainsworth marvelled at the ignorance ‘of the Jew’, Maimonides, who was blind to this ‘understanding’ of his own words. Maimonides’s claim that the tenth red heifer ever to be slaughtered ‘shall be done by King Christ’, seems to have outraged Ainsworth, who cited this halakha out of *Parah Adumah* (3.4) in order to show that the Jews were ‘without knowledge’ of ‘the sonne of God’.³⁶⁶ He thus performed at one and the same time both of the functions he vowed to perform in the preface to this work, at once explaining the ‘particulars’ of Jewish practice whilst also using these to ‘approve the New Testament’ to ‘the condemning of’ the Jews.³⁶⁷

The Deuteronomic ‘repetition of the law’ served to confirm Ainsworth’s conception of the Mosaic precepts, in their entirety as being, but a ‘veile’, beneath which lay ‘the doctrine of our sanctification, and preparation to enter into our heavenly Canaan by the conduct of Jesus’.³⁶⁸ In his comments on this book Ainsworth looked frequently to Maimonides to supply him fuller account of the Jewish belief in the Messiah, which is the subject of its 18th chapter, wherein it is written ‘whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him’.³⁶⁹ In order to clarify the key characteristics of the Messiah at which this verse gestures, Ainsworth looked to *Hilkbot Melakhim*. In his own translation of 11.3, Ainsworth recorded the following ‘that the king Christ needeth to do signes and wonder; the thing is not so’.³⁷⁰ He analogised this halakha with Matthew 12.39 (‘an evil and adulterous generation seeketh

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 119.

³⁶⁷ Ainsworth, *Annotations*, pp. i-iv.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ainsworth, ‘Deuteronomy’, p. 74.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 181, pp. 73-74.

after a sign’) and with John 4.48 (‘except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe’) that it might thus figure Jewish disbelief in the face of ‘many miracles’.³⁷¹ This inability to recognise their Messiah even as he stood before them, Ainsworth remarked, quoting his translation of *Hilkebot Yesodei Hatorah* 10 ‘After it is known that he is a Prophet, they must know and believe that the Lord is among them’, indicated that the Jews were not only guilty of disbelieving the Messiah but of disbelieving Moses himself, given that Jesus as per Acts 3.22,24, Matt. 17. 2,3 and John 1.45 ‘had the witnesses of Moses and of all the prophets.’ Once again, we see Ainsworth looking to the *Mishneh Torah* to flesh out the Old Testament text so as to increase the material available to him with which to seek out New Testament analogies. In this case this has enabled him to claim that ‘the testimonie of the Jews’ itself provides us with evidence, not only of the Jewish rejection of the Messiah but the resultant Jewish rejection of the ‘grace and truth’ veiled within their own Law.³⁷²

Whilst Ainsworth’s typological readings of the Old Testament may strike the contemporary reader as rather convoluted, they proceeded very much in the manner that the typological manuals of his day recommended, identifying ‘obscure types’ in the Hebrew Scriptures and then seeking to match each of these up with their ‘glorious Anty-type’.³⁷³ Ainsworth’s advantage here was that, beyond the Scriptures themselves, he had access to ‘their expositions’ via Maimonides, allowing him far more scope for typological interpretation than those manuals could supply.³⁷⁴ He seems therefore, in one sense, to have read Maimonides, much as a Jew would, as an expositor of the oral law, which was just as significant as the words of the Old Testament itself. Given that the two were given together, they were thus equally to be understood as ‘dark and

³⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 73-74.

³⁷¹ Ibid., p. 181, pp. 73-74.

³⁷² Ainsworth, *Annotations*, p. iv.

³⁷³ Guild, *Moses Unveiled*, sig. A3v.

³⁷⁴ Ainsworth, *Annotations*, p. iv.

figurative speeches', which were 'often explained' by the Christian Scriptures.³⁷⁵ We have, therefore, in the case of Ainsworth, a great example of a scholar for whom the potent combination of philological skill and novel scholarly resources meant the buttressing of orthodoxy. His great enthusiasm for Maimonides did not see him evolve his conception of Judaism, quite the opposite. Whilst he was perceived, with some justification, to have been a master Hebraist, Hebraism, for Ainsworth, was a tool. He was certainly not the critic of 'traditional Christian polemics' that Richard Muller made him out to be and whilst he certainly valued 'Jewish exegesis of the Old Testament', this was as and when such exegesis could be manipulated into support his often-contentious conclusions.³⁷⁶

Whilst later English Maimonideans would use their readings of him to undermine the typological manipulations of an Ainsworth, it is important to stress that such usages of Maimonides were not inevitable and not even particularly common. The *Mishneh Torah* was an abundant resource, through which the 'Hebraic Maimonides', could be made to speak, at least by those who could read him, to the opinions they held dear. As Ainsworth was working from Hebrew copies of the *Mishneh Torah* only, he could rest assured that few, if any, of his critics would ever be able to accuse him of misinterpretation. Whilst he would be criticised for his excessive engagement with Jewish sources, his reading too much into them was not a point on which he was ever pulled up. Ainsworth's liberal mining of the *Mishneh Torah* in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, was only possible because he was among the privileged few to whom it was legible.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ Ibid., p. i.

³⁷⁶ Muller, *After Calvin*, p. 173.

³⁷⁷ See for example John Paget, *An Arrow Against the Separation of the Brownists; Also An Admonition Touching Talmudique & Rabbinical allegations* (Amsterdam, 1618).

Why the *Mishneh Torah*?

Ainsworth's reliance upon Maimonides is particularly noteworthy given that he was not prone to developing his analogies with reference to 'the Christian fathers and Doctors'.³⁷⁸ Richard Muller has explained this in terms of his preferring 'the oldest available sources' over those of a more recent vintage, which is, of course, no explanation at all.³⁷⁹ Ainsworth himself was well aware that Maimonides had 'lived 1200 yeeres after our Lords birth'.³⁸⁰ His reliance upon him was justified, however, in terms of debt to Talmudic sources, which 'notwithstanding the many fables and falsehoods that are found generally them, constituted reliable records of 'the many good things and probable truths which from elder days they does record'.³⁸¹ Ainsworth identified in the *Mishneh Torah* almost a *Talmudica Prisca*, 'a plainer hebrew' record of 'the 'Thalmuds' which omitted 'the discourses, fables, disputes etc.' with which the Talmud was allegedly replete.³⁸² His charge to his critics, who preferred 'such books of the Jewish Rabbins as were written in Greek', was that they had used theology to justify their own ignorance. The likes of Philo and Josephus were judged more trustworthy than Maimonides, not on any evidentiary basis, but because they 'came to be knowne more easily' and had therefore been 'translated, commented upon, and commended for instruction'.³⁸³ Ainsworth's reliance upon Maimonides might be justified, I argue, on the same grounds. In comparison with the obscure Aramaic of the Talmud, the 'plainer Hebrew' text of the *Mishneh Torah*, is easy to follow and therefore proved useful to him.³⁸⁴ Whilst Ainsworth might have emphasised the problematic contents of the Talmud, it is highly likely, I conjecture, that he also found in the *Mishneh Torah* a much more easily digestible guide to the same. Maimonides, then, served Ainsworth, as something of a cipher for rabbinic

³⁷⁸ Ainsworth, *Annotations*, p. v.

³⁷⁹ Muller, *After Calvin*, p. 156.

³⁸⁰ Ainsworth, *Annotations* sig. 5Q4r-v.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

³⁸² *Ibid.*

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Judaism writ large. Ainsworth's need of access to the rabbis, I argue, does in fact point to his unwillingness to rely upon 'the Christian fathers and doctors', many of whom would not have enjoyed the same access as he had to the 'Chaldee and Hebrew workes' by which 'Moses Hebrew' could be best understood.³⁸⁵

Ainsworth was part of a growing constituency of Reformed scholars, whose knowledge of Hebrew was such that they could no longer take the words of the Fathers on authority.³⁸⁶ This constituency, which would include John Selden and later, John Lightfoot, identified in the *Mishneh Torah* a reliable historical source by which the New Testament could be interpreted. These scholars were painfully aware of the contingencies by which Greek sources had attained a status far greater than that of the Hebrew sources. The 'fathers both Greeke and Latine', Lightfoot had noted in his *Erubbin*, had paid little attention to the Hebrew sources 'not so much for affection as for mere necessity, few of them being able to reade the Bible in Hebrew.'³⁸⁷ The development of Hebraic scholarship had now opened up a veritable cornucopia of Hebrew language sources, which would allow contemporary scholars to advance far further than their illustrious predecessors ever could. In this context, the *Mishneh Torah* would emerge as a particularly significant resource for two reasons. Firstly, as Anthony Grafton has established, the Renaissance, ushered in a new emphasis upon legal sources in historical scholarship.³⁸⁸ Maimonides's locating of himself within the Jewish legal tradition was fundamental to establishing his authority within this scholarly context. Whereas an emphasis upon legal sources, might have resulted in a turning to the Talmud, the Talmud had been so successfully denigrated that Maimonides's, not entirely deserved, reputation as a critic of the same was fundamental to his newfound authority. Indeed, Buxtorf's introduction to his edition of the *Moreh Nebukhim*

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ See Quantin, *Christian Antiquity*, pp. 166-167.

³⁸⁷ Lightfoot, *Erubbin*, pp. 67-68.

³⁸⁸ Anthony Grafton, *What was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

made it very clear that Maimonides was ‘not at all devoted to the myths and traditions of the Talmud’ and should therefore not be tarred with its poor reputation.³⁸⁹ Secondly, Maimonides had not only ‘abridged’ the Talmud, but he had rewritten it in a ‘plainer’, much more concise style.³⁹⁰ It’s ‘confused and intricate order’, had, in his hands, been reworked into a series of ‘clear aphorisms in pure Hebrew, in an easy and elegant style’.³⁹¹ It was therefore a highly readable record of the oral law.

The Chain of Tradition – Buttressing the authority of the *Mishneh Torah*

Ainsworth’s conception of the *Mishneh Torah* as the Talmud ‘abridged’ would endure into the 1690s when Pockocke was still referring to it the ‘Summe of their Talmudical doctrine’ and even into the 1700s, when Humphrey Prideaux described it ‘as a most excellent Digest of Jewish Law as contained in the *Mishnah* and *Talmud*’.³⁹² Prideaux, in his introduction to his translation of extracts from the *Mishneh Torah*, went further still.³⁹³ He argued that the *Mishneh Torah* had saved the authentic oral law from the obscurantism of the Rabbis of the Talmud, resulting in a code whose excellence surpassed even those of the Romans.³⁹⁴ Acknowledging the poor reputation of the Talmud, Prideaux praised Maimonides as ‘a writer of the highest quality’ who had won the approval even of those would more typically have ‘rejected and condemned the writings of the Jews as completely useless’.³⁹⁵ The *Mishneh Torah* was therefore imbued with the authority

³⁸⁹ Buxtorf, *Moreh Nebukhim* sig. ***r.: “Theologiae in sua Religione & fide Doctor fuit insignis, ac (quae laus ipsi tribuenda) Fabulis & Traditionibus Talmudicis minime addictus.”

³⁹⁰ Ainsworth, *Annotations*, p. iv.

³⁹¹ Buxtorf, *Moreh Nebukhim* sig. ***r.: “Ex confuso & intricatissimo ordine, e lingua impura & varia, in certum ordinem, perspicuos Aphorismos, lingua Hebraea pura, stylo facili & eleganti redegit.”

³⁹² Ainsworth, *Annotations*, p. 3; Edward Pococke, *A Commentary on the Prophecy of Joel*, (Oxford, 1691), p. 4; ‘Prideaux to Ockley’, 2 September 1700 BL, MS Add. 23204, fol. 6r-v.

³⁹³ See Scott Mandelbrote, ‘The Significance of Historical Judaism and the Career of Humphrey Prideaux’, in Piet van Boxel, Joanna Weinberg & Kirsten Macfarlane (eds.), *The Mishnaic Moment: Jewish Law among Jews and Christians in Early Modern Europe* (OUP, 2022), pp.255-235, p. 270, fn. 65 for information as to Prideaux’s approach to the study of the *Mishneh Torah*.

³⁹⁴ Humphrey Prideaux, *R. Moses Maimonides De jure pauperis et peregrini apud Juaeos* (Oxford, 1679), sig. Av-b2r.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, sig. Ar: “Qui caetera convellunt Judaeorum scripta, et ut inutilia damnant prorsus et rejiciunt, Maimonidem semper agnoscunt scriptorem minime nugacem.”

properly due to the oral law, not despite but because of its having been written nearly a thousand years after the closing of the Talmudic corpus. Maimonides, who had inherited a tradition ‘almost absorbed and submerged in Talmudic authority’, had ‘brilliantly restored it’ to its former glory, thus accruing to himself the status of ‘a second Moses’.³⁹⁶

For scholars accustomed to taking Roman law as authoritative, the concept of a self-authorising tradition was easily established. Maimonides had begun his *Mishneh Torah* with a clear outline of his own position within the chain of *halakbic* transmission. The *prolegomena* to John Selden’s *De Successionibus* (1631) referred readers to this passage, within which the integrity of the Jewish tradition was secured. As with the laws of ‘Rome, Speyer, Naples, Paris’ etc., the Jews too had ‘vast volumes of Decisions, Responsa, Opinions, Consilia’, by which the development of their tradition could be traced.³⁹⁷ The consultation of these was of particular significance given that ‘not only Christian theologians but also statesmen and jurists often draw from the ancient customs of the Hebrews’.³⁹⁸ Whereas Christians had typically relied upon the fathers to elucidate relevant Jewish legal principles, Selden cautioned against this. St. Jerome, he noted, was not a rabbinical scholar. Indeed, in several places, he had mistakenly referred to ‘Rabbina’ and ‘Rabasse’ as the authors of the Talmud, likely on account of his having misread the names of ‘Rabbi Ina’ and ‘Rabbi Ashi’, the two final editors of the Jerusalem Talmud.³⁹⁹ Selden thus established the basis upon which Maimonides was regarded as being in possession of ultimate

³⁹⁶ Ibid., sig. A3r: “In qua palaestra tam optimo desudavit successu, ut totum jus Judaicum, barbarie et sentina Talmudica prius fere absorptum et penitus demersum, adeo feliciter restituerit, ut hinc, quasi alter esset, illius conditor de eo apud Judaeos egregium hoc totius gentis suffragiis ubique receptum est elogium, Mose [*propheta*] usque ad Mosem [Maimonidem] no exitit quails Moses [Maimonides].”

³⁹⁷ John Selden, *De Successionibus in bona defuncti, seu iure haereditario, ad leges Ebraeorum quae, florente olim eorum republica, in usus, liber singularis, ex sacris literis, utroque Talmude, & selectionibus rabbinis, id est, ex iuris Ebraici fontibus, pandectis, atque consultissimis magistris, desumptus*, (London, 1631), p. iii: “quae Roma, Spira, Neapoli, parisiis, Florentia, Genua, Tarracone, ac a tribualibus aliis Iurisconsultorumque Collegiis I Europa celebrioribus, in nemorosis Decisionum, Responsum, Opinionum, Consiliorum voluminibus, asserti solent, agnoscant Iurisconsulti.”

³⁹⁸ Ibid., p. ii: “Cum igitur non modo Theologi Christiani sed etiam Iurisconsulti & Politici, ex priscis Ebraeorum moribus, singularibus sancitis.”

³⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. xix-xx: “Studiorum ei consors erat Rabbi Ina, une & tam illi quam Rabbi Ashi tribuitur interdum quod Rabbi Ashi soli plerunque agnoscitur. Illinc est quod corrupte apud Hieronymum de Santa Fide, Rabbina & Rabasse, pro Rab Ina & Rab Ashi, velut primarij autores Talmudici non semel leguntur. De illis videsis Praefationem R. Mosis Maimonidis ad Misna Tora.”

authority within the realm of Jewish law, as the inheritor of this self-authorising traditions, and the basis upon which he should be preferred to St. Jerome, whose knowledge of both Hebrew and Judaism was far inferior.

Selden's reasoning in *De Successionibus* would underline the authority due to the Mishneh Torah in England for several generations. John Tillotson's *Rule of Faith*, published in 1666, argued that Maimonides could be trusted on account of his enumeration of all the names of the different people involved in the transmission of the oral Law. This meant that his pronouncements could be verified. For Tillotson, that the 'the Oral Law was publickly taught and after Rabbi Jehudah had compiled it into one Volume, the Israelites they generally write out copies of it, and it was everywhere carefully taught for fear lest the Oral Law should by forgetfulness be lost among the Jews' meant that the 'impossibility of Juggling and couzanage' that Maimonides had insisted upon could be taken on authority.⁴⁰⁰ Jeremy Taylor too appreciated the lists of the names 'of the persons' involved in the transmission of the oral law that Maimonides had helpfully supplied, in his introductions to both the *Mishnah* and the *Mishneh Torah*.⁴⁰¹ This process of transmission, having been 'particularly enumerated by Maimonides', could be verified and thus relied upon.⁴⁰²

The *Mishneh Torah* as typological and historical source

For Ainsworth, the *Mishneh Torah* had served as a sort of addendum to the biblical text which could therefore support the typological analysis of the same by which its inner meaning could be

⁴⁰⁰ John Tillotson, 'The Rule of Faith', *The works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson, late Lord Archbishop of Canterbury containing fifty-four sermons and discourses, on several occasions. Together with the rule of faith. Being all that were published by his Grace himself. And now collected into one volume* (London, 1701), pp. 653-755, pp. 748-749.

⁴⁰¹ Jeremy Taylor, *Antiquitates christianae, or, The history of the life and death of the holy Jesus as also the lives acts and martyrdoms of his Apostles: in two parts. Alternate title: Great exemplar of sanctity and holy life according to the Christian institution.; Antiquitates apostolicae, or, The lives, acts and martyrdoms of the holy apostles of our Saviour.; Lives, acts and martyrdoms of the holy apostles of our Saviour; History of the life and death of the Holy Jesus* (London, 1675), pp. 10-36.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*

drawn out. The more sophisticated English Hebraists of a subsequent generation, Lightfoot and Selden chief amongst them, understood the *Mishneh Torah* to be an historical source as well as a repository of Jewish law. They, far more than Ainsworth, sought to reconstruct the lifeworld of Second Temple Judaism, within which Jesus had lived, ministered, and died. The *Mishneh Torah*, with its detailed descriptions of the Temple Cult would therefore emerge for them as a vital resource. Jesus had lived, these scholars understood, within a particular historical and theological context. To fully comprehend the events of the Gospels, therefore, that context had to be recovered. This was only possible with recourse to the Talmudic tradition, by which Jewish law was transmitted from one generation to the next. Maimonides, as the chief systematiser of that tradition, was therefore essential to its historical recovery. He, far more than any Christian exegete, could provide the much-needed context by which the events recorded in the scriptures were to be understood. The discovery of Maimonides in the 1630s and 40s thus further entrenched the view, which had been in the ascendancy since the mid-1620s, that the Fathers, largely ignorant of Hebrew and without access to Jewish legal sources, had been simply unable to reconstruct the lifeworld of biblical Israel.⁴⁰³ Having established the function the *Mishneh Torah* performed for Ainsworth, as a means of confirming his particular doctrinal priors, we now turn to Selden and Lightfoot, both of whom were intimately involved in the purported reconstruction of the English Church along biblical lines during the English interregnum, a context within which the specific details of Ancient Israelite practice, took on an unprecedented significance.

As Hardy has taught us, typology, the favoured interpretive method of Ainsworth, was not generally understood to be at odds with history in this period.⁴⁰⁴ I wish to argue, further to this, that typology could actually ground the historian's enterprise, by elevating the significance of what might otherwise be read as mere antiquarianism. This was the case for John Lightfoot, who

⁴⁰³ See Quantin, *Christian Antiquity*, pp. 203-251.

⁴⁰⁴ Hardy, *Criticism and Confession*, pp. 170-173.

saw in every element of the tabernacle in the desert and then the temple in Jerusalem, ‘the shadow of heavenly things’.⁴⁰⁵ The very dimensions of the tabernacle, in fact, taught ‘the fundamentals of their religion’.⁴⁰⁶ The corners which ‘knit end and side together’ presaged the ultimate union of ‘Jewes and Gentiles’ in ‘one spirituall Temple’.⁴⁰⁷ The bars by which the Tabernacle was held together ‘fitly resembled’ Christ via a whole host of typological resonances.⁴⁰⁸ Indeed there was not one element of the tabernacle and then the first and second temples which did not have a spiritual resonance and therefore, the reconstruction of the same, which might appear to the untrained eye as an historical exercise, was, in fact, an exegetical one.

The sections of the *Mishneh Torah* which spoke most clearly to these ostensibly antiquarian interests are *Sefer Avodah* and *Sefer Korbanot*. For Lightfoot, however, as for Ainsworth before him, these were rich with typological resonances. The sacrificial cult, especially, through which man communicated with God was replete with ‘types’ of Christ. The offering up of sheep figured ‘Christ the lambe of God’.⁴⁰⁹ The requirement to burn the entirety of a burnt offering, including ‘the haire on the goats bear, and the bones and the sinews’, for Ainsworth ‘signified all Christ, and whatsoever he hath suffered and done, to be ours by faith.’⁴¹⁰ The laver of water by which ‘some part of the sacrifices might be washed’ was a symbol of ‘the water of Baptisme’ and ‘the blood of Christ that cleanseth us from all filthiness’.⁴¹¹ The specific requirements of the temple service were not a subject of historical speculation, but a lens through which the proper relationship between ‘both testaments Old and New’ and ‘the two Churches, of Jewes and Gentiles’ could be excavated.⁴¹² It is important to identify this grounding of Lightfoot’s

⁴⁰⁵ John Lightfoot, *A Handfull of Gleanings out of the Booke of Exodus: probable solution of some of the manifest scruples, and explanation of the hardest places of the Booke* (London, 1643), p. 38.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ Ainsworth, *Annotations*, p. 7.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴¹¹ Lightfoot, *Gleanings*, p. 52.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

antiquarianism in typology in order to make it very clear that his culling of historical information from Jewish sources, was not tantamount to historicisation.

In fact, Lightfoot's accounts of the temple cult, whilst more historically sensitive than Ainsworth's are replete with many of the same motifs. One of the most notable of these is that of the sin offering as a prefiguration of Christ's expiatory sacrifice. The laying of hands upon such an offering before it was offered up, was, for Ainsworth, a testament to 'faith in Christ the true sacrifice to be slain'.⁴¹³ The particular requirement to confess one's sins during the laying of hands, further confirmed the typological significance of this sacrifice as a foreshadowing of Christ's 'offring up his own body for us'.⁴¹⁴ Lightfoot, like Ainsworth, saw the laying of hands upon the sin offering as 'a rite of transmission' by which the sinner transferred his sin 'unto the sacrifice which was to die for him'.⁴¹⁵ This process, was, of course, 'a figure of the laying of our sins upon Christ'.⁴¹⁶

Whilst these authors could have made their claims as to the Christological significance of the sacrificial cult on the basis of patristic evidence, for both it was far more important to be rooted in 'the style and dialect of the New Covenant', which had been preserved by the Jews.⁴¹⁷ Neither openly stated their unwillingness to rely on patristic sources. Ainsworth merely claimed to think it 'needlesse to repeat' that which was 'usually cited by other expositors abundantly' and Lightfoot dismissed as invalid any interpretations that were not rooted in the study of Hebrew.⁴¹⁸ Both privileged rabbinic over patristic sources on account of the former's greater proximity to 'things mentioned in the Evangelists', though neither made this comparison openly, which would

⁴¹³ Ainsworth, *Annotations*, p. 5.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴¹⁵ Lightfoot, *Temple Service*, pp. 67-68.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*: "styli ac Dialecti Novi Foederis."

⁴¹⁸ Ainsworth, *Annotations*, p. v.; Lightfoot, *Horae* (I), sig. A3r-v.

have further compounded their respective reputations for ‘judaising’.⁴¹⁹ Selden, on the other hand, whose writings are strikingly free of typological analysis, identified in the rabbis a great many sources which ‘the Church Fathers, both ancient and modern’ had failed to consult.⁴²⁰ Whereas Lightfoot’s usage of the *Mishneh Torah* served to confirm his conception of the Old Testament as prefiguring the New, Selden’s gave rise to a radically different picture of ancient Israel, within which Christian theological concepts were strangely absent. He, as we shall see, was quite prepared to explicitly refute patristic interpretations on the basis of information culled from rabbinic sources, which the Fathers did not have access to.

‘Temple Studies’ in an English Key

The value of rabbinic sources for the reconstruction of ancient Israelite ritual had already been established in the course of a renewed interest in these subjects which had grown out of developments in architecture and Christian Kabbalah, concomitantly. This burgeoning field, which Matt Goldish has termed ‘Temple Studies’ was given new impetus by the Protestant Reformation, which birthed new investigations of apostolic Christianity. In Laudian England where church ceremonial would be aggressively re-enforced on the grounds of its historical validity, such investigations had a particular resonance.⁴²¹ Even before the rise of Laud, with whom these developments are most closely associated, the so-called avant-garde conformists, chief amongst them Lancelot Andrewes, justified ‘popish’ ceremonies on the grounds that these were rooted in ancient Judaism.⁴²² Those of a Laudian persuasion took ‘Jerusalem of Old’ as the

⁴¹⁹ Ainsworth, *Annotations*, p. iv.

⁴²⁰ Selden, *De Successionibus*, pp. xi-xii: “Patrum sive veterum sive recentiorum”.

⁴²¹ See Matt Goldish, ‘Some trends in Temple Studies from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment’ in Steven Fine (ed.), *The Temple of Jerusalem: From Moses to the Messiah* (Brill, 2008), pp. 303-329; Achsah Guibbory, *Christian Identity, Jews, and Israel in 17th- Century England* (OUP, 2011), pp. 56-88.

⁴²² Lancelot Andrewes, *A summarie view of the government both of the old and new testament whereby the episcopal government of Christs church is vindicated out of the rude draughts of Lancelot Andrewes* (Oxford, 1641), p. 23.

model for Christian worship.⁴²³ In pursuit of a new Jerusalem, they would switch communion tables for altars, now to be railed off as a mark of their ‘holiness and force the people of London to pay for the rebuilding of St. Pauls, as the ‘Jewes had severally bestowed their costly offerings’ on the Temple.⁴²⁴ For Laud’s detractors, these attempts risked returning England to ‘the Synagogue of Rome’.⁴²⁵ For them the temple cult’s contemporary resonance was spiritual, not physical, though its spiritual significance could be grasped through a careful explication of its physical dimensions behind which its inner meanings were veiled. For both Laudians and Puritans, then, albeit for opposite reasons, the specific details of the temple’s design were of the upmost significance and therefore a worthy object of study. It was on this basis then that scholars of differing confessional complexions competed with one another to devise more accurate portrayals of the temple’s design. Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah*, with its detailed descriptions of the temple, would thus prove incredibly useful.

Lightfoot, who would produce two guides to the Temple in Jerusalem, the first, published in 1649, and the second in 1650, would draw up a map of the same (see figure A), which would not be published until after his death. This map gives us a fair idea as to how Lightfoot saw the task of the temple’s historical reconstruction.⁴²⁶ It is important to stress that the significance of the temple for Lightfoot was typological, its design ‘held out the doctrine of salvation and taught of good things to come’.⁴²⁷ The temple therefore was not simply a matter of historical fact, but of the essence of the Gospel itself, which could be discerned therein, albeit ‘under an obscure representation’.⁴²⁸ And it was for this reason that Lightfoot saw fit to expend tremendous ‘paines

⁴²³ William Laud, ‘Sermon 3, preached Monday, 6 February, at Westminster at the opening of Parliament’ in William Laud, *Seven Sermons preached upon several occasions*, (London, 1651), pp. 111-114.

⁴²⁴ Peter Heylyn, *Antidotum Lincolnense* (London, 1637), Sect. II, p. 70.

⁴²⁵ Henry Burton, *For God, and the King* (London, 1636), p. 69.

⁴²⁶ John Lightfoot, *The Temple Service as it stood in the days of our saviour* (London, 1649); John Lightfoot, *The temple, especially as it stood in the days of our Saviour* (London, 1650).

⁴²⁷ John Lightfoot, *The harmony of the foure evangelists, among themselves, and with the Old Testament. From the baptism of our Saviour, to the first Passover after: with an explanation of the chiefest difficulties both in language and sense*, (London, 1647), pp. 59-60.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

and travaux' on his architectural drawings of the Temple.⁴²⁹ The uncovering of the Jewish legal tradition for most Reformed Protestants of the mid-seventeenth century given to this pursuit, whilst informed by historical sources chosen for their apparent historical accuracy, was not a matter of history alone. 'Sacred history' was a repository of 'types, shadows, predictions and representations' of salvific significance.⁴³⁰

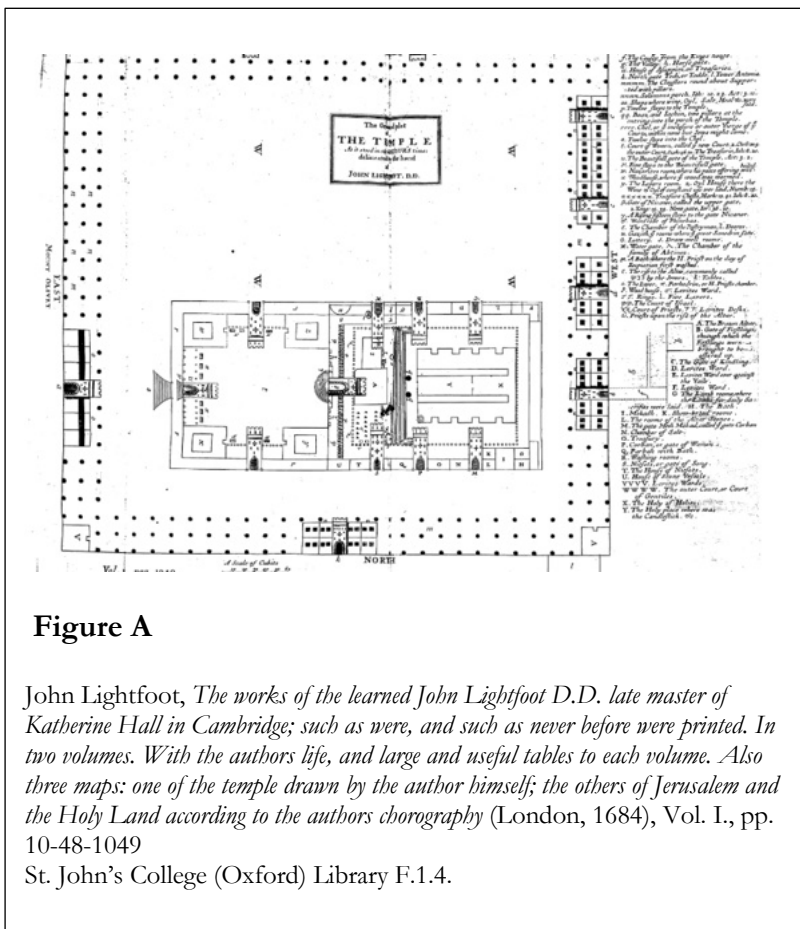


Figure A

John Lightfoot, *The works of the learned John Lightfoot D.D. late master of Katherine Hall in Cambridge; such as were, and such as never before were printed. In two volumes. With the authors life, and large and useful tables to each volume. Also three maps: one of the temple drawn by the author himself; the others of Jerusalem and the Holy Land according to the authors chorography* (London, 1684), Vol. I., pp. 10-48-1049

St. John's College (Oxford) Library F.1.4.

As the field of biblical antiquities expanded ever more complex drawings would appear. Louis Compiègne de Veil, whose *De Cultu Divino*, a translation of nine sections of the *Mishneh Torah* which pertained to the Jerusalem temple, would appear in 1678, commissioned the physician and amateur architect, Claude Perrault, to draw a series of architectural sketches to accompany the

⁴²⁹ Lightfoot, *Temple* (I), sig. *3.

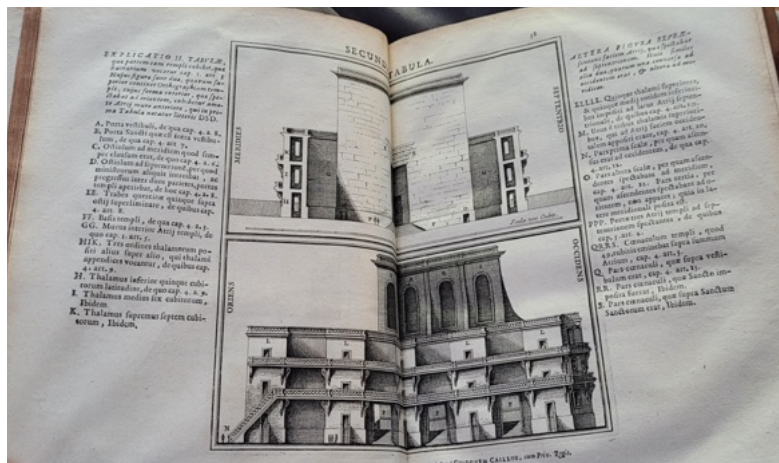
⁴³⁰ Lightfoot, *Harmony*, pp. 59-60.

work (See figures B and C).⁴³¹ Alongside these, Perrault produced an incredibly detailed defense of his drawings, and thus of the integrity of Maimonides, whom he claimed had described the temple ‘so vividly and graphically that any reader can easily form a clear and accurate mental image of its structure and details’.⁴³²

The motivation behind this work was Compiègne de Veil’s impression of the poverty of prior efforts at the same. John Bautista Villalpando had claimed to have spent ‘full sixteen whole years’ studying ‘the architecture of the Temple’ only to produce images of that conformed to classical architectural standards, as opposed to those of the ‘unbroken tradition’ of Jewish law, which were contained within Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah*.⁴³³

Figure B

Louis Compiègne de Veil, *De cultu divino: ex R. Mosis Majemonidae Secunda lege, seu manu forti liber VIII. Dividitur in IX. Tractatus, quorum seriem paginam e regione elenchi posita declarabit. Accesserunt tabulae aere incisae, in quibus exprimitur Hierosolymitani temple forma accuratissime, & eleganter descripta* (Paris, 1678), pp. 64-65.
 St. John’s College (Cambridge) Library Oo. 8.33.



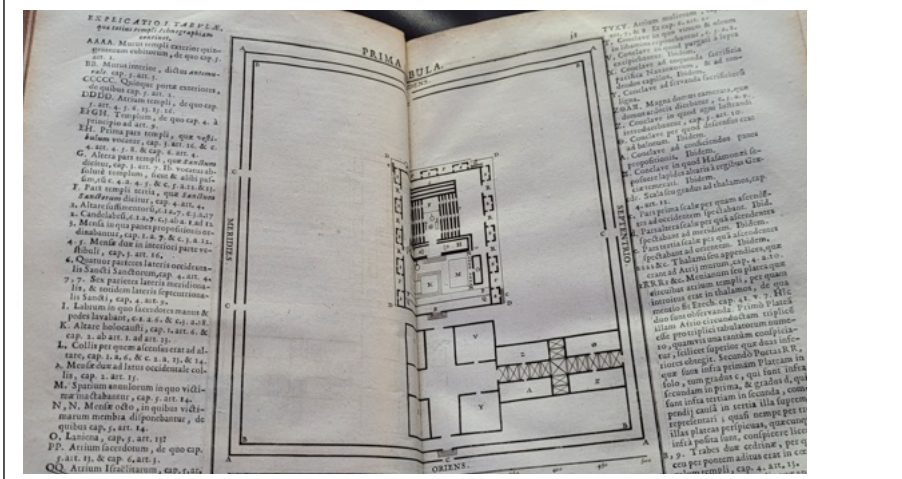
⁴³¹ Louis Compiègne de Veil, *De Cultu divino* (Paris, 1678), sig. avr.

⁴³² Claude Perrault, ‘Explicatio Tabularum, Quae Figuram Templi exhibent. Monitum.’ in Louis Compiègne de Veil, *De Cultu divino* (Paris, 1678), pp. 37-38: “In templi descriptione, quam Majemonides nobis reliquit, pleraque fere omnia sunt ita graphice veluti delineate, ut cuius ea legenti promptum sit rerum ipsarum veram imaginem sibi fingere.”

⁴³³ Louis Compiègne de Veil, *De Cultu divino* (Paris, 1678), pp. 37-38: “Joannes enim Baptista Villalpandus, vir bonarum artium laude praestans, se scribit decem et sex annos totos in hujus Templi artificio percipiendo describendoque posuisse... immo vero vir ille totus est in eo, ut suam hanc Templi Salomonici descriptionem ad Vitruvii praeceptionem conformet, idemque demonstret Graecis Latinisque nulla alia re quam huius augustae fabricae notatione atque animadversione partem esse aedificandi artem. Maimonides autem Templi expressit imaginem eam, quae tanto minus habet artificii, quanto est vero similior, quae perpetuae ac constanti traditioni consonat, eademque Sacrorum Voluminum oraculis apte quadrat.”

Figure C

Louis Compiegne de Veil, *De cultu divino: ex R. Mosis Majemonidae Secunda lege, seu manu forti liber VIII. Dividitur in IX. Tractatus, quorum seriem paginam e regione elenchi posita declarabit. Accesserunt tabulae aere incisae, in quibus exprimitur Hierosolymitani temple forma accuratissime, & eleganter descripta* (Paris, 1678), pp. 60-61.
St. John's College (Cambridge) Library Oo. 8.33.



Alongside typologically informed accounts of the temple's structures and strictures such as, John Selden's *De Jure Naturali* emerged as a detailed guide to the legal infrastructure of ancient Israel, which was absolutely vital to the reconstruction of the life of Christ. It instructive to look at his treatment of the temple cult alongside that of Lightfoot, with whom he shared a particular affinity with Maimonides. Whilst both scholars identified in the *Mishneh Torah* a historical source by which knowledge of ancient Israel could be vastly expanded, the historicising potential of the work was much more fully realised in Selden than in Lightfoot. Through surveying the treatment of particular episodes by both we can reveal Maimonides's significance for the development of typological exegesis and for its supersession by more strictly historical approaches.

Christ's adherence to the Pharisaic law – a rabbinic reading of the Gospels

Whilst Selden and Lightfoot certainly did not agree on the historical validity of the typological method, for both, the significance of the *Mishneh Torah* was as an historical source, by which the Gospels could be properly contextualised. As Lightfoot argued in his preface to *The Temple*,

‘Jewish customes and Antiquities to which the New Testament speaketh’ were most ‘credibly’ explained by the Jews themselves and whilst they were not to be regarded as religious authorities by Christians, ‘in things of historicall nature’, they were certainly to be consulted as ‘the best recorders of their antiquities’.⁴³⁴ For Selden, just as ‘canons of councils, forensic formulas and decisions, papal decrees, the opinions of the fathers, liturgies, rituals’ were essential to church history, when it came to Jewish history ‘no judgement can be made apart from the law they call the Oral law, the judicial customs, and the interpretations contained in the Talmudic books.’⁴³⁵ Such an approach begot a newfound emphasis upon the Pharisaic law as fundamental to the reconstruction of the life of Christ. For Lightfoot it was apparent that the Fathers had not taken this approach but had rather looked to ‘Josephus, whose credit is commonly reputed above Talmudicall’.⁴³⁶ As Selden’s work consistently demonstrated, the failure to ‘consult the legal scholars of that people’ on the part of ‘many of the Church Father, both ancient and modern’ had led to great errors of legal and thus historical interpretation.⁴³⁷ As a consequence, Christ’s relationship to his native community had been totally misunderstood. He had been consistently portrayed, quite erroneously, as a fierce opponent of the Law. For both Selden and Lightfoot, this inaccurate portrayal was the outcome of a total ignorance of Jewish sources on the part of the Fathers. Their superior knowledge would allow for them to reinterpret a number of key episodes in the life of Christ with a view to producing unprecedentedly accurate accounts of these. The Christ that emerges out of their studies is thus contextualised as never before. Lightfoot’s works on the Temple, and then on the New Testament more generally, combined with John Selden’s studies in Jewish Law betray a very deep commitment to Talmudic

⁴³⁴ Lightfoot, *Temple* (I), sig. *3v.

⁴³⁵ John Selden, *De successione in bona defuncti, seu iure haereditario, ad leges Ebraeorum quae, florente olim eorum republica, in usu, liber singularis, ex sacris literis, utroque Talmude, & selectoribus rabbinis, id est, ex iuris Ebraici fontibus, pandectis, atque consultissimis magistris, desumptus* (London, 1631), pp. xiv-xv: “Conciliorum Canones, Forenses Formulas ac Decisiones, Decreta Pontificia, Patrum scita, Liturgias, Ritualia... se res habeat necessum est (si Ebraeos spectemus) absque lege, quam Legem ore traditam appellant”.

⁴³⁶ Lightfoot, *Temple* (I), sig. ar.

⁴³⁷ Selden, *De Successionibus*, pp. xi-xii: “qui Iurisconsultos ejusdem gentis minime consulunt, Patrum sive veterum sive recentiorum Christianorum.”

scholarship as an alternative to patristics. Whilst both scholars referred frequently to the ‘Talmud’ as a cipher for rabbinical scholarship more generally, as will be established, their greatest intellectual debt was to the *Mishneh Torah*, which served for both as it did for Ainsworth, as the Talmud ‘abridged’.⁴³⁸

I wish here to look at two episodes recorded in the Gospels which were traditionally interpreted as revealing Christ’s disdain for the Law. These are: his healing on the Sabbath and his cleansing of the Temple. In both cases the *Mishneh Torah* allowed for a completely different reading of Christ’s actions and thus of his relationship to the Law. In their reinterpretations of these incidents Selden and Lightfoot could reveal the limitations of the Fathers, both as historical sources and thus as theological authorities, on the grounds that they did not have sufficient information by which to determine how the Law was applied in the Second Temple period.

The healing on the Sabbath, which is a famous incident recorded in Matthew 12. 9-13, Mark 3.1-6 and Luke 6.6-11 was taken by the fathers as emblematic of Christ’s relationship to the Law, which he was willing to violate in the interests of kindness. In fact, as all three accounts recall, Christ’s violation of the law in this instance, resulted in his fellow Jews plotting against him. He had violated their holy Sabbath in the interest of ‘works of charity’ and so the story goes that he would have to be rooted out.⁴³⁹ Lightfoot’s commentary on Matthew took up this story with a view to establishing what exactly Christ had done wrong from the perspective of the Pharisees. Where the Fathers had taken it for granted that he had committed a violation of the Mosaic law, for Lightfoot, who had studied the laws of the Sabbath, this was not obvious at all. He was aware, for example, of the limited application of the laws of the Sabbath on two grounds. Firstly, these did not apply in the Temple. As Maimonides had written on *Pesachim*, chapter 1, according

⁴³⁸ Ainsworth, *Annotations*, p. iii.

⁴³⁹ See Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels: Collected out of the Works of the Fathers*, St Matthew, Vol. 1, Part. II, (J.H. Parker, 1845), p.437.

to Lightfoot, though the comment actually arises in chapter 5, ‘there is no Sabbath rest in the Temple’ (אין שבות במקדש).⁴⁴⁰ Secondly, the laws of the Sabbath had been specifically abrogated to allow for healing. Vinegar applied to painful teeth for example, was considered unproblematic, provided it was fully absorbed and chewing gum, which had healing properties could be chewed in order to freshen the breath.⁴⁴¹ It was therefore simply not the case that no healing took place on the Sabbath and given that Christ healed ‘by his word alone’, he could not possibly have been violating the Sabbath.⁴⁴² Even animals, Lightfoot went on to point out, might be assisted on the Sabbath as per the *Mishneh Torah Shabbat* 25.⁴⁴³ It was therefore simply not the case that Christ’s charitable instincts had resulted in his breaking of the Sabbath and it was in fact those who had questioned his behaviour who had displayed a lesser commitment to the law, which provided no end of flexibility, especially where the imperatives of healing were concerned.

Lightfoot recognised that the Fathers, who did not have access to the laws of the Sabbath, had completely misinterpreted this episode. They had read it as Christ’s profanation of the Pharisaic law when the ‘Talmudic’ sources had offered a completely different perspective. The rabbinic sources, which ‘were generally disapproved of by everyone’ were in fact the best available resources with which to interpret the New Testament, which was otherwise easily misunderstood on account of the peculiarly Jewish nature of their contents.⁴⁴⁴ Christ had thus been misrepresented as a renegade Jew, even though his actions in this instance were entirely consonant with Jewish law. Whereas the Fathers had understood Christ to have been ‘profaning’ the law, he was, in fact, upholding it. Therefore, it was the Pharisees, and not Christ, in this instance, who were subverting the Law. In questioning a perfectly legitimate action the Pharisees

⁴⁴⁰ John Lightfoot, *Horæ Hebraicæ et Talmudicæ, impensæ i. In chorographiam aliquam terræ Israeliticæ. ii. In Evangelium s. Matthæi*, (London (1659), p. 165.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*: “verbo tantum”.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, sig. A3v: “potest Aucturom istorum mala fama, qui pessime quidem audiuntur apud omnes.”

revealed themselves to have been motivated by a hatred for Christ rather than a high regard for the law. In revealing the Pharisees and not Christ, to have been profaning the Law, Lightfoot confirmed his commitment to the upholding of the Jewishness of the New Testament which could therefore only be understood by those with recourse to Jewish sources.

Despite Lightfoot's emphasis on the significance of Jewish sources for New Testament interpretation, he was not averse to reading these Christologically, as Ainsworth had.⁴⁴⁵

Therefore, whilst it might be true to say that Lightfoot used the *Mishneh Torah* as an historical source, this did not mean that his approach to the Bible was historicised by it. For Lightfoot, the Law was theologically significant only where it appeared to prefigure the Gospel. It was not in itself of moral or spiritual value. The Law, he claimed, could be properly observed 'without a charitable spirit or fraternal heart'.⁴⁴⁶ The laws concerning stolen property, for example, which were enumerated in *Hilkebot Gezeila u'Avida* 'emphasised financial compensation and restitution alone'.⁴⁴⁷ For Christ such laws did not go far enough. This conception of the Law, as a much baser morality than that of the Gospels, allowed Lightfoot to use the *Mishneh Torah* in order to identify where Christ had enforced moral stringencies that were absent from it. It must be noted, however, that Lightfoot could reasonably be accused of thoroughly misrepresenting Maimonides and thus the Jewish tradition in these instances because the Law certainly demands more than 'financial compensation alone' in cases of wrongdoing. In fact, as *Hilkebot Teshuva* (1.1) makes clear, even a guilt offering could not atone for sins that had not been confessed and repented and where one had sinned against another, as opposed to God, even confession and sincere repentance could not alleviate one's guilt without the forgiveness of the victim.⁴⁴⁸ Lightfoot thus

⁴⁴⁵ *Horae Hebraicae* (II), sig. A3r-v.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90: "quae sine animo charitativo fieri potuit, aut corde fraterno."

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: "Nota ut hic cautum sit de damnis solum pecuniariis et nuda restitutione."

⁴⁴⁸ *Hilkebot Teshuva* 2.9.

used the *Mishneh Torah* to establish interpretive principles which did not actually accord particularly well with the contents of the *Mishneh Torah* itself.

Selden, however, took an entirely different approach to the Law which was much more thoroughly historicised. He understood Christ to have observed the law as it was enumerated in the *Mishneh Torah* and in the sources upon which that work was based, the Gemara and the Mishnah. He did not conceive of Christ as having expanded the remit of *halakhic* obligation, as Lightfoot had. This often made the task of New Testament interpretation, which was never his primary focus, more challenging as answers to particularly puzzling episodes could not be teased out with reference to the *Mishneh Torah* alone, which necessarily excluded much of the Gemara's back-and-forth. We have in the incidence of 'the cleansing of the temple' which is recorded towards the end of the Synoptic Gospels and again at beginning of the Gospel of John, an example of a key moment in the history of Christ's ministry which both Lightfoot and Selden felt had been long misinterpreted. For both the Church's inability to properly reconstruct this incident was on account of its unwillingness to consult the relevant sources. In Lightfoot's case, however, Christ's extension of the law was posited in order to explain the events at hand, whereas in Selden's a much broader survey of a much wider range of rabbinic literature was required in order to explain this incident without resorting to Christological readings.

This incident occurred when Jesus and his disciples went to the temple in Jerusalem for Passover. There they found merchants and money changers, who they promptly proceeded to expel on the grounds that they were responsible for turning this 'house of prayer' for all nations into 'a den of thieves' (Synoptic Gospels) or 'a house of trade' (John).⁴⁴⁹ The Fathers had understood this incident in terms of Christ's objections to profiteering in the temple complex.

⁴⁴⁹ Matthew 21. 12-17; Mark 11. 15-19; Luke 19. 45-48; John 2.13-16.

However, as both Lightfoot and Selden noted, the laws concerning the temple service did not prohibit profit-making therein.⁴⁵⁰ In fact, commercial activity, was built into the day-to-day life of the temple. Lightfoot noted, for example, citing the Jerusalem Talmud in *Joma* as his source, that ‘it was constant and perpetual’ for salesmen to appear at the temple gates to sell ‘wine, salt, oil and other things required for the sacrifices’.⁴⁵¹ He also pointed out that given the number of people who would have travelled to Jerusalem for Passover, the laws surrounding which were very strict, it would have made sense for lambs to be sold in the temple itself such that no one would have to carry their paschal lamb to the temple, a process during which injuries which would invalidate the lamb as a sacrifice could occur.⁴⁵² Selden pointed to the *Mishneh Torah* and the Mishnah in *Shekalim*, both of which recorded the laws surrounding the collecting of the annual half-shekel census payment at the temple.⁴⁵³ This payment, the rabbis recorded, had to be made in a specific denomination, the half-shekel, which meant that in order that everyone could make it, moneychangers were summoned to the temple. These moneychangers, in exchange for their services, received a generous fee, a ‘kolbon’, and, as such, they too as with the sellers of lambs, salt and of wine, were making money on the temple mount.⁴⁵⁴ The profit-making Christ encountered on the temple mount would not, both scholars established, have come as any great surprise to him and therefore this behaviour warranted further explanation. For Lightfoot, as for Selden, that explanation could only be derived from the Jewish sources, for it was in an entirely Jewish context that this episode took place.

⁴⁵⁰ See Aquinas, *Catena Aurea*, Vol. 1. Part II, pp. 711-712.

⁴⁵¹ Lightfoot, *Horae Matthaei*, pp. 230-231: “Constant et perpetuum erat in Templo, in loco isto qui vocabatur Tabernae, in quo indies vendebantur vinum, sal, oleum, aliaque requisita ad sacrificia; itemque boves et pecora in spatiosa area atrii Gentium.”

⁴⁵² Lightfoot, *Temple Service*, (I) pp. 127-128.

⁴⁵³ Selden, *De Jure Naturali*, pp. 493-494

⁴⁵⁴ Lightfoot, *Horae* II pp. 232: “kolbon [vel, lucrosus redditus nummulario pensus]”; Lightfoot, *Temple Service* (ii), pp. 110-111.

Both scholars identified the chapters of *Hilkebot Shekalim* which established the parameters for the paying of the ‘kolbon’.⁴⁵⁵ This payment was to be made on the 15th Adar, though those who did not make it by the appointed time would be forced to so on the 25th of the month.⁴⁵⁶ Both scholars noted that non-payment was punishable, even by the seizing of the debtor’s clothes, which would have been a humiliating affair.⁴⁵⁷ For Lightfoot, such behaviour towards the almost certainly very poor people, who had not been able to make the payment would have been regarded by Christ as ‘an abomination’, for he had expanded the laws of damages, as they were recorded in *Hilkebot Gezele u’Avida* to include damages that were emotional, as well as financial, in nature.⁴⁵⁸ For this reason, Lightfoot asserted, Christ had not disrupted the exchange of money, but had rather turned over the tables at which these moneychangers were hassling those who had not been able to come up with the money required of them.⁴⁵⁹

For Selden, however, Christ could not possibly have objected to the collection of the ‘kolbon’, not least because this was an established legal practice and, as the New Testament consistently shows, Christ conformed to ‘the established judicial procedures, whether Jewish or Roman’.⁴⁶⁰ Whilst Christ may have chafed against Pharisaic legalism, to publicly administer an extra-judicial punishment was zealotry and zealotry was clearly defined by Maimonides in *Hilkebot Rotzeach*, *Hilkebot Sanhedrin*, *Hilkebot Avodah Zarah* and *Hilkebot Memarim* as a violent response to a capital crime carried out ‘in the moment of its being committed’ (בשאת מעשה).⁴⁶¹ A capital crime was defined as a violation of the Divine name, the temple or the Jewish people.⁴⁶² Selden thus conjectured that the temple’s moneychangers and merchants must have been violating the

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.: “transactio hujus exsecranda.”

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.,

⁴⁶⁰ Selden, *De Jure Naturali*, p. 496: “Seipsum receptis atque stabilitis reipublicae formulis judiciariis, sive Ebraicae sive Romanae essent.”

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 487-488.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

temple's sanctity. They could not have simply been carrying out their allotted functions, no matter how cruel these seemed, for Christ was never punished for his cleansing of the temple. He must therefore have had the 'zealot's law' on his side.⁴⁶³ Selden thus sought to identify what possible crime the temple money changers could have committed which would have warranted Christ's treatment of them under this law. He thus looked away from the money changers, whose function was well delineated in *Shekalim* and toward those who sold 'doves, sheep and oxen'.⁴⁶⁴ Selden noted that doves, in particular, were associated with bad behaviour, as per a reference to dove-trainers (מפריחי יונים) in Gemara *Sanhedrin* where they listed as amongst those whose testimony was not admissible in a court of law.⁴⁶⁵ The problem with dove-trainers, the Gemara explained was that they would teach doves, and indeed other animals, to fight, for sport.⁴⁶⁶ This was why, Selden argued, both Matthew and Mark had mentioned specifically that doves were being sold on the temple mount, right next to the tables of the money changers. The mention of 'doves' was to alert the reader to the presence of gambling and blood-sports in the temple complex, which would certainly have 'violated the sanctity of the temple' making Christ's reaction to the same entirely in-keeping with the established laws of the Jews.⁴⁶⁷ As Jewish law recognised the right of a zealot to punish a capital crime unilaterally, Christ would not have been regarded as violating any law by expelling the dove-trainers and their associates the moneychangers. This was why, Selden pointed out, no accusations were brought against him in relation to this incident. Christ was proceeding according to 'right of the Zealots'.⁴⁶⁸ Far from objecting to the moral abuses that Pharisaic legalism permitted, as Lightfoot had suggested, Christ was here defending the dignity of the temple, as was his right under the law.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., p. 491: "Juris Zelotarum"

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 496: "columbas, oves et boves."

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 495.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 496.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 496-497: "Zelotarum Juris."

In comparing Selden's approach to this incident with that of Lightfoot, we note differences in their conceptions of Christ as an adherent of the law. Whilst both understood him to have been scrupulous in their observances, Lightfoot conceived of Christ as having extended the moral remit of the Law, whereas Selden did not. These differences might be explained by Lightfoot's enduring fealty to the typological system of interpretations, which Selden had jettisoned.

Whereas Lightfoot was willing to accept that the law had been extended by Christ such that that which had once been permitted, was now prohibited, Selden was not. He did not identify in the Law, which he understood Christ to have observed scrupulously, limitations which Christ might have been said to have overcome, Selden could therefore only account for Jesus's actions with reference to established Talmudic principles, not least because where he was not operating in line with these, he was accused of blasphemy.⁴⁶⁹ The very concision that the *Mishneh Torah* was praised for meant that it was insufficient for Selden, who proceeded from it to the Mishnah and then the Gemara. His explanation for the cleansing of the temple could not have been derived from Maimonides alone, whereas Lightfoot's, which presumed Christ's development of the law, certainly could.

The historicising influence of the *Mishneh Torah*

Whilst Selden and Lightfoot were equally insistent upon the historical validity of rabbinic scholarship, they pursued it with different ends in mind. Selden's primary interest was in recovering historical legal principles, not theological truths. He understood the *Mishneh Torah* quite correctly as a legal work, which sought to establish principles, whose roots were in the very extensive Talmudic tradition, which could be reconstructed. Lightfoot on the other hand, was a Christian exegete, first and foremost. For Selden episodes such as the cleansing of the temple

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 498.

had to be explained halakhically. Theological justifications of the kind Lightfoot sought would not suffice. He insisted upon explaining Christ's actions with reference to the Mosaic law, by which he was constrained. Lightfoot, by contrast, used the *Mishneh Torah* as a generic historical function. It was a user-friendly guide to the law as it had applied in the Second Temple period which could therefore 'shed some light on the Sacred Scriptures'.⁴⁷⁰ Unlike Selden, he was not making the case for the rabbinic tradition as an exemplary legal system in its own right but rather, dipping into it where necessary to explain that which really concerned him, the proper interpretation of the Bible.

Whilst Lightfoot used the *Mishneh Torah* as a source of historical information, his usage of it does not result in an historicisation of the Gospels. He took it for granted that Christ had expanded the remit of the law into the realms of the human heart, meaning that his behaviour could only be explained with reference to Jewish texts, where these were judged to have provided a moral framework upon which Christ had expanded. Selden, on the other hand, might be understood as a conduit for the historicising influence of the *Mishneh Torah*. His reliance upon a much wider range of Jewish legal sources, presents us with a much more 'Jewish' Jesus than even Lightfoot's whose behaviour could be explained by Jewish sources alone. He did not impose an inferior moral status upon the Jewish authors whom he read, and where he observed that which was morally problematic, as he did in the case of the trial of Christ, he did not attribute this to the particular failings of the Jews, noting instead that prejudice often had a role to play in legal decisions.⁴⁷¹

Selden's unwillingness to impose a moral-ceremonial distinction upon the law, as Lightfoot did, meant that his readings of it had to be consistently entirely rooted in the law itself. This approach

⁴⁷⁰ Lightfoot, *Horae* (I), sig. A3v: "facem praeberere viderentur Sacris Paginis."

⁴⁷¹ Selden, *De Jure*, pp. 264-265.

was consistent with Selden's broader scholarly enterprise. As he had stated in the preface to his *Historie of the Tithes*, Selden regarded the historian's task as distinct from that of the lawyer or the theologian.⁴⁷² His histories of Jewish law therefore were not overladen with theological assumptions in the manner that Lightfoot's were. This often meant that the very concision for which the *Mishneh Torah* was famed, rendered it useful to him only as a starting point. His assessments of both the cleansing of the temple and the trial before the Sanhedrin could never have been reached had Selden not looked beyond Maimonides to the sources upon which his rulings were based. Whilst Lightfoot, like Selden, would note Talmudic references relevant to his citations from the *Mishneh Torah*, he used these in order to showcase Maimonides's faithful transmission of the Talmudic tradition. Selden, on the other hand, frequently consulted the Talmud in order to establish that which the *Mishneh Torah* had left out, which, as has been revealed, was often pertinent. Whilst both scholars discovered in the *Mishneh Torah*, a vital historical source, to which the Fathers did not have access, for Selden, this source served as an entryway into the broader Talmudic tradition, whereas for Lightfoot, it served as a summary of it. Lightfoot's greater reliance upon the *Mishneh Torah* might be justified in terms of his more confident conception of the law as a tool of New Testament interpretation as opposed to Selden's reading of it as a highly sophisticated legal system in its own right.

The Fathers Reasserted

The scholarly careers of both Lightfoot and Selden owed a great deal to their appropriation of Jewish sources, chief amongst them, Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah*. That such sources should have merited so much scholarly attention by mid-century might be attributed to the decline in patristic authority, that Laud had invested so much in combatting.⁴⁷³ Both Lightfoot and Selden used

⁴⁷² John Selden, *Historie of the Tithes* (London, 1618), pp. xviii-xix.

⁴⁷³ Quantin, *Christian Antiquity*, pp. 238-251.

their knowledge of Hebrew to bring to the fore hitherto unknown sources which shed light on otherwise obscure passages in the New Testament. In doing so, they revealed the limitations of their predecessors who were inferior to themselves, both in skill and resources.

Whilst the return to monarchy, and to episcopacy, at the beginning of the 1660s might have threatened the rising tide of Hebraic scholarship, such were the gains of the previous two decades that rabbinic scholarship, especially as it related to the New Testament had become unignorable. Scholarly attempts to reassert the value of patristics, of which there would be many, would therefore have to engage with that which had been gleaned from the rabbis. This resulted in an interesting tendency, observable from the 1670s onwards, to run together insights from the rabbis and the fathers, as if to demonstrate, that their disagreements had been much exaggerated. Whereas for Lightfoot and Selden rabbinic scholarship served a useful corrective to the limitations of patristics, a new generation of scholars sought to close the gap between these two ostensibly contrasting source bases. William Owtram justified the claims of various of the Fathers that the Law had originated in either Syria or Egypt on the grounds that this line of thinking had been adopted too 'by some Jews, as shown by the teachings of Moses the Egyptian'.⁴⁷⁴ Maimonides's conception of the Law was, in fact, very different from that of the Fathers cited. He certainly did not believe, as Owtram suggested, that the Mosaic law had either been 'passed from the Hebrews to other nations' or that 'the Hebrews had corrected' the rites of 'the Syrians and the Egyptians'.⁴⁷⁵ Such vague assumptions as to the inter-relationship between Ancient Israel and the surrounding peoples had little to do with the highly developed 'Sabeian theory' of the Law's origins developed by Maimonides, which will be explained in a subsequent chapter. What is notable here, however, is Owtram's very clear attempt to lend credence to the Fathers by association with Maimonides. That a particular view was not Christian alone, but also

⁴⁷⁴ William Owtram, *De Sacrificiis* (London, 1677), p. 15: "Neque vero haec Christiani tantum, sed et Judaeis aliquibus visa quod Mosis Aegyptii illa docent."

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.: "ritus, qui aut ab hebraeis ad gentes alias venere ...correcti sunt ab hebraeis."

Jewish, made it more credible. This was an outcome of the extent to which Jewish scholarship had risen both in esteem and popularity over the course of the English Civil War and Interregnum.

John Spencer, like Owtram, would cite John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria and Eusebius on the Pagan origins of the law, noting that their views were amply ‘supported by Maimonides’ the ‘wisest and most knowledgeable scholar of the Hebrew school’.⁴⁷⁶ That the value of patristic scholarship might be affirmed by rabbinic scholarship was an interesting new development, which would prove highly significant for the evolution of biblical antiquities. Owtram’s *De Sacrificiis* is a very interesting product of these developments. It is essentially a reassertion of a typological approach to the Old Testament text, which uses the *Mishneh Torah* to prove that Christ’s death on the cross served as the fulfilment of the requirements of the sacrificial cult. Its purpose, to overcome Socinian critiques of the typological framework. The works we have previously assessed, those of Ainsworth, Selden and Lightfoot, identified in the *Mishneh Torah* the tools with which to read the New Testament anew, overturning patristic assumptions that were based on insufficient knowledge of the Jewish legal system. In Owtram, we have something completely different, the *Mishneh Torah* as offering support for the biblical interpretations of the Fathers. Owtram’s interest, however, like that of Lightfoot and Selden, was in accounting for the ways in which the Church had misled the faithful. In failing to produce evidence from the relevant Jewish sources, Owtram contended, the church had allowed for the undermining of its traditional interpretative framework. It was only by returning to these that the traditional typological reading of the sacrificial cult could be upheld.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁶ John Spencer, *De Legibus Hebraeorum et rationibus* (Cambridge, 1685), p. 29: “Patrum sententiam probat Maimonides... quo nihil sanius doctiusque novit Hebraeorum schola.”

⁴⁷⁷ Owtram, *De Sacrificiis*, sig. a2r.

William Owtram and the coalescence of rabbinic and patristic scholarship

Owtram's stated intention at the beginning of *De Sacrificiis* (1677) his only major work, was to refute Socinianism by way of Judaism.⁴⁷⁸ The mistake of Socinianism, as he saw it, was its rejection of typological readings of the Bible, by which core doctrines such as Christ as expiatory sacrifice and the soul of Christ as ransom could be justified.⁴⁷⁹ The Socinian dismissal of church traditions that were not 'recorded in the divine writings' as inessential to salvation was a rejection of the theology of 'many centuries of the Christian Church'.⁴⁸⁰ In order to buttress this theology anew, Owtram set about uncovering 'obscurities' which were implicit in 'the very nature of the passages concerning the sacrifice of Christ'.⁴⁸¹ This led him to a detailed study of those 'sacrifices prescribed by the Mosaic law', which governed the early church's conceptions of sacrifice.⁴⁸² His study consists largely of paraphrases of the sections of the *Mishneh Torah*, which outlined the laws pertaining to the temple: *Avodah* and *Korbanot*.

Owtram rooted his conception of the typological enterprise in the words of the Fathers. Ainsworth, who was equally committed to the typological enterprise, rooted it instead in the proper interpretation of the Hebrew language. Lightfoot too deliberately fashioned his approach to the New Testament in opposition to older commentators who had failed to account for the invaluable witness of rabbinic literature. Owtram's study, however, took its authority from its fealty to patristic sources. It pointed to the comments of St. Augustine and St. Jerome on Colossians 2 in support of its starting assumption as to the figurative nature of 'the Law of

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., sig. A3v-a2r.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., A3v-A4r.

⁴⁸⁰ See *Catechesis ecclesiarum quae in regno Poloniae, & Magno Ducatu Lithuaniae, & aliis ad istud regnum pertinentibus provinciis, affirmant, neminem alium, praeter patrem Domini nostril' jesu Christi, esse illum unum Deum Israelis hominem autem illum jesum Nazarenum, qui ex Virgine natus est, nec alium, praeter aut ante ipsum, Dei Filium unigenitum et agnoscunt & Confitentur* (Rakow, 1614), p. 13: "quae divinis Literis non sunt comprehensa"; Owtram, *De Sacrificiis*, sig. A3r: "a multis saeculis ab Ecclesia Chrsitiana."

⁴⁸¹ Owtram, *De Sacrificiis*, sig. av: "ipsa locorum ratione, quibus de Sacrificio Christi agitur, iis oclusas nonnunquam vidi."

⁴⁸² Ibid., sig. av-a2r: "Sacrificiorum genera legibus Mosaicis designata."

Moses'.⁴⁸³ The Old Testament, for Owtram, was replete with types, which had their antitypes in the New.⁴⁸⁴ In order to understand the true significance of the Mosaic law, these types had to be identified in order that they might be connected up with their antitypes through the identification of shared 'characteristics' or 'faint' resemblances.⁴⁸⁵ Owtram's objective with *De Sacrificiis* was to reveal the characteristics that Christ shared with the 'Jewish sacrifices' and the ways in which they signified his death on the cross, in order to overcome the Socinian critique of the typological method.⁴⁸⁶

Whilst Owtram understood the laws governing sacrifice to be typological in nature, he conceived of the act of sacrifice itself as an entirely natural one. Following Chrysostom, he argued that 'the wisdom given by God to humanity', led naturally to expressions of gratitude in the form of sacrifices.⁴⁸⁷ As the author of *The Responses to the Orthodox* (believed to be Justin Martyr) had pointed out, before the giving of the Law, humans sacrificed foodstuffs entirely unprompted.⁴⁸⁸ The first sacrifice the Bible records is that of Abel, who 'informed by his conscience', offered up the best of his produce to God.⁴⁸⁹ Whilst Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God and thus was clearly acceptable to him, sacrifices are not always presented in an entirely positive light by the Hebrew Bible, as is indicated in Jeremiah 7 where 'God reproaches the Hebrew people for their excessive confidence in sacrifices'.⁴⁹⁰ It was thus in order to prevent an overemphasis on sacrifice, which was tantamount to idolatry, that God saw fit to regulate the practice of it, according to Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyril of Alexandria 'and several other early writers'.⁴⁹¹ Importantly, 'the same view of sacrifices was held by Maimonides', who identified in

⁴⁸³ Ibid., pp. 205-206: "Mosis lex."

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.: "quam cum antitypo communem habuerit."

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.: "Judaeorum sacrificiis."

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 7: "sapientia humano generi divinitus data."

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.: "propriaque conscientia doctus."

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 6: "Deus nimias in sacrificiis populo Hebraeo fiduciam objicit."

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., p. 8: "aliique nonnulli Scriptorum veterum."

this form of religious behaviour not ‘God’s primary intention but a secondary provision.’⁴⁹²

Maimonides’s seeming acceptance of the patristic consensus on the origins of the sacrificial cult, lent credibility to that consensus. It meant that, in standing apart from it, the Socinians were not only setting themselves against the authority of the fathers, but that of the rabbis too.

The same was true of penal substitutionary atonement. Whilst Maimonides would obviously not have affirmed the salvific nature of Christ’s death on the cross, he could be drawn up to buttress the orthodox belief in vicarious atonement. His explanations as to the laws concerning the sacrificial cult could be used to demonstrate the role therein of vicarious atonement and the characteristics by which sacrifices offered might be rendered analogous with the crucifixion. Owtram’s careful study of *Avodah* and *Korbanot*, much like Lightfoot’s and Ainsworth’s before him allowed him ‘to explain Christ’s sacrifice in light of the Jewish sacrifices’.⁴⁹³

This meant firstly, the rooting of the principle of penal substitutionary atonement in Jewish law.

This was not difficult to do for Leviticus 1.4 stated very clearly that a sin offering served as an expiation (כפרה). The sacrificing of cattle, in particular, Maimonides had argued in the *Moreh*, served as a general expiation for the aversion to their slaughter by many an idolatrous sect.⁴⁹⁴

Sacrifice in Judaism wasn’t just expiatory however, it was also redemptive. The redemptive power of the sin offering, was outlined in Maimonides’s comments on the Mishnah in *Negaim* 2.1, where he used the words פדיון (redemption) and כפרה (expiation) interchangeably. The words recited over a sin offering זו כפרתי, ‘this is my expiation’ thus also connoted זו פדיוני ‘this is my redemption’. Maimonides used the word פדיון (redemption) in place of כפרה (expiation),

Owtram argued, so as to indicate that by offering up a sin offering, a sinner could atone for his

⁴⁹² Ibid., p. 9: “Idem de Sacrificiorum Maimonidi visum”; Ibid., p. 12: “non ex primo Dei consilio, sed ex secundo profectam judicet.”

⁴⁹³ Ibid., p. 268: “Ut Sacrificium Christi Judaeorum ex Sacrificiis explicem.”

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p.100.

sins, thereby redeeming himself.⁴⁹⁵ The ‘early Christians’ had thus inherited a very clear conception of atonement through sacrifice.⁴⁹⁶ The ‘sacrificial victims were offered in place of the souls of those making the offering’ so that they could be redeemed.⁴⁹⁷

In the recitation over the sin offering Owtram identified a prefiguration of Christ’s acceptance of the sins of humanity. As these words were said, the sinner was to ‘place their hands on the head of the victim’, as if to communicate that the victim would lose its head ‘in place of theirs’.⁴⁹⁸ According to Eusebius, this laying of hands upon the victim, predated the giving of the law ‘since pious men, familiar with God and enlightened by divine inspiration’ had always ‘judged that some ransom be given to God... in order to obtain salvation’.⁴⁹⁹ The ultimate ‘ransom’, according to Eusebius, was Christ, ‘the substitution for all humankind’.⁵⁰⁰ The laying of hands upon sacrificial victims prefigured the salvation of souls through faith in Christ. The substitutionary atonement that was achieved through the laying of hands upon a sacrifice provided served as a mere prefiguration of ultimate ‘sacrifice for all nations’ that was Christ on the cross.⁵⁰¹

The particular significance of the sinner’s placing his hands upon the head of his offering was well understood by the fathers, Owtram argued. Theodoret had commented on Leviticus 1.5, ‘you shall lay your hand upon the burnt offering’, that the use of the hand therein was vital ‘for the hand signifies action’ and the sacrificial victim was to serve ‘as a representation of their actions’.⁵⁰² For Origen this practice specifically figured Christ’s acceptance of the sins of

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 274: “פדיןן pro כפרה redemptionem pro expiatione posuti.”

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 265-266: “Christianos veteres.”

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 265-266: “animas quoque victimarum animarum offerentium vice susas.”

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 266: “pro capite suo.”

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 267-268: “enim viri pii Deoque familiars, et afflatus divino illuminati ... Deo vitae animaeque datori λύτρον aliquod dandum iudicabant salutis impetrande causa.”

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.: “omniumque plane hominum ἀντιψυχοι.”

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.: “pro omnibus gentibus immolandum.”

⁵⁰² Ibid., pp. 264-265: “Manus enim actiones significant, pro his autem victimam offerebat.”

humanity as ‘the head of the body of the church’.⁵⁰³ ‘He placed His hand upon His vital head’, designating himself as an atonement for ‘the sins of humanity’.⁵⁰⁴ The *זו כפרתי*, according to Cyril of Alexandria too, prefigured Christ’s acceptance upon himself of ‘the punishment for our sins’.⁵⁰⁵ The emphasis the law placed upon this rite spoke to its symbolic significance for those carrying it out and, at the same time, to its future significance in the ultimate vicarious atonement.

Owtram’s approach to this subject is striking, both in its similarities to those of Ainsworth and Lightfoot and in its differences from theirs. Where Ainsworth and Lightfoot found in Maimonides an alternative to patristic authority, Owtram discovered in him, an endorsement of it. The *Mishneh Torah* was fundamental to his defense of typology, which sought to show that the ‘figurative’ nature of sacrifice was not a patristic imposition on the biblical text, but essential to its ‘literal sense’. For all three scholars, the *Mishneh Torah* was essential to the recovery of the ‘literal sense’ of the New Testament. The types identified therein, whilst not necessarily accessible to the contemporary reader, would have been well understood by the early Christians, whose lifeworld could best be reconstructed through the study of Jewish law.

Conclusion

That the *Mishneh Torah* would prove such a powerful tool in the early modern English context was the outcome of several interlocking trends. Firstly, the growing emphasis on the study of Hebrew by both episcopalians and their puritanical opponents made access to it possible for those with a university education. Secondly, the tremendous difficulty implicit in Talmudic scholarship made the reputation of the *Mishneh Torah* as the Talmud ‘abridged’ central to its

⁵⁰³ Ibid., pp. 264-265: “est caput corporis Ecclesiae.”

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.: “posuit manum suam super caput vitali... peccata generis humam.”

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.: “poenas eorum peccata nostra.”

appeal.⁵⁰⁶ Thirdly, the demonstrable utility of Maimonides's elucidation of the law for New Testament interpretation stimulated demand, not just for access to it in Hebrew, but for translations, which were soon supplied. By the end of the seventeenth century therefore, a text that had once been available only to those with significant Hebrew, was now a mainstay of biblical interpretation.

Through the *Mishneh Torah*, the Jewish legal system was rendered legible to early modern Christians, who could use it both to reconstruct the lifeworld of the New Testament and to better identify 'types' of Christ in the Mosaic law. That this source was used in this way was a direct result of a growing scepticism as to the authority of both the fathers, and Philo and Josephus, whose credibility had been assured on account of their accessibility in Greek, the language of the Christians, as opposed to Hebrew, the language of the Jews. As the examples of Spencer and Owtram prove, however, even the reassertion of patristic authority in the Restoration-era would do little to undermine the reputation that the status that Maimonides had attained in the intervening quarter century. He had been established as the authority on both Jewish legal theory and the application of Jewish law for generations to come. The authority the *Mishneh Torah* had assumed for English New Testament scholars by this period is confirmed by the royal support offered to Louis Compiegne de Veil for his translation of *Sefer Korbanot* in 1683.⁵⁰⁷ Key sections of the *Mishneh Torah* were now easily accessible to Christian scholars. No longer merely the purview of pioneering Hebraists such as Lightfoot and Selden, this text was now widely recognised as a compendium of historical data whose insights could be brought to bear upon all manner of theological and historical questions, to be used, not just to undermine established authorities, but also to buttress these in the face of new scepticisms, as Owtram's *De Sacrificiis* shows.

⁵⁰⁶ Ainsworth, *Annotations*, p. 3.

⁵⁰⁷ Moses Maimonides, R. *Mosis Majemonidae De sacrificiis liber* (London, 1683).

In the decades following the Restoration of the Church of England, the *Mishneh Torah*, in tandem with the *Moreh Nebukhim*, would come to be consulted by students of the Old Testament as well as the New, thus stimulating a veritable ‘industry’ in the pursuit of the prehistory of Israelite religion.⁵⁰⁸ These scholars, chief amongst them Edward Stillingfleet, whose *Origines sacrae* was briefly mentioned here, and John Spencer (1630-1693), unlike Lightfoot and Selden were not really pioneering students of the *Mishneh Torah*. Instead, they were building upon the efforts of earlier scholars and translators for access to the Maimonidean *oeuvre*.⁵⁰⁹ As we have seen in the case of Owtram, who was of this latter generation, a reliance upon rabbinic sources had become established practice by the 1660s. For this generation, Maimonides’s reputation having been firmly established, he would come to represent not so much a primary source, as he did for the previous generation but a secondary source, ‘an earlier colleague’, a fellow scholar, who could help uncover the mysteries, of the Old Testament, as well as the New.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁸ See Dmitri Levitin, ‘From Sacred History to the History of Religion: Paganism, Judaism, and Christianity in European Historiography from Reformation to Enlightenment’, *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 4 (December 2012), pp. 1117-1160, p. 1131.

⁵⁰⁹ See Katchen, *Dutch Rabbis*, p. 233.

⁵¹⁰ Stroumsa, *New Science*, p.241; Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (PUP, 2018), p. 241.

Chapter 3 - The Multilingual Maimonides and Menasseh's false Messiah

Introduction

In 1697, fellow of Magdalen College, Richard West set out to refute John Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity*.⁵¹¹ Locke had made the shocking claim that Jesus's first disciples had believed him to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, and nothing more.⁵¹² West set out to prove that such a conception of Jesus was only tenable on account of the Jewish attempt to reconceptualise their messianic hope 'in direct opposition to the Christians'.⁵¹³ In support of this claim, he supplied a series of English translations of unpublished Hebrew manuscripts to be found in the Bodleian library in which such luminaries as David Kimhi and Rashi admitted to doing just that. West, who does not appear to have been a competent Hebraist himself cited these manuscripts out of a rather obscure work, a series of so-called 'Miscellaneous Notes', addended to Edward Pococke's Latin translation of several sections of Maimonides's comments on the Mishnah, the *Porta Mosis*. These notes, according to West demonstrated that if the Jews 'should admit those Interpretations of their ancient Doctors, to speak the genuine sence of Scripture' then they would, at once, be reconciled with the Christians and Socinianism would be no more.⁵¹⁴ If West was citing the *Miscellaneous Notes* accurately, these appear to have constituted a very significant work indeed. It is a wonder then that they have received so little scholarly attention. That is, until one begins the daunting task of making sense of them. Written in dense Latin interspersed with Greek, Arabic and Hebrew quotations derived from a dazzling array of sources, the *Miscellaneous Notes* often read more like a series of private notebooks than chapters of a major published work.

⁵¹¹ Richard West, *Animadversions on a late book intituled The reasonableness of Christianity as delivered in the Scriptures* (Oxford, 1697).

⁵¹² John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity as delivered in the Scriptures* (London, 1695), pp. 120-122.

⁵¹³ West, *Animadversions*, pp. 80-81.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Whilst decoding them is no small task, it is my contention that the *Miscellaneous Notes* reveal a far more interesting Edward Pococke than much of the laudatory recent scholarship has accustomed us to.⁵¹⁵ This is a polemical Pococke, a fierce opponent of Socinianism, a harsh critic of millenarianism and a passionate advocate for academic freedom. Pococke's years of work on the careful construction of the *Porta Mosis* awakened him to the challenges facing his fellow scholars, whose access to well-preserved unredacted manuscripts was not as privileged as his own. It also alerted him to their weaknesses, their unwillingness to take Jewish accounts of Christianity seriously on their own terms and their failures to recognise the virtues of the work he was undertaking.⁵¹⁶ Properly understood, the *Porta Mosis* and its accompanying notes make the case for the significance of Maimonides as both Jewish theologian and historian of Judaism as never before. They bring him into conversation with other Jewish thinkers on the most fundamental questions of Jewish belief. This work represents a major scholarly breakthrough. I contend, however, that regrettably, if not entirely surprisingly, it has been largely neglected and, where it has been referred to, such references, like those of West, have been very far from really engaging the substance of Pococke's arguments.

Pococke's Multilingual Maimonides

Pococke has long been lauded for the outsized role he played in the development of oriental scholarship in England, though as Simon Mills points out, this emphasis often obscures Pococke's personal priorities which tended more towards theology than philology.⁵¹⁷ This chapter goes one step further in aiming to show that Pococke's scholarship was not only

⁵¹⁵ See in particular G.J. Toomer, *Easterne Wisedome and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth Century England* (OUP, 1996)

⁵¹⁶ Edward Pococke, *Porta Mosis* (Oxford, 1655), p. 18.

⁵¹⁷ Simon Mills, 'Edward Pococke (1604-1691), Comparative Arabic-Hebrew Philology, and the Bible', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 53, no. 1 (January 2023), pp. 117-147.

profoundly shaped by his religious beliefs but was also, at least in part, motivated by the broader socio-theological context within which he was writing.⁵¹⁸ The Pococke of the 1650s, as will be demonstrated, was profoundly interested in the Jewish Messianic hope, both as a means by which to identify precisely where Christianity had diverged from Judaism and in order to combat what he believed to be the misguided attempts of many of his contemporaries to hasten the return of the Messiah. It was Pococke's view that his very granular way of working, often from manuscripts that he had personally procured, always attentive to their provenance, made for authoritative interventions in debates of contemporary concern. His writings of this period reveal why he felt it necessary to make Maimonides's commentary on the Mishnah available to the neo-Latin Republic of Letters, which he believed to be overly reliant on redacted manuscripts, which allowed for the compounding of errors. It also reveals his respect for Judaism, properly understood as a predecessor to Christianity. That the Jews, or at least their writings, had endured was a great advantage to Christians who relied on these for the accurate reconstruction of their own tradition.

Pococke's particular fascination with Maimonides was grounded in a very genuine appreciation for the exemplarity of his scholarship, for who else had 'so clearly elucidated the rationale and history of the entire Talmud?'⁵¹⁹ For Pococke, scholarship was the most precious thing in all the world. It was in order to preserve Maimonides's superlative scholarship for posterity that Pococke embarked upon the ambitious project of reproducing selected sections of his commentary on the Mishnah in their original language. In his introduction to this work, he quoted approvingly the saying, 'reported to be attributed to Ali' that 'the decline of knowledge itself is more lamentable than the passing of scholars'.⁵²⁰ In the *Porta Mosis* Pococke was preserving the knowledge Maimonides had produced and something of the culture in which he

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Pococke, *Porta Mosis*, sig. ***2r: "Quis totius operis talmudici rationem et historiam tam dilucide alibi enucleavit?"

⁵²⁰ Ibid., sig **4v: "dictum videtur quod Ali ab acceptum fertur...*Scientiae ipsius quam doctorum leviolem esse occasum.*"

had produced it. Maimonides's introductions to the Mishnah had never been published before in their original language. Pococke was able to achieve this remarkable scholarly feat thanks to the extensive network of contacts he had built up in the Orient over many years.⁵²¹ This was his personal project, an outcome of his singular devotion to the recovery of the history of Arabic intellectual culture, a devotion which many of his contemporaries at Oxford, especially during the turbulent 1650s, looked askance upon. Pococke produced this work during a period of profound personal insecurity. His position at Oxford was at stake and his parishioners treated him with suspicion. He nonetheless believed the reconstruction of Maimonides's work to be of paramount importance and was therefore content to pursue it at great personal cost.⁵²² For he truly believed that 'no greater misfortune can befall an age than the loss of its scholars'.⁵²³ He noted, however, that such men were 'frequently treated with contempt, if not with manifest hatred, while they are still alive'.⁵²⁴ It is not hard to draw the conclusion that Pococke was here talking about himself and the difficulties he faced at the hands of the Cromwellian regime and those he deemed 'the scourge of this age', for whom 'any study beyond their native language is deemed a significant obstacle'.⁵²⁵

Pococke's efforts on behalf of Maimonides and the Judeo-Arabic context within which he had lived were largely successful. Though he never did cultivate the coterie of Arabic scholars, whom he had hoped would be inspired by the *Porta Mosis*, he did, however, vastly expand the source base through which Maimonides's writings could be accessed and contextualised.⁵²⁶ Indeed, it is highly unlikely that Maimonides's works would have become as influential as they did without

⁵²¹ See Simon Mills, *A Commerce of Knowledge: Trade, Religion, and Scholarship between England and the Ottoman Empire, c. 1600-1760* (OUP, 2020), pp. 71-95.

⁵²² See Leonard Twells, 'The Life of Dr. Edward Pococke' in Edward Pococke, *The theological works of Dr. Pococke, sometimes professor of the Hebrew and Arabick tongues, in the University of Oxford, and canon of Christ-Church* (London, 1740), pp. 1-84.

⁵²³ Pococke, *Porta Mosis*, sig **4v: "nihil gravius pati possit saeculum eruditorum jactura."

⁵²⁴ Ibid.: "utut incolumes plerumque contemptui, si non odio manifesto haberi soleant."

⁵²⁵ Ibid., p. 18: "hujus saeculi lues... quibus vel quid ultra vernaculam sepere, iis rite interpretandis maximum statuatur impedimentum."

⁵²⁶ Ibid., sig. ***2r-***3r.

his *Porta Mosis* and indeed without his translations of Arabic historical sources in the *Nazm al-Jawbar*, *Historia compendiosa dynastiarum* and the *Specimen historiae Arabum*, which both affirmed and substantiated the historical approach to the Law proffered in the third book of the *Moreh Nebukhim*.⁵²⁷ Equally important was the evidence these provided as to Maimonides's life in the Arab world, which Pococke would build upon in his introduction to the *Porta Mosis*. Therein Maimonides is presented in his Judeo-Arabic and Islamic contexts. Whilst Buxtorf had provided his readers with a very impressive reconstruction of Maimonides's life from Jewish sources, Pococke, who revealed him to 'have attained such great glory among the Mohmmedans (who are usually rather biased against men of a different profession)' as well as his own people, offered a much more historically sensitive perspective.⁵²⁸ Buxtorf's account of the life of Maimonides offered copious quotations from obvious hagiographies, alongside a very well-researched account of the huge controversy ignited by the *Moreh Nebukhim* in France, Pococke centred the reception of his works, first in Arabic and then in Hebrew. That Maimonides's works were written principally in Arabic was of huge significance for him, as it meant that they provided a window into a Jewish world that was largely unfamiliar to European Christians. Buxtorf's retelling of the story of the reception of the *Moreh Nebukhim* in Montpellier conjured up a contrast between a rationalist Maimonides and a readership 'ignorant of philosophy and too attached to Talmudic fables'.⁵²⁹ Pococke's introduction to the comments on the Mishnah takes us inside the rationalist universe that Maimonides occupied and introduces us to its linguistic base, in the 'richness' and 'clarity' of the Arabic language, which, by his day, had sadly

⁵²⁷ Bar Hebraeus, *Specimen Historiae Arabum sive Gregorii Abul Farajii Malatiensis, De Origine & Moribus Arabum succincta narration, in linguam Latinam conversa, Notisque probatissimis apud Ipsos Authoribus, fusius illustrate. Opera & Studio Edvardi Pocockii Linguarum Hebraeorum & Arabicum in Academia Oxoniensi Professoris* (Oxford, 1650); Eutyechius, *Nazm al-Jawbar: Contextio gemmarum, sive Eutychiei Patriarchae Alexandrini. Illustriss: Johanne Seldeno, tou makaritou, chorago. Interprete Edvardo Pocockio linguarum Hebraicae & Arabicae in Academia Oxoniensi Professore publico* (Oxford, 1659); Bar Hebraeus, *Tarikhj mukhtasar al-duwal; historia compendios dynastiarum* (Oxford, 1663)

⁵²⁸ Ibid., sig. *2v-*3r: "Apud Mohammedanos (in diversae professionis homines satis plerunque obliquos) gloriam adeptus fuerit".

⁵²⁹ Johannes Buxtorf, *Liber Moreh Nebukhim* (Basle, 1629), (sig. ***r-v): "Philosophiae ignari et Talmudicis fabulis nimis addicti essent".

diminished.⁵³⁰ He thus offered his readers, to whom ‘the great name of Maimonides’ was already known, an account of the cultural context in which he had lived.⁵³¹

The full implications of Pococke’s ‘Multilingual Maimonides’ would not be felt through his writings directly, however. Pococke granted access to the scholarly sources by which Maimonides’s account of the aetiology of the Law would be confirmed and then supplemented. He was in many ways, however, a rather conservative figure. As Simon Mills has established, Pococke used his knowledge of Oriental languages to buttress the typological framework and thus the Masoretic text within which the Reformed tradition had rooted it.⁵³² In a particularly evocative phrase, Pococke expressed his full confidence in the capacity of the ‘Hebrew Text’ to ‘stand on its own bottom to wear out all assaults against it’ and he was fully convinced that the study of Hebrew and Arabic, of Judaism and Islam would only serve to affirm its status ‘as the undoubted word of God’.⁵³³ He therefore looked to the copious scholarly sources to which he had access in order to educate, first himself, and then the broader scholarly public, as to the stability of Christian orthodoxy, which had been variously undermined by a succession of over-enthusiastic censorship regimes and then, in England, by an outpouring of rather dubious theological material.

Pococke’s significance as a close student of Maimonides, this chapter argues, lies firstly in his having rendered him both more accessible and better contextualised than ever before. Secondly, however, it lies in his identification in Maimonides of copious scholarly resources by which the Church’s conception of its own history and theology could be better established. The too-often-overlooked *Miscellaneous Notes* which accompany the *Porta Mosis* and the commentaries on Hosea,

⁵³⁰ Pococke, *Porta Mosis*, sig. *2v-*3r: “lingua istius amplitudinem et perspicuitatem.”

⁵³¹ Ibid., sig. ***2v: “magnum Maimonidis nomen”.

⁵³² See Mills, ‘Edward Pococke’.

⁵³³ ‘Edward Pococke to Narcissus Marsh’, February 1680 cited in Twells ‘Edward Pococke’, p. 74.

Joel, Micah and Malachi, written towards the end of his life, reveal a Pococke profoundly concerned with questions of eschatology and its abuses. The Pococke that emerges from these works was deeply concerned with disaggregating the truth claims of Judaism and Christianity, a source of great confusion in his own day. Pococke's Maimonides, whilst thoroughly contextualised served for him as the arbiter of Jewish orthodoxy. In a time of heightened millenarian speculation, which was partially fuelled by the belief that the conversion of the Jews was close at hand, Pococke relied upon Maimonides to establish an accurate picture of where Judaism stood in relation to Christianity. This was only possible thanks to his own original copies of unredacted manuscripts. Were he to be relying on printed books, he, like many others, would have been misled as to Maimonides's, and thus Judaism's conception of the Messiah.

Pococke, I argue, saw himself as proffering a middle-way between reflexive anti-Judaism, on the one-hand, and an uneducated philosemitism, on the other. He believed that the Jewish messianic hope, as articulated by that tradition's greatest authorities could and should guide the fair-minded Christian toward an appreciation of the veracity of his own tradition. Pococke's engagement with Jewish scholarship evolved through his studies in Hebrew and then in Arabic. As the Levant Company's chaplain in Aleppo, Pococke had plenty of opportunities to develop his philological skills and to build up his manuscript collection. In pursuit of these goals, he was able to vastly expand his knowledge, not just of the Hebrew language, but of the Jewish tradition. He attributed his growth in this area to a teacher, whose services he would later procure in Constantinople, Rabbi Jacob Romano.⁵³⁴ Pococke's private letters reveal his great fondness for Rabbi Romano, 'a man very inquisitive after books', with whom he had sadly lost contact by the summer of 1650.⁵³⁵ Romano had taught him, he wrote in the *Miscellaneous Notes*, to faithfully represent the Jewish tradition in his writings by taking very great pains to ensure that any Jews he

⁵³⁴ See Cecil Roth, 'Edward Pococke and the first Hebrew Printing in Oxford', *Bodleian Library Record* 2 (1948), pp. 215-19; Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom*, p. 135; Mills, *Commerce of Knowledge*.

⁵³⁵ Edward Pococke to John Selden, August 5th, 1653, Bodleian Library, MS Selden supra 109 f. 351r.

cited as authorities were regarded as such by the Jews themselves.⁵³⁶ It was on this basis that he chose to dedicate so much of his time and energy to the publication of Maimonides's commentary on the Mishnah. Maimonides was, he wrote in the preface to that work, 'praised amongst his own people, like no one else' as the 'light of Israel' (נר ישראל) and as 'the light of the East and the West' (אור מזרח ומערב).⁵³⁷ Whilst Pococke absolutely acknowledged the fame Maimonides had achieved beyond his own community, it was on account of their regard for his scholarship that he understood him to be a uniquely authoritative voice.

With Pococke's broader approach to the study of Judaism in mind, it should therefore come as no surprise that it was through an analysis of Maimonides's articulation of Jewish fundamentals as they appear in his introduction to the tenth chapter of Mishnah *Sanhedrin* that Pococke produced his most detailed study on the subject of eschatology. The eighth chapter of the *Miscellaneous Notes* constitutes a broad survey of both Jewish and Christian approaches to the end-times, the Messianic era and the figure of Jesus as he is perceived to appear in the Old Testament.⁵³⁸ It is in this essay, first and foremost, that Pococke articulated his concerns as to the millenarian fervour that had engulfed his country. His targets herein were twofold. On the one hand, he attacked the all-too-many Christians who, unable to appreciate the variety and sophistication of the Jewish tradition, had tended to assume that it constituted nothing more than a rejection of Christ, and, on the other, he attacked another sort of Christian, the philosemitic millenarian, who, in his deeply felt eschatological hopes, risked giving too much credence to self-appointed representatives of the Jewish tradition.

⁵³⁶ Edward Pococke, 'Miscellaneous Notes', *Porta Mosis* (Oxford, 1655), p. 160: "ea cautione utemur, quam a *Judaeorum*, quos mihi nosse contigit, nemini vel doctrina vel ingenuitate secundo, *jac. Romano* accepisse me memini, ut si quid ut a *Judaeis* dictum aut assertum referre vellemus, illos sequeremur authores qui alicujus apud suos notae, et fidei haberentur."

⁵³⁷ Ibid., sig*2v-*3: "Minime mirum est eum apud suos, laudes consecutum esse, quas nemo fere alius, a quibus נר ישראל Lucerna Israelis, אור מזרח ומערב Lumen Orientis et Occidentis, חכם עבר וערב."

⁵³⁸ Ibid., pp. 306-349.

To fully engage with Pococke's *Miscellaneous Notes* is to engage with his scholarly explorations as the *Porta Mosis* was going to print. It is to engage with the importance he attributed to the scholarship of Maimonides for the resolution of both age-old questions and contemporary concerns. Most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, however, it is to gain an appreciation of Pococke's conception of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, as, on the one hand, stemming from the same original sources, whilst, at the same time, having proceeded in completely different directions. This chapter reveals the full extent of Pococke's reliance on Maimonides as the most reliable arbiter of the Jewish tradition, who, unlike more recent arbiters, chief amongst them Menasseh ben Israel, did not seek to reconcile Judaism with Christianity. Pococke's multilingual Maimonides unveiled a Judaism that would have felt foreign to European Christians, in contrast with that of Menasseh, which was remarkably compatible with their own traditions.⁵³⁹ Christianity, for Pococke, was distinct from Judaism in that it offered a fully-fledged eschatology, whose principal sources were in the Gospels, not the Law. Christians interested in theological speculations should therefore, he argued, look to Christian sources rather than those of the Jews, which addressed these matters very infrequently and with little clarity.

This chapter represents the first study of Pococke's eschatological interests. It is perhaps unsurprising, given Pococke's laudatory reputation as a pioneering secular scholar that these have been largely ignored. Pococke, much like his similarly feted colleague, John Selden, has often been perceived to have been a man out of time, a 'pure scholar' whose interests were more in age-old questions of philology than contemporary conflicts as to the computation of the Messianic age. This characterisation, which, I would venture, owes much to John Locke's

⁵³⁹ See Sina Rauschenbach, 'Mediating Jewish Knowledge: Menasseh ben Israel and the Christian Respublica litteria', *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 102, no. 4 (2012), pp. 561-588; Sina Rauschenbach, *Judaism for Christians: Menasseh ben Israel (1604-1657)* (Lexington Books, 2019).

masterful *Memoirs of the life and character of Dr. Edward Pococke*, has been given new impetus by recent developments in the history of Arabic studies, which have seen Pococke take centre stage as the founder of this discipline.⁵⁴⁰

I have chosen to focus on Pococke's engagement with eschatological questions for the purposes of this thesis for it was on these questions that he turned most frequently to Maimonides as the arbiter of Jewish law and theology. Pococke was convinced that Maimonides was uniquely qualified to offer Christian readers direct access to both the oral tradition and the pre-history of that tradition. His close engagement with Maimonides's conception of the Messiah reveals him to have been concerned by the disconnect between the academic study of Jewish sources, which he and his fellow scholars were greatly advancing, and the popular perception of these. That perception was being shaped by Menasseh ben Israel and his growing band of Christian followers who looked to him for evidence of the imminent conversion of the Jews.⁵⁴¹

⁵⁴⁰ See John Locke, *The remains of John Locke Esq viz. I. Some memoirs of the life and character of Dr. Edward Pococke. II. Instructions for the conduct of a young gentleman, as to religion and government, &c. III. The best method of studying, and interpreting the scriptures. IV. Sentiment concerning the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* (London, 1704), pp. 1-6; On Pococke as founder of 'Arabic studies' see Benjamin Williams, 'More than One Way to Read a Midrash: The Bodleian Copy of Bomberg's Midrash Rabbah,' in Scott Mandelbrote and Joanna Weinberg, *Jewish Books and their Readers: Aspects of the Intellectual Life of Christians and Jews in Early Modern Europe* (Brill, 2016), pp. 287-311; Benjamin Williams, 'The Pococke Collection' in Rebecca Abrams and Cesar Merchan-Hamann, *Jewish Treasures from Oxford Libraries*, (Bodleian Library, 2020), pp. 67-87; Cecil Roth, 'Edward Pococke and the First Hebrew Printing in Oxford', *Bodleian Library Record* 2 (1948), pp. 215-219; Johann Fuck, *Die arabischen Studien in Europa bis in den Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Otto Harrassowitz, 1955), pp. 85-90; P.M. Holt, 'The Study of Arabic Historians in Seventeenth-Century England: the Background and the Work of Edward Pococke', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 19, no. 3 (1957), pp. 444-55; P.M. Holt, 'An Oxford Arabist: Edward Pococke (1604-1691)' in P.M. Holt, *Studies in the History of the Near East* (Cass, 1973), pp. 3-26; P.M. Holt, 'Edward Pococke (1604-1691), the first Laudian professor of Arabic at Oxford', *Oxoniensia* 56 (1991), pp. 119-130; G.J. Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth-Century England* (OUP, 1996); pp. 116-126; Mordechai Feingold, 'Oriental Studies' in Nicholas Tyacke, *The History of the University of Oxford, Vol. 4: Seventeenth Century Oxford*, pp. 449-503; Nabil Matar, 'Edward Pococke' in David Thomas and John A. Chesworth, *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Biographical History*, Vol. 8, *Northern and Eastern Europe (1600-1700)*, pp. 445-458.

⁵⁴¹ See Moses Wall, 'Considerations Upon the Point of the Conversion of the Jewes' in Menasseh ben Israel, *The hope of Israel: written by Menasseh ben Israel, an Hebrew divine and philosopher Newly extant, and printed at Amsterdam, and dedicated by the author, to the High Court of the Parliament of England, and to the councill of State* (London, 1650), pp. 47-62.

The *Porta Mosis* itself certainly represents a significant scholarly milestone. That it pioneered the study of Judeo-Arabic in Europe is well-recognised.⁵⁴² The publication of the *Porta Mosis* put the study of Maimonides's writings in Europe on a new footing by contextualising them as never before, giving rise to a new 'multilingual Maimonides', thus inaugurating a new phase in his early modern reception. What the *Miscellaneous Notes* added to the comments reveal however, was that Pococke saw a role for his scholarship outside of his immediate academic circles. The primacy accorded to Maimonides as the greatest authority on Judaism should call for the close reading of his writings about Jewish messianism, a subject of popular fascination. The vicissitudes of the Civil War and Interregnum periods which were widely interpreted as presaging the end-times, had given rise to copious millenarian speculations.⁵⁴³ It was in this context that the eschatological writings of Rabbi Menasseh Ben Israel, whom Pococke charged with the thorough misrepresentation of the Jewish tradition, rose to prominence in England. Central to Pococke's thinking as the *Porta Mosis* went to print was the extent to which the popularity of Menasseh's writings were fuelling a culture of messianic computation which he judged to be out of step with the truths of the Gospel.

In the opinion of Pococke, Menasseh's authority had been much overstated giving rise to a new conception of Judaism as largely compatible with Christianity. Pococke sought not only to warn against the reading of Jewish sources in pursuit of clues as to the impending eschaton, but to undermine eschatological speculations, more generally. Pococke sought to situate the eschatological writings of Menasseh ben Israel, who was certainly interested both in stressing the continuities between Judaism and Christianity, within their proper context, highlighting where

⁵⁴² Simon Hopkins, 'Porta Mosis and the Beginning of Judeo-Arabic Research', *Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* (2004), pp. 7-13.

⁵⁴³ See Richard Popkin 'Jewish-Christian Relations in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: The Conception of the Messiah', *Jewish History* 6, no. 1 (1992), pp. 163-177; Richard Popkin, *Millenarianism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought 1650-1800: Clark library lectures, 1981-1982* (Brill, 1988); B.S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy men: a study in seventeenth-century English millenarianism* (Faber Finds, 2008); Achsah Guibbory, *Christian Identity, Jews, and Israel in 17th-Century England* (OUP, 2010), pp. 186-219.

his views cohered with those of more authoritative voices within Judaism, and indeed, where they did not. Pococke sought to highlight the problems which much recent eschatological speculation which had drawn upon the writings of Menasseh ben Israel. One such work was the *Apokalypsis anastaseōs* of Nathaniel Homes (1653), with whom Menasseh had corresponded directly, whose characterisations of Maimonides owed much to Menasseh's misrepresentations.⁵⁴⁴

In addition to attacking contemporary millenarianism, Pococke devoted an entire chapter of his *Miscellaneous Notes* to excoriating the Catholic Church for its censoriousness, which had greatly hampered the transmission of Jewish texts. It was his contention that the writings of Maimonides, amongst others, had been mutilated by inquisitors to the point that he had been reproduced incorrectly in printed works. I wish to argue that Pococke chose to emphasise this particular concern in the *Miscellaneous Notes* as it was the fundamental driver behind his scholarly project *tout court*, which rested upon the careful interrogation of manuscript evidence.⁵⁴⁵ It was his view that scholarship of this kind could greatly advance the case for Christ's Messiahship, which he accused many an illustrious predecessor, most notably Calvin, of failing to build.⁵⁴⁶ Such failures were attributable, both to overly dismissive attitudes toward Jewish biblical interpretation, as in the case of Calvin and to the overly credulous embrace of these by millenarians, such as Wall. The former allowed for erroneous interpretations to go unchallenged whilst the latter, perhaps more worryingly, allowed for the absorption of 'many things unsupported by Scripture' into the theological mainstream.⁵⁴⁷

In an era in which the writings of Maimonides were being deliberately misinterpreted with a view to bolstering the Messianic hopes of European Christians, Pococke sought to introduce readers

⁵⁴⁴ See Richard Popkin, 'Jewish Messianism and Christian Millenarianism' in Perez Zagorin (ed.), *Culture and politics: from Puritanism to the Enlightenment* (UC Press, 1980), pp. 70-80, p. 75.

⁵⁴⁵ Pococke, 'Miscellaneous Notes', pp. 239- 251.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 344-348.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 232: "multa nullo Scripturae fundamento nixa."

to the historical Maimonides, who had much to teach Christians about their own tradition, but who did not and indeed could not, offer a compelling picture of the eschaton. Pococke's eschatological writings, set against those of Menasseh ben Israel, pointed his readers away from Judaism, which they lacked the tools to properly understand, and toward the Gospels, within which the clearest available statements as to the end-times were to be found. They argued for the limited utility of Jewish eschatological writings, including those of Maimonides for Christian biblical interpretation, especially as these had been doubly manipulated, firstly by Jews themselves and secondly, by those charged with censoring Jewish texts. Whilst Pococke never penned a work of systematic theology, this should not be taken to mean that the subject did not interest him. On the contrary, this chapter reveals the extent to which grand questions of eschatology and Christology preoccupied Pococke from his work on the *Porta Mosis* in the early 1650s through to his publication of his commentary on Joel shortly before his death in 1691. It was Pococke's contention that it was the business of the Christian scholar to reconstruct the evolution of the Jewish tradition, by identifying the many theological and interpretive errors that had been allowed to accrue throughout history in order that its divergences from Christianity could be accounted for and thus countered. This was not a task he envisioned completing alone. As the closing lines of his preface to the *Porta Mosis* indicate, it was Pococke's dearest hope that readers engage closely with his scholarship, 'using their own judgement' and 'finding mistakes'.⁵⁴⁸ Fittingly, this preface concludes with the words of Maimonides's *Tekhiat Hameitim*, which might be taken as a summation of his approach to scholarship:

והשם יתעלה יישירנו במאמר ובמעשה יצילנו מן החטא והשגיאות למען הסדו

May the exalted God guide us in word and deed, save us from sin and errors for the sake of His kindness.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁸ Pococke, *Porta Mosis*, sig. ***2r-***3r: "Lector, quo utilitati suae (cui post Dei gloriam dicatus est labor noster) consulat, in ea, quae veritati maxime consentanea est interpretatione eligenda iudicio suo utatur; & si in utraque erratum deprehenderit, tertiam ipse reponat."

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., sig. ***4r.

Maimonides's eschatology: The thirteen principles of faith and *Hilkhot Melakhim*

Hilkhot Melakhim 12.2 states that 'neither the order' nor 'the occurrence' of the 'events' of the eschaton 'are among the fundamental principles of the faith' and, as such, the verses concerning these were the subjects of legitimate differences of interpretation by the sages. *Hilkhot Melakhim* and Maimonides's thirteen principles of faith, which he outlined in his introduction to chapter 10 of *Mishnah Sanhedrin*, offer a systematic overview of the minimum theological requirements of the Jewish tradition, which include a belief in the coming of the Messiah. Latin translations of the thirteen principles had been published by Sebastien Munster in 1529 and by Gilbert Générard in 1572.⁵⁵⁰ Générard, a French Benedictine exegete and Orientalist, had a very deep interest in the writings of Maimonides. In 1572, he published his translation of *Seder Olam* entitled *Hebraeorum Breve Chronicon*. This work, which sought to educate Christians as to the lives of the 'unsaved Jews' about whom their 'popular histories' were 'deeply silent', contained Latin translations of chapters 11 and 12 of *Hilkhot Melakhim*.⁵⁵¹ The purpose of this was to reveal to Christians 'what kind of Messiah the Jews expect, what they think of him, and what prevents them from embracing our unique and true faith'.⁵⁵²

Some years later, in 1605, the self-same chapters of *Hilkhot Melakhim* which Générard had made available in Latin were published in English by the famed bible translator and polemicist, Hugh Broughton. Broughton had taken upon himself to make available to English readers just a few

⁵⁵⁰ See Moses Maimonides, *Shelosh 'esreh 'iḳarim, divre ha-bayit ha-sbeni, 'eser geliyot Yisra'el tredecim Articuli fidei Iudaeorum, item, Compendium elegans historiarum Iosephi, complectens* (Strasbourg, 1529); Gilbert Générard, *Symbolum fidei Iudaeorum è R. Mose Aegyptio. Præcationes eorumdem pro defunctis, è lib. Mahzor. Aliæ è breuiario Hebraeorum. Sexcenta tredecim legis præcepta, è More nebuchim* (Paris, 1569).

⁵⁵¹ Gilbert Générard, *Hebraeorum Breve Chronicon* (Paris, 1572), pp. 2-3: "Scis enim, quam altum sit de Iudaeorum rebus silentium in vulgatis historiis, et tamen multum interesse Ecclesiae, ne nos ipsius membra plane ignoremus quid iste populus agat post repudiatum Christum, unicum suae salutis perfugium, quatenus langueat circa aridos cortices et siliquas Scripturae."

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 4-7: "Cujusmodi Christum expectent, quid de ipso sapiant, quid impediatur, ne nostrum unicum atque adeo verum amplectantur, iudicari sane possit atque intelligi, per quam partem irrumpendum sit in ipsorum arces et propugnacula, ut celerius fidei imperio subiiciantur".

snippets of Maimonides's writings on the subject of the Messiah, with a view to demonstrating the Jewish inability to recognise Christ for who he supposedly was and their ongoing ignorance of him despite his being pointed to on almost every page of their holy scriptures. Maimonides's thoughts on this subject could be used to demonstrate, Broughton believed, the extent to which the Jewish conception of the Messiah 'agreed with the Apostles', though the Jews, in their ignorance continually 'miseth extraeamly' of this.⁵⁵³

In 1629 these excerpts were published once again in Latin, this time by Johannes Coccejus in a volume entitled *Duo Tituli thalmudici*, which constituted of Latin translations of the Mishnah in *Sanhedrin* and *Maccoth* each with extensive commentaries drawn up by Coccejus himself. His agenda here was clear. He sought to the undermine the Jewish Messianic hope in order to bolster the Christian faith of his readers. It was his view that Jewish eschatological writings had very little to offer Christian readers who were already equipped to 'recognise the true Christ from the false one'.⁵⁵⁴

Christian Millenarianism meets Maimonides

Whilst the efforts of Munster, Générard, Broughton and then Coccejus demonstrate that there was at least some measure of interest in Maimonides's eschatological thinking from the 1520s onwards, it would be fair to conclude that such interest was mostly confined to the realms of learned erudition and anti-Jewish polemic. Come the 1640s, however, Jewish eschatological thinking had emerged as a subject of particularly widespread significance within the English political context on account of a veritable explosion of millennial expectation.⁵⁵⁵ Thanks to Civil

⁵⁵³ Hugh Broughton, *A Comment upon Coheleth* (Amsterdam, 1605), pp. 31-39.

⁵⁵⁴ Johannes Coccejus, *Duo Tituli thalmudici* (Amsterdam, 1629), pp. 363-365: "quo dignoscet homo verum Christum a falso."

⁵⁵⁵ On the place of the Jews within Protestant Millenarian thinking see Avihu Zakai, 'Thomas Brightman and English Apocalyptic Tradition' in Yosef Kaplan, Henry Mechoulan, & Richard Popkin, *Menasseh ben Israel and his*

War-era suspensions of censorship legislation, a plethora of publications on the supposedly imminent conversion of the Jews, made their ways into the hands of Englishmen, who would be eager to confirm their veracity.⁵⁵⁶

The eschatological significance of Jewish conversion had become almost an article of faith for early seventeenth century Puritans. Broughton himself had raised expectations in 1610 by suggesting that that blessed day might already be close at hand.⁵⁵⁷ According to Thomas Brightman, whose works circulated widely from 1640, five out of the seven judgements thought to precede the apocalypse would have been unleashed by 1650, meaning that the sixth judgement, the conversion of the Jews, would soon follow.⁵⁵⁸ Brightman's timetable was, remarkably, by mid-century very broadly accepted. Whilst Thomas Goodwin predicted that 1666 would be the year and Mary Cary, less optimistically, suggested 1701, few who fought on the Parliamentary side in the Civil War wished to dampen these Messianic hopes, which fuelled their quest to construct a 'New Jerusalem' on English soil.⁵⁵⁹ Even the decidedly minimalist *Directory of Public Worship* included a prayer 'for the conversion of the Jews' and 'the hastening of the second coming', to be recited by each and every minister, prior to his Sunday sermon.⁵⁶⁰ That

World (Brill, 1989), pp. 31-44, p. 31; Christopher Hill, 'Till the Conversion of the Jews' in *Millenarianism and Messianism in English Literature 1650-1800* (Brill, 1988), pp. 12-36; Andrew Crome, *The Restoration of the Jews: early modern hermeneutics, eschatology, and national identity in the works of Thomas Brightman* (Springer, 2014); Andrew Crome, *Christian Zionism and English National Identity* (Springer, 2018), pp. 29-66; Arthur H. Williamson, 'Tudor Apocalypse: Sixteenth Century Apocalypticism, Millenarianism and the English Reformation: From Jonathan Bale to John Foxe and Thomas Brightman', *The Journal of Modern History* 53, no. 2; Jeffrey K. Jue, *Heaven upon earth: Joseph Mede (1586-1638) and the legacy of millenarianism* (Springer, 2006); Jan De Bruijn, Pieter Holtrop and Ernestine Van Der Wall, 'Continuity within a Changing Context: The Apocalyptic Thought of Joseph Mede and Henry More' in Johannes Van Den Berg (ed.), *Religious Currents and Cross-Currents* (Brill, 1999), pp. 83-101.

⁵⁵⁶ See David Como 'Print, Censorship, and Ideological Escalation in the English Civil War', *Journal of British Studies* 51. No. 4 (2012), pp. 820-857; Jason Peacey, 'News, Pamphlets, and Public Opinion' in Laura Lungers Knoppers (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Literature & the English Revolution* (OUP, 2013), pp. 173-189; Jason McElligot, 'The Book Trade, Licensing, and Censorship' in Laura Lungers Knoppers (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Literature & the English Revolution* (OUP, 2013), pp. 135-153; Tim Harris, 'Propaganda and Public Opinion in Seventeenth-Century England' in Jeremy D. Popkin (ed.), *Media and Revolution* (University of Kentucky Press, 1995), pp. 64-92; David Cressy, *England on the Edge* (OUP, 2007), pp. 281-309; Jason Peacey, 'The Revolution in Print' in Michael Braddick, *The Oxford Handbook of the English Revolution* (OUP, 2014), pp. 276-293.

⁵⁵⁷ Broughton, *Apocalypse*, p. 50, p. 126, p. 269.

⁵⁵⁸ Thomas Brightman, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos, or a Revelation of the Revelation* (Leiden, 1616), p. 711, 851, 836..

⁵⁵⁹ Thomas Goodwin, *Works* (Edinburgh, 1861-63), III, p. 196; Mary Cary, *The little horns doome and downfall* (London, 1651).

⁵⁶⁰ *A directory for the publique worship of God throughout the three kingdoms* (London, 1651), pp. 12-19.

these prayers were already being answered by the early 1650s was made manifest by stirring reports of American ‘Indians’, believed by many to be the lost tribes of Israel, converting to Christianity.⁵⁶¹

It was through such stories that English millenarians came into extensive contact with perhaps the most famous Rabbi of the age, Menasseh ben Israel. Menasseh was a Dutchman of Portuguese descent, who, despite occupying only a precarious position within the Amsterdam Jewish community, had a tremendous reputation for scholarship which, thanks to his copious writings in Latin and his willingness to offer Hebrew language tuition to Christians, extended very far beyond it.⁵⁶² Menasseh maintained correspondences with many of the finest scholars of the age.⁵⁶³ His own interests in the resurrection of the dead, the creation of the world and the reconciliation of apparent contradictions in scripture were largely shaped by this network, a network which brought him to the attention of English millenarians, some of whom would have come across him on visits to Amsterdam.

Menasseh’s name likely first became known in England through his friend, G.J. Vossius, whose son, Dionysius, was his close student. Dionysius would publish Menasseh’s *Conciliator* in Latin translation in 1633, the year of his untimely death.⁵⁶⁴ It was not until Menasseh dedicated his

⁵⁶¹ See Richard Popkin, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Indian Theory’ in Yosef Kaplan, Henry Mechoulán, & Richard Popkin, *Menasseh ben Israel and his World* (Brill, 1989), pp. 63-82; Richard Cogley, ‘Some Other Kinde of Being and Condition: The Controversy in Mid-Seventeenth Century England over the Peopling of Ancient America’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68, no. 1 (2007), pp. 35-56; Elizabeth Kenton, *Old Canaan in a New World* (New York University Press, 2020).

⁵⁶² See J.H. Copenhagen, *Menasseh ben Israel: Manuel Dias Soeiro, 1604-1657: a bibliography* (Misgav Yerushalayim, 1990); Steven Nadler, *Menasseh ben Israel: Rabbi of Amsterdam* (YUP, 2018); Steven Nadler, ‘Spinoza and Menasseh ben Israel: Facts and Fictions’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 80, no. 4 (2019), pp. 533-554; Sina Rauschenbach, ‘Mediating Jewish Knowledge: Menasseh ben Israel and the Christian Respublica litteria’, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 102, no. 4 (Fall 2012), pp. 561-588; Lawrence J. Rabone, ‘Eschatology and the Readmission of the Jews to England, 1655-56’ PhD Thesis, University of Manchester, 2021; Richard Popkin, ‘Jewish Messianism and Christian Millenarianism’ in Perez Zagorin, *Culture and politics: from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, pp. 70-80; Benjamin Fisher, *Amsterdam’s People of the Book: Jewish Society and the Turn to Scripture in the Seventeenth Century* (Hebrew Union College Press, 2020).

⁵⁶³ Nadler, ‘Spinoza and Menasseh’, p. 537.

⁵⁶⁴ On Menasseh’s relationship to the Vossius family see F.F. Blok, *Isaac Vossius and his Circle* (Brill, 2000) p. 57-61; Menasseh ben Israel, *Conciliator, sive De convenientia locorum s. Scripturae, quae pugnare inter se videntur* (Amsterdam, 1633).

Hope of Israel (1650) to the English revolutionary government, however, that he would achieve true renown on these shores.⁵⁶⁵ The *Hope of Israel* is a curious work. Framed as an intervention in the English dimension of the pan-European debate as to the validity of the so-called ‘Jewish Indian theory’, the work surveys the evidence for Antonio de Montezinos’s claim that he had encountered a tribe of lost Jews living out in the Andes.⁵⁶⁶ This claim had received the enthusiastic endorsement of John Dury, a regular correspondent of Menasseh’s, who had shared it with Thomas Thorowgood who would go on to write a very influential work on the subject. Contrary to Dury’s claims, *The Hope of Israel* does not provide a ringing endorsement of the Jewish Indian theory. Whilst Menasseh acknowledged that it was certainly conceivable that one of the lost tribes of Israel had made it to North America, he was not of the view that Montezinos’s testimony could be taken as hard evidence that this was the case. He was, nonetheless, much like his English millenarian readers, thoroughly convinced that the reunification of the Jewish people and their return to the Holy Land, was close at hand and it was this shared conviction that undergirded the significance of his writings for them.⁵⁶⁷ So authoritative were Menasseh’s writings taken to be during the millenarian ferment of the 1650s that Cotton Mather noted some years later that it seemed as if almost anything was to be believed in those days ‘if a report of a *Menasseh ben Israel* could confirm it.’⁵⁶⁸

The Hope of Israel, which had been prepared for publication in English translation by one Moses Wall was the text by which most English readers would have known Menasseh ben Israel.⁵⁶⁹ Appended to this translation is a further essay, however, which appears to be Wall’s own work, by which he attempts to give his own account of the imminent ‘conversion of the Jewes’.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁵ Menasseh ben Israel, *Hope of Israel* (London, 1650).

⁵⁶⁶ For an excellent summary of this debate see Popkin, ‘Jewish Indian Theory’.

⁵⁶⁷ Menasseh, *Hope Of Israel*.

⁵⁶⁸ Cotton Mather, *Magnolia Christi Americana* (London, 1702), bk. III, p. 193.

⁵⁶⁹ Menassah ben Israel, *Spes Israel* מְקוּהַ יִשְׂרָאֵל (Amsterdam, 1650).

⁵⁷⁰ Moses Wall, ‘Considerations Upon the Point of the Conversion of the Jewes’ in Menasseh ben Israel, *Hope*, pp. 47-61.

Wall's essay makes some truly outrageous claims, chief amongst them that Moses Maimonides had come very close to endorsing Christ's Messiahship which he apparently regarded as 'so like to the Messiah' as had been seen since 'Moses his time'.⁵⁷¹ Unsurprisingly, Wall cited no source for this claim but he nonetheless pointed to it as evidence that 'their owne writers' could be mobilised to make the case for the imminent conversion of the Jews.⁵⁷²

Whilst it might be expected that Menasseh's eschatological writings would direct English readers towards the work of Moses Maimonides, whose thoughts on the subject were already accessible in their own language (thanks to Hugh Broughton) and to a much greater extent in Latin (thanks to both Générard and Coccejus), there is little evidence that that was the case. Some scholars have suggested that Menasseh played an outsized role in making Jewish scholarship available to Christian audiences, though it would seem to me that many of Menasseh's readers were content to rely on him alone to mediate their access to post-biblical Jewish texts.⁵⁷³ Whilst there might be some evidence that Boyle, for example, developed a familiarity with Maimonides through Menasseh, as Martin Mulsow has argued, this does not seem to have translated into a broader engagement with his eschatological thinking.⁵⁷⁴ The chief authority on all questions of Jewish eschatology in mid-century England then was none other than Menasseh himself, who would develop a peculiarly close relationship with that country, perhaps with a view to securing the Jews a safe haven there.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., p. 53.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ See for example Rabone 'Readmission of the Jews', p. 61.

⁵⁷⁴ See Martin Mulsow, 'Idolatry and Science: Against Nature Worship from Boyle to Rudiger, 1680-1720', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 4 (2006), pp. 697-712, p. 702.

⁵⁷⁵ See Lucien Wolf, *Menasseh ben Israel's Mission to Oliver Cromwell: Being a Reprint of the Pamphlets Published by Menasseh ben Israel to Promote the Re-admission of the Jews to England, 1649-1656* (Cambridge, 1901); Achsah Guibbory, *Christian Identity, Jews, and Israel in Seventeenth-Century England* (OUP, 2010), pp. 220-51; Jeremy Fradkin, 'Protestant Unity and Anti-Catholicism: The Irenicism and Philo-Semitism of John Dury in Context', *Journal of British Studies* 56, no. 2 (2017), pp. 273-94; Eliane Glaser, 'Reasons ... Theological, Political, and Mixt of Both: A Reconsideration of the "Readmission" of the Jews to England', *Reformation* 9, no. 1 (2004), pp. 173-203; Adam Sutcliffe, 'The Philosemitic Moment? Judaism and Republicanism in Seventeenth-Century European Thought,' in Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe, eds, *Philosemitism in History* (CUP, 2011), pp. 67-88.

Menasseh's relationships with fellow scholars have proved central to his-still-controversial historical reputation. These have been the subject of much scholarly speculation, and, no doubt, significant exaggeration.⁵⁷⁶ What is clear, however, is that he was part of a pan-European scholarly network, that he maintained close connections with the family Vossius over many years, that Grotius was a friend and that his scholarly collaborations with millenarians John Dury and Henry Jessey played no small part in securing the readmission of the Jews to England. In 1985, a major conference on Menasseh and his relationships was held in Israel, leading to the publication of a compendium of essays, which explore his life and thought in all its fascinating diversity.⁵⁷⁷ These assess his political views, his relation to broader currents of seventeenth-century millenarianism, especially his contributions to the development of the Jewish Indian theory and his contributions to the Dutch Sephardic colonisation movement. What neither this volume, nor indeed subsequent work on Menasseh Ben Israel by Steven Nadler and Sina Rauschenbasch can provide is an account of Menasseh's English critics.⁵⁷⁸ From the extant literature of the subject one could almost be forgiven for thinking that all England was enraptured by the writings of this relatively obscure Dutch Rabbi. Whilst Menasseh's low standing within his community is well established, what is less well known is that at least one major English scholar, Pococke, took it upon himself to undermine the reputation that he had established for himself as the leading authority on all things Jewish in both England and the Netherlands.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁶ See Steven Nadler, 'Spinoza and Menasseh ben Israel: Facts and Fictions', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (October 2019), pp. 533-554.

⁵⁷⁷ Kaplan, Mechoulam, & Popkin (eds.), *Menasseh ben Israel*.

⁵⁷⁸ Sina Rauschenbach, *Judaism for Christians: Menasseh ben Israel (1604-1657)* (Lexington Books, 2019); Steven Nadler, *Menasseh: Rabbi of Amsterdam* (YUP, 2018).

⁵⁷⁹ On Jewish views of Menasseh see Popkin, 'Messianism and Millenarianism', pp. 71-72.

Maimonides and the shifting interpretations of Psalm 2.7

The eighth chapter of the *Miscellaneous Notes* begins with a quotation from the Rambam's introduction to chapter 10 of Sanhedrin, which he had taken from Psalm 2.7 'you are my son'. This verse, according to him, indicates the closeness of the Messiah to the Lord, not his divine parentage, as Christians would have it. On Rambam's using this verse in this way, Pococke asked 'why has the Jewish view of the Messiah changed over time?'⁵⁸⁰ This question, of course, speaks to a then-common assumption amongst Christian scholars that those Jews who rejected Christ had subsequently defined their conception of the Messiah in order to justify his rejection. This was an assumption that Broughton had made as to Maimonides's motives. He suspected that Maimonides's account of the conditions under which the Messiah could come was nothing more than an attempt to 'corner' Christian interlocutors.⁵⁸¹ Pococke was not content, however, to simply assume that all Jewish accounts of the Messiah were motivated purely by an anti-Christian animus. It was his view that where this might be the case, proof must be sought. The search for such proof was often fraught with difficulty, however, because the Jewish texts to which Christians had access would often have been heavily censored. For Pococke, such censorship not only failed to eliminate the 'blasphemies of the Jews' but, in fact, promoted it, as the secret correspondences of Jews, would not, unlike their published works, be met with the refutations of learned Christians.⁵⁸²

In presuming Jewish views of the Messiah to be dangerously anti-Christian, censors, who often crossed out entire passages of works such as *Hilkebot Melakhim* (see figure two) which directly contradicted Christian dogmas, had made it very difficult for learned Christians to make the case for Christianity. This section of the *Mishneh Torah*, which had been translated in part by

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 239: "De Messia a Judaeis antiquis expositus, quare a recentioribus alio tractetur."

⁵⁸¹ Hugh Broughton, *A Comment Upon Cobeletb* (Amsterdam, 1605), p. 43.

⁵⁸² Pococke, 'Miscellaneous Notes', p. 322: "blasphemias Judaeorum."

Broughton, had, thanks to the work of censors, been interpreted as an implicitly anti-Christian text, though as manuscript evidence collated by Pococke revealed, Maimonides's antipathy towards Christianity was actually very explicit. In 11.6 he had stated clearly that he saw the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfilment of the prophecy in Daniel 11.14 'the vulgar among your people shall exalt themselves, but they shall stumble'. Broughton's translation of *Hilkhot Melakhim* had simply left out the offending *halakha* in both the Hebrew rendering of the text and its English translation. The book from which Broughton was working either did not contain this crucial passage (see figure two) or had had been edited such that it did not appear (see figure three). Pococke, in the eighth chapter of the *Miscellaneous Notes*, identified that the two most prominent editions of *Hilkhot Melakhim* to have been published in Latin misrepresented *halakha* 11.6 likely on account of their reliance upon badly distorted manuscripts.⁵⁸³ His meticulous marshalling of manuscript evidence allowed him to demonstrate the extent to which Maimonides was able to reject, explicitly and in writing, the core tenets of the Christian faith. He patently saw no need to carefully manipulate the conditions which would have to be met in order for a Messiah to be recognised so as to construct for himself the grounds upon which to reject Christ. Christ was, like Muhammed after him, in the view of Maimonides, merely a precursor to the Jewish Messiah, who would unite the world in the service of the one true God.⁵⁸⁴ In burying the evidence for Maimonides's publicly stated opinions, the Church had done the Republic of Letters, and by extension, itself, a great disservice. It had made it impossible to correct the erroneous doctrines of the Jews by inexpertly removing all references to those doctrines. It was his contention that a careful analysis of Maimonides's eschatological writings, properly contextualised, could play a vital role in recovering the emergence of the Jewish theological context within which Christianity had emerged.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., pp. 249-250.

⁵⁸⁴ *Hilkhot Melakhim* 11.7

The Perils of censorship – Kimchi and Rashi on the Prophets and the Psalms

The Edward Pococke that emerges in the eighth chapter of the *Miscellaneous Notes*, whilst a convicted Christian, feels remarkably familiar to the modern historian. Pococke's task in this chapter was to demonstrate the ways in which Jewish interpretations of biblical texts of eschatological significance had evolved over time, taking care to emphasise the role that censors had played in perverting, or indeed mutilating, them. His starting point was Maimonides's introduction to the tenth chapter of Sanhedrin in which his thirteen principles of Jewish faith are outlined. Pococke, in his granular, meticulous style chose to begin his discussion of the Jewish messianic hope with an investigation into Maimonides's characterisation of a single biblical verse, which is cited in the preamble to the thirteen principles, Psalm 2.7, 'you are my son, I conceived you today'. This verse is of tremendous significance for Christians, for whom it points to Christ's sonship. For Maimonides it was better understood as a testament to the close relationship between the Messiah and God. For Pococke, Maimonides's interpretation of the verse, though comprehensible, left out its all-important history.⁵⁸⁵ In this case, Pococke argued, the historic Jewish interpretation of the verse as relating to the Messiah, had been largely abandoned by Jews who recognised its significance for Christianity. The Catholic Church, in its overzealous censoriousness, had sought to systematically remove all references to the abandonment of this prior interpretation, which had resulted in the impression that it had never existed.

Whilst waiting for the printing of the *Porta Mosis*, Pococke embarked on a history of the interpretation of this verse. That history would eventually become the eighth chapter of the *Miscellaneous Notes*. Pococke first expressed his intentions to write it in a letter to John Selden, from whom he requested information 'concerning the first institution of inquisitors for a review

⁵⁸⁵ Pococke, 'Miscellaneous Notes', pp-316-317.

of the Jewes writings and correcting or castrating them'.⁵⁸⁶ The resultant chapter offers a very interesting argument for the re-examination of original manuscripts, whose meaning had been obscured by the mutilations of the inquisitors. It was Pococke's contention that far from undermining the case for Christianity, access to Jewish tradition, might, in surprising ways, lend succour to its cause. This conviction of Pococke's speaks to the broader intentions behind the *Porta Mosis*, a faithful reprinting of much of Maimonides's commentary on the Mishnah from original manuscripts which had been exclusively in the hands of the Jews of the Arab world until they reached Pococke. He could therefore rest assured that he was transmitting the words of Maimonides faithfully. The need for such work, Pococke argued, was driven by the 'frequent complaint' of scholars that the Hebrew manuscripts to which they had access were 'censored and mutilated by inquisitors', so much so, that they were often unable to make sense of them.⁵⁸⁷ This, Pococke argued, was not just a problem for scholarship, but for the Christian faith, which was being denied much needed opportunities to defend itself against 'the blasphemies of the Jews'.⁵⁸⁸

Pococke believed himself to be uniquely placed to uncover that which the Catholic Church had attempted to hide. Thanks to a number of manuscripts, 'rightly called Laudian', as well his own, which still bore the marks of the censor's pen, he was in a position to identify exactly where references to Jesus had been removed from Jewish texts.⁵⁸⁹ The manuscripts in his possession, he claimed, could be restored 'from the surviving traces of letters', which censors had either scrubbed out or covered over.⁵⁹⁰ In highlighting that which censors had hidden from history, Pococke wished to reveal to those 'into whose hands only printed books come', the limitations

⁵⁸⁶ Edward Pococke to John Selden, July 21st, 1654, Bodleian Library, MS Selden supra 109 f. 473r.

⁵⁸⁷ Pococke, 'Miscellaneous Notes', p. 322: Frequens est in ore hominum querela, Inquisitorum opera castrata atque mutilata esse *Hebraeorum* scripta, adeo ut sensus saepe haud integer fluat.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.: "Blasphemias *Judaeorum*."

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.: "quorum alter *Laudianus* merito appellatur, ab eo cujus singulari munificentiae ipsum cum millenis aliis debet Academia *Oxoninensis*."

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.: "Literarum vestigiis restitui possint."

of those books and in doing so he was making a case for the kind of scholarship he was engaged in in the *Porta Mosis* and beyond.⁵⁹¹

For Pococke, it was evident that the Jews had chosen to suppress their original interpretation of Psalm 2.7 in order to undermine the belief in Christ's divinity. That this was not better known was the fault of the censoriousness of the Catholic Church, which had altered so many Jewish texts to such an extent that their original meanings were now unrecoverable. Rashi, Pococke observed, had revealed that Psalm 2.7 was historically understood to refer to the Messiah. He had stated very clearly that this interpretation was not a Christian invention but a Talmudic one.⁵⁹² According to David Kimhi, whose words had been frequently distorted, the Psalm was far better understood as a reflection by David upon his own experiences of kingship.⁵⁹³

Pococke's manuscript copy of Rashi's commentary on the Psalms revealed that this interpretation of the verse was of a rather recent vintage.⁵⁹⁴ Rashi was recorded there as saying that the rabbinic meaning of the verse had been altered in order to 'answer the heretics' (לתשובות המינים). What Rashi meant by this, according to Pococke, was that the Jews abandoned a traditional interpretation of Psalm 2 in order to remove that same interpretation from the armoury of the Christians.⁵⁹⁵ This proved to him that for contemporary Jews truth mattered less than did undermining the dogmas of the Christian faith to the extent that even their own traditions could be cast aside if these were judged overly favourable to Christ's Messiahship.⁵⁹⁶ Interestingly, this comment of Rashi's, which revealed something of the extent of Jewish exegetical manipulations, had not been printed in either Buxtorf's *Rabbinic Bible* or the more

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.: "ad quorum manus non alii quam codices impressi pervenerint."

⁵⁹² *Berakoth* 7b.

⁵⁹³ Pococke, 'Miscellaneous Notes', p. 239.

⁵⁹⁴ Rashi, *Commentary on the Prophets and on the Writings*, 1201-1225, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley Or. 142, 159v.

⁵⁹⁵ Pococke, 'Miscellaneous Notes', pp. 315-316: "dum nobis tela quibus veritatem propugnemus eripere conatur, ea adversariorum contra ipsam militantium manibus excutit."

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

recent of the same published in Venice.⁵⁹⁷ This, for Pococke, pointed to the perils of censorship. The Catholic Church had made the task of defending Christian orthodoxy that much harder by destroying crucial evidence in its favour.⁵⁹⁸

Socinianism, Pococke argued, was an outgrowth of the overzealous censoriousness of the Church of Rome. The Socinian claim that the figure of Jesus did not appear in Jewish writings, was a direct result of his having been systematically removed from the Jewish historical record by the inquisitors.⁵⁹⁹ For Pococke, this one example of a Jewish biblical interpretation which could offer strong support to Christ's Messiahship having been abandoned by the Jews on those grounds, pointed to the possibility that there could be many more such examples. These, however, thanks to the Catholic heresy-hunting had thus been lost to history, and, as such, the anti-Christian intentions behind them, had been achieved. It was now very difficult to demonstrate with any degree of certainty that Christ conformed to Jewish messianic expectations as these expectations had been re-interpreted as a response to the rise of Christianity. Evidence of such reinterpretations would prove vital, not just to combatting 'the blasphemies of the Jews', but also to mitigating the threat posed by Socinianism to the typological method in its entirety.⁶⁰⁰ The evidence Pococke assembled as to the reasons why the Jews had decided not to interpret Psalm 2.7 as a reference to the Messiah thus served as strong evidence for the kind of work he had attempted in the *Porta Mosis*, the careful reconstruction of Jewish texts from original, unredacted manuscripts which would enable Christians to see clearly where rabbinic Judaism had diverged from its ancient antecedent.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 318: "editionibus non occurrit; fatendum nec in editione *Basileensi* a Clarissimo *Buxtorfio* adornata, nec in *Venetis*."

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 318-319.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 322: "Blasphemias *Judaeorum*."

To demonstrate the application of his method to the question at hand, which was the evolution of the Jewish conception of the Messiah, Pococke chose to focus on the commentaries of David Kimhi, more broadly, manuscript copies of which had been heavily censored. He would go on to cite several cases in the published writings of David Kimhi, where the author's sincerely held beliefs in Christ's mere humanity and thus the idolatrousness of Christianity, had been obscured by censors, giving the impression that Kimhi had little, or perhaps nothing at all, to say on the subject of Christ's Messiahship. Whilst Pococke was of the opinion that the motives of the censors may have been pure, he set out to prove that their actions had had dire consequences for the Republic of Letters.⁶⁰¹ There was now as much demand for the recovery of original manuscripts as there had once been for their expurgation.⁶⁰²

Unsurprisingly, it was Kimhi's comments on the Book of Isaiah which Pococke chose to centre in his analysis. These provide us with a number of examples of Christian biblical interpretations which Kimhi had explicitly rejected, only for evidence of this to have been censored out, giving the impression that he had no knowledge of them. Pococke was lucky enough to have in his possession Archbishop Laud's manuscript copy of Kimhi's comments on the Psalms and the Prophets.⁶⁰³ The first seven leaves of the manuscript had been mysteriously removed, only to have been reinserted later, likely preserved away from the prying eyes of censors, further evidence as to the threats posed by censorship to scholarship.⁶⁰⁴ This manuscript afforded Pococke a perspective on Kimhi that few others were privy to. It revealed his deep knowledge of Christian scriptural interpretation, which, he enthusiastically rejected at every turn.

On Isaiah 2.18, he had written:

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Ibid. p. 321: "non minori ardore jam flagrent nonnulli ea videndi quae sublata sunt, quam olim alii eadem tollendi."

⁶⁰³ Bodleian MS. Laud Or. 273.

⁶⁰⁴ Pococke 'Miscellaneous Notes', p. 32.1

עוד יש בקצה המזרח עובדי אלילים ועוד יחשבו הנוצרים גם הם עובדי אלילים שהם משתחווים ועובדים לצלם ישו הנוצרי, ואז בימות המשיח כל האלילים יכרתו עד גמירא

There are still those in the far East regions who worship idols. The Christians, furthermore, should also be considered idolaters because they prostrate themselves and worship the image of Jesus of Nazareth. In the future messianic era, all idols will be excised until they cease completely.

The censored version of this sentence was published in the rabbinic bibles of both Bomberg and Buxtorf. It reads:

היום עוד יש בקצה המזרח עובדי אלילים ועוד יחשבו גם הם עכו"ם שהם משתחווים ועובדים לצלם, ואז בימות המשיח כל האלילים יכרתו עד גמירא

There are still those in the Eastern regions who worship idols and they are also still considered idol worshippers because they prostrate themselves and worship before an image and in the messianic era all idols will cease completely

Kimhi's explicit reference to Christianity, having been scrubbed out by censors, as it was in the case of Laud's manuscript copy of the text (see figure one), was nowhere to be found in the printed editions of the work, leaving readers with the impression that Kimhi understood the term idol worshippers עובדי אלילים (worshippers of gods) to mean Pagan polytheists, not orthodox Christians. Kimhi himself had been very clear. Christianity was no less idolatrous than paganism and would therefore disappear along with it upon the arrival of the Messiah. Indeed, a

mark of the Messiah's coming would be the decline of the Christian religion, as Kimhi noted on Isaiah 2.20:

גם יש בזה הפסוק רמז לאמונת הנוצרים שיכפרו אז באמונותיהם ויאמר איש אל אחיו חדלו לכם כי מן האדם ולא אשר עבדתם ולא אלוה כאשר חשבתם אלא נשמה היתה באפיו כאשר אם כן במה נחשב הוא

There is also in this verse a hint of the belief of the Christians who shall repent of their faith and a man shall say to his brother 'desist for you because he whom you served is the son of man and not God, as you believed, but there was a soul in his nostrils, and if this is so, how is he thought of?'

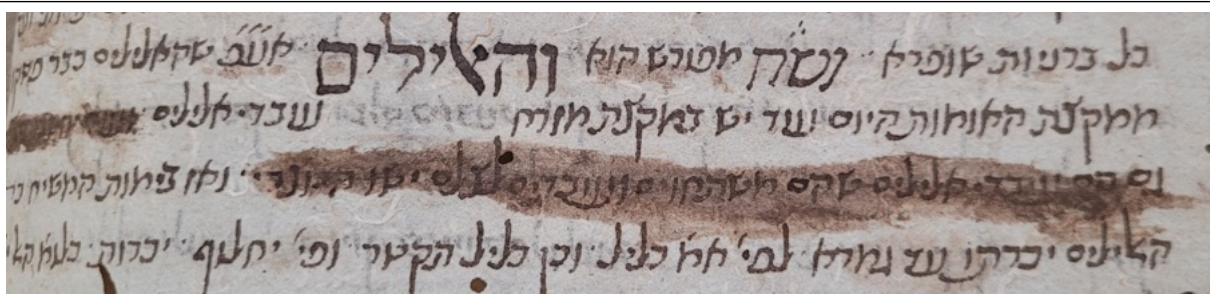


Figure one: Bodleian Library, MS. Laud. Or. 273. 51.

These lines too do not appear unredacted in printed additions of the text, which read:

גם יש בזה הפסוק רמז ויאמר איש אל אחיו חדלו לכם מן האדם אשר עבדתם ולא כאשר חשבתם אלא היתה כאשר אם כן נחשב הוא

There is also in this verse a hint and a man shall say to his brother 'desist from the man whom you have served and is not as you believed and if this is so how is he thought of?'

The censor had here not only removed all references to Christianity from Kimhi's comment but he had removed the sentence's meaning along with it. What does the verse hint at? Who was not

how he is thought of? It was impossible to understand Kimhi's interpretation of the Book of Isaiah without the emphasis he had placed therein on the idolatrousness of Christianity. Censorship had hidden Jewish antipathy toward Christianity from view. It had also risked covering up legitimate biblical interpretations with it, which, in turn, gave quarter to Socinians, who doubted the Trinity on account of its marked absence from Jewish scriptural interpretation. Anti-trinitarians had denied 'Christ's eternal existence and shared essence with God the Father' on the grounds that these doctrines appeared not in 'Jewish writings', but if, as Pococke had proved in the cases of Isaiah 2.18 and 2.20, those Jewish writings had deliberately excluded certain of 'their ancient interpretations' so as 'not to concede too much to Christians', then the Socinian position was 'seems to collapse entirely'.⁶⁰⁵

The effect of Chapter 8 of the *Miscellaneous Notes* is to demonstrate to the reader the virtues of the kind of work Pococke was engaged in in the *Porta Mosis*. It demonstrates the vulnerability of scholars to the twin evils of Jewish exegetical manipulations and Catholic censoriousness which, unbeknownst to most contemporary scholars, were being perpetuated by influential editions of key texts. Thus, evidence of the elimination of traditional Jewish scriptural interpretations, which might potentially lend support to the Christian cause, had been eliminated. Whilst Rashi had, in Pococke's view, most unjustly branded the Christian faith with the label of 'heresy', he had also done her a great service in revealing the legitimacy as well as the antiquity of her interpretation of Psalm 2.7.⁶⁰⁶ Accurate renderings of Jewish commentaries, when properly contextualised, could therefore, far from undermining Christian faith, actually serve to strengthen it. Anti-trinitarian arguments, such as those put to 'that most noble man Joseph de Voisin' were often purportedly

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 316: "eorum antiquitas interpretationibus ... objectio nullam aeternae Christi existentiae, communisque cum Deo patre essentiae, in *Judaeorum* scriptis reperiri mentionem... sed ne Christianis nimium largiantur... considerer prorsus videtur."

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.: "At nos R. *Salomoni* quamvis haereseos notam immerito nobis inurenti, & novam interpretationem cudenti, ob haec ab ipso prolata, non uno nomine gratias agimus, tum quod majorum sententia quaenam fuerit, nobis indicat, et quam ob causam eadem recentioribus minus placeat; tum quod, dum nobis tela quibus veritatem propugnemus eripere conatur, ea adversariorum contra ipsam militantium manibus excutit."

rooted 'in the Jewish books'.⁶⁰⁷ Through examining the original sources upon which these books were based, the arguments drawn from them could be swiftly undermined. Threats to orthodoxy, in Pococke's view, would not be enhanced, through the proliferation of Jewish scholarship, quite the opposite. Access to unreacted manuscripts of the kind Pococke had in his possession were the greatest weapon in the armoury of the orthodox in their fight against Socinianism.

Recovering Maimonides – the magic of manuscripts

Because the Catholic Church had taken it upon itself to remove references to Christianity from copies of Jewish texts in its possession, it had created the entirely false impression that Maimonides had never explicitly addressed the question of Christ's Messiahship. Pococke's own unredacted manuscripts showed that Maimonides had very clearly indicated that he saw Christ's pretended Messiahship as the fulfilment of the verse in Daniel 11.14 'people shall exalt themselves in an attempt to fulfil the vision, but they shall stumble'.⁶⁰⁸ He felt no need to carefully manipulate his conception of the Messiah in order to subtly undermine that of the Christians as he was very much willing to argue in explicit opposition to the Gospel narratives. Pococke did not believe, however, that Maimonides's clearly stated opposition to Christianity meant that Christians should reject his analysis out of hand. On the contrary, he identified Maimonides as an authority on Judaism, acceptable to both Christians and Jews. Whilst his writings could be used to undermine Christian biblical interpretations, they might also serve to buttress these and so Christians would do well to pay careful attention to these.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid: *Nobilissimus Virum. Josephum de Voisin*"; See Joseph de Voisin, *De Sanctissima Trinitate adversus Disceptationem Haeretici* (Paris, 1647), sig. Yiiiijr-Yivjv: "Iudaeorum libris."

⁶⁰⁸ Pococke, 'Miscellaneous Notes', pp. 343-344.

In order to properly understand Maimonides's conception of the Messiah on his own terms, one could not just rely on the available printed editions of *Hilkhot Melakhim* or the thirteen principles. One had to return to the writings of the author himself. As Pococke wrote in his introduction to the *Porta Mosis* 'it is well known that it is far better to consult the sources of the authors themselves rather than the streams of interpreters'.⁶⁰⁹ And, of course, where those interpreters did not themselves have access to reliable source material, this was all the more vital.

Génébrard's translation of chapters 11 and 12 of *Hilkhot Melakhim* was motivated by his desire to uncover 'what kind of history of Christ Jews may anticipate'.⁶¹⁰ Johannes Coccejus's translation of the same was placed within the broader context of his translations of the Talmudic tractates, *Sanhedrin* and *Maccoth*.⁶¹¹ Both authors were profoundly concerned with Jewish ignorance as to Christ's Messiahship, with Coccejus attributing this to their lies, wickedness and atheism and Genebrard claiming that 'the miserable condition of this nation' was its result.⁶¹² Pococke strongly objected to this approach. Whilst he acknowledged that it should come as no surprise that Jews were willing to reject interpretations of the scriptures fundamental 'to the establishment of the Christian faith', he felt that it was the responsibility of the believing Christian to defend such interpretations on the basis of textual evidence.⁶¹³ It was his view that Christians had traditionally been too lenient in this respect, granting Jews 'concessions that they neither deserved to claim nor could effectively rebut,' by refusing to engage with their anti-Christian polemics.⁶¹⁴ The notion that the virgin birth of the Messiah, for example, was prophesied in Jeremiah 31.22, which was met with mere derision by Jews, deserved to be

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., sig. **3v: "Quanto autem satius sit Autorum fontes quam interpretum rivulos adire, nemini ignotum est."

⁶¹⁰ Gilbert Génébrard, *Hebraeorum Breve Chronicon* (Paris, 1569), pp. 2-3: "Ut qualem Christi historiam futura putent Iudaei."

⁶¹¹ Johannes Coccejus, *Duo Tituli thalmudici* (Amsterdam, 1629), pp. 363-365, p. 367, p. 368, pp. 372-373, pp. 381-383.

⁶¹² Ibid., pp. 372-373; Génébrard, *Chronicon*, pp. 2-3: "si hodiernus status miserabilis istius gentis."

⁶¹³ Pococke, 'Miscellaneous Notes', pp. 344-345: "Haud certe mirum est a Judaeis explodi quamlibet interpretationem, quae ad Christianorum fidem stabiliendam faciat."

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.: "Vereor enim ne nimis aliquando faciles hac in parte fuerint nostri, eaque illis indulserint, quae nec ipsi sibi vindicare nec eludere poterant."

defended, lest Jews be allowed to assume that Christians had no basis for it.⁶¹⁵ As Leonard Twells put it, it was Pococke's contention that in failing to respond to Jewish attacks, prior authorities, chief amongst them John Calvin, 'gave up to the adversaries of Christianity'.⁶¹⁶ Despite, or perhaps, because of, the evidence he had personally uncovered of Jewish interpretations of passages 'commonly adduced to confirm faith in Christ' it was his view that such interpretations warranted scrutiny.⁶¹⁷ Christians should be confident in their interpretations of the prophets and the psalms. They should be able to 'weigh the testimonies presented for confirming the truth of Christ' in dialogue with the writings of learned Jews, whose 'false glosses', could and should be thereby exposed.⁶¹⁸ In taking seriously the scholarship of Jewish commentators and *halakhists*, the case for Christ's Messiahship would be greatly strengthened. In failing to make that case, Christians warranted the scorn of their Jewish adversaries.⁶¹⁹

To stand up to their adversaries, Christians were required to engage with the Jewish interpretations of the scriptures that were particularly important to them. This was the virtue of Pococke's manuscript collection. It gave him access to the unvarnished truth of Maimonides's, and indeed, Kimhi's and Rashi's anti-Christian animus. It was only with access to such evidence that Christians could take advantage of their superior arguments by putting them to those very Jews who presently dismissed them out of hand. As Pococke put it rather poetically 'the soldier is equally to be blamed whether he attacks the enemy with a lead sword or, having obtained a sharp one, allows it to be shaken off his hands by the laughter of another.'⁶²⁰ Christians, in his

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 344-345.

⁶¹⁶ Leonard Twells, 'The Lives of Dr. Edward Pococke' in Leonard Twells, *The Theological Works of the Learned Dr. Pococke* (London, 1740), p. 45.

⁶¹⁷ Pococke, *Miscellaneous Notes*, pp. 249-250: viz. "ne si locum Scripturae aliquem ex iis quae ad fidem in Christum confirmandam adduci soleant, aliter exponent saeculorum citeriorum Judaei, ideo ipsum statim tanquam minus huic rei idoneum missum faciamus; cum quibus aatribus ea omnia nobis eripere conentur illi viderimus."

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 348-349: "Ponderentur quae proferuntur ad veritatem Christi confirmandam testimonia."

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., pp. 343-349: "Aeque culpandus est miles qui vel gladio plumbeo hostem aggreditur, vel acuto nactus, eum sibi manibus risu alterius excuti patiatur."

view, had no reason to fear the scorn of the Jews and should thereby proceed confidently to a full and frank examination of their biblical interpretations.

Neither Coccejus nor G nebrard, in their translations of *Hilkbot Melakbim* had worked with unredacted manuscripts, as their renderings of 11.6, reveal. This *halakha*, in the original, began as follows:

אף ישוע הנצרי, שדימה שיהיה משיח

Concerning Jesus of Nazareth (who was seen to be/who imagined he would be/who gave the impression of being) the Messiah

Pococke translated the above as follows:

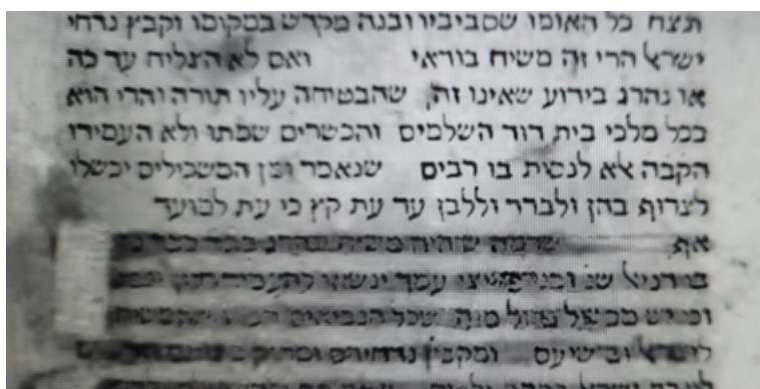
Etiam Jesus Nazarenus *qui visus est* Messias

Concerning Jesus of Nazareth who was seen to be the Messiah

Because numerous manuscript copies of *Hilkbot Melakbim* had been edited such that these lines did not appear, it was entirely possible that neither Coccejus nor G nebrard had seen what Maimonides had actually written. See for example the Venetian manuscript copy of the work from 1480, which is held by the British Library (Figure 2). This shows the offending passage redacted with the words ישוע הנצרי (Jesus of Nazareth) having been very deliberately scrubbed out.

Figure 2

Mishneh Torah, 1480, Venice BL c. 50. e10.



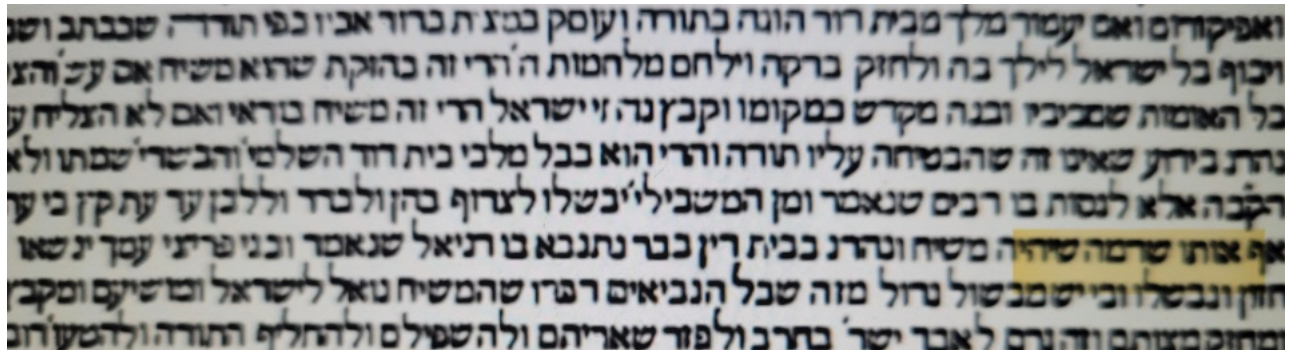
Their translations indicate that they, unlike Pococke, were likely not working from unredacted manuscripts. Pococke would certainly have had access to Laud's copy of *Hilkebot Melakhim*, which remains in the Bodleian to this day, within which the name of Jesus of Nazareth is given (see figure 4). Both G enebrard and Coccejus would likely have been working from printed editions of the *Mishneh Torah*, most likely the Venetian of 1574-75 (see figure 3), within which the first line of *halakha* 11.6 reads thus:

אף אותו שדמה שיהיה משיח

Concerning **he** (who was seen to be/who imagined he would be/who gave the impression of being) the Messiah

Figure 3

Mishneh Torah Venice, 1574-5, BL 1918.d.5.



This would explain the translations offered by Génébrard and Cocejus.

Coccejus: Etiam de illo, qui se putavit fore Christum.⁶²¹

But concerning **he** who believed himself to be the Christ

Génébrard: De illo autem qui Christus existimatur (nostrum christum intelligit)⁶²²

But concerning **he** who is believed to be the Christ (he understands our Christ)

Both authors were not aware that Maimonides's had addressed the question of Christ's Messiahship very directly. Their translations imply that Maimonides merely hinted at Christianity here, when, in fact, he confronted it head on. Maimonides was very clear as to the role played by Christianity in the unfolding of history; it was a waystation en-route to the coming of the true Messiah, who would only return when the world was filled with observance of *Mitzvot* (MT

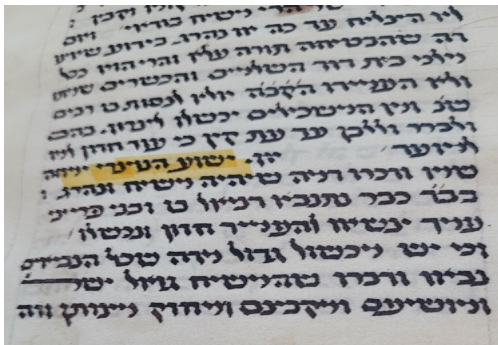
⁶²¹ Coccejus, *Sanhedrin Et Maccoth*, pp. 363-365.

⁶²² Génébrard, *Chronicon*, p. 49.

Melakhim 11. 7-8). Christianity was to be viewed as part of the process outlined in Zephaniah 3.9 whereby all people would be transformed through a collective embrace of the one true God.

Figure 4

Ms. Laud. Or. 159. 174l.



It is also notable that both Coccejus and G enebrard chose to render the Hebrew word משיח *Messiah* in Latin as ‘Christus’, as Broughton had done, whereas Pococke preferred the more neutral, and more faithful *Messias*. Pococke’s using the Hebrew term as opposed to the Greek is significant for its indication that Jewish beliefs about the Messiah could not be easily translated into Christian conceptions of the same. This does at least appear to have been somewhat influential with Early English Books Online reporting a spike in the usage of the term, ‘Messiah’, which appears in 576 records in the 1650s, up from just 298 records in the preceding decade. Whilst this is partially due to the millenarian fervour of those years, it is worth noting that these decades did not see a major increase in the publication of the word ‘Christ’, which nonetheless rose from 4479 records in the 1640s to 4753 records in the 1650s. More specifically, however, Pococke’s usage of the term ‘Messiah’ as a translation of the Hebrew word משיח, was followed by those who cited him on this question, including Richard Baxter, Henry Hammond and John Owen.⁶²³ In using the term ‘Messiah’ instead of ‘Christ’, Pococke was distinguishing clearly

⁶²³ See for example John Owen, *Of the divine original, authority, self-evidencing light, and power of the Scriptures. With an answer to that enquiry, how we know the Scriptures to be the Word of God* (London, 1659), p. 239, p. 255, p. 258; Henry Hammond, *A paraphrase and annotations upon the books of the Psalms* (Oxford, 1659), p. 119, p. 234, p. 254, p. 330, p. 349, p. 402, p.

between the Jewish conception of the ‘Messiah’ and the Christian conception of the same. It was his contention that matters eschatological were ‘more clearly transmitted in the Gospel than they were in the Law’, and, as such, references to the ‘Messiah’ in Jewish texts, did imply all that was meant by the word ‘Christ’.⁶²⁴

In this chapter of the *Miscellaneous Notes* Pococke revealed Judaism to have been far more hostile to Christianity than many of his contemporaries had supposed. Menasseh, who had explicitly avoided criticising Christianity, had given rise to a new perception of Jews as relatively susceptible to Christian truths.⁶²⁵ Pococke sought to show that such a perception was only tenable on account of the overzealous censoriousness of the inquisitions, which had made it very difficult for Christians to access unredacted manuscript copies of major works of Jewish theology, robbing them of useful knowledge, whilst failing to achieve their stated aims. For the eradication of references to ‘Jewish blasphemies’, now meant that Christians were in no position to offer thorough refutations of these.⁶²⁶

Whilst Pococke entitled his *Miscellaneous Notes* as just that, miscellaneous, it is my contention that in the eighth chapter of the same, he was developing a justification of the scholarly method that underlay the entire edifice entitled the *Porta Mosais*. The reconstruction of Jewish texts from original manuscripts would serve to correct for many of the misunderstandings of Judaism which had crept in on account of Jewish misrepresentations and the inquisitorial censoriousness which had removed the evidence for these. That Menasseh could so easily recast Judaism as largely compatible with Christianity was on account of much as medieval Judaism’s anti-Christian

442, p. 449, p. 478, p. 542, p. 562, p. 309, p. 638, p. 655, p. 711; Richard Baxter, *A Christian directory* (London, 1673), p. 50, p. 77, p. 794, p. 825, p. 906.

⁶²⁴ Pococke, ‘Miscellaneous Notes’, p. 102: “in Evangelio magis perspicue tradita sint... quam olim in lege.”

⁶²⁵ See Menasseh ben Israel, *De termino vitae libri III* (Amsterdam, 1639), sig. a3r; for a detailed analysis of Menasseh’s reception see Sina Rauschenbach, *Judaism for Christians: Menasseh ben Israel (1604-1657)* (Lexington Books, 2012).

⁶²⁶ Pococke, ‘Miscellaneous Notes’, p. 322: “blasphemias Judaeorum”.

animus having been hidden from history. In reading this chapter, one is mindful of the significance Pococke attributed to the broader work he was then engaged with which gave scholars access to Maimonides's introductions to a number of key sections of the *Mishnah* in the 'original Arabic as written by the author himself', for the very first time.⁶²⁷ The efforts of his predecessors, Coccejus and G nebrard, he judged insufficient on account of their respective failures to 'read the very words of Maimonides', relying instead on 'printed books', which were based on redacted manuscripts.⁶²⁸ These authors had misrepresented Maimonides, creating the entirely false impression that to read *Hilkebot Melakchim* 11.6 as pertaining to Christ was mere 'conjecture'.⁶²⁹ Pococke was able thus to demonstrate the value of his manuscript collection for the faithful transmission of Maimonides's words, which, like those of other Jews, had been badly distorted by an army of censors.

The *Porta Mosis* represented for Pococke, a project of historical recovery. He argued that the reconstruction of Jewish texts from original manuscripts would allow for a more accurate view of the Jewish tradition to emerge. Like Lightfoot and Selden before him, Pococke justified his study of the writings of Maimonides in terms of their capacity to enliven Christians to errors, both theological and historical, that had crept into their tradition. Maimonides's *Hilkebot Melakchim* did not as Broughton's, Coccejus's and G nebrard's rendering of it had communicated, allow for the possibility that Jesus might have been the Jewish Messiah. In making this very clear to his scholarly colleagues, Pococke was revealing the deficiency of the sources they were relying upon and thus making the case for his way of working as essential to the all-important task of combatting heresy.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., sig. **3v: "Ab ipso Authore *Arabice* conscriptae fuerint."

⁶²⁸ Ibid., pp. 343-344: "quae si *Maimonidis* ipsius verba legissent... in libris impressis."

⁶²⁹ Ibid.: "ex conjectura proferre."

The Very Contemporary Significance of the *Miscellaneous Notes* – the Coming of the Messiah and the Resurrection of the Dead

As the *Porta Mosis* went to print, Pococke reflected on the thirteen principles of faith. These had a surprising resonance in an era in which many believed that the conversion of the Jews, which would presage the second coming, was close at hand. They also spoke to contemporary debates as to the scriptural evidence for the belief in a bodily resurrection.⁶³⁰ In his *Miscellaneous Notes* Pococke sought to reconstruct the Jewish approach to both matters in full, mindful of the influence of Menasseh ben Israel, who had addressed them comprehensively. Pococke argued that Maimonides had not seen fit to offer detailed explanations as to either the coming of the Messiah or the resurrection of the dead for rabbinic Judaism had transmitted these expectations in the form of general principles.⁶³¹ On this account he pointed his readers away from the vague speculations of the rabbis for the resolution of these questions and towards the, much-more-definitive statements of the Gospels, within which matters eschatological were addressed as far as was necessary for the purposes of saving faith.⁶³²

Pococke had been reluctant to address these issues of significant contemporary concern, he confessed in a letter to Selden, on account of his ‘prejudice against the dealings of Abarbanel and Manasse ben Israel’, who had written about them at length.⁶³³ Don Isaac Abarbanel was a very

⁶³⁰ See Michelle Pfeffer, ‘The Pentateuch and Immortality in England and the Dutch Republic: The Confessionalisation of a Claim’ in Dmitri Levitin and Ian Maclean (eds.), *The World of Knowledge and the Classical Tradition in the Early Modern Age* (Brill, 2021), pp. 142-176; Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time and the History of Nations* (Chicago University Press, 1984), p. 238; Frank E. Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism through Christian Eyes* (HUP, 1992), pp. 185-186; Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian* (HUP, 1998); Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (OUP, 2001), p. 611; John Gascoigne, ‘The Wisdom of the Egyptians and the Secularisation of History in the Age of Newton’ in Stephen Gaukroger (ed.), *The Uses of Antiquity: The Scientific Revolution and the Classical Tradition* (Kluwer Academic, 1991), p. 143; Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (CUP, 2010), pp. 60-62, p. 141, p. 180; Stephen Snobelen, ‘Isaac Newton, Socinianism and “The One Supreme God”’ in Martin Mulrow and Jan Rohls (eds.), *Socinianism and Arminianism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth Century Europe*, pp. 241-298.

⁶³⁰ John Owen, *Exercitations on the Epistle to the Hebrews: Also concerning the Messiah. Wherein the promises concerning him to be a spiritual redeemer of mankind, are explained and vindicated. His coming, and accomplishment of his work according to the promises, is proved and confirmed. The person, or who he is, is declared* (London, 1668).

⁶³¹ See *Melakhim* 12.2.

⁶³² Pococke, ‘Miscellaneous Notes’, p. 102.

⁶³³ Edward Pococke to John Selden, July 21st, 1654, Bodleian Library, MS Selden supra 109 f. 473r.

significant influence upon the life and thought of Manasseh ben Israel.⁶³⁴ He had responded to the Jewish expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula, where his family had lived for centuries, with the conviction that the Messianic era was close at hand.⁶³⁵ The ‘great chagrins and evils’ of the expulsion with all the cultural devastation it had entailed should be interpreted optimistically, he argued, as ‘the birth pangs of the redemption’ (חבלי משיח).⁶³⁶ Menasseh, in his own Messianic speculations, which the rabbis had historically warned against, leaned heavily upon the writings of Abarbanel.⁶³⁷ Against a backdrop of mounting millenarian expectation, which was soon to result in the readmission of the Jews to England, Pococke cautioned against Menasseh’s now-influential ‘Converso Messianism’, which, he revealed, had only a very limited basis in rabbinic literature.⁶³⁸

Pococke’s immersion in rabbinic literature in general and in the writings of Maimonides, in particular, had left him with very little patience for the kinds of totalising claims as to the dictates of ‘Jewish law’ or ‘the rabbinic tradition’ that the ‘Hebraic Maimonides’ had often been used to make. At the same time, however, these had convinced him of Maimonides’s unique authority as the ‘gravest and most serious’ of the Rabbis.⁶³⁹ The implications of Pococke’s portrayal of Maimonides as a multilingual, multicultural figure were stark, however. His Maimonides could not serve as a stand-in for the Jewish tradition as Lightfoot’s and Selden’s had. He was a product of his peculiar life journey through Muslim Spain, Morocco and finally, Egypt and his peculiar intellectual journey through Judaism, Islam and Greek Philosophy. Maimonides’s approach to Judaism was thus far from universal and, at the same time, it was judged the most reliable. He

⁶³⁴ See Rabone, ‘Readmission of the Jews’, pp. 59-60.

⁶³⁵ Isaac Abarbanel, ‘Introduction’, *Mashmia Yeshuab* (Monopoli, 1496-1498).

⁶³⁶ Ibid.: “צרות רבות ורעות”.

⁶³⁷ See Rabone, ‘Readmission of the Jews’, pp. 59-60; For a very thorough treatment of the rabbinic aversion to Messianic speculation see Abba Hillel Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel: From the First through the Seventeenth Centuries* (Macmillan, 1927), pp. 207-239.

⁶³⁸ See Matt Goldish, ‘Patterns in Converso Messianism’ in Matt Goldish and Richard Popkin (eds.), *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture* (Springer, 2001), pp. 41-63.

⁶³⁹ Edward Pococke, *A commentary on the prophecy of Malachi* (Oxford, 1677), p. 182.

had insulted many of his fellow Jews by producing a summary of Jewish law which rarely explicitly referenced the Talmud and he had also been branded a heretic by some for producing a work of Jewish philosophy which borrowed heavily from Greek and Arabic sources.

Maimonides was not unique in this respect, however. The vicissitudes of the Jewish experience, Pococke was at pains to make his readers aware, had led to a very diverse interpretative tradition and nowhere was this diversity more strongly felt than when eschatological questions were at issue. Menasseh too, as Abarbanel before him, had emerged within a particular historical and intellectual context. If Maimonides's writings had to be properly contextualised, this was all the more essential in the cases of these more recent figures whose 'credibility seems necessarily undermined', Pococke argued, by their failures to faithfully represent their own tradition.⁶⁴⁰

The Coming of the Messiah between Judaism and Christianity – the twelfth principle examined

Menasseh ben Israel dedicated the English translation of his *Hope of Israel* to the English Parliament and Council of State that the 'most renowned fathers' who constituted those bodies might be better informed as to the 'Divine truth' of the in-gathering of the exiles that was about to unfold.⁶⁴¹ Some years later, Menasseh would visit England in person in order to petition Oliver Cromwell to help bring about this in-gathering, which was expected by 'many Christians' who shared in the Jewish commitment to a 'restauration' of the Jewish people which would presage the coming of the Messiah.⁶⁴² That the Jews and Christians shared a Messianic hope that was rooted in the 'sacred traditions of Abraham' was fundamental to the influential account of

⁶⁴⁰ Pococke, 'Miscellaneous Notes', pp. 159-160: "*Abarbeneli*, vel *Manassi ben Israel* fides necessario deroganda videatur." vel *Manassi ben Israel* fides

⁶⁴¹ Menasseh ben Israel, *The hope of Israel: written by Menasseh ben Israel, an Hebrew divine and philosopher Newly extant, and printed at Amsterdam, and dedicated by the author, to the High Court of the Parliament of England, and to the councill of State* (London, 1651), sig. A3r.

⁶⁴² Menasseh ben Israel, *To His Highness The Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland. The Humble Address of Menasseh ben Israel, a Divine, and Doctor of Physick, in behalfe of The Jewish Nation* (London, 1655).

Judaism offered up by Menasseh.⁶⁴³ Menasseh's account, however, according to Pococke, was a misleading attempt at eliding the remarkable diversity of rabbinic opinion on the subject of the Messiah. He did not speculate as to Menasseh's motives though these seem to have aimed quite transparently at securing the readmission of the Jews into England.⁶⁴⁴

That Jews and Christians shared a common Messianic expectation was true in only a very general sense. As Pococke had shown in regard to the history of the interpretation of Psalm 2.7, ancient Judaism may have been much closer to Christianity than modern Jews would care to admit, though this did not mean that the conversion of the Jews was close at hand, as many of Menasseh's English readers had chosen to believe.⁶⁴⁵ Whilst confronting the irenicism of contemporary millenarianism associates, Pococke also sought to combat the kind of reflexive anti-Judaism, which had seen even such luminaries as John Calvin respond to the interpretive claims of the Jews with mere derision.⁶⁴⁶ The rabbinic tradition, he claimed, contained within it copious resources by which Christian dogma might be affirmed and therefore Christians dismissed it at their peril. Even those interpretations which might, at first glance, appear hostile to Christianity, sometimes held out the promise of its better explication

The traditional interpretation of Psalm 2 was a case in point. Whilst, as Pococke had argued, the words 'you are my son' were traditionally understood to have referred to the Messiah, this did not necessarily mean that the Jews had ever expected a Messiah whose father was the Lord God himself for the word 'son' was often used by the rabbis as a synonym for 'disciple'. Indeed, this was how Maimonides had understood Psalm 2.7, not out of some anti-Christian animus but out

⁶⁴³ Menasseh ben Israel, *De Creatione Problemata* (Amsterdam, 1635), sig. +3r: "Abrahamidum sacra".

⁶⁴⁴ Menasseh ben Israel, *To the Lord Protector*.

⁶⁴⁵ See Moses Wall, 'Considerations Upon the Point of the Conversion of the Jewes' in Menasseh ben Israel, *The hope of Israel: written by Menasseh ben Israel, an Hebrew divine and philosopher Newly extant, and printed at Amsterdam, and dedicated by the author, to the High Court of the Parliament of England, and to the councill of State*, pp. 47-62.

⁶⁴⁶ Pococke, 'Miscellaneous Notes', pp. 344-345.

of his understanding of the interchangeability between the Hebrew words בן (son) and תלמיד (disciple) as these were used in the Talmud.⁶⁴⁷ In *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 1.2, he had written ‘disciples are called sons’ (שהתלמידים קרויין בנים) and, again, in 5.12 ‘a man is obligated to take care of his disciples and to love them for they are the sons who benefit in this world and in the world to come’ (צריך אדם להיזהר בתלמידיו ולאובהבן, שהם הבנים המהנין בעולם הזה ולעולם הבא).⁶⁴⁸ On *Peab* 1.1 he had written ‘honour the fathers and the wise men, for they are [called] fathers’ (וכבוד ואבות והחכמים שהם אבות). It is therefore clear that for Maimonides, the word ‘son’ connoted discipleship as much as it connoted descent.⁶⁴⁹ It was therefore entirely legitimate to interpret Psalm 2.7, as Maimonides had, as David’s expression of his own closeness to and respect for the Lord. Whereas both Kimhi and Rashi seem very clearly to have interpreted this verse with a mind to undermining the Christian belief in the co-eternity of the Son, the same could not be said for Maimonides who did understand this verse to refer to the Messiah, just not in the same way that Christians did.

Whilst some might feel inclined to reflexively reject Maimonides’s interpretation of Psalm 2.7 as hostile to their own interpretive tradition, Pococke counselled otherwise. For far from posing a problem for Christians, this interpretation allowed for the resolution of a further issue which arose out Kimhi’s commentary on Isaiah. This was an issue which censors had attempted to get around by carefully editing the passage in question. It concerned the reference in Isaiah 53 to the ‘offspring’ (זרע) of the ‘suffering servant’, whom Christians identified with Christ. As Kimhi pointed out, the suffering servant’s having reproduced meant that he could be neither Jesus, the man, who had no children, nor God, who has no children. Understanding the term זרע to refer to disciples as opposed to children, however, did away with this problem. It would therefore

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 334

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 331-334.

behave Christians to accept that Psalm 2.7 did not necessarily imply the Messiah's divinity such that they might also understand the term 'offspring' as a synonym for 'disciples' in case. For if the offspring of the 'suffering servant' were his disciples then he could absolutely represent Jesus, who did not father children, though he certainly made disciples.⁶⁵⁰ To interpret both verses thus would be neither 'in opposition to truth' nor in opposition to 'the scholars among the Jews'.⁶⁵¹ Whilst Judaism had evolved its own distinctive biblical interpretations, Christians did themselves more harm than good by simply ignoring these.

The differences between Christianity and Judaism, for Pococke, were fundamental. Unlike Menasseh, he had nothing to gain by exaggerating the import of their common origins. Maimonides, Pococke argued, had offered 'the most serious' account of Jewish theology.⁶⁵² Judaism, as presented by him, was better understood as the predecessor to Christianity than as her antagonist. Maimonides's Judaism was an ancestral tradition, which had been accepted by Israelites at Mount Sinai, on trust, not rational conviction.⁶⁵³ This conception of Judaism, Pococke argued, underlay the thirteen principles of faith, which were notably light on detail across Maimonides's *oeuvre*. Even *Hilkhot Melakhim*, Maimonides's oft-translated account of the longed-for Messianic age, was remarkably evasive. It gave no information at all as to the identity of the Messiah or the date of his coming and further to this reaffirmed the Talmudic prohibition against Messianic speculations.⁶⁵⁴ It was hardly surprising therefore that many allusions to the coming of the Messiah which were present in the Old Testament, had been missed by the Jews, who had 'interdicted all such enquiries', not necessarily out of any anti-Christian animus but because their tradition had not furnished them with the substance of these.⁶⁵⁵ Pococke approved

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.: "semen de discipulis, seu doctrinae semine prognatis filii, intelligamus."

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.: "nos vero nec contra rei veritatem nec contra Doctiorum apud *Judaeos*."

⁶⁵² Pococke, *Commentary on Malachi*, p. 182.

⁶⁵³ Ibid., p. 165.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 114.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 151.

this rabbinic reticence to make definitive pronouncements as to the coming of the Messiah as ‘in accordance with the truth of the Gospel’.⁶⁵⁶ Maimonides’s very limited account of the Jewish Messiah was taken by Pococke as emblematic of the rabbis’ entirely-justified aversion to Messianic speculations, which neither Menasseh ben Israel, nor his great mentor, Abarbanel, seem to have shared in.

Because the Jews had inherited only the vaguest of Messianic hopes, where they sought to articulate these, they often did so ‘without any ground in Scripture’ or even in ‘reason’.⁶⁵⁷

Pococke thus relied upon Maimonides to disaggregate the sincere from the spurious. Where a particular theological claim was not ‘supported by the authority of Maimonides’, it was dismissed.⁶⁵⁸ This was very much the case with Menasseh’s claim that the Jewish tradition had admitted of two Messiahs, the first, the Messiah Ben Joseph and the second, the ultimate Messiah Ben David.⁶⁵⁹ Rabbi Tanchum had made a similar claim in the name of Maimonides, in whose writings this notion was, in fact, entirely absent.⁶⁶⁰ In a sermon addended to his commentary on Malachi, Pococke excoriated those rabbis who had transmitted this doctrine ‘to their successors as if had been received from the Patriarchs’.⁶⁶¹ Maimonides’s thirteen principles of faith had made it abundantly clear that there would be ‘no Messiah for the Jewish people except someone born of David’ and so an Ephraimite Messiah was ‘contrary to the unshakeable foundations of the Jewish faith’ and was thus ‘most likely a later invention from a long time after Christ’.⁶⁶² Maimonides, ‘the wise rabbi’, in the view of Pococke regarded the notion of the ‘Messiah Ben Joseph as a putrid thing’, hence he declined to mention it in his delineation of ‘all

⁶⁵⁶ Pococke, ‘Miscellaneous Notes’, p. 114: “sententia veritati *Evangelicae* consona.”

⁶⁵⁷ Pococke, *Commentary on Malachi*, p. 151, p. 182.

⁶⁵⁸ Pococke, ‘Appendix’, *Malachi*, p. 206.

⁶⁵⁹ Menasseh ben Israel, *The Hope of Israel*, pp. 64-67.

⁶⁶⁰ Pococke, ‘Miscellaneous Notes’, p. 219.

⁶⁶¹ Pococke, ‘Appendix’, *Malachi*, p. 203: “quasi a Patribus accepta posteris fuerit.”

⁶⁶² Ibid.: “Maimonide, inter fidei eorum articulos de quibus dubitare, nescit, locum habet, *Non futurum Israeli regem nisi Davide oriundum*... fidei Judaicae fundamentis plane contrariam.”; Ibid., p. 206: “multis post Christum ea passum annis, effectum”.

matters related to the Messiah' in *Hilkhot Melakhim*.⁶⁶³ The reality of the Jewish Messianic hope, as per *Hilkhot Melakhim* 12.2, was that its derivation from 'the words of the prophets' was 'debated among the sages', there being 'no established tradition regarding these matters'.⁶⁶⁴ On Maimonides's very great authority then Pococke concluded that it was not possible to establish a comprehensive picture of the events of the coming of the Messiah on the basis of either the Old Testament, or the rabbinic tradition. It was to the Gospels therefore, that believers should look for such information about these matters as was available though they would do well to avoid making any predictions based on these.⁶⁶⁵

Pococke's detailed investigations into the twelfth principle of faith served to confirm that whilst Jewish texts and especially those of Maimonides, had a great deal to offer the Christian, these did not confirm Menasseh's claims as to the many points of continuity between Judaism and Christianity. The Jewish Messianic hope as it was documented by the most authoritative of the rabbis was unnamed and unknowable. Far from indicating that the 'last days' were close at hand, as Menasseh's readers asserted, the most reliable of Jewish sources offered no support at all to the millenarian agenda.⁶⁶⁶

Life after death between Judaism and Christianity - the thirteenth principle examined

Long before he had intervened in the millenarian speculations engulfing interregnum England, Menasseh ben Israel had involved himself in a related controversy which had been ignited by the

⁶⁶³ Ibid., p. 206: "Sapientem illum Rabbinum (Maimonidem intelligo) alium religionis Judaicae assertorem satis pertinacem, putidi istius Messiae Ben Joseph."

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.: "statuit ait, יהיו עד שיהיו, לא ידע אדם היאך יהיו עד שיהיו, כל אלו הדברים וכיוצא בהן לא ידע אדם היאך יהיו עד שיהיו, haec et quae eo spectant omnia nemo distincte noverit antequam exitum habuerint: obscura sunt quae a Prophetis de iis dicuntur אלא לפי הכרע הפוסקים, nec apud sapientes de illis traditio est, praeter illud quod ex scriptura inserta."

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 114.

⁶⁶⁶ Wall, 'Considerations', p. 47.

apostacy of fellow his fellow Dutch Sephardic intellectual, Uriel Da Costa. Da Costa had scandalised the Jewish community of Amsterdam by arguing for the late origins of the oral law, and with it much of what Jews took to be fundamental to their faith. Most controversially of all, he rejected the Jewish belief in the immortality of the soul on the grounds that it had no biblical basis.⁶⁶⁷ Menasseh's *De Resurrectione Mortuorum* (1636) constituted a response to Da Costa, though, as his epistle dedicatory to Laurentius Rael, former Governor of the East Indies and Albert Conrad van der Burch, Dutch envoy to Muscovy, makes clear, this was far from a minor intervention in an intercommunal conflict. Da Costa's apostacy, he argued, should concern Christians as much as it concerned Jews. For the belief in a bodily resurrection was fundamental to both traditions. The immortality of the soul, he argued, was essential to the belief in a Creator-God, who had endowed human beings with 'something divine', whereby they could come to know him.⁶⁶⁸ This belief, common to Jews and Christians, who also shared a commitment to 'the worship of the one God' and 'the subjection of ourselves to the commandments should therefore motivate them to work together in opposition to those 'Sadducees' who posed a tremendous threat to the spiritual health of the commonwealth.⁶⁶⁹ Menasseh offered a comprehensive account of the Jewish belief in the resurrection, structured around Maimonides's thirteen principles of faith, all of which, he argued, presumed a belief in the immortality of the soul.⁶⁷⁰ This won him the ire of Pococke who accused him of eliding the differences between the approaches of the various major rabbinic authorities to this most mysterious of doctrines.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁷ See David Kromhout & Irene E. Zwiep in 'God's Word Confirmed: Authority, Truth and the Text of the Early Modern Jewish Bible in Dirk van Miert (ed.), *Scriptural Authority and Biblical Criticism in the Dutch Golden Age: God's Word Questioned* (OUP, 2017), pp. 133-154, pp. 143-146; Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind* (OUP, 2002), pp. 157-181; H.P. Salomon & I.S.D. Sasson, *Uriel da Costa's Examination of the Pharisaic Traditions, supplemented by Semuel da Silva's Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul* (Brill, 1993).

⁶⁶⁸ Menasseh ben Israel, *De Resurrectione Mortuorum* (Amsterdam, 1636), sig. +2r: "aliquid divini".

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., sig. +8v: "Unum enim Deum colimus, ejus praeceptis nos subjicimus... nos contra Zaducaeos".

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., sig. +2r+8v.

⁶⁷¹ Pococke, 'Miscellaneous Notes', p. 229.

Menasseh had produced a highly idiosyncratic account of Jewish belief by which Christians were being misled, Pococke argued. According to him, what Maimonides had meant by the ‘resurrection of the dead’, had been interpreted in so many different ways that it was ‘difficult for myself or others to be satisfied when attempting to explain their doctrine’.⁶⁷² Readers should thus be sceptical of simplistic attempts to draw together the Jewish and Christian faiths in a shared eschatology, for ‘matters relating to the resurrection are more clearly stated in the Gospel than they were in the Law’.⁶⁷³

The sixth chapter of the *Miscellaneous Notes*, which is by far the longest, is dedicated to unpacking exactly what was required by the thirteenth principle of faith. What the resurrection of the dead entailed had never been clearly stated, not by Maimonides himself, nor by any of his interpreters. Indeed, Maimonides’s ambiguous account of this article had led some to claim that he was not himself entirely certain about it.⁶⁷⁴ Menasseh, on the other hand, had offered an account of the Jewish rendering of this doctrine that was not only internally consistent, but largely compatible with Christianity.⁶⁷⁵ Where Menasseh sought to stress the continuities between Judaism and Christianity, Pococke emphasised Judaism’s discontinuity with itself, especially where the most pressing matters of belief and doctrine were concerned. Through this meandering chapter, Pococke made the case for his conception of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Judaism was an ancestral tradition, given only ‘to the descendants of Abraham’, who, having been led out of Egypt by Moses, trusted him implicitly. Moses had no reason therefore to entreat the Israelites with promises of a future state. The Gospel, however, which was given to the Gentiles, was received as ‘new’ and ‘unheard-of’.⁶⁷⁶ Paul could not win Athenian souls for Christ

⁶⁷² Ibid., p. 1228: “ut vix mihi vel aliis satisfacere referendis... dum eorum doctrinam enarrandam susceperim”.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., p. 102: “In Evangelio magis perspicue tradita sint, quae ad resurrectionis articulum spectant, quam olim in Legge”.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 86-88.

⁶⁷⁵ Menasseh ben Israel, *De Resurrectione*, sig. +2r-+8v.

⁶⁷⁶ Pococke, *Miscellaneous Notes*, p. 102: “nova... inaudita fuit”.

on the basis of his prior relationship to them. He was therefore forced to ‘preach the good news about Jesus and the resurrection’.⁶⁷⁷ Maimonides’s principles of faith were rooted in the Law as it had been given on trust at Sinai. It therefore offered only the vaguest notion of an eschaton, which would be articulated much more clearly in the Gospels.

The eschatological claims of Judaism, Pococke argued, varied wildly on account of the Law’s originally having engaged with them to a very limited extent. Maimonides’s thirteen principles represented a minimal creed to which all Jews could assent. Where he had offered a fuller account of the Messianic age, in his *Hilkebot Melakhim*, he had opened himself up to the criticisms of the followers of Nachmanides. The Nachmanideans, as Joseph Albo had outlined in his *Sefer Ikkarim*, were much more mystically inclined than the Maimonideans, who had embraced what Kenneth Seeskin has described as Maimonides’s ‘deflationary Messiah’.⁶⁷⁸ Nachmanides’s miraculous conception of the Messiah appeared so familiar to Pococke that he suggested, following Abarbanel, that it had its origins in ‘Christian doctrine’.⁶⁷⁹ Pococke’s response to Nachmanides is instructive. That he implicitly deemed Maimonides’s account of the Messianic era to be more ‘Jewish’ than the mystically inflected alternative proffered by Nachmanides, is indicative of his broader conception of the differences between Judaism and Christianity.

Following Maimonides, he understood the Jewish conception of the Messiah in naturalistic terms, in contrast with the mystical and miraculous Christian conception of the same. Whilst Pococke asserted therefore that Judaism seemed to have provided ‘almost as many opinions as there were doctors’, he also felt able to distinguish between the authentic transmission of the

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid.: “Unde illud Atheniensium de Paulo, Jesum et resurrectionem praedicante.”

⁶⁷⁸ Kenneth Seeskin, ‘Maimonides and the Idea of a Deflationary Messiah’ in Michael L. Morgan and Steven Weitzman, *Rethinking the Messianic Idea in Judaism* (Indiana University Press, 2014), pp. 93-108.

⁶⁷⁹ Pococke, ‘Miscellaneous Notes’, pp. 212-213: “quod sententiam *Christianorum* doctrinae assiniorem, et quam ab ipsis partim hausisse videatur.”

Jewish tradition, which was embodied in the writings of Maimonides and its more syncretic manifestations in the writings of Nachmanides, Abarbanel and Menasseh ben Israel.⁶⁸⁰

Maimonides's account of the resurrection of the dead was expressed in particularly peculiar terms. Pococke opened his sixth chapter of the *Miscellaneous Notes* with the following quote from Maimonides's introduction to Sanhedrin 10, 'the thirteenth fundamental principle is the resurrection of the dead, which we have already explained'.⁶⁸¹ This, of course, raised the question as to where exactly Maimonides had 'already explained' this principle. Failing to answer this question, Pococke supposed that Maimonides may not have seen fit to articulate any further thoughts on the resurrection of the dead.⁶⁸² Citing Maimonides's *Maamar Tekhivat HaMetim*, he noted that many of Maimonides's co-religionists had been as puzzled as he himself was by Maimonides's claim that he had 'already explained' this article of faith.⁶⁸³ Such was their puzzlement that it would not have been unreasonable for them to have suspected that Maimonides himself was unsure as to what 'the resurrection of the dead' actually entailed.⁶⁸⁴ Maimonides's *Maamar*, attempted to clarify things, to little effect.⁶⁸⁵

In both his introduction to chapter 10 of the Mishnah in *Sanhedrin* and in *Hilkhot Teshuva*, Maimonides had expressed only a very vague belief in the resurrection of the dead.⁶⁸⁶ In his comments on *Hilkhot Teshuva* 8.1, the *Kesef Mishneh*, Rabbi Joseph Karo (1488-1575), had pointed

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 86: "ita interim ut tot fere invenias sententias, quot Doctores."

⁶⁸¹ Pococke, 'Miscellaneous Notes', p. 86: "Fundamentum decimum tertium est, resurrectionem mortuorum, quam jam explicavimus."

⁶⁸² Ibid.

⁶⁸³ Authorship of this work is debated. See Ralph Lerner, 'Maimonides's Treatise on Resurrection' *History of Religions* 23, no. 2 (1983), pp. 140-155; Naomi Vogelmann, *Maimonides' treatise on resurrection: an inquiry into its authenticity* (Ktav, 1986); J.I. Dienstag, *Eschatology in Maimonidean thought: messianism, resurrection, and the world to come: selected studies, with an introduction and bibliography* (Ktav, 1983); J.L. Teicher, 'Maimonides' treatise on Resurrection - A Literary Forgery', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 1 (1948-9), pp. 35-54; Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (PUP, 2009), pp. 165-183.

⁶⁸⁴ Edward Pococke, *Commentary on Micah* (London, 1677), pp. 49-50.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

out that Rabbi Abraham ben David, the Rabad, who was ultimately assured that Maimonides could not possibly have had any doubts at all about the world to come had, nonetheless queried his usage of the expression ‘that which the sages called the world to come’ (שקראו אותו חכמים העולם הבא). Such words implied, the Rabad had admitted, that for Maimonides ‘the world to come’ was merely an idea in the mind of the sages as opposed to an empirical reality. Abarbanel too in his *Nachalat Aboth*, Pococke commented, had expressed no small measure of bewilderment as to where exactly Maimonides had explained his thirteenth principle of faith, which warranted no sustained treatment across any of his extant writings.⁶⁸⁷ Given Maimonides’s customary emphasis on clarity his failure to explain what was meant by ‘the resurrection of the dead’.⁶⁸⁸ There could be no doubt, Pococke claimed, pointing to the *Kesef Mishneh*, Abarbanel, the Rabad and the *Maamar Tekhiyat HaMetim* itself as his witnesses, that the Rambam’s writings on this subject were replete with ambiguous expressions (דברים סתומים).⁶⁸⁹ This term was one which Maimonides himself had used in his prefatory remarks to the *Guide of the Perplexed* to connote the allegorical, figurative or metaphorical language, which was necessary for the communication of the most profound truths.⁶⁹⁰

Pococke thus concluded that Jewish eschatological thinking could do little for one’s faith in the resurrection of the dead. ‘Knowledge of its mysteries’ were the ‘unique privilege’ of Christians alone, he argued.⁶⁹¹ Whilst some Christians might hold erroneous beliefs about ‘the earthly kingdom of Christ and the saints with him’, these beliefs were most likely ‘borrowed’ from Jews intent upon undermining Christian dogmas.⁶⁹² Works such as Menasseh’s were dangerous for

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid.: “ubi alias maxime omnium dilucide, adeo ut num quod senserit totum protulerit forfan subitet qui illud scire aveat.”

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.: “Suntque ea re vera דברים סתומים.”

⁶⁹⁰ See ‘Prefatory Remarks’ *Guide for the Perplexed*.

⁶⁹¹ Pococke, ‘Miscellaneous Notes’, p. 123: “Nobis tamen vel nihil melius apud Ipsos invenisse in lucrum cedet non minimum, dum hac ratione grati agnoscere cogemur non solum resurrectionem mortuorum fiduciam esse Christianorum, sed et ejus mysteriorum scientiam unicum ipsorum privilegium, haud aliis cum ipsis commune.”

⁶⁹² Ibid., pp. 212-213: “Quod vereor ne illi fecerint qui de *Christi*, Sanctorumque cum ipso in terris regno, quo durante rebus iterum terrenis (ad meliores dudum recepti) se immisturi, tque ex iis voluptatem captaturi sint, multa

they foisted upon ill-informed Christians confounding notions which deviated from ‘the rule of perfect faith which we have received from Christ’.⁶⁹³ The writings of Maimonides, which were notably light on eschatological content were deemed by him to be the most authoritative accounts of Jewish belief.

Menasseh had argued in his *De Resurrectione Mortuorum* that a belief in the immortality of the soul underlay all thirteen of Maimonides’s principles of faith.⁶⁹⁴ His account of the resurrection of the dead differed markedly from that of Maimonides, however. His was a peculiarly physical resurrection of the dead, who, once reborn, were never again to wither and die. The reborn, according to Manasseh, would have all the normal bodily functions. In opposition to Maimonides, Nachmanides, Saadia Gaon and Abarbanel, Manasseh had argued that the attainment of immortality in the supposed ‘world to come’ would be no barrier to the continual enjoyment of both ‘food and drink’ and ‘procreation’.⁶⁹⁵ Such a view appeared rather problematic to Pococke, given the practical limitations of terrestrial space.⁶⁹⁶ The reality was, as Pococke pointed out, that Manasseh was here, presenting his own, rather dubious, view and attempting to pass it off as the received opinion of the Jewish tradition.⁶⁹⁷ The expression ‘in the world to come there is no eating and no drinking and no reproduction’ (העולם הבא אין בו)

nullo Scripturae fundamento nixa, et credunt et aliis obrudunt, quae (ni fallor) omnia a *Judaeis*, primum, quo olim comparuit, *Christi* adventum, negantibus atque eludere satagentibus, originem traxisse reperientur.”

⁶⁹³ Ibid.: “Regulam fidei perfectam a Christo accepimus”.

⁶⁹⁴ Menasseh ben Israel, *De Resurrectione*.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 228: “operam daturus statuit, quibus in hac vita homines, cibo, scilicet et potu usuros esse, generationique vacaturos.”

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 228-229: “enim omnes quotquot unquam in terris vixerint, resurrecturos affirmaret, eosque in terra habituros, sufficeret forfan illud quod assert responsum, omnes terrae plagas jam ignotas retendas atque habitabiles futuras; at si vel pauciores resuscitandos autumet, eos tamen & Ipsos perpetuo victuros, filiosque & filias, ui & alios gignant, in omnia seculorum secula genitros, non video quomodo spatium hoc molis terrestri terminis non adeo immensis circumscriptum, tantae hominum multitudini, quantam ab istis, aeternitatis duratione continua, oriturum facile concipiamus, capiendis olim sufficiat.”

⁶⁹⁷ Pococke, ‘Miscellaneous Notes’, p.229: “*Manasse* vero, et immortalia esse et simul ea praestare, quibus mortalitatis defectibus subvenitur, credi vult; quod nescio an praeter ipsum e doctoribus quispiam. Nam quod ipse hanc opinionem fuisse ait *R. Saadiae Gaon*, *R. Mosis Aegyptii*, *R. Simhonis Bar Semach*, & *Isaaci Abarbenelis*, ex iis, quae jam a nobis allata sunt, minime asserendum videtur; cum illi resuscitatos quidem in resurrectionis (quod volunt) seculo edere, bibere, aliaque id genus exercere affirmant, at in *Olam Habba*, seu mundo quem futurum vocant, ea locum habere prorsus negant.”

(לא אכילה ולא שתיה ולא פריה ורביה) appear several times in the Gemara and therefore should certainly have been cited by Menasseh were he indeed to have been presenting a comprehensive overview of the Jewish conception of the resurrection of the dead.⁶⁹⁸

Menasseh, Pococke was convinced, was not an honest broker. His conception of the resurrection of the dead had been dismissed by Maimonides as a logical impossibility. For Maimonides, immortality would, by necessity, do away with the impulse to eat and drink, which is guided by the human instinct for survival.⁶⁹⁹ Menasseh's articulation of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead was thus neither Jewish, nor Christian and therefore held little value for contemporary Christians. In outlining the various Jewish approaches to the resurrection of the dead, it was Pococke's view that he had demonstrated these to offer little in the way of clarity, which once again, should point Christians back to their own tradition within which this 'article of faith' was 'much more clearly stated.'⁷⁰⁰ Whilst the Jews were to believe in the resurrection of the dead, the specifics of the matter were hotly disputed and, according to Maimonides, of no particular importance. Christians concerned to establish the facts of this matter should thus look to the Gospel as opposed to the Law within which, despite the claims of Menasseh, it was not clearly accounted for.

Maimonides's minimalist account of Jewish belief was thus, for Pococke, thoroughly reliable in its minimalism. The Law had been given on trust, not lofty promises and therefore where such loftiness was posited, non-Jewish influences were suspected. In formulating his conception of Maimonides as the ultimate authority of Judaism, Pococke widened the gap between Judaism and Christianity. Where Menasseh had formulated his conception of the article of the

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 210-211.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 102: "in Evangelio magis perspicue tradita sint, quae ad resurrectionis articulum spectant, quam olim in Lege, quid ni dixisse sufficiat."

resurrection of the dead with a view to establishing common ground between Jews and Christians, for Pococke this was neither advisable, nor even possible. There were historical reasons as to why “Matters relating to the article of resurrection are more clearly stated in the Gospel than the Law”.⁷⁰¹ Pococke relied upon Maimonides’s reconstruction of the Law in order to account for the ways in which the Gospel had built upon its strictly limited eschatological vision. He opposed the messianic expectations that had been fuelled by the writings of Menasseh ben Israel just as much as he opposed the reflexive anti-Judaism that had led the Catholic Church to rob itself of vital historical and theological resources through its campaigns of censorship. For Pococke the theological utility of the study of Judaism was in its very separateness from Christianity. The Law had developed quite apart from the Gospel, evolving its own accretions. Maimonides, for Pococke, was that rare figure who could see through all of these and thus give Christians access to the Law as it was observed in ancient times, when the Gospel’s message was first preached. Jewish notions of a more recent vintage, which could be identified through manuscript collection and collation were to be dismissed as mere fabrications.

Conclusion

There is paradox at the heart of Edward Pococke’s relationship to Moses Maimonides. On the one hand, Pococke saw Maimonides in all his multiple glories; the clarity of his writing, his status within the Arab world, his preservation of the Judeo-Arabic language and culture. On the other, Pococke, through his deep engagement with Maimonides came to see him as the faithful transmitter of historic Judaism, shorn of all rabbinic accretions. He was therefore the standard by which the Jewish tradition could be judged more broadly. Anything that did not accord with his own rendering of the principles of Jewish faith was therefore not Jewish. Pococke served then to

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

rest his conception of Maimonides's authority upon that which had led his fellow Jews to question him, his having offered a minimal account of Jewish law and faith. Pococke's Maimonides, much like Hebraic predecessor and colleague, did ultimately serve, at least for him, as a stand-in for historic Judaism.

This chapter has offered a new account of the scholarly career of Edward Pococke. It has revealed him to have been profoundly concerned with questions theological as well as philological. Far from the secularising force of the contemporary scholarly imagination, Pococke looked to Judaism in order that he might better understand Christianity. Pococke's multilingual Maimonides was, he believes, a vital resource for a church which had been led astray by misapprehensions of the Jewish tradition, by censorship, by ignorance and by the spurious arguments of the Jews themselves. Pococke emphasised Maimonides's role in the transmission of the Jewish tradition on the advice of his beloved teacher, Jacob Romano, who instructed him to "follow those authors who were regarded with some credibility among their own".⁷⁰² This approach, he had found, served Christianity far better than that either of the censoriousness of the Catholic Church or of the reflexive anti-Judaism of the Reformed. The failure to engage seriously with Christianity's Jewish past was, at least partially responsible for the twin errors of both millenarianism and Socinianism. Christian truth required a comprehensive, yet clearly delineated account of the Law, which constituted its first iteration.

The emergence of Pococke's 'multilingual Maimonides' would have a transformative effect upon post-Restoration biblical exegesis. For Pococke himself, however, the Maimonides he had introduced served two functions. He was, first and foremost, the means by which the Jewish tradition was to be judged, as the best qualified arbiter of it, and, secondly, he opened up the

⁷⁰² Ibid., p. 90: "sequeremur auctores qui alicujus apud suos notae".

remarkable world of Judeo-Arabic scholarship to European audiences. Maimonides's significance had been established by his *Moreh Nebukhim*, 'rightly celebrated among the Christians as among the Jews' and 'that great syntagm, the *Yad Hachazakah*'.⁷⁰³ Beyond his philosophical and legal work, Maimonides was an exemplary Arabist, his introductions to the various chapters of the Mishnah, 'treasures that might be completely lost' on account of the decline of Judeo-Arabic.⁷⁰⁴ Pococke lamented the 'fate that had befallen the books of the Jews' and 'also to a great extent those written in Arabic by others'.⁷⁰⁵ The *Porta Mosis* was thus a work of historical reconstruction, which, Pococke hoped, might 'provide a useful guide for scholars' such 'that they may become accustomed to the same method of writing that almost all the Jews who have written in Arabic, both now and in the past, seem to have used'.⁷⁰⁶

Maimonides's greatest significance, however, was as the ultimate authority on matters of Jewish theology. Pococke had very little time for philosemitism. He understood Judaism to be a precursor to Christianity, which had continued to evolve alongside it. He was not interested in Judaism itself but rather, in what it could reveal about Christianity. Maimonides had concisely articulated the minimalist theology of biblical Judaism, upon which Christianity was a development. Through his work the essential Jewish creed could be distilled and thus more recent accretions, products of anti-Christian animus or mere conjecture, could be distilled. The 'more recent Jewish scholars had produced such a confusing mess of theological opinions that the only way Pococke was able 'to explain their doctrine' was to say, as Judah Zabara had, 'I describe the whole thing to you, choose whatever seems best to you'. Pococke's very close engagement with Maimonides was then the primary means by which he could determine what

⁷⁰³ Ibid., sig. *2r-v: "apud Christianos quam Iudaeos merito celebri"; Ibid., sig. *3v: magno isto Syntgmate *Yad Hachazakah*."

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., sig. **3v: "metus sit, ne prorsus perirent thesauri isti."

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., sig. **3v-**4r: "fatum illud Iudaeorum libris contigeret... et aliorum Arabice scribentium."

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., sig. **4v: "non inutili, quo ita ei scribendi rationi assuescant, qua quotquot fere e *Iudaeis Arabice* scripserunt usi, ut nunc solent, & olim videntur."

was and what was not authentic to Judaism. The most extreme example of this was his failure to mention the notion of the Messiah Ben Joseph, which was as clear an indication as any that this was ‘a disgusting doctrine’ of which ‘he was ashamed’ and therefore a mere fabrication.⁷⁰⁷

Pococke was then, I contend, the pioneering scholar of the contemporary intellectual historical imagination, but not for the reasons that have previously been articulated. Firstly, recent histories of ‘Arabic studies’ have sought to separate out scholarly from confessional concerns. This was not an objective of Pococke’s, whose conception of ‘the utility of Rabbinic and Arabic scholarship’, was as a means of ‘extracting the true meaning of the Holy Scriptures’, which could then be disseminated.⁷⁰⁸ Pococke has merited recognition on account of his revealing that ‘Arabic studies’ was more than ‘a mere ancillary to biblical exegesis’.⁷⁰⁹ It is my contention, however, that Pococke would not have recognised this anachronistic distinction between the study of the Bible and the study of what he believed to be biblical languages. Secondly, Pococke has often been portrayed as an outsider to the ‘political and ecclesiastical upheavals of his age’.⁷¹⁰ Whilst it is true to say that unlike many of his contemporaries, Pococke certainly did not make his name as a controversialist, as this chapter has revealed, he was certainly more than willing to wade into controversy, even if only in the notes addended to what was already a very difficult work. Pococke was then both at the forefront of philological exegesis and an unwilling controversialist, as recent works that have attempted to trace the history of ‘Arabic studies’ have claimed. His commitment to philology, however, was born of his belief in its theological utility and his quietism in the face of controversy was born of experience, not conviction. Pococke had lost his great patron, William Laud, to the vicissitudes of confessional conflict at its most

⁷⁰⁷ Pococke, ‘Appendix’, *Malachi*, p. 206: “putidi istius Messia ... puduisse videtur.”

⁷⁰⁸ Pococke, *Porta Mosis*, sig. **3v: ut studiorum Rabbinicorum & Arabicorum in genuino S. Scripturarum sensu eruendo, iisque explicandis usum, prolatis exemplis, ostendant, & commendatiorem reddant.

⁷⁰⁹ G.J. Toomer, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online.

⁷¹⁰ See Mills, ‘Edward Pococke’, p. 138.

extreme and then come dangerously close to losing his own livelihood, were it not for the interventions of powerful friends.⁷¹¹

Pococke was not then uninterested in matters of contemporary controversy but rather a particularly careful person, whose interventions in the debates of the day were more likely to be buried in footnotes than broadcast in popular pamphlets. As this chapter has made clear, Pococke could argue very passionately and indeed convincingly against perceived theological mistakes. He felt able to challenge Menasseh ben Israel on his idiosyncratic account of Jewish Messianism and also to take on his illustrious predecessor, Abarbanel. He undermined the work of Munster, Générard, Broughton and Coccejus on the grounds of his superior access to original manuscripts and even criticised Calvin for his failure to engage Jewish theological claims. Pococke understood himself to have superior access to the Jewish tradition than all these other scholars. This was on account of his superior access to the writings of Moses Maimonides.

⁷¹¹ See Twells, 'Edward Pococke', pp. 19-24.

Chapter 4 - From Typology to Anthropology, the Multilingual Maimonides and the Transformation of Old Testament Scholarship

Introduction

In August 1687, an aging Samuel Parker, Bishop of Oxford, was installed as President of Magdalen College at the behest of Catholic King, James II. In this capacity, he would, against the wishes of the Fellowship, force upon them a multitude of Catholics, including several Jesuits. This did little to persuade Parker's colleagues of the legitimacy of his Presidency. Seeking a solution, he suggested that an Oxford College be set aside specifically for Catholics, such that those of that religion would not seek to impose themselves upon the broader university. This suggestion was rebuffed by the King who responded with a request for the admission of a further nine Catholic fellows. Unable to keep out the Catholics whose appointments the King had requested, Parker was forced to make a case for their integration into the English religious establishment, and so he set to work on a one-hundred-and-fifty-page pamphlet in which he argued for the abrogation of the Test Act, a piece of legislation which had excluded Catholics from both Houses of Parliament.⁷¹² This case rested upon his contention that Catholic sacramentalism was not fundamentally incompatible with the doctrines of the 'Church of England' and that, in fact, anti-Catholic claims as to the idolatrousness of Catholicism fundamentally misunderstood the nature, not just of Catholicism, but of idolatry.

In Parker's view, the widespread identification of Catholicism with idolatry was fuelled by 'learned men' giving too much credit to the writings of 'Rabbi Maimon, the most learned and

⁷¹² Samuel Parker, *Reasons for abrogating the test imposed upon all members of Parliament, anno 1678, October 3* (Edinburgh, 1688).

judicious of the Jewish doctors.’ Widespread acceptance of Maimonides’s account of the evolution of the Law, which he rooted in the simultaneous accommodation and repudiation of prior norms, associated with a mysterious ancient people known as the Sabeans, had elevated the significance of ‘idolatry’ in the scholarly consciousness. As a consequence, according to Parker, the ‘dream of the ZABII’ - had been accepted as historical fact.⁷¹³ Despite this people having left ‘no ancient footsteps’, they were widely believed, on Maimonides’s authority, to have once populated much of the earth.⁷¹⁴ Parker’s rejection of Maimonides’s account of the origins of the law formed the basis of his, only very subtly, modified account its evolution, which was rooted in the repudiation of the practices of the Ancient Egyptians and Canaanites amongst whom the Israelites lived.⁷¹⁵ Their worship, he contended, was directed toward ‘the Sun’ and ‘under him the Heavens, Earth, Moon, Stars.’⁷¹⁶ This worship of the creation, as opposed to the creator, constituted the archetypal idolatry for Parker. Having defined idolatry thus he was then able to differentiate it from Catholicism, which conceived of the Creator-God as incorporeal.

Unsurprisingly, Parker’s arguments for the admissibility of Catholic sacramental theology fell on deaf ears. This may well have hastened his demise, which would come as a great shock to many of his respondents. William Lloyd, then Bishop of St. Asaph and indefatigable opponent of James II’s pro-Catholic policies countered Parker’s *Reasons for abrogating the test act* with a strongly worded re-assertion of the idolatrousness of the ‘so call’d Church’ of Rome.⁷¹⁷ Gilbert Burnet aggressively critiqued Parker’s ‘second-hand Reading’ of the principal works ‘upon the Notion of Idolatry’, which had led him to erroneously argue for the compatibility of Roman Catholicism with ‘the Church of England’ and John Phillips, a nephew of John Milton’s, suggested that

⁷¹³ Ibid., p. 73.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 105-108.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid.,

⁷¹⁷ William Lloyd, *An Answer to the Bishop of Oxford’s reasons for abrogating the test impos’d on all members of parliament anno 1678, Octob. 30 in these words, I, A.B. do solemnly and sincerely in the presence of God, profess, testify, and declare, that I do believe that in the sacrament of the Lord’s super there is not any transubstantiation*, (London, 1688), p. 45.

Parker's pleas would only serve to hasten the cause of English re-Catholicisation and should therefore be suppressed.⁷¹⁸ The most substantive refutation of Parker's view, however, was delivered by one William Wake, future Archbishop of Canterbury, who wished, through an exploration of the extant literature on ancient idolatry to undermine Parker's claims as to the admissibility of the sacramental theology of 'the Church of Rome'. He was able to demonstrate that the scholarly consensus on the ancient Sabians was not a mere 'dream' as Parker had conceived it but rather a well-documented historical fact, supported both by Scripture itself and a vast array of documentary evidence. Parker's trump card, 'that Dr. Spencer had discovered for him', that the term 'Zabii' was 'no older than Mohammed' no more undermined the history of the Sabian people as Maimonides recounted it than the claim that 'the Britains' must 'be a people of no antiquity, because they are now called Welch, and that's a modern name.'⁷¹⁹ His characterisation of ancient idolatry as the worship 'of the Sun, Moon, and Stars, as visible and corporeal deities', too, misrepresented the scholarly consensus. The Sabians had, much like contemporary Catholics, animated the corporeal with 'living, rational and intellectual substances' which serve as 'mediators betwixt God and them'. They had not, as Parker had erroneously claimed, denied the existence of the Supreme Being.⁷²⁰ The scholarship to which Wake referred in his critique of Parker would have been very familiar to him, given his friendships with a number of its most famous names. John Spencer, in particular, was a regular correspondent of his.⁷²¹ On the 20th March 1687, Samuel Parker, beleaguered by the attacks of his colleagues, met his end.⁷²²

⁷¹⁸ Gilbert Burnet, *An enquiry into the reasons for abrogating the test imposed on all members of Parliament*, (London, 1688), p. 8, John Phillips, *Sam. Ld. Bp. Of Oxon. His celebrated reasons for abrogating the test, and notions of idolatry answered by Samuel Arch-Deacon of Canterbury*, (London 1688), p. 12.

⁷¹⁹ William Wake, *A discourse concerning the nature of idolatry; in which a late author's true and onely notion of idolatry is considered and confuted*, (London, 1688), pp. 22-23, pp. 34-36.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁷²¹ A number of letters from Parker to Spencer are held at Lambeth Palace Library MS 942,33.

⁷²² For a concise biography of Parker see Jon Parkin, 'Samuel Parker', *ODNB*.

Whilst the story of Parker's final years reveals something of the challenges faced by James II in his attempts to re-Catholicise England, it also serves to demonstrate the remarkable rise of what I am terming an 'anthropological' approach to the study of the Bible, which was principally shaped by several decades of scholarly engagement with Maimonides's *More Nebukhim*. Critical responses to Parker's *Reasons for abrogating the test act* hinged upon his erroneous characterisation of the very lively contemporary discourse on idolatry. William Wake's sophisticated analysis of the nature of ancient idolatry, as it had been characterised in the writings of Edward Pococke and John Spencer, in particular, served to highlight the limitations of Parker's attempts to put the fundamental distinction between Catholic monotheism and idolatrous polytheism beyond all reasonable doubt. Wake's emphasis upon ancient Chaldean 'knowledge of the one true God', in particular, made a mockery of Parker's mischaracterisation of the idolatrous beliefs which the Law sought to temper, according to Maimonides's theory. It is important to point out, however, that whilst Parker and Wake disagreed as to the nature of the particular beliefs which the Law repudiated, neither dissented from the view, outlined very clearly in *More Nebuchim* 3.29, that its proper function was the repudiation of these. The Law was therefore the response of the Jewish people to the cultural and theological context within which they found themselves. The establishment of this conception of the Law, which served to de-emphasise the role of the Jews in the ancient world as the status of scholarly consensus in England, is the subject of this chapter. Its prominence by the later 1680s speaks to nothing short of a transformation in the study of the Old Testament in England, from an emphasis upon typological analyses throughout the Reformation to an entirely contrary approach, which emphasised the value of historical research, over and above allegory and analogy, for the uncovering of the inner meanings of the Scriptures.

This chapter centres the work of John Spencer whose *De legibus Hebraeorum* has received significant attention from intellectual historians in recent years. That Spencer's conception of 'the

laws of the Hebrews' owed a great deal to Maimonides is well established. What has yet to be established however is the full extent of Spencer's project in *De legibus*, which proposed to do for Christianity what Maimonides had done for Judaism: namely, to put it on an entirely rational footing. Recent Spencer scholarship has tended to emphasise either his originality or his heterodoxy.⁷²³ Recent articles by Daniel Stolzenberg and Dmitri Levitin have undermined both of these approaches, suggesting instead that Spencer's objective in *De legibus* was principally the repudiation of English nonconformity.⁷²⁴ None of these approaches, however, capture the full extent of Spencer's ambition, the very Maimonidean repudiation of mysticism in favour of rationalism in religion.

The express purpose of Maimonides's *Moreh Nebukhim* - is the elucidation of the law for those whose capacities for 'human reason' has allowed them to succeed in 'philosophical studies'- at the possible expense of their religious faith.⁷²⁵ Such people are the 'perplexed', to whom this work might serve as a *Guide*. Far more numerous than the 'perplexed' are 'the uneducated' who do not have the capacity to fully understand the work.⁷²⁶ For Spencer, this distinction between the 'perplexed' and 'the uneducated' applied as much to Christianity as it did to Judaism. The Fathers had devised 'elaborate conjectures or fictitious allegories' in order to appeal to 'the common people'. Whilst this often achieved its intended result, it had the unintended consequence of directing rationalists away from orthodoxy.⁷²⁷ Spencer's *De legibus* is an ambitious

⁷²³ On Spencer's originality see Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (HUP, 2010); Guy Stroumsa, 'John Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry', *History of Religion* 61 (2001), pp. 1-23; Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (CUP, 1997), pp. 55-79; Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (CUP, 2003), pp. 248-49. On Spencer's heterodoxy see Martin Mulrow, 'Orientalistik im Kontext der sozinianischen und deistischen Debatten um 1700, Spencer, Crell, Locke und Newton', *Scientia Poetica* 2 (1998), pp. 27-57; William Horbury, 'Spencer, John (bap. 1630, d. 1693, College Head and Hebraist', *ODNB*; William Horbury, 'John Spencer (1630-1693) and Hebrew Study', *Letter of the Corpus Association*, LXXVIII, 1999, pp. 12-23.

⁷²⁴ Daniel Stolzenberg, 'John Spencer and the Perils of Sacred Philology', *Past and Present* 124 (February 2012), pp. 129-163; Dmitri Levitin, 'John Spencer's *De Legibus Hebraeorum* (1683-85) and Enlightened Sacred History: A New Interpretation', *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 76 (2013), pp. 49-92.

⁷²⁵ *More Nebukhim*, Prefatory Remarks.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁷ John Spencer, *De Legibus Hebraeorum et Ritualibus*, (Cambridge, 1685), p. 17: "speciosis conjecturas aut fictis allegoriis"; *Ibid.*, p. 189: "vulgus."

defence of Christian orthodoxy, which proceeds by undermining the many allegories that were often thought of as central to it in favour of a much more straightforward history of religion. He rooted this history in Maimonides's claim that the law was intended to serve as a bridge between polytheism and monotheism.

Maimonides's conception of the Law as peculiarly accommodated to the needs of the Israelites to whom it was given, as Owtram had pointed out, was not new. That the 'Hebrews had corrected' the rites of 'the Syrians and the Egyptians', he had shown, was established by various of the Fathers.⁷²⁸ Where Maimonides was making a novel claim, however, was in his appeal to a verifiable source base. For he had supposedly come to understand the Law thus through his reading of Arabic translations of the books of the Sabaeans, the people amongst whom Abraham was raised.⁷²⁹ Maimonides's 'Sabean theory' purported to explain the Mosaic Law in terms of its accommodation of Sabean practices. If this was indeed the case, then there was every chance that the books Maimonides had used could be identified and his theory verified, ushering in a new era for sacred historians and sacred geographers. Old Testament scholarship would be utterly transformed by the kinds of source material to which Maimonides was pointing.

The *Mishneh Torah* had, over the course of the first half of the seventeenth century, become an indispensable tool of New Testament interpretation. In the latter half of the century however Englishmen would return to the *Moreh Nebukhim*, in a move which would prove hugely significant for the development of Old Testament interpretation. The typological mode of biblical exegesis, which was central to Reformed scholarship, had proved remarkably able to accommodate the insights that the likes of Lightfoot and Ainsworth had gleaned from the

⁷²⁸ William Owtram, *De Sacrificiis* (London, 1677), p. 15: ritus, qui aut ab hebraeis ad gentes alias venere ...correcti sunt ab hebraeis."

⁷²⁹ *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.29.

Mishneh Torah.⁷³⁰ As Owtram's *De Sacrificiis* demonstrates, however, the rise of Socinianism, with its insistence upon a much more rigorous conception of the 'literal sense', put tremendous pressure on the typological mode of analysis as did threats to the integrity of the Masoretic text.⁷³¹ Whilst some, like Owtram and indeed Pococke, responded to these threats with scholarly refutations, others, such as John Spencer, were willing to concede the point. 'Many books and sermons' had persuaded 'Christians of the lower ranks' to believe that they could 'behold Christ directly' through decoding the mysteries apparently implicit in the law.⁷³² This made the 'laws of God a mockery to the atheists', lending succour to 'Socinians and modern Jews', who correctly identified in orthodox Christianity, a reliance upon 'forced similitudes and fantasies of play'.⁷³³ For Spencer that Christianity had proceeded in this direction was very mysterious indeed given 'how many great and excellent intellects, gifted in every kind of learning, and inflamed with highest zeal for Scripture' there were who might have followed Maimonides in ensuring that the 'reasons behind the laws were properly understood'.⁷³⁴ The only possible explanation for this sorry state of affairs was 'the sheer magnitude of this task', a supposition that would be proven by the immense quantity of pages that the final edition of *De Legibus* would ultimately comprise.⁷³⁵

For Spencer, Maimonides's 'Sabeian theory', the explication of which constitutes the bulk of the third book of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, provided a model for the exposition of the law in particular

⁷³⁰ On the endurance of typology in Protestant exegesis, see Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, II, Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, (Grand Rapids, 2003), pp. 477-482, S. Drouin, *Theologie ou libertinage? L'exégèse allegorique a l'age des Lumeries*, (Paris, 2010), and in England, more specifically, Kevin Killeen, *The Political Bible in Early Modern England*, (CUP, 2017), pp. 22-51.

⁷³¹ On the implications of source criticism for typology see Simon Mills, 'Edward Pococke (1604-1691) Comparative Arabic-Hebrew Philology, and the Bible', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 53, no. 1 (2023), pp. 117-147; N.J.S. Hardy, *Criticism and Confession; The Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Republic of Letters* (OUP, 2017).

⁷³² Spencer, *De Legibus*, p. 194: "plurimi libri et conciones... sortis inferioris Christianis ... Christum recte intueantur."

⁷³³ Ibid.: "Dei leges Atheis Iudibrium debent... Sociniani et Judaei moderni... similitudines coactas et lusus phantasie."

⁷³⁴ Ibid., p. 14: "plurimos magno atque excellenti ingenio fuisse, literature omigena donatos, et summo scripturae illustrandae studio inflammatos... causis legum earum probe cognitis."

⁷³⁵ Ibid.: "provinciae hujusce magnitudo."

and of the relationship between the Divine and humanity in general. At the centre of this book, lay the extraordinary claim that the reasons for the commandments were to be found in the idolatrous practices of the mysterious Sabean people, which the law was designed to extirpate (3.49). This novel approach to the Law would obviate the need for the excessive focus upon typology that had come to characterise Reformed exegesis, thereby limiting the realm of typological analysis to the perpetuation of only those ‘allegories accepted in ancient times’.⁷³⁶ At the same time, it could also be used to combat Puritan scripturalism on the basis of which ‘so many Christians zealously retain Jewish Sabbaths, abstain from blood and strangled animals’, and uphold ‘other institutions of the law with such combative zeal’.⁷³⁷

Spencer was not the first to embrace Maimonides’s Sabean theory. Indeed Selden, in his first edition of *De Diis Syriis*, written long before he had even read the *Moreh Nebukhim* in Hebrew outlined the history of Sabeanism, on the basis of Maimonides’s account.⁷³⁸ Pococke had also pursued this theory very seriously in the notes accompanying the *Specimen historiae Arabum* where he attempted to trace the history of the Sabeans through the Arabic sources.⁷³⁹ Spencer was, however, the first to develop Maimonides’s ideas into a fully articulated theology of the law. Whilst *De Legibus* is a very long and extensively researched scholarly work, which builds upon the attempts of first Selden and then Pococke to delineate the histories of Sabeanism, it is, at the same time, a very creative development upon Maimonides’s Sabean theory. This theory, as developed by Spencer, proved remarkably amenable to the dismantling of both Puritan biblicism and Socinian scepticism.

⁷³⁶ Ibid., pp. 193-194: “allegorias antiquitus receptas tradiderunt.”

⁷³⁷ Ibid., sig. A3r: “tot Christiani passim inveniuntur, qui Judaeorum Sabbatismos, abstentiam etiam a sanguine & suffacato, aliaque Legis instituta, zelo tam pugnaci retinent.”

⁷³⁸ See John Selden, *De diis Syris* (London, 1617) pp. 40-43.

⁷³⁹ See Edward Pococke, *Barbebraeus: Specimen Historiae Arabum* (London, 1650), pp. 142-145.

Whilst the second generation of Maimonides's early modern English readers, the first to engage with the 'Hebraic Maimonides', had been motivated by a sceptical attitude toward patristic sources, Spencer's generation took the opposite approach. A leading figure at Cambridge University from his admission to the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1665, until his death in 1693, Spencer was central to the shaping of a new 'patristic identity' which would come to define the English church for centuries to come.⁷⁴⁰ The fruitfulness of his own career is attributable to Restoration England's unprecedented investment in its academic institutions as bulwarks against the unlearned biblicism that had led to Civil War in the first place.⁷⁴¹ Spencer was the beneficiary of the institutionalisation of both high-level patristic scholarship and historicist approaches to scripture as 'central planks' of a the new 'conformist clerical identity'.⁷⁴² It should come as no surprise then, that far from pitting Maimonides against the fathers, Spencer used him to vindicate their supposed characterisation of the law as an antidote to 'the errors of polytheism' and a source of 'enlightenment to those who were in darkness'.⁷⁴³ 'Maimonides supports the opinion of the fathers', he boldly proclaimed, before embarking on an extended extract from the third book of *Moreh Nebukhim*. Spencer's co-optation of Maimonides's Sabeian theory, which he substantiated with copious evidence culled from 'the annals of Greece and Rome', allowed him to reveal the prescience of the Fathers, with whose conceptions of the ancient Israelites it accorded remarkably well.⁷⁴⁴

Whilst the *Mishneh Torah* had offered strong support to modes of reading already popular with the Puritan public, the popularisation of the *Moreh Nebukhim*'s Sabeian theory introduced English

⁷⁴⁰ See Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: the Construction of a Confessional Identity in the 17th Century*, (Oxford University Press, 2009) pp. 252-326.

⁷⁴¹ See Dmitri Levitin, 'Confessionalisation and Erudition in Early Modern Europe: A Comparative Overview of a neglected Episode in the History of the Humanities' in Nicholas Hardy and Dmitri Levitin (eds.), *Confessionalisation and Erudition in Early Modern Europe: An Episode in the History of the Humanities* (OUP, 2019), pp. 71-74.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 72

⁷⁴³ Spencer, *Legibus* (1685), p. 29: erroris polythismi...et illuminationem eorum qui in tenebris errant.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 235: annalium Graecorum et Romanorum.

audiences to an entirely novel mode of biblical exegesis. Despite Spencer's claims to the contrary, none of the church fathers had explained the aetiology of the law in terms of the particular propensity of the Israelites toward idolatry. This explanation then, had the power to undermine well-worn assumptions as to the primacy of the Hebrew language and Israelite religion, which were themselves rooted in patristic sources. Spencer's characterisation of his own project as a restatement of the historical authority of the fathers, belies the radicalism of both his reliance upon the *Moreh Nebukhim* and his acceptance of the Sabean theory contained therein. Spencer was here rewriting the history of the church on the basis of a rabbinic source, and, in the process, paving the way for the emergence of a new discipline, the history of religion.⁷⁴⁵

The anthropological turn

Maimonides had claimed to have derived his theory through his 'diligent reading' of the writings of 'the Arabs, Turks, Greeks, Egyptians, Talmudic scholars, philosophers, pagans and others'.⁷⁴⁶ The breadth of Maimonides's own source base, which he 'frequently quoted from', made him a strangely contemporary figure in an era in which scholars sought to integrate new discoveries into well-established historical narratives.⁷⁴⁷ The Sabean theory turned out to be a particularly ingenious response, not just to the claims of Puritans and Socinians, but to a whole host of dangerous theories which threatened the primacy of the Genesis narrative.⁷⁴⁸ As the popularity of travel writing surged, scholars were called upon to explain how the descendants of Noah had

⁷⁴⁵ On the emergence of 'the history of religion', see Dmitri Levitin, 'From Sacred History to the History of Religion: Paganism, Judaism, and Christianity in European Historiography from Reformation to Enlightenment', *The Historical Journal*, December 2012, Vol. 55, No. 4 (December, 2012), pp. 1117-1160., Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason*, (HUP, 2010), Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, (PUP, 2018), pp. 203-289.

⁷⁴⁶ Spencer, *De Legibus* (1685), p. 235: annalium Graecorum et Romanorum; Maimonides, *Moreh Nebukhim* (1629), sig. **2v-**3r: "diligenter perlegisse...Arabes, turcas, Graecos, Aegyptios, Talmudicos, Philosophos, Ethnicos et alios... praeceptorum Mosaicarum rationes."

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.: "qui passim ab ipso allegantur"; See Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), pp. 170-235.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 248-249.

come to diverge so markedly from one another and why it was that religions ‘purportedly older’ than Judaism appeared to parallel it so closely.⁷⁴⁹ The Sabeian theory did away with the first problem and solved the latter. The bewildering variety of peoples encountered by explorers would turn out to be a great advantage, for, as per the Sabeian theory, each and every dictate of the law was either a condescension to or a repudiation of a practice of a prior people. This meant that the remnants of every precept could, at least in theory, be traced to Pagan practices, which might still be extant. The problem of religions paralleling Judaism, on the other hand, was no longer a problem at all, for Judaism had incorporated these religions. The ‘anthropological’ approach that Maimonides’s Sabeian theory had made way for went far beyond the mere reconciling of new evidence with biblical truth. No longer a threat to the veracity of Scripture, Pagan histories and artefacts now had pride of place as tools of biblical interpretation.

Whilst the interregnum period saw the study of the *Mishneh Torah*, especially as it pertained to New Testament exegesis expand and develop in interesting ways, it was the *Moreh Nebukhim* that really spoke to the concerns of the Restoration-era. Where the *Mishneh Torah* for the most part served an encyclopaedic function, operating as a sort of databank within which one could find explanations of Old Testament rites and indeed further contextualisation of verses which might through it be rendered typologically significant, the *Moreh Nebukhim* pointed towards an entirely different approach. It directed readers away from the texts of the Old Testament themselves and toward other historical sources, which might help scholars make sense of those texts. It made claims which could be verified, either by the available evidence or by future discoveries. The significance of the *Moreh Nebukhim* for scholars of the Restoration era was more historical than theological. Unlike their sixteenth-century predecessors, it was not Maimonides’s explanations of the various names of God that held their attention, but his historicisation of the law. In an era in

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 301-332.

which competing histories dominated theological controversies, Maimonides's ostensibly well-documented account of the law's origins appeared both uniquely pertinent and uniquely authoritative.

Maimonides's Sabean Theory

The appeal of the Sabean theory in early modern England was twofold. It was, first and foremost, an historical claim about a people of world-making significance, who were as yet unknown to the Western world. Scholars from Selden to Thomas Stanley would attempt to confirm Maimonides's account of the Sabeans. Further to the historical evidence for Sabeanism, much of which was helpfully supplied by Pococke, were its theological implications, which would be drawn out much most fully by John Spencer.

It is important to state here that the significance of Sabeanism for Maimonides was theological. Unlike his early modern English readers, Maimonides himself was not engaged in a project of historical recovery. Indeed, he seems to have held scholarship that was purely historical in nature, in peculiarly low regard.⁷⁵⁰ While Sabeanism was important for him because it had shaped the contents of the law, it was not a subject for exploration in its own right. Indeed, Maimonides began his discussion of Sabeanism with the audacious claim that it was 'well known that Father Abraham was brought up in the religion of the Sabeans'.⁷⁵¹ Sabean tradition, he claimed, had been outlined in a work entitled *The Nabatean Agriculture* (עבודת האדמה הנבטית), from which he had derived most of his knowledge of its precepts. Other sources out of which he had discovered the history and religion of the Sabeans included the theological writings of 'the Sabean Iskhak' as well as the book of Tomtom', 'the book of al-Sarb', 'the book on the degrees

⁷⁵⁰ See Introduction to *Perek Helek*.

⁷⁵¹ *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.29.

of the sphere and constellations’, two purported works of Aristotle and one ‘ascribed to Hermes’.⁷⁵² ‘All these books’ Maimonides claimed to have read in Arabic translation, though they likely represented only ‘a very small proportion’ of the writings of the Sabeans, most of which had never been translated.⁷⁵³ Whilst Sabeian literature contained a vast array of information as to Sabeian ceremonies, festivals and religious beliefs, its import was singular:

היא שער גדול מאוד למתן טעם למצוות

It is a great gate to the reception of the inner meaning (טעם) of the commandments⁷⁵⁴

As Spencer outlined in great detail in his *prolegomena* to *De legibus*, Maimonides was the inheritor of a great tradition of seeking after the ‘meanings of the precepts’ (טעמי המצוות). For some the precepts themselves were not inherently meaningful at all. Their significance was on account of their divine origin, their only object, ‘obedience’.⁷⁵⁵ Others, such as Joseph Albo ‘Author of the book *Ikkarim*’ suggested that whilst some laws might be defined thus as חוקים (statutes), laws for which there were no obvious reasons, there were two other categories of law, which could be justified rationally, the so-called מצוות (commandments), which taught ‘knowledge or understanding of God’ and the משפטים (judgements) regulated human relationships.⁷⁵⁶ The חוקים, whilst incomprehensible were, according to the Gemara in *Yoma* (67b), never to be questioned.⁷⁵⁷ For Maimonides, however, as for Spencer, the notion that the Almighty, ‘the source of wisdom and the author of reason would have willed to enact any laws devoid of reason’ was inconceivable.⁷⁵⁸ He thus posited, on the basis of his extensive research into idolatry, that the

⁷⁵² Ibid.

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ Spencer, *De legibus*, p.1: obsequium.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid.: “ad Dei Scientiam vel intellectum originem suam.”

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 1-4: “deus sapientiae fons sit et rationis auctor... Eum Leges ullas rationis experts ferre voluisse.”

purpose of the law was ‘the extirpation of foreign worship and the memory of it and everything pertaining to it and also its legacy’.⁷⁵⁹

Maimonides’s Sabean theory, did away entirely with the category of **הוֹקִים**. Indeed, he displayed a remarkably cavalier attitude toward the statements of prior authorities.⁷⁶⁰ Where a law had no obvious meaning, as was the case with the dietary laws and many of the laws concerning the temple service, its meaning should be sought in the practices of the Sabeans for it either served to repudiate one or multiple of these or to accommodate them. So, for example, mixtures of wool and linen were prohibited on account of these having been popular among Sabeans and the obligation to build a temple in honour of God was a condescension to the Sabean preference for the worshipping gods within temples dedicated to them.⁷⁶¹ As Maimonides himself acknowledged, however, given how little evidence of Sabeanism had survived to his day (*MN* III.50), it might never be possible to fully reconstruct the basis upon which the laws had been developed. ‘If only we knew’, he recorded mournfully ‘the rules of the Sabeans and the events of those days, we would be able to see plainly the reason (**טעם**) for many things mentioned [in the Pentateuch]’.⁷⁶²

Maimonides had thus unknowingly set a challenge to his early modern readers. He had dangled the possibility that ‘many ceremonies of the Sabeans’ might be ‘scattered throughout other Oriental records’ than the ones to which he had access. This meant that the search after Sabeanism might not be so hopeless after all and that for the first time in history, the legacy of that mysterious people, which had once ‘filled the entire world’ might be reconstructed.⁷⁶³ If this were indeed possible, the pay-off would be massive. Maimonides had already ‘shed considerable

⁷⁵⁹ *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.29.

⁷⁶⁰ See for example A. Halkin and David Hartmann, *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides* (JPS, 1985), p. 461.

⁷⁶¹ *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.29 & 3.45.

⁷⁶² *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.50.

⁷⁶³ Spencer, *Legibus* (1685), p. 238: “totum terrarium orbem implevit.”

light' on many laws 'that had previously puzzled scholars'.⁷⁶⁴ The increasing availability of oriental sources held out the possibility that early modern Englishmen might be able to shed light on a great many more, thus ushering in a new era of historically informed biblical scholarship, which would put paid to the 'mystical and allegorical theology' on account of which 'the atheists had made a mockery of the laws of God'.⁷⁶⁵

Not everyone was so excited by the new scholarly directions proposed by the pursuit of Maimonides's Sabean theory. Some scholars, Johann Heinrich Heidegger, chief amongst them, feared that the popularity of the *Moreh Nebukhim* would divert attention away from 'the true faith', towards an obsessive - and ultimately fruitless focus on the 'ceremonial precepts', whose only real function was 'the foreshadowing of things to come'.⁷⁶⁶ For him, the distinction between the חוקים, which he rendered 'ceremonias' in Latin and משפטים (rendered 'statuta forensia') was to be maintained at all costs, for this was after all the basis upon which 'the difference between Judaism and Christianity was established'.⁷⁶⁷ Whereas the Jews had provoked 'the most immediate and grievous wrath and indignation of God' on account of their undying commitment to the ceremonial precepts, the Christians had successfully distinguished 'between mercy and sacrifices, between circumcision of the flesh and of the heart'.⁷⁶⁸ The scholarly fascination with the Sabean theory thus threatened to collapse the distinction between the moral and ceremonial precepts, which was the basis upon which Christianity had diverged from Judaism. It was therefore not only a threat to typology but also potentially a theological basis upon which church ceremonial could be established.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 236: "lucis non parum attulit ... quae doctis antea crucem fixerunt."

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 194: "mysticam theologiam et allegoricam... dei leges Atheis ludibrium debent"

⁷⁶⁶ Johann Heinrich Heidegger, *Libertas Christianorum a lege cibaria veteri de sanguine & suffocato, demonstrata, & ab instantiis Stephani Curcellaei defensa: Inseritur commentarius in Concilium Hierosolymitanum*, (Tiguri, 1662), p. 94: "ceremonialum... τῆς προτυπώσεως τῶν μελλόντων."

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 97-98: "חוקים ceremonias et statuta forensia משפטים... hac distinctione constat discrimine Iudaismi et Christianismi."

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid.: "molestissimam Dei iram et indignationem provocarint... miseridcoridam et sacrificiam... inter circumcisionem carnis et cordis."

Support for Maimonides's Sabeian theory in England came from two, often-overlapping quarters. It was, first and foremost a boon to scholars seeking to integrate advances in patristics, classics, rabbinics, and oriental studies, for which it provided an enticing common framework. Secondly, however, as Heidegger might have feared, it would be taken up by advocates of church ceremonial, who identified therein a powerful argument for the necessity of ritual continuity. This was very much the position of Spencer, who noted out of *De Idololatria* that the law specifically prohibited 'worshipping in a hidden manner' in order 'to prevent the countless evils that easily arise from private and unaccountable religion'.⁷⁶⁹ Stillingfleet, that great architect of 'latitudinarianism' found the Sabeian theory, which emphasised the utility of ritual, very congenial to his cause, that of ceremonial flexibility.⁷⁷⁰ Unlike Spencer, however, Stillingfleet did not identify therein any particular threat to the typological method. Despite granting 'the hypothesis of this learned Rabbi', in its entirety, his approach to the law was primarily typological.⁷⁷¹ For Stillingfleet, the law was always the conduit for 'mysteries', 'veiled and hidden', except to the 'fully initiated', inheritors of the 'true spiritual cabala, which was constantly preserved'.⁷⁷² For both scholars, however, the story Maimonides had to tell as to the emergence of the Jewish religion, undermined the schema underlying much of the basis for existing religious and orientalist scholarship, which understood Hebrew as an 'Ur-language', knowledge of which might be enhanced by the study of neighbouring languages. This decentralisation of ancient Hebrew had the added benefit of firmly casting Christianity as Judaism's successor, rather than her descendent. It also allowed Restoration-era scholars to counter the unlearned biblicism

⁷⁶⁹ John Spencer, *Dissertatio Urim & Thummim in Deuteron. C. 88, v. 8 in qua eorum natura & origo, non paucorum rituum mosaicorum et obscuriora quaedam Scripturae loca, probabiliter explicantur* (London, 1669), p. 79: in occulto servierit... ut malis innumeris ex hac private & sine teste religione facile oriundis obviam iret

⁷⁷⁰ See Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines sacrae, or, A rational account of the grounds of Christian faith, as to the truth and divine authority of the Scriptures, and the matters therein contained* (London, 1662), pp. 207-225.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

⁷⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 223.

associated with the Puritanism which had given rise to the Civil War and thus the unprecedented disruptions of the Interregnum period, which they were very keen to consign to history.

Having identified the appeal of the Sabean theory as outlined in the *Moreh Nebuchim*, it is now our task to try to understand the ways in which scholars pursued this theory. I will attempt to explore two big questions which the Sabean theory, once accepted, posed, with particular reference to the work of Stillingfleet and Spencer. The first, and most obvious question, is the historical one. Scholars sought to understand when exactly the cult of the Sabeans had emerged. Maimonides, as cited above, claimed that by his lifetime, knowledge of it had mostly been lost, which would indicate that the Law had, at least to some extent, achieved its goal. He also claimed, however, to have had access to Sabean records.⁷⁷³ This might mean that contemporary scholars too could identify fragments of Sabean literature, auguring the possibility that, in an age of discovery, further evidence of the Sabeans might be uncovered, which would, in turn, enable scholars to better understand the Pentateuch. The second, and perhaps ultimately more significant question for our purposes, is the theological one. If this theory was indeed to be accepted, which it would be in period under discussion, it would have very troubling consequences for Old Testament interpretation and thus for conceptions of the Christian faith writ large. Scholars sought to understand how this theory could elucidate the Scriptures with a view to settling controversial questions of exegesis and theology. The implications of the widespread acceptance of the Sabean theory in the latter half of the seventeenth century would have profound implications for much of the theological and historical scholarship which would come to characterise the Enlightenment era.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷³ *Moreh Nebuchim* 3.50 & 3.48.

⁷⁷⁴ See Dmitri Levitin, 'John Spencer' and Dmitri Levitin, 'Enlightened' Sacred History: A New Interpretation, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. 2013, Vol. 76 (1), pp. 49-92, p. 49.

Identifying the Sabeans

The first English scholar to write on the subject of the Sabeans, and one of Spencer's key sources, was John Selden.⁷⁷⁵ His *De diis Syris* (1617) investigated the worship of the various false gods of the Old Testament. On the Sabeans, Selden said that these were 'the oldest among the Orientals', also known as the Chaldeans, who dedicated temples to the sun and the moon, the chief objects of their worship.⁷⁷⁶ His knowledge of Sabeanism was derived from the writings of Maimonides, whom, he noted, had 'reported many things out of their books'.⁷⁷⁷ The introduction to *De diis Syris* identifies Maimonides as one of two key sources upon which the work relied, the other being Alexander of Hales.⁷⁷⁸ It thus should not surprise us that Selden appears here to have taken Maimonides's account of the Sabeian religion at face value. His identification of the Sabeans with the Chaldeans was likely drawn from the *Moreh Nebukhim* itself, where Maimonides recorded that Abraham, whom Genesis tells us grew up in Chaldea, was raised in the religion of the Sabeans.⁷⁷⁹ In a work of 1640, however, Buxtorf's famed edition of *Moreh Nebukhim* having been released ten years earlier, Selden delved much deeper into the question of the origins of Sabeanism, indicating that his interest in the subject had greatly increased in the intervening years, furnished by the evolving pursuit of this question by his fellow citizens of the Republic of Letters.⁷⁸⁰

⁷⁷⁵ For a comprehensive overview of writings of the copious literature on the subject of the Sabeans see Daniel Chwolson, *Die Sabier und der Sabismus*, 2 vols, (St Petersburg, 1856), I, pp. 23-90 & Jonathan Elukin, 'Maimonides and the Rise and Fall of the Sabians, Explaining the Mosaic Laws and the Limits of Scholarship', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2001) pp. 619-637.

⁷⁷⁶ John Selden, *De diis Syris syntagmata II. Adversaria nempe de numinibus commentitijs in vetere instrument memoratis, accedunt quae sunt reliqua Syrorum. Prisca porro Arabum, Aegyptiorum, Persarum, Afrorum, Europaeorum item theologia subindex illustratur* (London, 1617), p. 23: "vetustissimi Orientalium."

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23: "ex quorum libris plurima retulit."

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, sig. a4v.

⁷⁷⁹ *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.29.

⁷⁸⁰ John Selden, *De Jure Naturali & gentium, iuxta disciplinam Ebraeorum, libri septem*, (London, 1640), p. 211.

This deeper dive into the question of the origins of the Sabeanism drew upon two key sources to which Selden likely did not have access in 1617.⁷⁸¹ The first of these was a 1601 letter from Joseph Scaliger (who owned a copy of the *Moreh Nebukhim* in the original Arabic), to Isaac Casaubon in which the author affirmed Selden's prior claim that the Sabeanism were Chaldeans.⁷⁸² The name 'Sabean', he wrote, meant 'an easterly wind'.⁷⁸³ It might therefore be taken to have been a generic name for 'Easterners' or 'Orientals'.⁷⁸⁴ The second of these sources was Eutychius of Alexandria's (877-940) *Nazm al-Jauhar*, a translation of which Selden had commissioned Edward Pococke to prepare for publication.⁷⁸⁵ This work pointed to two other Sabean origin stories, the one, that their religion was founded by the Persian, Zoroaster, a contemporary of Nahor, during whose lifetime Sabeanism had emerged as per the *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.29 and *Hilkhot Avodah Zarah* 1.3, and the other, that the Sabeanism were Greeks.⁷⁸⁶ Interestingly, Selden suggested that his readers pursue the Zoroastrian origin story, pointing them toward Laertius, Justin and Jacques Boulduc's *Ecclesia ante legem*, instead of the Greek origin story, though both seem to have been treated as equally plausible by Eutychius, who had named the Greek founder of Sabeanism as Iunan, son of Ieraklius of AlZaitunah, who was involved in the construction of the Tower of Babel.⁷⁸⁷ Selden's preference for the Zoroastrian origin story as opposed to the Greek should not surprise us. Dating the founding of Sabeanism to a participant in the Tower of Babel would mean that it emerged a full nine generations earlier than that of Nahor, who, according to Maimonides, was among the first Sabeanism. Selden's directing of his readers toward Zoroastrianism in pursuit of further knowledge of Sabeanism is thus evidence of his commitment to upholding the reliability of the *Moreh Nebukhim*.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid.,

⁷⁸² See Joseph Scaliger, *epistolae omnes* (Frankfurt, 1628), epistola 62, pp. 177-180.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.: "vento apeliote."

⁷⁸⁴ Joseph Scaliger to Isaac Casaubon, 6 November, 1601, in Paul Botley & Dirk van Miert, *The Correspondence of Joseph Justus Scaliger* 8 vols. Vol. 4, (Librarie Droz, 2012), pp. 102-107: "quasi dicas Orientales."

⁷⁸⁵ On this scholarly collaboration see Leonard Twells, 'Life of Edward Pococke' in Edward Pococke, *The Theological Works* (London, 1740), pp. 1-80, pp. 41-53; Alastair Hamilton, *Arabs and Arabists* (Brill, 2021), p. 293.

⁷⁸⁶ Selden, *De Jure*, p. 211.

⁷⁸⁷ Edward Pococke, *Contextio Gemmarum, Sive Eutychii Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales*, (Oxford, 1658), p. 63.

Selden's faith in the *Moreh Nebukhim* as an historical source is further borne out by his investigation of its central point of reference for Sabean practices, a mysterious work entitled *The Nabatean Agriculture* (העבודה הנבטיה). This source, according to Selden, should leave us with no doubt as to the divination, soothsaying and other arts which neighbours of the Israelites indulged in. The *Nabatean Agriculture*, Selden suggested, following Scaliger, was likely still extant in the Arab world, despite its never having been seen by European eyes.⁷⁸⁸ The 'Nabateans', the subject of this book, lived somewhere in the vicinity of Judea, he explained, which might partially explain Giustiniani's decision to render העבודה הנבטיה, *de Agricultura AEgyptiorum*.⁷⁸⁹ Buxtorf's *Moreh Nebukhim*, in contrast, had not offered any translation at all, leaving the question as to its meaning open.⁷⁹⁰ The assumption that the Nabateans were Egyptians, could explain, Selden conjectured, why it was that Thomas Aquinas had variously referred to the Egyptian origins of much of the Mosaic rite. Perhaps, he speculated, Aquinas himself and later Giustiniani had confused the Hebrew letters נ and כ and so read הנבטיה (the Nabatean) as הכבטיה (the Egyptian). Regardless of the precise identity of the Nabateans and the Sabeans, details of whose rites were preserved in their writings, the very existence of their records held the promise of a revolution in biblical scholarship.⁷⁹¹

Whilst Selden's commitment to the pursuit of the Sabean origins, did not, in 1640, extend very far beyond an attempt to use the available evidence to confirm the account offered in the *Moreh Nebukhim*, his survey of the available literature on the subject is instructive.⁷⁹² Whereas in 1617 he had been content merely to state that the Sabeans were Chaldeans, by 1640 this statement

⁷⁸⁸ Scaliger to Casaubon, 1601.

⁷⁸⁹ See Moses Maimonides, *rabbi Mossei Aegyptii Dux seu dubitatum aut perplexorum* (Paris, 1520).

⁷⁹⁰ See Moses Maimonides, *Liber [Moreh Nebukhim] Doctor perplexorum: ad dubia & obscuriora Scripturae loca rectius intelligenda veluti clavem continens, prout in praefatione, in qua de authoris vita & operis ratione agitur, plenius explicatur*, (Basle, 1629).

⁷⁹¹ Selden, *De Jure*, p. 212: "Impense facit ad reddendas praeceptorum causas... porta magna."

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 211-212.

required further clarification. Selden was now aware of Scaliger's interest in this subject and with it, his view that Sabeanism implied 'Orientalism'. He had also now read Euty chius's two accounts of the Sabean origins and Buxtorf's new and improved translation of the *MN* in 1629, which had stimulated a flurry of interest in the Sabeans. These developments had forced Selden, whose views on this question do not appear to have changed substantially between 1617 and 1640, to develop his account of it in order to satisfy the curiosities of his readers for whom it had, in the intervening period, taken on a much greater significance.

Enter Pococke

The significance of both the Sabean origin story and Maimonides's historical reputation would be given tremendous new impetus in 1650, when the beleaguered Edward Pococke published his first mature work, the *Specimen historiae Arabum*. This work, often regarded as his 'greatest', consisted in an extract from Abu 'l-Faraj's *History of the Dynasties* accompanied with copious notes drawn from Pococke's manuscript collection, the majority of which no other European had previously exploited.⁷⁹³ The *Specimen* is a phenomenal achievement, which Toomer has called 'a revolution in Arabic studies'.⁷⁹⁴ It presented for the first time, the history, literature and culture of the Arab world to a European audience previously unaware of its treasures. The significance of this for our story is that the *Specimen* reveals the Sabeans to have been very well known across the Islamic world, within which Maimonides was a famous figure. He had been mentioned in Ebn Abi Osaibeah's *History of Physicians*, where he was given the name 'Alrais' meaning 'the Prince' as well as in *History of the Dynasties*.⁷⁹⁵ Both works recorded that the young Maimonides

⁷⁹³ See G.J. Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth Century England* (OUP, 1996), pp. 160-161.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁵ Edward Pococke, *Specimen historiae Arabum, sive Gregorii Abul Farajii Malatiensis, De origine & Moribus Arabum: succincta narratio, in linguam Latinam conversa, notisque e probatissimis apud Ipsos authoribus, fusius illustrata* (London, 1650), pp. 366-367: "princeps."

had been ‘forced to profess Islam in Spain’, only returning to his ancestral traditions upon arrival in Egypt.⁷⁹⁶ Ebn Abi Osaibeah, in an amusing aside, had noted the *Guide*, *Delālat alHairīn*, which had been praised by some and yet criticised by others, had been unfortunately titled, for the Arabic word ‘Delalah’ (guidance) sounded very similar to ‘Ddelalah’ (error or misguidance), hence its critics referred to it as ‘Misguidance for the perplexed’.⁷⁹⁷ That the work was referred to often in the Arabic world, even in this mocking tone, was an indication of its great renown. ‘Leaving aside what is recorded about this distinguished scholar in Jewish sources’, Maimonides was evidently a famous name in the Arab world, whose scholarship brought him to the attention of even those who were not inclined to consume Jewish literature.⁷⁹⁸ This conception of Maimonides, propounded by Pococke as a significant participant in the Arabic scholarly world, moved the conversation about the Sabeans on from being principally a discussion of biblical sources to a discussion of historical sources, access to which Pococke and then Johann Heinrich Hottinger would be able to grant.⁷⁹⁹

Beyond Maimonides’s *Guide*, Pococke pointed to the Quran as the chief source of information as to the Sabeans. There, they were referred to as ‘People of the Book’, *Ahl al-Kitab*, alongside Jews and Christians. It was only in the *Guide*, however, that theirs was said to be a global religion.⁸⁰⁰ Pococke identified two further historical sources which accounted for the origins of the Sabeans. The first, Thabit ibn Qurra, the famed Greek-Arabic translator, who was himself a member of a religious community known as ‘the Sabeans’. The second was Abulfeda (1237-1331), author of *The Concise History of Humanity*. Ibn Qurra- provided Pococke with a new Sabean origin story. He said that this people descended from Seth, son of Noah, not via Enosh, the only one of his children whom Genesis saw fit to mention, but via another son by the name of Sabi,

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.: “in Hispania ad Islamismi professionem vi adactum.”

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid.: “Ea quae in Judaeorum monumentis de eximio hoc doctore traduntur.”

⁷⁹⁹ See Hamilton, *Arabs*, pp. 293-294.

⁸⁰⁰ Pococke, *Specimen*, p. 145; *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.29.

hence Sabean. In support of this account Abulfeda referenced a work of Sabean literature entitled ‘The Book of Seth’, within which the teachings of Seth himself were contained.⁸⁰¹ Ibn al-Athir, (1160-1233), author of *The Complete History*, offered a completely different account of the term.⁸⁰² For him, it connoted deviation from the dominant religion, so for example, Muhammed was called a Sabean on account of his deviating from the traditional religion of Quraysh.⁸⁰³ Pococke himself, offered an etymological rendering of the term ‘Sabean’, supposing it to derive from the Hebrew word צבא which means ‘army’ or ‘host’, used on account of the Sabean proclivity to worship the ‘heavenly hosts’ as opposed to the one God.⁸⁰⁴ Pococke contrasted this etymological analysis of his own with that of Al-Shahrastani who had supposed the word ‘Sabean’ to derive from the Syriac word *Saba* meaning ‘love’ or ‘desire’.⁸⁰⁵ Pococke’s exploration of these Arabic sources stood to confirm for him much of what Maimonides had said about the Sabeans. These were ancient idol worshippers from Chaldea, whose beliefs had spread all around the world. Their devotions were directed towards the luminaries, and, as such, their name implied for Muslims, a deviation from the true and righteous monotheistic path.⁸⁰⁶ Pococke’s contribution to the debate as to the Sabean origins was not decisive, but rather catalytic. He vastly expanded the range of sources English scholars could consult in pursuit of this question, thus serving to direct biblical scholars towards Arabic texts, which, as his notes on the *Specimen* demonstrate so clearly, could guide Pentateuchal interpretation. Thus, Pococke demonstrated to his readers the significance of Arabic sources for the study of the Bible. The conundrum of the Sabean origins proved for him an opportunity to engage a European audience with texts, whose significance might otherwise have been lost on them.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., p. 143: “libri Seth.”

⁸⁰² Ibid., pp. 143-144.

⁸⁰³ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid.

Pococke's *Specimen* held out the exciting possibility that Maimonides's Sabeian theory could be independently verified and developed. It served to convince a whole host of European scholars that the proper interpretation of the Bible might be arrived at through the study of ancient near-eastern sources and placed Maimonides at the very centre of this cutting-edge endeavour.

Enter Stillingfleet

In an era in which evidence drawn from the 'ancient Heathen nations' was being turned 'against Religion', Maimonides's 'Sabeian theory' presaged the possibility that such evidence, properly understood could be used to make the case for it.⁸⁰⁷ Edward Stillingfleet, whose *Origines Sacrae* set itself against the absurd notion, propounded by Isaac La Peyrère, that there might have been 'men before Adam' would therefore pursue it with great vigour.⁸⁰⁸ This work, judged by Levitin to be seventeenth-century England's 'most successful work of historical apologetics' sought to provide 'rational evidences for the words of 'Moses, and the Prophets, our Saviour and his Apostles'.⁸⁰⁹ The 'Sabeian theory' which had been 'proved from Maimonides', would emerge as absolutely fundamental to his case.⁸¹⁰

Stillingfleet opened the first chapter of this work with a series of arguments for the 'defects of Ancient history' proceeding through 'those several nations which have born the greatest name in the world for learning', namely, 'the Phoenicians, Chaldeans, AEgyptians and Grecians'.⁸¹¹ Central to his account of the Chaldeans, was a sweeping overview of the evidence for Sabeianism. The evidence presented was drawn from the writings of Scaliger, Selden and Salmasius, each of whom had affirmed Maimonides's claim that Sabeianism had emerged in Chaldea during the

⁸⁰⁷ Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae* (London, 1663), sig. b2v.

⁸⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, sig. b3r.

⁸⁰⁹ Dmitri Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom in the Age of the New Science* (CUP, 2015), p. 84; Stillingfleet, *Origines*, sig. a3v-b2v.

⁸¹⁰ Stillingfleet, *Origines*, p. 17.

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

lifetime of Abraham's grandfather, Nahor.⁸¹² Following Scaliger specifically, who had suggested that their name evoked 'Easternness', Stillingfleet suggested that the Sabean likely lived East of Chaldea and that, citing Scaliger again, whilst their records had not yet been 'discovered to the European world' these were still to be found 'among the Arabians'.⁸¹³ Like Selden before him, Stillingfleet was very keen to confirm Maimonides's account of Sabeanism and so was inclined to accept Salmasius's identification of this religion with Mesopotamia on the grounds that it was 'consonant with what Maimonides saith'.⁸¹⁴ He was less inclined to pursue Salmasius's many supporting references among the 'Greek historical accounts', however, on the grounds that the Zoroastrian theory, as endorsed by Selden following Eutychius, might yield more useful insights.⁸¹⁵

In addition to Selden's reading recommendations on the subject of Zoroastrianism, Stillingfleet identified two further sources, which had confirmed him in his view that Zoroastrianism was a Sabean religion. The first of these was a work by erstwhile East India Company chaplain, Henry Lord entitled *Sect of the Persees*, and the second, Ammianus Marcellinus's history of the Roman Empire. Both accounts laid particular stress upon Zoroastrian worship of the sun, which, for him, greatly resembled Maimonides's account of Sabeanism.⁸¹⁶ Stillingfleet thus felt able to assert that the Sabean religion must have spread into Persia, and likely beyond, in line with Maimonides's claim that the Sabean people filled the entire world. He noted, however, that if that were the case, we would have expected to have read far more of them in 'the Eastern histories'.⁸¹⁷ This, however, did not give him pause but rather served to confirm his priors. The paucity of Sabean records provided European scholars with 'further evidence to our purposes of

⁸¹² Ibid., p. 30.

⁸¹³ Ibid.,

⁸¹⁴ Ibid.,

⁸¹⁵ Claudius Salmasius, *De annis climactericis et antiqua astrologia diatribae*, (Leiden, 1648).

⁸¹⁶ See Henry Lord, *A display of two forraigne sects in the East Indies, the sect of the Banians and the sect of the Persees*, (London, 1630); *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.45.

⁸¹⁷ Stillingfleet, *Origines*, p. 30.

the defectiveness' of oriental historical writing and thus the righteousness of their reliance on 'evidence from Scripture', with which Maimonides's account of Sabeanism accorded. Stillingfleet demonstrated this with two examples, the one drawn from Leviticus and the other from Numbers.⁸¹⁸ Out of Leviticus, he read of the threat to destroy the **הַמִּנְיִם**, rendered 'incense altars' by the King James Version which he took to imply 'sun worship', given that the root of this word, **הַמָּה**, means sun. This, he conjectured, implied a widespread incidence of sun-worship by 'the nations about Palestine', thus confirming Maimonides's claim as to the numerousness of the Sabaeans.⁸¹⁹ Out of Numbers too, Stillingfleet thought he had identified a practitioner of Sabeanism in Balaam, the soothsayer, from, if the Chaldee paraphrast was to be believed, 'Peor of Syria by the Euphrates', the very Mesopotamian location that Salmasius had pointed to.⁸²⁰ Thus for Stillingfleet, as for Selden before him, the emerging literature on the Sabeian question was converging on the truthfulness of Maimonides's account.

That Maimonides's account was judged reliable was not only a boon for Stillingfleet's case against 'Atheism', but it also provided him with a deep theological basis for his commitment to the integrity of the Church of England.⁸²¹ God's imposition upon the Israelites of a very detailed set of laws that could not be added to, he conjectured, made it abundantly clear that 'men should not of their own heads offer to find out new ways of worship'.⁸²² Whilst the Sabeian theory was an historical argument by which the historicity of the Bible could be defended, it also had very significant theological implications. The entire Law had come about in order to regulate religious expression. Hence, as Maimonides had pointed out, 'the Prophets' often found themselves 'reproving men for their too great sedulity in bringing oblations'.⁸²³ Religious fervour was a

⁸¹⁸ Ibid.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid.

⁸²⁰ Ibid., pp. 44-45.

⁸²¹ Ibid., sig. b2v.

⁸²² Ibid., p. 214.

⁸²³ Ibid., p. 207; *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.32.

dangerous force which could lead men away from God far more easily than it could lead them to him.

Despite the very great historical and theological utility of the ‘Sabean theory’, it did pose quite a significant threat to Stillingfleet’s exegetical method, though he seems not to have been aware of this. Spencer’s *De Legibus* identified in the Sabean theory a powerful means of overcoming the popular enthusiasm for typology, the tendency to ‘extract something spiritual from any dry Mosaic rite’.⁸²⁴ Stillingfleet, however, despite his devotion to the Sabean theory maintained that the Law, which was a means of expurgating ‘idoltrous customs’ was also a conduit for ‘spiritual meaning’.⁸²⁵ That it was almost impossible to sustain both claims, as Heidegger had feared, he appears not to have noticed. Stillingfleet therefore embraced the new anthropological approach toward the scriptures despite its inconsistency with the older typological approach to which he remained equally committed. It is worth noting at this juncture, that Spencer too, in his *Urim et Thummim* (1669) had failed to recognise the radical potential of the Sabean theory. Outlining its core claim that some Sabean rites were forbidden, and others accommodated, Spencer specified that it was those rites ‘better suited to foreshadowing a mystery’ which the Divine had chosen to incorporate into.⁸²⁶ Spencer’s realisation of the radical implications of the Sabean theory appear then to have come only after the publication of *Urim*.⁸²⁷

Enter Stanley

The *Origins Sacrae*, despite its limitations, was no doubt a highly successful application of the Sabean theory to historical apologetics. It did not, however, examine Maimonides’s case on its

⁸²⁴ Spencer, *De legibus*, pp. 185-186: “e quovis aridissimo ritu Mosaico extrahere posse”.

⁸²⁵ Stillingfleet, *Origines*, p. 221.

⁸²⁶ Spencer, *Urim*, pp. 119-120: “ad mysterium aliquod adumbrandum aptiores.”

⁸²⁷ Spencer, *De legibus*, pp. 248-250.

own merits. Choosing instead to grant ‘the hypothesis of the learned rabbi’, as Scaliger, Selden and Salmasius had, Stillingfleet was not interested so much in the production of new knowledge but in confirming the veracity of that which had already been established.⁸²⁸ Thomas Stanley’s *The History of Chaldaick Philosophy*, which appeared the same year is a work of a very different kind. The final instalment in a four volume *History of Philosophy*, the first to appear in the vernacular, it is, as Levitin points out, surprisingly under-appreciated.⁸²⁹ An intellectual history of the ancient Near-East, Stanley’s *History of Chaldaick Philosophy* treats Sabeanism as an outgrowth of Chaldaic theology. Chaldea, which, according to Stanley, was ‘confirmed by R. Maimonides’, as the birthplace of the Sabeans, gave rise to a ‘philosophy’ which ‘exceeded the bounds of their Country and diffused itself into Persia and Arabia’.⁸³⁰ The superstitious elements of this philosophy, termed by Stanley ‘the Chaldaick magick’, had been preserved by Maimonides alone and therefore, it was to his writings that Stanley looked for evidence as to the Chaldean rites, rituals and records which might be mined to tell their particular story, which was after all, as he outlined in his introduction, the story of ‘Learning’ itself.⁸³¹ This work makes no interventions in contemporary theological controversy. It is truly, as Levitin would have it, the outcome of one scholar’s ‘curiosity about the subject matter’.⁸³² Its significance, however, lies in its reading of recently discovered source material through the lenses of the Sabean theory. It represents a further development in the reception of the ‘multilingual Maimonides’, in this case as a purely secular historical authority.

Stanley recognised, however, the limitations of Maimonides’s historical authority. He bemoaned the fact that ‘what is left to us of the Doctrine of the Sabeans’ was ‘delivered upon later

⁸²⁸ Stillingfleet, *Ibid.*, *Origins*. pp. 218-219.

⁸²⁹ Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, pp. 38-39.

⁸³⁰ Thomas Stanley, *The History of Chaldaick Philosophy* (London, 1662), p.1.

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59, p. 48.

⁸³² Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, pp. 111-112.

authorities'.⁸³³ The available evidence indicated, however, that it was 'derived from the Chaldaick', though this was not guaranteed as it was entirely possible that 'the Talmudists' and the 'Arabick writers' thereafter 'from whose hands only we receive it' had fabricated this genealogy.⁸³⁴ Indeed Stanley's knowledge of Sabeanism was drawn in equal part from the *Moreh Nebukhim*, 'a fragment of a Mahometan writer', Said Batricides, a book by one Ahmedus entitled 'Of the rites of the Charenean Chaldeans commonly known by the name of Sabeans' and 'a Ms. Of Mahumed ben Isac, cited by Hottinger'.⁸³⁵ The term, 'Chaldean', according to Stanley implied 'for the later Eastern writers (especially the Arabians)', a range of Oriental peoples, 'not only the Babylonians but the Nabatheans, Charaneans, and Sabeans'.⁸³⁶ The reason for this, Stanley made clear, was the very wide spread of the 'Doctrine of the Chaldean'. Stanley accepted Maimonides's account of Sabeanism, as a global religion.⁸³⁷ He noted that Berosus had referred to Abraham as 'skillful in the celestials' and that Eusebius had ascribed to him the 'Invention of Astrology and Chaldaick'. Both statements appeared to him to confirm Maimonides's supposition that Abraham was born and raised among the Sabeans.⁸³⁸ Despite his evident reliance upon it, Stanley did attempt to move the discussion as to the origins of Sabeanism on from the *Moreh Nebukhim*. Following Lactantius who had named him the first ever idolater, he identified Ham, son of Noah, father of Canaan (Genesis 9.18), as a possible founder of Sabeanism and following John Damascene, he pointed to the great-grandfather of Abraham, Serug, as another possible 'Original of Idolatry' and hence originator of 'the Sabean superstition'.⁸³⁹ Stanley, whilst maintaining Selden's identification of Sabeanism with Zoroastrianism, was clearly content to explore other possible origin stories, foreshadowing the unprecedentedly wide-ranging investigations into these which would be carried out some twenty years later by John Spencer.

⁸³³ Stanley, *Chaldaick.*, p. 86.

⁸³⁴ Ibid.,

⁸³⁵ Ibid., p. 79, p. 80, p. 83, p. 87.

⁸³⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

⁸³⁷ Ibid., p. 79.

⁸³⁸ Ibid., p. 82.

⁸³⁹ Ibid.,

Despite the range of possibilities expressed by Stanley's *History* and the even greater range of possibilities offered by Pococke's notes on Bar Hebraeus's *History*, by the 1670s the identity of Sabeanism with Chaldea had reached the status of truism. John Spencer's account of this tradition on the pages of his *Urim et Thummim*, was based almost entirely on the *Moreh Nebukhim*, ably supported by carefully chosen classical sources. The claim that Sabaens dedicated shrines to images of stars, for example, was endorsed with reference to Lucian, who had written about Syrian shrines to oracles.⁸⁴⁰ Maimonides, had, of course, also indicated that oracles had formed part of Sabeian religious practice. This apparent similitude between Maimonides's account of Sabeanism and Lucian's account of Syrian religion led Spencer to suggest that perhaps both Syrians and Chaldeans might be regarded 'as the earliest parents of idolatry'.⁸⁴¹ 'Sabeanism', it would seem, had thus become a generic term for Eastern practices. Ralph Cudworth, in his *Discourse concerning the true notion of the Lord's Supper* (1670) identified the Sabeans thus, attributing to Scaliger, both the claim that the name 'Sabeian' inferred an Oriental origin and the claim that 'the book which Maimonides so often quoteth concerning that Nation', the *Nabatbean Agriculture*, was 'still extant among the *Mahumetan Arabs*', presaging the possibility of it's at some point being rediscovered.⁸⁴² Theophilus Gale too, in his *Court of the Gentiles* (1678), affirmed the identification of the Sabeans with 'the Chaldeans' who produced 'images dedicated to the sun'.⁸⁴³ He even suggested that the ancient Stoic idea of the sun as fire, was likely derived from the Sabeans, on account of the greater antiquity of the latter.⁸⁴⁴ Edward Reyner (1600-1668), in his *Necessity of Humane Learning* (1663) when referencing a 'Zabian' practice out of Vossius's 1642 translation of

⁸⁴⁰ *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.29.

⁸⁴¹ Spencer, *Dissertatio de Urim & Thummim. In Deuteron. C. 33. V. 8. In qua eorum natura & origo, non paucorum rituum mosaicorum rationes, et obscuriora quaedam Scripturae loca, probabiliter explicantur*, (Cambridge, 1669), p. 51.

⁸⁴² Ralph Cudworth, *A Discourse concerning the Lord's Supper*, (London, 1670).

⁸⁴³ Theophilus Gale, *The court of the gentiles, or, A discourse touching the original of human literature, both philologie and philosophie, from the Scriptures and Jewish church. in order to a demonstration of 1. The perfection of Gods word and church light, 2. The imperfection of natures light and mischief of vain philosophie, 3. The right use of human learning and especially sound philosophie*, (Oxford, 1678), p. 62.

⁸⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,

Hilkbot Avodah Zarah, saw fit to follow it up with an ‘or Eastern’, in brackets, denoting the interchangeability of the two terms.⁸⁴⁵

The subject of idolatry seems to have had a peculiar historical appeal in Restoration England. This was an outcome of the explosion of interest in Maimonides. His *Moreh Nebukhim* was now widely available in Buxtorf’s translation as was his *Hilkbot Avodah Zarah* in Vossius’s. The ready availability of these works alongside those of Pococke and Hottinger allowed for Maimonides’s conception of idolatry to be explored, expanded, and applied to the always pertinent subject of the idolatrousness of Catholicism. Its theological implications would not be fully fleshed out, however, until John Spencer’s *De Legibus* emerged in three volumes between 1683 and 1685.

Enter Spencer

When John Spencer came to write his major work upon the subject, *De legibus* (1683-5), the question as to the origins of Sabeanism had actually faded from the forefront of scholarly debate, its having been resolved into a somewhat foggy consensus. This came as a result of decades of authoritative affirmations of Maimonides’s reliability, the Scaligerian rendering of ‘Sabean’ as ‘Eastern’ religion and a growing body of work which identified many of its key features with other, better documented ancient Oriental religions.

John Spencer’s scholarly career had begun during the English interregnum, though he did not publish a major work until 1663.⁸⁴⁶ In 1667 he was unanimously elected master of his Cambridge College, Corpus Christi, where he would spend the rest of his life, pursuing his most abiding preoccupation, Jewish law. It was Spencer’s contention, following Maimonides, that the Mosaic

⁸⁴⁵ Edward Reyner, *A Treatise on the Necessity of Humane Learning For a Gospel Preacher* (London, 1663), pp. 118-119.

⁸⁴⁶ John Spencer, *A Discourse concerning prodigies wherein the vanity of presages by them is reprehended and heir true and proper ends asserted and vindicated*, (Cambridge, 1663).

Law had to be placed on a rational footing. He had identified two competing anti-rationalist trends in the English Church, which he believed a thorough explication of the law could disrupt. On the one hand, he was worried by the esteem in which Jewish ‘legal institutions’, chief amongst them Sabbath observance, were held, and on the other, he feared the rise of a certain disregard for the Law, which entailed an admittance of a false dichotomy between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament.⁸⁴⁷ This work Spencer hoped, would reveal ‘the gem of truth’ amidst ‘the dung heap’ of Pagan rites.⁸⁴⁸ Spencer’s commitment to this task was such that he continued editing the work long after its publication up to the day of his death in 1693. He was, by that time, preparing to publish a greatly expanded edition, which would reveal the fruits of his more recent research.⁸⁴⁹ This edition would eventually see the light of day, in 1727, when Leonard Chappelow took upon himself the mammoth task of its preparation for publication. This fuller edition of the work included a fourth book as well as nineteen new chapters which were distributed throughout the first three books.⁸⁵⁰

Spencer’s Preface to the first book of *De legibus* clearly set out his view, drawn from the pages of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, that the function of the law was the extirpation of idolatry. Citing the *Guide* III.29, the notes accompanying which he had firmly turned over in his copy of Buxtorf’s translation, he put forward the view that the Law served not only to eliminate idolatry itself but all records of such practices, which might, if left unencumbered serve to reignite it.⁸⁵¹ He then went on to outline the contrary view, which this scholarly behemoth had been built to combat. He derived his knowledge of this view from those notes of Buxtorf’s which he had marked up.⁸⁵² Buxtorf, whom Spencer referred to as Maimonides’s interpreter had claimed that the purpose of

⁸⁴⁷ Spencer, *De legibus*, sig. A3r.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid., sig. A3v: “eo sterquilinio Veritatis gemmam invenire.”

⁸⁴⁹ The resulting manuscript is in the Cambridge University Library CUL MS Add. 2610.

⁸⁵⁰ See John Spencer, *De legibus hebraeorum ritualibus et earum rationibus, libri quatuor* (Cambridge, 1727).

⁸⁵¹ Spencer, *De legibus*, p. 29: Legis nostrae sit idololatriam tollere.

⁸⁵² Spencer’s copy is in the Parker Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge as M.8.33.

the *Moreh Nebukhim* was to challenge the popular view that the Mosaic precepts emanated from the mysterious Divine Will alone and were therefore not intelligible to human beings.⁸⁵³ Spencer presumed this view to have been held by the ‘very many Jews throughout the ages, including Joseph Albo (1380-1444), whose *Sefer Ikkarim* distinguished between those laws which could be explained and those which could not, the *הוקים*. The concept of the *הוקים*, Spencer noted, seemed to have been imbibed by Christian scholars too. Samuel Bochart appeared to have invoked it on the subject of the prohibition against the mixing of wool and linen, which he believed was an arbitrary expression of the Will of the Legislator.⁸⁵⁴ Maimonides’s response to this apparent failure to reckon with the absolute rationality of God was his Sabean theory. Spencer’s embrace of the Sabean theory was not a condescension to rabbinics in place of patristics, for, on the contrary he identified in many patristic sources strong support for the Maimonidean hypothesis. Aquinas, for example, was said to ‘follow the same view’ arguing that just as ‘human laws have reason in a general sense’, divine law could not be totally arbitrary, though its specifics, such as how many animals were needed in order for a particular sacrifice to be considered valid might be.⁸⁵⁵ Indeed Spencer claimed that ‘the Church Fathers, who were almost always at my side’ throughout the writing process, in a very general sense, ‘supported Maimonides’.⁸⁵⁶ Like him, they believed that the Law was designed ‘to lead people away from the worship of demons’ and yet, much to Spencer’s chagrin, they had not investigated how the Law had performed this function, having been ‘diverted elsewhere by allegorical cleverness’.⁸⁵⁷ As a consequence, allegory had become the dominant mode of reading and ‘the rationale behind some laws may perhaps remain hidden from us forever’, because the sources through which it might be uncovered, having been neglected by the fathers, were ‘no longer extant’.⁸⁵⁸

⁸⁵³ Spencer, *De legibus*, p. 1.

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 1-2: “plerique ex mero pendent Legislatoris arbitrio”

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 3: “in eandem sententiam ivit...sicut leges humanae in universali rationem habent.”

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid., sig. A3v: “Ecclesia patres, qui mihi pene semper assisterunt, Ibid., p. 29: Patrum sententiam probat Maimonides.”

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 29; Ibid., p. 167; Ibid.: “argutiis allegoricis alio detorqueantur.”

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 193: “Legum nonnullarum ratio nos forsitan in aeternum latebit... hodie desiderentur.”

Spencer's claim therefore to have been reliant on patristic sources for the development of his theory of the law's origins does not stand up to scrutiny. His approach was borrowed wholesale from Maimonides. It was 'Origen, Clement, Cyril of Alexandria, and others most learned in the writings of the ancient historians' who had failed to investigate the 'primary meaning and purpose of the laws', which was the elimination of idolatry.⁸⁵⁹ In other words, they had not subscribed to the Maimonidean hypothesis choosing instead to understand the Old Testament though 'clever allegorical interpretations', which had won orthodox Christianity the scorn of 'the modern Jews and Socinians'.⁸⁶⁰ It was only through the pursuit of the Sabeian theory, Spencer claimed that Christianity could be put on a rational footing that it might no longer 'serve as a mockery to the Atheists'.⁸⁶¹ This was Spencer's agenda in his *De Legibus*. In articulating the 'reasons for sacred rites', he was attempting to rid Christianity of 'superstition', which, he believed, was a very serious threat to it.⁸⁶² Those who were 'fleeing superstition as one would a swamp' were 'unwittingly plunged into atheism as if into a precipice'.⁸⁶³ A rational account of the development of the Christian religion, he hoped, would stop the rot.

Whereas Stillingfleet had sought to undermine the validity of sources drawn from 'the heathen nations', Spencer was attempting something very different, their integration into biblical scholarship. For him, anthropology, like philology, might serve as a handmaiden to theology.⁸⁶⁴ It could allow for the proper contextualisation of the Scriptures based on evidence drawn from the societies in which they were composed. Maimonides had placed the law on a rational, historical footing. There were, however, 'several laws overlooked by Maimonides' which, on the

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid.: "Origenes, Clemens, Cyrillus Alexandrinus, alii literis et historicorum antiquorum scriptis... scopum primarium legem."

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 185-186: "Sociniani et Judaei moderni."

⁸⁶¹ Ibid., p. 194: "Atheis ludibrium debent."

⁸⁶² Ibid., sig. A3r: "superstitionem."

⁸⁶³ Ibid.: "superstitionem tanquam paludem fugientes, imprudentes in Atheismum tanquam praecipitium cederent."

⁸⁶⁴ Stillingfleet, *Origines*, sig. a3v-b2v.

basis of new evidence, might now be interpreted.⁸⁶⁵ This was Spencer's interest in *De legibus*, the thorough treatment of 'the laws opposed to the ancient Sabeans', the completion of the work that Maimonides had begun.⁸⁶⁶

In order to fulfil this commitment, Spencer would have to search the records, of East and West, for practices which the Law seemed to either accommodate or repudiate, for this would be the distinguishing mark of Sabeanism.⁸⁶⁷ Before he could do this however, he needed to wade into the, still-open-discussion as to the identity of the Sabeans. Whilst Spencer's acceptance of the Sabeian theory was fundamental, his survey of the evidence for them paints a more complex picture. 'Sabeianism', he ultimately determined, was not one unified religion, but a range of pre-Islamic belief systems.⁸⁶⁸ It was a Quranic term, which was used to refer to prior religions hence Parker's claim that it was not in fact an 'ancient' religion.⁸⁶⁹ Spencer himself had taken great pains to point out that just because he believed the term 'Sabeian' to post-date the giving of the Law that did not mean that he believed the people to whom that term referred post-dated the Law. On the contrary, it was his view that the Sabeians mentioned in the Quran were contemporaries of Moses, who embraced the same Chaldaic myths common to a whole host of Ancient Eastern religions.⁸⁷⁰ Amongst these was not just the worship of the luminaries, traditionally associated with Chaldea, but also Gnostic demonology, Platonic allegory and Kabbalah.⁸⁷¹ Spencer laid out very clearly for his readers the route by which he reached this conclusion. He identified two over-lapping methods of determining the truths of the Sabeian origin story, the one philological, the other historical.

⁸⁶⁵ Spencer, *De legibus*, p. 236: "leges aliquot a Maimonide praetermissas."

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid.: "leges tractasse quae Zabiis antiquis opponuntur."

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 241.

⁸⁶⁹ Parker, *Reasons*, p. 73.

⁸⁷⁰ Spencer, *De legibus*, pp. 248-250.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 240-241.

Sabean origins revisited – a philological approach

Spencer's engagement with the philological debate as to the Sabean origins is very interesting given that he does not appear to have had significant facility with oriental languages himself. Indeed, Spencer's knowledge of both the Jewish and Arabic sources he cited in *De legibus* was largely derivative.⁸⁷² Islamic sources were rendered accessible to him by Pococke's *Specimen*, Thomas Erpenius's *Grammatica Arabica* and Hottinger's *Historia orientalis* and the various translations of Jacobus Golius. His personal collection of Jewish literature, still to be found in the Parker Library of Corpus Christi College, includes heavily marked up copies of Buxtorf's *Moreh Nebukhim* and Vorstius's *De Fundamentis Legis*.⁸⁷³ These reveal the tremendous extent of Spencer's reliance upon Latin translations of the works to whose exposition he dedicated his life. As this chapter demonstrates, the notes accompanying these citations often furnished him with references to other Hebrew works which he did not appear to have consulted himself. The enormous index of the 1727 edition of *De legibus*, which was drawn up by Leonard Chappellow after Spencer had died has left at least one historian with the entirely false impression that Spencer was 'an excellent Hebraist'.⁸⁷⁴ Certainly during the composition of the first edition of *De legibus*, Spencer appears to have had quite limited access to the Maimonidean corpus. In fact, at one point in *De legibus* he wrote that he did not at the time of writing have access to the entire corpus of Maimonides's commentary on the Mishnah and so was reliant for particular references on the citations of others.⁸⁷⁵ Interestingly, the fourth book of *De Legibus*, published some thirty years after his death, reveals Spencer to have vastly expanded his knowledge of the Maimonidean corpus following his publication of the third volume. Therein he cited the *Mishneh Torah*

⁸⁷² On Spencer's philological (in)competence see Levitin, 'John Spencer', pp. 53-56, G.J. Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth Century England*, (OUP, 1996), pp. 270-271.

⁸⁷³ Moses Maimonides, *Moreh Nebukhim* Parker Library M.8.33; Moses Maimonides, *Hilkhot Yesodei Hatorah* Parker Library M.8.35.

⁸⁷⁴ Guy Stroumsa, 'Origins of Idolatry', pp. 19-20.

⁸⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 304-305.

extensively, even quoting its third book, *Zemanim*, which could only have been read in the original Hebrew. This seems to indicate that Spencer's facility with Hebrew continued to improve as he sought to delve deeper into Maimonides's legal writings, in particular.

Despite his apparent lack of linguistic competence, Spencer engaged confidently and forcefully with the complex philological debate as to the term 'Sabean'. Spencer explored six possible origins of the term before ultimately concluding that no one of these should be accepted and that the term should be understood to refer broadly to all 'practitioners of divination and astrology (emulating Egyptian or Chaldean practices)'.⁸⁷⁶ That Egyptian practices could be construed as Sabean was especially important to Spencer, as he had significant access to Egyptian antiquity through Greek and Roman sources.

The first philological argument which Spencer considered was that of Pococke, who had supposed that the Hebrew word **צבא** meaning 'army' or 'hosts' in Hebrew might represent the root of the word Sabians, **צבאים**.⁸⁷⁷ He thought this likely on account of Sabian worship of the heavenly hosts. Spencer was not convinced by Pococke's reasoning here. Given the breadth of Sabean worship, as per Maimonides, Spencer thought that their name was unlikely to admit of such a specific meaning.⁸⁷⁸ The second, Hottinger's suggestion that **צבאים** was likely derived from the old Arabic word **ضبا**, meaning 'to deviate' or 'to depart', implying religious conversion or deviation, Spencer judged more credible, on account of its derivation from the writings of Bidavius, a 'renowned interpreter of the Koran' and on account of the support found for this conjecture in the writings of Ibn al-Athir.⁸⁷⁹ Perhaps more interestingly, he also cited as further

⁸⁷⁶ Spencer, *De legibus*, p.239: "quosvis fatidicos et vaticinicos (AEgyptii vel Chaldaici moris artis aemulos)."

⁸⁷⁷ See Pococke, *Speicmen*, pp. 143-144.

⁸⁷⁸ Spencer, *Legibus*, pp. 237-238.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid.: "celebrem Alcorani interprtem"; See Johann Heinrich Hottinger, *Historia Orientalis Quae Ex Variis Orientalium Monumentis Collecta*, (Zurich, 1651) p. 170. Spencer's citation indicates that he was quoting from this particular edition which renders Arabic words in Hebrew letters.

supporting evidence for this reading in a recent work on this subject by Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, which made the claim that, on account of the reports of various unspecified travellers, it had become apparent that the term ‘Sabbi’ was still used in this manner by the Mandeans.⁸⁸⁰

The third argument was Sharestanius’s. He had suggested that צבא resembled the Syriac word *Saba* meaning ‘love’ or ‘desire’, which Spencer considered plausible, on account of its implication that Sabianism had spread from Syria into the Arab world.⁸⁸¹ The fourth, another suggestion of Huet’s to the effect that צאבה was rooted in an Arabic word צבא, meaning ‘the rising sun’, appears to have been considered extremely seriously by Spencer, who was also willing to admit of a fifth possibility that the term meant an ‘an easterly wind’ and was therefore a generic term for ‘Orientals’, as per Scaliger’s supposition.⁸⁸² The sixth possibility, present in a number of Arabic sources was that ‘Saba’ was a given name, either for Sabio, son of Seth or Saba, son of Ham.⁸⁸³ This particular line of reasoning had been rejected by Isaac Casaubon, who wished to make a distinction between the descendants of Seba סבא, son of Cush, as per Genesis 10.7, the סבאים, of whose greatness we have no evidence, and the צאבה, about whom Maimonides wrote, who had populated much of the Arab world.⁸⁸⁴ Whilst Spencer was willing to admit of this distinction, he faulted Casaubon’s reasoning on this point, which was rooted in the relative irrelevance of the ‘Sabean’ as opposed to the ‘Zabian’ people.⁸⁸⁵ Given that the Sabeans of whom Maimonides wrote were a global religion, they could not possibly be the unheard of descendants of Seba son of Cush.⁸⁸⁶ Bochart’s *Geographica sacra*, which pointed to a wealth of evidence from ancient sources as to the strength of the ancient ‘Sabean’ empire, confirmed Spencer in this view

⁸⁸⁰ See Pierre Daniel Huet, *Demonstratio Evangelica* (Amsterdam, 1680) p. 103.

⁸⁸¹ See Pococke, *Speicmen*, pp. 143-144.

⁸⁸² Huet, *Demonstratio*, pp. 107-108

⁸⁸³ See Pococke, *Speicmen*, pp. 143-144.

⁸⁸⁴ Spencer, *Legibus*, pp. 238-239.

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

as did Hottinger's critique of Casaubon, which was rooted in the claim that סבא, as it appears in the Quran, was likely a mere misspelling of צאבה.⁸⁸⁷ Hottinger posited that Muhammed, who did not speak Hebrew, could not possibly have distinguished between letters צ and ס.⁸⁸⁸ Spencer, who, like Hottinger, did not want to accept Casaubon's suggestion as to the the Sabaeans having been descendent of Seba, was, nonetheless, unconvinced by his line of reasoning which presumed the evidently eloquent Arabs had retained an elementary mistake in their holy book.⁸⁸⁹

The etymology of this word, as the varying explanations given demonstrate, had become so hotly disputed that Spencer eventually concluded that this indicated that no one explanation could be trusted, leading him to conclude that it should be understood in a generic sense as it was by Scaliger and Huet.⁸⁹⁰ Spencer's decision to understand Sabeanism thus as a set of practices was justified on the basis of the available evidence, though it was also strategic. His equation of Sabeanism not only with 'Chaldeans' but with 'anyone imbued with their customs and doctrines' gave him the broadest possible remit to identify Sabean practices which could then be used to explain Jewish practices.⁸⁹¹ His having settled upon a Quranic origin for the term was useful too for it explained why it was that no 'Greek or Roman author' had used it.⁸⁹²

Sabean origins revisited – an historical approach

By the time Spencer came to write his *De legibus* a very wide array of sources by which he could pursue the 'Sabean theory' had been made available. Spencer's decision to adopt such an expansive definition of Sabeanism rendered relevant the largest possible range of historical

⁸⁸⁷ See Samuel Bochart, *Geographia sacra*, (Frankfurt, 1681), pp. 147-148.

⁸⁸⁸ Spencer, *Legibus*, pp. 238-239.

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 238-239.

⁸⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁸⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 238-239: "non ad Chaldaeos tantum, sed et quovis eorum moribus et dogmatibus imbutos."

⁸⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 241: "Nulla enim hujusce gentis, in Graeco vel Romano authore."

sources. He accessed most of these through the works of others, Hottinger, Golius, Erpenius and Pococke chief amongst them.⁸⁹³ Through Hottinger, he knew of Abu Joseph Aschaeus's *On the rites or religion of the Charaneans, who in our time are called Zabians*.⁸⁹⁴ The title of this work confirmed him in his view that it was only 'with Islam in power' that the term 'Sabean' entered 'common parlance'.⁸⁹⁵ Through Golius and Hottinger, he identified evidence of a sect, which was likely that referred to by Maimonides, which had emerged in the environs of Ancient Chaldea.⁸⁹⁶ This sect had built shrines atop mountains, which was a central feature of the Sabean religion, according to Maimonides, on account of its devotion to the luminaries.⁸⁹⁷ The emergence of the term 'Sabean' at the dawn of Islam would further accord with Thomas Erpenius's claim that the emergence of Islam was coupled with the emergence of an Arabic Republic of Letters, which was constituted by translations of Egyptian, Persian, Chaldean, Greek, Latin and other ancient languages.⁸⁹⁸ Amongst these translations, Spencer suggested, following Maimonides, there would have been much on the subject of idolatry, taken from sources which are no longer traceable in languages which were no longer comprehensible.⁸⁹⁹ This material would constitute the evidence base for the Sabean religion, which Maimonides mined for practices that the Law had either accommodated or repudiated. Sabeanism thus need not have been a coherent body of ancient traditions but might rather have constituted a composite, which had emerged out of the histories of various cults, which had been studied by Muhammad's contemporaries and their descendants.⁹⁰⁰

⁸⁹³ Ibid., pp. 147-150.

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 241.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid.: "vigente Muhammedismo... communi loquendi."

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 239; See Jacobus Golius, *Kitāb fi-al-ḥarakah al-samāwiyah wa-jawami' 'ilm al-nujūm bi-tafasīr al-shaykh al-fādil Muhammedis fil. Ketiri Ferganensis, qui vulgo Alfraganus dicitur, elementa astronomica, Arabicè & Latinè. Cum notis ad res exoticas sive Orientales, quae in iis occurrunt* (Amsterdam, 1669), p. 251; See Johann Heinrich Hottinger, *Historia Orientalis* (Figuri, 1651), p. 165.

⁸⁹⁷ Spencer, *Legibus*, pp. 238-239.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 243; See Thomas Erpenius, *Orationes tres, de linguarum Ebraeae, aequae dignitate* (Leiden, 1621), p. 53.

⁸⁹⁹ Spencer, *Legibus*, pp. 238-239.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 243.

Spencer's conception of Sabeanism as a generic term for Near-Eastern religions repudiated by Islam did away with the problem that Maimonides had outlined in the *Guide* as to the paucity of evidence for the Sabeian religion.⁹⁰¹ Maimonides had claimed that he had only read a small proportion of the writings of the Sabeans, most of which had never been translated into Arabic. Developments in oriental scholarship, such as Robert Huntington's discovery of the Mandaeans, known as 'Sabeans', and subsequent acquisition of their literature, held out the promise that the limitations of language that had plagued Maimonides might eventually be overcome.⁹⁰² If this were the case, then a thorough conception of the true meaning of the Mosaic law - was in the grasp of European scholars.

The 'Sabeian Theory' as a tool of historical research

Spencer had inherited a version of the Sabeian theory which was deeply rooted in the history of the ancient Near-east. The utility of the theory, for him, was theological, not historical. Spencer's *De legibus* did not record evidence of any new historical discoveries. Spencer himself unlike Pococke or now Huntington, was not in the business of procuring rare manuscripts by which he could uncover new evidence as to the Law's origins. His discoveries came in the form of new readings of Maimonides's works and of the comments on these made by illustrious predecessors, through which he developed an immensely creative, and certainly timely, synthesis of Maimonides's legal and philosophical writings.

Whilst Spencer's intentions may not have been historicising, the implications of his work certainly were. To read the Bible through the lens of the 'Sabeian theory' was to use it as a tool of historical research. To apply the Sabeian theory was to seek to understand each and every

⁹⁰¹ *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.29 & 3.50.

⁹⁰² See Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom*, pp. 283-284.

seemingly inexplicable law in terms of either its accommodation of or its repudiation of some prior practice. Selden's *De Jure* had already used it in this way. So, for example the prohibition against cross-dressing in Deuteronomy 22.5, indicated that the Sabaeans had cross-dressed. Maimonides had suggested that they may have done so in order to worship gendered idols, so female worshippers of Mars would take up weapons of war and male worshippers of Venus would don women's clothing. Selden identified this practice with 'the Canaanites or neighbouring peoples.'⁹⁰³ He suspected that the religious behaviour Maimonides was referencing had indeed spread far and wide, for both Philochorus and Julius Firmicus had written of priests who dressed as women in order to commune with Venus.⁹⁰⁴ Through studying Deuteronomy, through the lens of Sabeian theory, he had come to understand something about Canaanite practice and its broader dissemination that he could not have got from the text itself. Through the study of the Law the ancient Near-eastern context to which it constituted a response opened up. This was an exciting scholarly prospect, though its theological implications were uncertain.

For Stillingfleet, the Sabeian theory was more a tool of historical apologetics than historical research. Vital to his apologetic project, however, was the integration of seemingly problematic evidence into the biblical narrative. Stillingfleet used the 'Sabeian theory' both to develop an account of the Law that made sense of its ultimate supersession by the Gospel and to account for the growing mountain of evidence of cultures just as ancient as Christianity which had no place in the biblical narrative. The theological pay-off was a reading of history that was guided by the hand of God. The relationship between human and Divine was ever-changing on that basis. Religious forms were adapted to human needs and therefore not fixed. Their adaptation, however, was not the prerogative of man, but of God Himself, whose shifting expectations of

⁹⁰³ Selden, *De Jure*, pp. 209-210: "Caanaeis sive vicinis."; *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.38.

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 192-194.

humanity could be gauged through the uncovering of historical evidence. History, properly understood, therefore, was replete with theological meaning.

The implications of Maimonides's Sabeian theory for seventeenth-century thought were then twofold. On the one hand, history was now a site of revelation. The fast-evolving historical record would allow humans to glimpse the mind of God as never before. On the other hand, however, it also held out the promise of a fully historicised theology, within which religious practice itself played only a secondary role. The ceremonial laws were not significant in themselves but rather in what they revealed about the role of the Divine in history. The Law, properly understood, evolved by necessity, according to the determinations of the lawgiver who oriented himself towards his people as a doctor towards a patient. "The wisest physician," Spencer wrote 'cures serious and persistent diseases with gentle remedies.'⁹⁰⁵ Given the enormous gulf between the ethnic rites observed in Egypt and the worship of the one God, which was the Law's object, the route from one to the other had to proceed by small steps. The Law, by its incorporation of 'the old worship' could be read in hindsight as a testament to the wisdom and goodness of God.⁹⁰⁶ Rather than 'immediately removing whatever could be abolished from ancient custom', he had opted for a gradual 'reformation', at a pace commensurate with the capacities of his people.⁹⁰⁷ Spencer's conception of the Sabeian theory as the divine's model for religious reformation thus seems to have accorded remarkably well with the spirit of the English Restoration. The manner in which the law had emerged warned humanity against radical changes, which, even when well intentioned, were doomed to fail. Human beings in 'their infancy' were to be 'nurtured', not thrust, into 'maturity'.⁹⁰⁸

⁹⁰⁵ Spencer, *Urim*, p. 21: "Medicus sapientissimus graves & pertinaces lentis remediis Melius sanari."

⁹⁰⁶ Spencer, *De legibus*, pp. 120-122: "ritus istos veteres."

⁹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*: "reformationem moliri visum esset, non protinus quicquid ex usu veter tolli potuit sustulerunt."

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*: "populi illius infantiam sensim et leniter erudiit."

The Sabean theory thus gave rise to an understanding of the law as contingent though nonetheless necessary on account of this. The precepts of the law were thus, Stillingfleet reasoned ‘required not for themselves, but for some further end’, which was to be determined by the lawgiver.⁹⁰⁹ It was not the job of the individual to determine the operations of the Law for themselves, so much so that ‘to add to the Law of Moses’ was deemed ‘repugnant to the wisdom of God’.⁹¹⁰ The Sabean theory thus proved friendly not only to the cause of gradual reformation but also to the cause of the national church, through which religion could be directed towards its desired ends by a properly regulated hierarchy. Spencer noted that central to the ‘reformation’ of Sabean religious practices was their removal from the private sphere and their entrance into the public sphere.⁹¹¹ Indeed Deuteronomy 27.15 had specifically forbidden the erection of an idol ‘in secret’.⁹¹² This was on account of the ‘countless evils that easily arise from private and unaccountable religion’.⁹¹³ This was the purpose of the construction of the Tabernacle and then the Temple, the centralisation of religious worship under a clearly delineated authority.⁹¹⁴ *De legibus*, whilst a vast and complex work, demonstrated throughout the need for trust in legitimate authorities, which the history of religion laid out therein culminated in. On this account it was very important for Spencer to situate himself within the tradition of orthodox biblical interpretation, even if in reality, his major inspiration was Jewish, rather than Christian. Spencer’s emphasis on the role of religious authority was absolutely central to his entire project. The case he made for the necessity of evolution in religious life was dependent upon there being proper authorities to guide that evolution. The lesson from the history of religion that Spencer derived from his unprecedented application of the Sabean theory was that human beings could be easily diverted from the path of right religion. For this reason, the true church, he believed, required

⁹⁰⁹ Stillingfleet, *Origines*, p. 17.

⁹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁹¹¹ Spencer, *Urim*, p. 79.

⁹¹² *Ibid.*: “in abscondito.”

⁹¹³ *Ibid.*: “malis innumeris ex hac privata et sine teste religione oriundis.”

⁹¹⁴ Spencer, *Urim*, p. 79.

strict rules with which to govern religious behaviour and proper authorities with which, both to enforce those rules and, in the face of necessity, to change them. Maimonides's theory thus, in the hands of Spencer and Stillingfleet had been almost totally co-opted for the cause of the beleaguered national church, to whose purposes it proved remarkably amenable.

Spencer and Stillingfleet like Pococke, Lightfoot and Selden before them, identified in Maimonides's works copious resources they could correct for the historical errors by which Christians had been led astray. Stillingfleet's prime targets were those 'atheists of our age' who did not give enough credit to Scripture, questioning whether indeed 'Moses was the author of the records under his name'.⁹¹⁵ Spencer, on the other hand, was more concerned by those who overemphasised the Scriptures, either by insisting upon the contemporary observance of the Mosaic Law or by reducing that Law to a site of allegorical interpretation. Both unfortunate tendencies, he claimed, could be corrected for via the thorough historicisation of the Law as per the Sabean theory.

The subject of *De legibus* is the proper contextualisation of the Mosaic precepts as historical artefacts by which the operation of God in history could be revealed. Spencer argued throughout that the Law was neither binding in perpetuity though nor was its function primarily typological. Following Maimonides, he confidently asserted that 'if we were to examine Sabean rituals, a great light would shine for many, illuminating the obscure passages of the Hebrew laws, which were given precisely to impede the course of prevailing Sabeanism.'⁹¹⁶

Sabeanism, for Spencer, constituted a diverse array of religious practices. The common thread running through all of these was their grounding in the 'pestilence of the worst of superstition',

⁹¹⁵ Stillingfleet, *Origines*, sig. b2v; *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 177: "Si ritus eorum perspectos haberemus lux magna plurimus affulgeret, in obscure jam sitis, hebraeorum legibus, quae ideo tradebentur, ut Zabiismi tunc late regnantis cursum remorari possent."

which he contrasted with well-regulated, rational religion.⁹¹⁷ On account of this fundamental commitment to the quelling of prior superstitions, the Law's prerequisites had to be very clearly spelled out, leaving 'hardly any room for mystical meanings' of the kind that Christians had become accustomed to reading into the law.⁹¹⁸ I propose here to show how Spencer presented this argument in the case of both the Jewish dietary laws and the observance of the Sabbath with a view to demonstrating his double refutation of the contemporary observance of the laws and the allegorical framing of them.⁹¹⁹

The Sabean Origins of the Dietary Laws

The primary function of the Jewish dietary laws, for Spencer following Maimonides, was their marking out of the Jews out as a peculiar people. They were to live a lifestyle, strictly enforced by their religious hierarchies, which made them distinct from their neighbours such that they would not find themselves, over time, reintegrating into the very idolatrous cults from which the Law had freed them.⁹²⁰ In support of this rationale, Spencer cited *De Idololatria* 11.1,2, 'you shall not walk in the statutes of the nations.'⁹²¹ It was his view that without distinguishing marks, given the merely rudimentary understanding that they were in possession of, the Hebrews would have forgotten their particular relationship with the creator over time.⁹²² The specific laws they were to follow revealed something of the people whose practices these were designed to repudiate. They could thus be shown to have had a practical purpose when understood in historical context. The popular tendency to divine typological or allegorical significance in 'every word and institution of

⁹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-117: "pessimae superstitionis peste."

⁹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 248: "In iis locus vix ullus sensui alicui mystico relinquatur."

⁹¹⁹ Spencer, *De legibus*, sig. A3r.

⁹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁹²¹ *Ibid.*: "non ambulatis in statutis Gentium."

⁹²² *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Moses', had diverted 'so many of our theologians' away from the excavation of the surest possible reading of the Hebrew Scriptures as history, not mystery.⁹²³

The prohibition in Genesis against seething a kid in its mother's milk had long been understood in a tropological sense as a means of cultivating 'mercy and gentleness'.⁹²⁴ Spencer, however, whilst appreciating the rhetorical value of this framing, deemed it illogical. For if what was at issue was animal cruelty then the prohibition should have been generic. The singling out of the kid for special treatment warranted an explanation.⁹²⁵ This could be found in the application of the Sabeian theory.

Maimonides had attempted to apply his theory to this particular prohibition, presuming it to have had its origins in a Sabeian practice, though, by his own admission, he had no evidence of such a practice.⁹²⁶ Spencer, however, thought he had in a source cited in Ralph Cudworth's *True Notion of the Lord's Supper*.⁹²⁷ This source took the form of a Karaite manuscript, whose authorship was not known. In this manuscript was recorded details of an ancient fertility rite, involving the cooking of a kid in its mother's milk and the pouring of that milk onto surrounding vegetation.⁹²⁸ Unaware of the evidence uncovered by Cudworth, Maimonides had identified a more pedestrian justification for this law, its health benefits. He was of the view, that the heaviness of the meat of a kid cooked in its mother's milk would render its digestion difficult.⁹²⁹ Spencer, following Aben Ezra, rejected this suggestion on the grounds that Arabs often cooked kids in their mother's milk because they believed that the milk of the kid's mother would have a similar flavour to the meat of the kid itself, thus cooking the kid in her milk would serve to

⁹²³ Ibid., pp. 180-181: "tot theologos nostris...ad omnia Mosis verba et instituta"

⁹²⁴ Ibid., p. 299: "celementia et manfuetudinem."

⁹²⁵ Ibid.

⁹²⁶ Ibid., p. 300; *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.45.

⁹²⁷ See Ralph Cudworth, *True Notion of the Lord's Supper* (London, 1642), pp. 64-66.

⁹²⁸ Spencer, *De legibus*, p. 300.

⁹²⁹ Ibid., p. 301.

enhance its flavour.⁹³⁰ Far from detracting from the experience of eating goat meat, a milk-based sauce, according to Aben Ezra, would guarantee a tenderer, tastier meat.⁹³¹ Further to this, Spencer suggested that if Maimonides were right and the ban on eating meat with milk was motivated purely by the costs to one's health of doing so, the Torah would not have specified that it was the milk of the mother that was problematic but rather milk in general.⁹³² He suspected therefore that it was very likely that a ritual akin to the one the Karaite Cudworth had cited was being prohibited by this verse. He found a reference to ritual which involved the cooking of a kid in its mother's milk in an unidentifiable text by 'the lesser known' Rabbi Menachem Recanati, which described an idolatrous practice involving the cooking of meat in milk in order to create a mixture into which idolaters would place seeds in the hopes that these seeds would yield particularly glorious fruits.⁹³³ Given the similarities between this account and those of other rituals described in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, which in a number of cases involved the cooking of meat, Spencer was inclined to believe that this too represented a Sabeian practice.⁹³⁴ Furthermore, he noted that the Chaldee paraphrast's rendering of Exodus 23.19 indicated a similar justification for this law:

מי בית ישראל לית אתון רשאין לא למבשלא ולא למיכול בשר וחלב מערבין כחדא

You, of the house of Israel, you are not permitted to cook or to eat meat and milk together

This rendering confirmed Spencer's suspicions. The purpose of this law was to ensure that the minds of the Israelites, as they planted their crops, were turned to God, who could provide them

⁹³⁰ Ibid., pp. 300-301.

⁹³¹ Ibid.

⁹³² Ibid.

⁹³³ Ibid., p. 305: "non adeo decantatum."

⁹³⁴ Ibid., p. 270.

with true abundance, as opposed to the superstitious rituals of the surrounding cultures which could not.⁹³⁵

Another clue as to the aetiology of this law was its placement in Exodus among other laws pertaining to the three ‘foot festivals’ (שלש רגלים), when the Israelites would traditionally travel to Jerusalem in order to offer up festive sacrifices. This led Spencer to believe that it likely concerned a particular foot festival. As the surrounding laws concerned the Feasts of Passover and Pentecost, this one likely concerned the Feast of Tabernacles, the harvest festival. This strengthened his case for the prohibition against the cooking of a kid in its mother’s milk as a repudiation of a Pagan fertility rite.⁹³⁶ Spencer derived further support for this position from a comment of Abarbanel’s on Exodus 23.1, which referred to an idolatrous fertility rite in which meat was cooked in milk ‘during the harvest season’ (בזמן אסיפת).⁹³⁷ Perhaps this fertility rite, which involved a goat, could also explain the sacrificing of goats as sin offerings during the festival of the Tabernacles. For sin offerings were only brought in atonement for sins. Had the Hebrews sinned by cooking goats in milk to idolatrous ends, they would thus be able to atone for these sins through the offering up of goats to the one true God.⁹³⁸

Whilst Spencer was convinced on account of the evidence gathered here that the prohibition against the cooking of a kid in its mother’s milk was a repudiation of an ancient fertility rite which enjoined the same, he recognised that he had no evidence of this practice from Moses’s own time, nor had he identified traces of any parallel rites in the annals of Greece and Rome.⁹³⁹ He did, however, wish to state that this rite which he had read of in the writings of Aben Ezra, Rabbi Menachem and the anonymous Karaite manuscript cited by Cudworth, did accord with

⁹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 305-306.

⁹³⁶ Ibid.

⁹³⁷ Ibid., p. 306.

⁹³⁸ Ibid.

⁹³⁹ Ibid., p. 307.

the very great evidence for the use of both goats and milk in Pagan fertility rituals. Sylvanus, god of forests, for example, was appeased by milk offerings and Faunus was appeased by offerings of young goats. Pan too was worshipped through milk offerings, as was Ceres, in the ambarvalia ceremonies.⁹⁴⁰ It would therefore not be unreasonable to suggest that there was likely an ancient fertility ritual which involved the offering up of a goat, cooked in his mother's milk, which this law was instituted to repudiate.

The case of the kid cooked in its mother's milk demonstrates Spencer's particular commitment to the thorough explication of the Mosaic Law in terms of the Sabean theory. He was not content to interpret the Law in a moral sense as was standard exegetical practice. Even where Maimonides himself was not able to identify the Sabean origins of a particular practice, Spencer approached said practice with a view to uncovering evidence for it in the history of the ancient Near-east. Spencer's approach to Maimonides's explanations as to the origins of particular laws was to attempt to buttress these where Maimonides himself did not have the evidence with which to do so. In the instance of this particular law, Spencer was able to identify relevant evidence for its Sabean origins that Maimonides himself would not have had access to. He thus built upon the historical method that Maimonides had outlined.

Sabbath

Spencer's reconstruction of the Law has confounded historians of scholarship who have been unsure as to whether it is a work of history or of theology.⁹⁴¹ Whilst the Law was consistently historicised therein, the theological implications of this historicisation are not always clear, as in

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁴¹ See Fausto Parente, 'Spencer, Maimonides and the History of Religion; Spencer's *De Legibus Hebraeorum* and its Modern Evaluation' in Christopher Ligota and Jean-Louis Quantin, *A Selection of Papers from the seminar on the History of Scholarship Held Annually at the Warburg Institute* (OUP, 2006) pp. 277-304.

the above example of the prohibition against the cooking of a kid in its mother's milk. Spencer did, however, address a number of questions of contemporary theological controversy through the lens of the Sabeian theory in which its theological implications are made plain. None of these were quite so contentious as his discussion of the Jewish Sabbath which he regarded, controversially as a matter of Jewish 'ritual worship', with little connection to the Christian Sabbath as it had been instituted by Christ.⁹⁴²

Spencer's study of the laws of the Sabbath saw him develop Maimonides's ideas to ends Maimonides certainly would not have recognised. Spencer understood the Jewish conception of the Sabbath in thoroughly Maimonidean terms, as a reminder of the 'doctrine of the creation of the world'. Indeed he had very firmly folded the corner of the relevant page over these lines in his copy of Buxtorf's translation of the *Moreh Nebukhim*.⁹⁴³ In a world which was widely believed to be eternal, the Sabbath provided the Jews with a weekly reminder of their renunciation of this erroneous view.⁹⁴⁴ This view having been abandoned, however, the original function of the Sabbath was no more.⁹⁴⁵ The Sabbath as observed by Christians, was not, according to Spencer, mandated by the fourth commandment.⁹⁴⁶

That the Sabbath was a ceremonial, as opposed to a moral, precept could be shown by its having been abrogated in order to allow for the performance of religious functions as was the case with the priests, who performed their ministerial duties seven days a week and those responsible for performing circumcisions, who frequently did so on the Sabbath day (John 7.22).⁹⁴⁷ This legitimate Sabbath-day work, should point the reader, Spencer argued, towards an understanding

⁹⁴² Ibid., p. 93: "cultum rituaem".

⁹⁴³ See Maimonides, *Liber Doctor Perplexorum*, (Parker Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge as M.8.33), p. 470; *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.43.

⁹⁴⁴ Spencer, *De legibus*, pp. 60- 61.

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 94.

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid.,

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 93-94; See John 7.22

of the true function of the Sabbath, as a reminder of the power of the Creator-God. Rest on that day was not necessary for those already devoted to his service who therefore did not require a further reminder and as such, the strict renunciation of activities unrelated to religion on the Sabbath-day was rooted in a misunderstanding of the commandments, and thus constituted an accidental heresy.⁹⁴⁸ Further evidence of the distinctiveness of the Jewish Sabbath for the Jewish people was to be found in Philo's commentary on the decalogue, where the fourth commandment was judged to refer 'not only to the weekly Sabbath but also to the Sabbath of years, all the feasts'. It was therefore central to the ceremonial Law, which did not bind Christians, rather than the moral Law, which did.⁹⁴⁹ Indeed, the decalogue, as a whole, Spencer would go on to claim in a new chapter composed for the second edition of *De legibus*, was not, as previously assumed, a universal moral code, but rather a summary of the ceremonial Law whose chief aim was the eradication of idolatry.⁹⁵⁰ Spencer also noted that the word 'Sabbath' appeared both in the Old Testament (*Leviticus* 23.24) and in Pagan literature as a generic term for a religious observance.⁹⁵¹ The Jewish Sabbath was, therefore, according to Spencer, a 'ritual institution', which did not bind Christians, and so for them to mandate its observance would constitute a 'grave sin.'⁹⁵²

Spencer thus staked out the controversial view that the Sabbath was a specifically Jewish observance. Whilst it was instituted in order to remind the Jews of creation *ex nihilo*, it had now achieved this aim. The 'ancient gods have been naturally reduced to nothing' and thus there was no longer a need to set aside a particular day to mark our particular devotion to the Creator-God.⁹⁵³ The *Pentateuch* as Maimonides understood it could not 'support the position of the

⁹⁴⁸ Spencer, *De legibus*, pp. 93-94: "Non solum Sabbatum septem dierum, sed Sabbata etiam annorum in yem omnia fest."

⁹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁹⁵⁰ See Spencer, *De legibus* (1727), pp. 28-40.

⁹⁵¹ Spencer, *De legibus*, p. 93.

⁹⁵² *Ibid.*,: "gravissime peccare."

⁹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 94: "Diis illis antiquis jam e rerum natura sugatis".

Sabbatarians'.⁹⁵⁴ It was vital, Spencer claimed, for Sabbath observance to differ in kind from that of the Jews, hence the Early Church had used its legitimate authority to move the Sabbath to the first day of the week, Sunday, on which Jesus had risen from the dead. This was so as to ensure that Christians were worshipping the creator of all who sent his son to die for our sins, as opposed to the 'temporal redeemer' of the Hebrews who had brought them out of Egypt.⁹⁵⁵ Fascinatingly, Spencer, usually averse to such readings, here pointed out that the Exodus, from the perspective of the Fathers, served merely as a 'shadow and a type' of Christian redemption and therefore it was imperative that Christians, moderate their observance of the Jewish Sabbath, lest they come to associate it with the giving of the Law, instead of Christ's expiatory sacrifice, which is what it memorialised for them.⁹⁵⁶

In the case of the Sabbath, Spencer applied the Sabeian theory to the evolution of Christianity out of Judaism. Just as the Law had originally modified Pagan practices such that these might be redirected to the worship of the one true God, so the Early Church had modified Jewish practices such that these might be redirected from the remembrance of the relationship between the God of Abraham and his descendants to the remembrance of the universal salvation attained through the expiatory sacrifice of Christ. Sabbatarianism, for him, then, represented something quite different from that which it aimed at. Far from restoring the primitive holiness of the Early Church, the strict observance of the Sabbath might be accused of 'regressing the matured Church back to its infancy'.⁹⁵⁷

Spencer's characterisation of the fourth commandment as part of the ceremonial law was not novel, indeed this notion was widely accepted by Laudians, and later, by covenant theologians.⁹⁵⁸

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid.: p. 93: "ad Sabbatariorum partes adjuvandas".

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 92-93: "redemptoris temporalis".

⁹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 92-93: "typum tantum et umbram."

⁹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 94: "Ecclesiam jame adultam ad primas cunas revocat."

⁹⁵⁸ See Kirsten Macfarlane, *Lay Learning and the Bible in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World* (OUP, 2024), pp. 129-135.

His reading of it through the lens of the Sabeian theory was historical, however. He believed that the Sabbatarian commitment to the strict observance of the Jewish Sabbath, whether on Saturday or Sunday, as a day ‘of rest and sanctity’ was born of ignorance of the Law’s historical context.⁹⁵⁹ This much-misguided movement, on Spencer’s view, would be easily quelled if only the idolatrous origins of the Jewish Sabbath were well established. That Jewish Sabbath was part of the ceremonial law Spencer’s critique of Sabbath observance was rooted in his thoroughgoing commitment to the Sabeian theory.

Sacrifice

The significance of Maimonides for the explication of the sacrificial cult was unparalleled. As we have established, it was primarily through the *Mishneh Torah* that seventeenth-century scholars had access to the inner working of the Temple. This knowledge, especially in the case of Ainsworth’s *De sacrificiis* was used to uphold the typological enterprise. Spencer relied more on the *Moreh Nebukhim* for access to the Jewish tradition than he did the *Mishneh Torah*, not least because it was not until after *De legibus* was published that he was able to access the latter work. For him, Maimonides did not offer strong support for a typological reading of the Old Testament text but rather an inducement to an anthropological approach which threatened to upend the entire typological enterprise.

Whilst, as the example of his account of the Sabbath shows, Spencer was not entirely averse to typology, he did not employ this methodology at all in his analysis of the sacrificial cult. Without rejecting typology outright, Spencer stressed its limited utility, cautioning against the temptation to ‘extract something spiritual from any driest Mosaic rite’.⁹⁶⁰ Spencer attributed this tendency to

⁹⁵⁹ Spencer, *De legibus*, p. 93: “otium et sanctitatem”.

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 185: “spirituale aliquid e quovis aridissimo ritu Mosaico extrahere posse.”

a misinterpretation of the verse in *Colossians* 2.17, ‘these are a shadow of the things to come but the substance belongs to Christ.’ Whilst the Apostle had been taken here to have implied that ‘all Mosaic rites are shadows and figures’ of the Gospel truth, what he had actually meant, according to Spencer, was that ‘compared with Christ’, the Mosaic precepts ‘were mere shadows’.⁹⁶¹

Spencer, unlike the Jews or the Socinians, however, did not reject the possibility that ‘certain rites and legal institutions’ might represent ‘sacred mysteries’, though he took great pains to stress that this could only ever be their ‘secondary purpose’, their chief object being the elimination of idolatry.⁹⁶² He maintained the validity of the typological approach only as it had been employed on the basis of tradition, as was the case with Philo, who did ‘not himself invent’ allegorical readings but was content to perpetuate those ‘received through tradition’.⁹⁶³

Spencer’s unwillingness to completely abandon typology as a mode of exegesis, perhaps in a bid to shirk accusations of Socinianism, has led Levitin to claim that his early Anglican readers credited him with ‘saving’ it.⁹⁶⁴ This was never the case. The only such reader Levitin cites in support of his argument is William Owtram, who was long dead by the time Spencer’s major work, *De Legibus*, was published and the only evidence of his gratitude to Spencer’s typological analyses are taken from *Urim*, in which the mature Spencer’s approach to typology had yet to take shape.⁹⁶⁵ Both Stolzenberg and Levitin have argued convincingly against the claims of

⁹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 186: “Omnia, meram umbram, sumum, nihil, esse; si cum Christo et illa rerum soliditate quas introduxit ipse conferantur.”

⁹⁶² Ibid., p. 29-30: “Deum ritus & instituta quaedam legalis mysteriis quibusdam sacratoribus adumbrandis inservire voluisse. Deum instituta legalia, non omnia, sed quaedam solummodo, in usum illum ordinasse.”; Ibid., p. 21: “Rebus quibusdam Evangelicis & officiis moralibus, tanquam in imagine representandis, inservient.”

⁹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 193-194: non a se ipso primum excogitas, sed traditione receptas.”

⁹⁶⁴ Some scholars have attempted to recast Spencer as a closet Socinian. See Fausto Parente, ‘Spencer, Maimonides and the History of Religion; Spencer’s *De Legibus Hebraeorum* and its Modern Evaluation’ in Christopher Ligota and Jean-Louis Quantin, *A Selection of Papers from the seminar on the History of Scholarship Held Annually at the Warburg Institute* (OUP, 2006) pp. 277-304; Martin Mulsow, ‘Orientalistik im Kontext der sozinianischen und deistischen Debatten um 1700; Spencer, Crell, Locke und Newton’, *Scientia Poetica*, II, 1998, pp. 27-57; William Horbury, ‘John Spencer’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; William Horbury, ‘John Spencer (1630-1693) and Hebrew Study’, *Letter of the Corpus Association*, LXXVIII, 1999, pp. 12-23; Ludwig Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testaments in der christlichen Kirche* (Jena, 1869) p. 543.

⁹⁶⁵ Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, pp. 170-171; Dmitri Levitin, ‘John Spencer’s *De Legibus Hebraeorum* (1683-85) and Enlightened Sacred History: A New Interpretation’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 2013, Vol. 76 (2013), pp. 49-92, p. 86.

Martin Mulsow, Fausto Parente and William Horbury as to the heterodoxy of Spencer. Levitin has even sought to defend Spencer against the claim that his belief in the Platonic corruption of the Scriptures put him outside the bounds of orthodoxy. This is a strange move from Levitin given that Spencer himself did not endorse the Platonic corruption hypothesis, which would indeed have aligned him with many Socinians.⁹⁶⁶ The notion that ‘Platonic teaching prevalent among the Hellenists’ had made its way into the doctrines of the early church, promoting an excessive emphasis on ‘shadows, types, and representations of heavenly realities’, for Spencer, was ‘without solid foundation’.⁹⁶⁷ He thought it more likely that such modes of thinking about the temple had a much earlier origin, on account of the ‘correspondence and semblance that existed between the Tabernacle’, as it had been constructed in the desert, and ‘heaven’.⁹⁶⁸

For Spencer, the significance of the laws concerning sacrifice was to be found in the ‘prior idolatrous practices’, which the law had repudiated, and, on the other hand, in the incorporation of those practices.⁹⁶⁹ This repudiation of idolatry came in the form of the offering up of particular animals, such as rams, goats and oxen, which idolaters of old had held in particular esteem.⁹⁷⁰ The quintessential example of this repudiation was the Passover sacrifice, which saw the Hebrews saved through the offering up the lamb, an object of religious worship in Egypt.⁹⁷¹ Sacrifice, in general, however, was incorporated into the Law as a condescension to prior religious traditions. In support of this point, Spencer directed his readers toward Josephus’s *Jewish Antiquities*, which indicated the specific times during the day at which each of the daily sacrifices would be offered up, the morning lamb after the second hour, the evening lamb at the

⁹⁶⁶ Levitin ‘John Spencer’, p. 75.

⁹⁶⁷ Spencer, *De Legibus*, p. 188: “doctrina illa platonica inter hellenistas obtinens... rerum caelestium, umbrae, typis et simulacra... haec opinione fundamento caret.”

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid.: “Judaeos antiquos tabernaculum rerum caelestium umbram et exemplar existimasse ob affinitatem e similitudinem quae inter tabernaculum intercessit.”

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 142-143: “Probabile est certa illa sacrificii jugis offerendi tempora, moris idololatriae abolendi causa instituta.”

⁹⁷⁰ *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.46.

⁹⁷¹ Spencer, *De Legibus*, p. 260.

ninth hour, the paschal lamb following the continual sacrifice neither before sunrise nor after sunset, which he took as strong evidence for the highly regimented nature of the sacrificial cult, a testament to its having replaced more extemporaneous expressions of religious ardour.⁹⁷² Whilst the Law incorporated particular elements of prior sacrificial cults, under its authority these were to be very strictly governed such that the distinction between the worship of the one true God through the offering up of sacrifices to him would always be different in kind to the offering up of sacrifices to the various mediators between Man and God, which had characterised older forms of worship.

Maimonides's explanation for the sacrificial cult is given in *Moreh Nebukhim* 332. There he wrote, 'It was in accordance with the wisdom of and plan of God, as displayed in the whole Creation, that he did not command us to give up and discontinue', the offering of sacrifices. Spencer affirmed this view whole-heartedly, citing Shem Tobh ibn Falaquera, he observed, 'and it was impossible to abandon what they were accustomed to,' affirming, the basic conception of the evolution of the Law that he had outlined in *Urim* so many years earlier.⁹⁷³ The human propensity to hold fast to old habits was borne in mind here, thus whilst the object of sacrifice was changed, its substance was not, allowing the Israelites to continue many aspects of their traditional worship well into the evolution of their peoplehood. On this point, Spencer felt himself to be in good company, having failed to identify 'any of the Fathers, whether Greek or Latin' who held a contrary view.⁹⁷⁴ He noted, however, that some Jewish scholars, including Nachmanides, had departed from Maimonides on this point, rejecting his claim that the sacrificial cult would end with idolatry.⁹⁷⁵ Spencer, of course, came to Maimonides's defense, citing Abarbanel, who had demonstrated 'with the authority of Scripture and the ancient Sages',

⁹⁷² Ibid., pp. 142-143.

⁹⁷³ Ibid., pp. 647-648: "impossibile erat abicere ea ad quae errant assueti."

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 645: "Nullum tamen e patribus, Graecis aut Latinis, in memoriam."

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 647-648.

that Maimonides's account of the origins of the sacrificial cult was 'in harmony with piety.'⁹⁷⁶ For Spencer, identifying the idolatrous origins of religious sacrifice allowed one to make sense of it, which 'the commentaries of the Rabbis, allegorists, and common critics', did not.⁹⁷⁷

This identification of the sacrificial cult with ancient idolatry proved tremendously useful, for its rendering sensible the initial impetus for sacrifice and for its guiding us in our exploration of the particular rules governing the administration of temple. I will discuss two of these here, which are particularly useful for revealing the ways in which Spencer read Maimonides. The first is the requirement that the blood of a sacrifice be drained before that sacrifice be consumed and the second is the very strict criteria governing the conditions under which a sacrifice might be offered. Both of these requirements, Spencer identified, repudiated very specific ancient idolatrous practices, which it was the Law's function to eradicate and emphasised the importance of public, as opposed to private sacrifices.

The prohibition against the consumption of blood was one which clearly greatly interested Spencer. The 'ad lectorem' to *De legibus* specifically identified this as a Jewish practice which Christians, in their ignorance of the origins of the Law, had taken up.⁹⁷⁸ Recent research by Hannah Dongsun Lee indicates that Spencer was not alone in his condemnation of the rise of this observance, which had been particularly fiercely debated during the English interregnum.⁹⁷⁹ In order to convince Christians of the inapplicability of this particular commandment, he sought to explain its aetiology. His starting point was Genesis 23.4 which clearly reads:

בשר בנפשו דמו לא תאכלו

You may not eat meat with its lifeblood.

⁹⁷⁶ Ibid.: "Verba ejus hac de re non sunt futilia, sed pietati consona."

⁹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 640: "Rabbinorum, Allegorizantium et criticorum vulgarium commentarii."

⁹⁷⁸ Ibid., sig. A3r.

⁹⁷⁹ Hannah Dongsun Lee, 'Religion and Natural Law in Interregnum England: Thomas Barlow on Human Obligation,' Oxford DPhil thesis (2023), pp. 61-128.

The instruction here is very clear. The blood of a sacrifice must be drained before that sacrifice could be consumed.

It is therefore curious, Spencer noted, that a very similar command was issued in Leviticus 19.26:

לא תאכלו על הדם לא תנחשו ולא תעוננו

You shall not eat (upon/with) the blood. You shall not practice divination or soothsaying.

Whilst the first prohibition, against the consumption of blood, according to Maimonides, was likely motivated by medical concerns, the blood of an animal being difficult for humans to digest, the second, which surely did not represent merely a repeat of the first, must have had its roots in an ancient idolatrous practice, seeming as it does, to outlaw not just the consumption of blood but the consumption of any foodstuff in the presence of blood.⁹⁸⁰ This, Maimonides believed, could only be explained in terms of the Sabean attempt to commune with demons via the consumption of food in close proximity to blood, upon which they habitually feasted.⁹⁸¹

Confirmation that this law was a means of prohibiting a Sabean rite was to be found in the clause that followed its promulgation, **לא תנחשו ולא תעוננו** do not practice divination or soothsaying, indicating that this prohibition specifically concerned illegitimate religious practices.⁹⁸² As Maimonides explained in *Moreh Nebukhim* (3.46), citing ‘the book of the Tomtom’ the practice at

⁹⁸⁰ Spencer, *De Legibus*, p. 148; *More Nebukhim* 3.46.

⁹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 336.

hand, involved the draining of the blood of an animal slaughtered for sacrificial purposes into some sort of vessel, following which, the slaughtered animal would be consumed in community. The object here was communion with demons, who, it was believed feasted on blood, thus the presence of a vessel full of blood at a religious gathering, would serve to attract them to it.⁹⁸³ Spencer noted too that a similar ritual had been referenced in the Zohar, ‘which predates Maimonides by several centuries,’ where this practice was attributed to the Egyptians, who supposedly indulged in it upon the high mountains.⁹⁸⁴ This particular Sabean ritual seemed to especially intrigue those who wrote of their customs. Ralph Cudworth, in his *True Notion of the Lord’s Supper*, referred to it as an ‘excellent story’.⁹⁸⁵ Thomas Stanley, in his *Chaldaick Philosophy*, called it a ‘most obscene custom’.⁹⁸⁶ Henry More, too, highlighted the obscenity of the ritual, noting that the ‘imposing priests’ would have had to have gone to particularly great lengths to encourage people to partake in it given in its inherent unpleasantness.⁹⁸⁷ Simon Patrick, noting that this custom was also presumed by the Ramban to be at the root of the prohibition against the consumption of blood, mentioned it severally too, in his commentary on Leviticus.⁹⁸⁸ The interest in this ritual can perhaps be explained in terms of its proximity to sacramental theology. As Cudworth put it, ‘to eat the Body and Bloud of *Christ* in the *Lord’s Supper* is to be made a partaker of his Sacrifice offered up to God for us; as to eat of the Jewish Sacrifices under the Law was to partake in the Legal Sacrifices themselves: so to eat of things offered up in Sacrifice to Idols was to be made partakers of the Idol-Sacrifices, and therefore was unlawful’.⁹⁸⁹ Spencer took it upon himself to offer the most comprehensive guide to this practice, which would best

⁹⁸³ Ibid., p. 129.

⁹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 327-328: “Maimonidem seculis aliquot antecessit.”

⁹⁸⁵ Ralph Cudworth, *A Discourse Concerning the True Notion of the Lord’s Supper*, (London, 1670), p. 75.

⁹⁸⁶ Stanley, *Chaldaick Philosophy*, p. 37.

⁹⁸⁷ Henry More, *A Modest Enquiry into the Mystery of Iniquity*, (London, 1664), p. 21.

⁹⁸⁸ Simon Patrick, *A Commentary upon the third book of Moses, called Leviticus*, (London, 1698), pp. 34-35, p. 99, p. 317, p. 320, pp. 372-373.

⁹⁸⁹ Cudworth, *Lord’s Supper*, p. 75.

explain why the consumption of blood was forbidden to Jews and further to this, why it was therefore unnecessary for contemporary Christians to concern themselves with this prohibition.

Spencer believed himself to have identified an example of this law's being broken, which revealed just how far back ignorance of the Sabeian origins of the Law went. He pointed to Samuel I 14.32,33 where Saul caught his troops eating 'upon the blood' (עַל הַדָּם) which was rendered by the Septuagint 'with the blood' (σὺν τῷ αἵματι), implying that the prohibition violated in this case was that of Genesis 23.4 rather than that of Leviticus 19.26.⁹⁹⁰ He indicated that the Septuagint typically rendered the Hebrew word עַל in the dative, taking it to imply proximity, as in the case of Genesis 16.17, where Hagar is found 'by the water fountain' (עַל עֵין הַמַּיִם). The decision to render עַל הַדָּם 'with the blood', as opposed to 'by the blood' had serious implications for our comprehension of this verse. It meant that generations of Christians and Jews had presumed Saul's soldiers to have been eating meat in haste, failing to drain the blood off the meat prior to its consumption when what was actually taking place was an old idolatrous ritual which the Law was supposed to have abolished. Further evidence of this was supplied by what happened next. Saul erected 'an altar to the Lord' (מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה) such that all among his troops were able to offer up either a sheep or an ox in the proper manner. Saul, according to Spencer, sought to encourage the lawful offering up of animals in place of the unlawful offerings which he had there witnessed.⁹⁹¹

This narrative from I Samuel, on Spencer's retelling, gives us the entire story of the Law in microcosm. Idolatrous rites were repudiated and then replaced by analogous rites, only subtly different in substance, but diametrically opposed in object. The strength of the Law's opposition to polytheism was made manifest in the very subtle ways by which elements of the sacrificial cult

⁹⁹⁰ Spencer, *De legibus*, pp. 334-335.

⁹⁹¹ *Ibid.*,

which were reminiscent of idolatrous practices were strongly guarded against. Correct administration of the sacrificial cult was an extremely complex matter, which has been explored in much greater detail in the preceding chapter. Beyond the regulations which sought to control the role of blood in the offering up of sacrifices were further regulations which Spencer, citing Maimonides, understood to perform the function of subverting the idolatrous practices to which the Hebrews had become accustomed. For example, the Hebrews formed their altars out of the earth, rather than of stone. This served to distinguish the Hebrews from the surrounding peoples who used an array of man-made materials in the construction of their altars (*MN* 3.45). For Spencer, this conception of the Hebraic altar as a natural formation in contradistinction with the more elaborate altar of the idolater was confirmed by Acts 17.23 where an altar bearing an inscription to an unknown god was found.⁹⁹² This conception of the instruments of idolatry was also confirmed by the writings of Selden and Reinsius, and by a comment of Laertius's on the rarity of an altars which contained no inscriptions.⁹⁹³

A further example of a regulation which distinguished the sacrifices of the Hebrews from the sacrifices of surrounding cultures was their particular emphasis upon the consumption of a sacrifice within a fixed period. This was the case with the Passover sacrifices, any leftovers of which, the book of Exodus (23.18 & 34.25) insists could never be consumed. This rule, Spencer surmised, served to differentiate the Passover sacrifice from the sacrifices of the surrounding cultures, which might involve distributing remnants of sacrifices to pilgrims. Indeed, Casaubon had testified to the prominence of such a practice in Ancient Greece and Herodotus had provided evidence of something similar among the Persians. This rule, therefore, Spencer suspected, had been implemented with a view to preventing the integration of the remnants of the Passover sacrifice into the sorts of idolatrous rites with which the ancient Israelites would

⁹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 283.

⁹⁹³ *Ibid.*,

have been familiar.⁹⁹⁴ The wearing of breaches by priests too, he believed to have been a means of preventing the inadvertent worship of the ancient god, Pehor, before whom idolators would expose themselves.⁹⁹⁵ Every aspect of the temple cult, from Spencer's perspective, revealed something of the practices of prior, and indeed, neighbouring peoples, which the Law as a whole aimed to eradicate. Everything from the design of the altar to the frequency with which sacrifices were offered up was specifically calculated to facilitate as far as possible the worship of the one true God, in place of the lesser gods, to whom surrounding nations swore fealty.

The Second edition of *De Legibus* – Spencer's developing relationship with the *Mishneh Torah*

Whilst the first edition of *De legibus* had been completed by 1685, this was not the end of Spencer's pursuit of the Sabean theory. As the second edition of the work, published in 1727, which is preserved in manuscript form in the Cambridge University library, makes clear, Spencer spent the remaining years of his life developing his language skills, enabling him to pursue ever further explanations as to the origins of the laws.⁹⁹⁶ This meant engaging with the *Mishneh Torah* in which the details of those laws were spelled out. Often treated distinctly from the *Moreh Nebukhim*, the *Mishneh Torah* is a compendium of law as opposed to a broad survey of its origins. Spencer's developing knowledge of the subject, however, enabled him to draw connections between the two works, the fruits of which are nineteen further chapters of *De legibus*. Here I will survey the ways in which two particular practices, on account of their similarities to ancient idolatries were explored in those further chapters, with a view to highlighting Spencer's scholarly development as facilitated by his increasing access to Maimondes. These are the donning of *tephillin* or phylacteries and the shaking of the *lulabh* on the holiday of *sukkot*.

⁹⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 274-275.

⁹⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 296-297; *Moreh Nebukhim* 3.46.

⁹⁹⁶ Spencer, *Legibus* (1727); Cambridge University Library CUL MS Add. 2610.

Tephilin

Figure 1 – diagram illustrating the wearing of phylacteries found in *De legibus* (1727), p. 1204.



Spencer's decision to include a chapter on 'phylacteries' in the second edition of *De legibus* was that outcome of his having judged its absence from the first edition 'unacceptable'.⁹⁹⁷ The 'phylacteries' were well known to all 'familiar with the Gospel' as 'certain instruments' which 'Jews were once accustomed to wearing out in public.'⁹⁹⁸ There was very little information available, however, as to how these instruments were used. It was clear from *Hilkhot Tephillin* 4.25, which Spencer cited out of a note of William Vorstius's on *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* 5.15, that the phylacteries were objects of 'great sanctity'.⁹⁹⁹ In the *halakha* cited, Rav, a student of Rabbeinu Hakadosh was praised specifically for his refusal to walk more than four cubits without his phylacteries on his head.¹⁰⁰⁰ He, along with the rest of 'the Jewish nation' Spencer claimed

⁹⁹⁷ Spencer, *De legibus* (1727), pp. 1217-1218.

⁹⁹⁸ Ibid., sig. 7Dr: "omnes qui norunt Evangelium... instrumentis, quae Phylacteria dicebantur... in publicum prodire solitos."

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid.: "sanctitatis magna."

¹⁰⁰⁰ Moses Maimonides, *Hilkhot Yesode ha-Torah Rabbi Moshe ben Maimoni; Constitutiones de fundamentis legis*, (Amsterdam, 1638), p. 73.

seemed to have been unaware that these instruments were designed to serve as an alternative to Sabeian amulets.¹⁰⁰¹

Understood thus, the phylacteries had no intrinsic value. As with the sacrifices offered up in the temple, they served as a bridge between polytheism and monotheism. Pointing to the writings of Martin de Roa, Spencer assured his readers, that the phylacteries functioned much like the amulets of Persia, Babylon and Rome, which were said to protect those who wore them against the forces of evil.¹⁰⁰² He also pointed out that the Maccabees were said to have gone into battle wearing phylacteries and amulets, which was to say that phylacteries could function in practice much like good luck charms.¹⁰⁰³ This view was compounded by a quotation from St. Chrysostom in which he pointed out that the Jews, of his own day, were often believed to have healing powers.¹⁰⁰⁴ Maimonides too, in *Hilkebot Shabbat* indicated that he also believed in the healing power of amulets.¹⁰⁰⁵ There was thus plenty of evidence from across Jewish, Christian and Greek antiquity that ancient Jews were wont to look to amulets for healing. This having been the case, the Sabeian theory would suggest that amulets would have to be integrated into the Law, these were the phylacteries or *tephilin*.

The great significance attributed to *tephilin* Spencer suggested, might have been a result of its usurping a more heinous practice than the use of amulets for healing purposes, that of inscribing the name of God on the flesh. In the first edition of *De legibus* Spencer had referred to this practice as one which had survived up to the present day in the Arab world.¹⁰⁰⁶ Citing *Hilkebot Yesodei HaTorah* 6.7, which he had marked up very firmly in his copy of Vorstius's translation of

¹⁰⁰¹ Spencer, *De legibus* (1727), sig. 7Dr-v: "originem Judaeorum natio praecepto illi Mosaico tribuendum sentit Deuter 6.8-9."

¹⁰⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 1217-1218.

¹⁰⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰⁶ Spencer, *De legibus*, p. 364.

the work, he pointed out that Deuteronomy 14.1 had explicitly banned the cutting of one's own skin and the shaving of the front of the head.¹⁰⁰⁷ Citing a note on this *halakha*, he pointed to *Avodah Zara* 2.11 where Maimonides had firmly stated that tattoos had been banned because of the role they had played in idolatry.¹⁰⁰⁸ Next to this *halakha*, Spencer had pencilled in the word קַעֲקַע, the word used for tattooing in Leviticus 19.28, where this practice is banned. Also marked up is a note which refers to *Hilkhot Tefilin* 4.1,7, where the placement of the phylacteries and the short benediction which accompanies their donning is spelled out. The placement of these phylacteries, on the forehead, on the hairline, Spencer conjectured, must be significant. It may well have related to the prohibition against the shaving of the of the corners of the head in Deuteronomy 14.1, the same verse which bans self-harm. The short benediction which one says when one dons phylacteries serves as a reminder of God's kingship and therefore serves to reinforce the entire purpose of the practice, the transformation of superstition into religion.¹⁰⁰⁹

Lulabh

Much like the phylacteries, the *lulabh* constituted a peculiar religious artefact which Spencer, in the second edition of *De legibus*, sought to trace back to the idolatrous rituals which the Law sought to eliminate. He wished to do so, not on the basis of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, but rather on the basis of his reading of the *Mishneh Torah*, which, by the end of his life, he appears to have engaged with much more extensively.

The *lulabh* is a palm branch, which, during the feast of the Tabernacles, the Jews parade around with a branch of willow and a branch of myrtle. As Spencer identified out of *Lulabh* 7.23, during

¹⁰⁰⁷ Spencer, *De legibus* (1727), pp. 1224-1225.

¹⁰⁰⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 124-1225: "superstitionem in religionem converterent."

the festival, the Hebrews paraded around the altar singing אָנָּא ה' הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא 'please Lord, save us' אָנָּא ה' הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא 'Please Lord, grant us success' (Psalms 118.25) each day and then, on the final day of the festival, the seventh, they did this seven times. This ceremony, to him, did not sound typically Jewish, but rather typically idolatrous. It reminded him of similar practices which he had read of in the annals of Greece and Rome, and whilst Grotius had suggested that the Greeks had learned such ceremonies from the Jews, Spencer thought the change of transmission went the other way, with the Jews having absorbed this custom from the Greeks and/or other neighbouring idol worshippers.¹⁰¹⁰ Spencer thought this particularly likely given that this ceremony was not mentioned in the Bible with Leviticus 23.40 having merely ordained the taking up of 'the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows', without actually specifying what was to be done with these. Spencer suspected that this verse, far from indicating a ceremony to be performed with these branches, might actually have been referring to the instruments used in the construction of the tabernacles, in which the Jews live during the feast of Tabernacles and that the parading them was instituted later thanks to the influence of Greek ritual.

The final book of *De legibus* indicates the heightened significance which Spencer had begun to attribute to the *Mishneh Torah* by the end of his life, though unlike his predecessors Lightfoot and Ainsworth, he did not use this resource in order to better derive analogies between the Old and New Testaments but rather with a view to identifying the particular features of Jewish practice which he could then analogise with those of other Ancient cultures. His fulsome acceptance of the Sabeian theory appeared to be culminating, at the end of his life, in an attempt to reconcile the history recounted in the *Moreh Nebukhim* with the laws codified in the *Mishneh Torah*, all with a view to identifying the Pagan origins of Jewish religious practice.

¹⁰¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 1111-113.

Conclusion

This chapter has placed the figure of John Spencer at the helm of a new mode of biblical exegesis, which was rooted in an historical conception of the ancient Near-Eastern context within which the law was given. This is not an original claim. Spencer's significance for the inauguration of a new discipline, which would later become known as 'comparative religion', has already been established by Guy Stroumsa.¹⁰¹¹ What prior scholars seem not to have noticed, however, is that Spencer's greatest intellectual debt was to Maimonides. Maimonides was not just the originator of the Sabeian theory, which Spencer transformed into a novel approach to the Bible, but the chief inspiration behind *De legibus Hebraeorum*, which essentially sought to do for Christianity what Maimonides sought to do for Judaism. Where Maimonides's chief target was superstition, so attractive to the average believer, Spencer's was allegory, the faulty means by which most Christians read the law. 'The illumination of antiquity', he believed would obviate the need for 'clever allegorical interpretations', thus saving orthodox Christianity from 'the mockery and jokes of atheists.'¹⁰¹²

Whilst scholars have struggled immensely with Spencer's seemingly contradictory approach to the typological method, this chapter offers clarity. Firstly, it seems to me that Spencer's *Urim*, which was published over a decade before the appearance of his *De legibus*, is a very early iteration of the thesis he would later develop. Therein, Spencer does not seem to have been quite so intent on repudiating the excessive focus on the typology in Reformed exegesis. I suspect that whilst he was cobbling together the evidence for what would become *De legibus*, Spencer found himself increasingly perturbed by the popular appetite for Samuel Mather's *The Figures or Types of The Old Testament* (1683) and Benjamin Keach's *Tropologia* (1682). These are likely the works to

¹⁰¹¹ See Stroumsa, *New Science*.

¹⁰¹² Spencer, *De legibus*, p. 196: "fannis et jocis Atheorum."

which he was referring when he complained of ‘many books and sermons’ which ‘call the common class of Christians’ to ‘mystical and allegorical theology’.¹⁰¹³ Spencer’s growing antagonism towards the typological method which sometimes gives readers the impression that he repudiated it outright, was likely a consequence of its increasing ubiquity at the time of writing. Secondly, Spencer was opposed to typology in practice, not in principle. He accepted that ‘the dignity and excellence of certain rites’ seemed designed ‘to impress upon the Jews a vivid awareness of heavenly realities, and ‘to point, as with an outstretched finger to the coming of the Messiah’.¹⁰¹⁴ What he did not accept, however, was that such ‘figures and shadows’ represented ‘the primary intention’ behind the law.¹⁰¹⁵ This willingness to admit of typology and allegory without emphasising these over and above the historical evidence which could give rise to the law’s most important intentions was coupled with a broader scepticism in the face of mystical readings, excepting those of ‘the ancient allegorists, Philo, Clement and Origen’, especially those of Philo, ‘which were received through tradition’.¹⁰¹⁶ Spencer’s entire approach to typology should thus be understood as guided by a thoroughly Maimonidean reading of the relationship between popular and rational religion. Whilst the common man might ‘marvel today at many of Moses’ institutions’, this sense of wonder was on account of ‘ignorance of antiquity’ as opposed to genuine wonder.¹⁰¹⁷ That the Mosaic laws seemed ‘obscure or devoid of reason’, was on account of the contextual data by which they might be properly understood being hard to come by, as opposed to their inherent mysteriousness.¹⁰¹⁸ Thirdly, Spencer’s critique of typology should not be used to place him in the Socinian camp for it was precisely because he opposed

¹⁰¹³ Ibid., p. 194: “plurimi libri et conciones, Christianorum vulgus ad theologiam illam mysticam et allegoricam.”

¹⁰¹⁴ Ibid., p. 192: “rituum quorundam dignitatem et excellentiam plane singularem quod vivendum caelestium sensum judaeis incutere et messiam venturum, quasi digito exerto monstrare viderentur.”

¹⁰¹⁵ Ibid., p. 191: “figuris et umbris... intentio primaria.”

¹⁰¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 193-194: “allegoristae veteres, Philo, Clemens, Origenes... traditione receptas.”

¹⁰¹⁷ Ibid., p. 190: “multa Mosis instituta mirari hodie... ex antiquitatis inscita factum est.”

¹⁰¹⁸ Ibid.: “obscurae et ratione destitutae.”

the Socinians that he sought to rid orthodox Christianity of the kind of indefensible allegories that they so disdained.¹⁰¹⁹

As the discussions around the abrogation of the Test Act with which we started demonstrate, by the 1680s, the notion that the Law was perfectly designed to combat the idolatrous beliefs which the ancient Israelites had absorbed from surrounding peoples, was very broadly accepted by churchmen in England. We have seen the ways in which the rise of philological scholarship, which was stimulated by the efforts of both the advocates of patristics and their detractors, served to undermine the typological readings of the scriptures. We have also observed the ways in which the Restoration of the English Church advanced the causes of oriental and patristic scholarship in tandem, which had begun to flourish in the England of the 1630s thanks particularly to the largesse of Archbishop Laud, who had permanently endowed a Chair of Arabic in 1636. Indeed, it was the inaugural holder of that chair, Edward Pococke, who did the most to facilitate the transition of biblical scholarship from typology to anthropology, which is the great theme of this chapter. The coincidence of Pococke's hugely impressive scholarly career with the publication and then popularisation of Johannes Buxtorf's translation of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, transformed the study of the Old Testament, providing English scholars with a new framework through which its laws might be interpreted alongside a massive source base which would facilitate that interpretative work. This framework, the Sabeian theory, could only have been marshalled as it was in the Restoration-era thanks to the unprecedented array of historical material then becoming available to English scholars. Its popularity cannot be merely attributed to the strong support for it to be found in the sources made available by Pococke and others, however. The Sabeian theory, as the examples of Spencer and Stillingfleet made clear, served a particular function for scholars committed to intellectual defenses of the recently re-established

¹⁰¹⁹ See Fausto Parente, 'Spencer, Maimonides and the History of Religion; Spencer's *De Legibus Hebraeorum* and its Modern Evaluation' in Christopher Ligota & Jean-Louis Quantin, *A Selection of Papers from the seminar on the History of Scholarship Held Annually at the Warburg Institute*, (OUP, 2006) pp. 277-304, p. 278.

Church, demonstrating, as it did, the need for religious forms to evolve, if only under the supervision of the proper authorities and, most importantly, the virtues of properly regulated, uniform, public worship. The Sabeian theory, for both Spencer and Stillingfleet demonstrated very clearly the ease with which human beings might be tempted to diverge from right religion, hence the significance of established religious forms in eliminating such divergences. It also, particularly in the case of Spencer, provided the Republic of Letters with a framework through which the Hebrew Bible might be mined as a source of historical, as well as theological, knowledge. In Spencer's hands, the Sabeian theory became a tool of historical research, enabling him to uncover evidence within the Scriptures themselves of a vast array of long forgotten religious practices, which he hoped might ultimately be explained through new discoveries. This approach to the Bible, best exemplified by Spencer, is what I am terming the 'anthropological', with its emphasis on the diversity of peoples and cultures to which the biblical books speak.

The *Moreh Nebukhim* then, can be said, without exaggeration, to have generated an entirely novel approach to the study of the Old Testament in the second half of the seventeenth century. I am terming this approach 'anthropological', not because it presages the assumptions and methods of that modern discipline by the same but because it did, in very concrete ways, expand the study of the Old Testament outwards, from an emphasis on a particular people, whose history was to presage universal salvation, to an appreciation of a much broader range of peoples and cultures, evidence of which it revealed to be hidden within the text. The consequences of this transformation are to be seen in Enlightenment-era debates as to the origins of the Mosaic Law and in the universal histories of the same period, in the origins of late eighteenth-century 'Egyptomania', and then, of course, in the evolution of biblical criticism.¹⁰²⁰ Whilst Maimonides

¹⁰²⁰ See Levitin, 'John Spencer', p. 49, Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian; The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, (CUP, 1997), pp. 18-19; Daniel Stolzenberg, 'John Spencer and the Perils of Sacred Philology', *Past and Present*, (February 2012), pp. 129-163, William Binnington Boyce, *Six Lectures on the Higher Criticism upon the Old Testament*, (Sydney, 1878), p. 4, Gustav Friedrich Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, (New York, 1884), pp. 31-32, Michael

could never have imagined the energy with which his ideas would have been pursued by scholars with motives quite apart from his own, the *MN* for reasons I have sought to establish here found a ready, willing and creative readership in the Restored English Church. Its most enthusiastic readers of this period, whatever the implications of their engagement with the work, were not radicals, but passionate defenders of Orthodoxy, seeking to buttress the authority of the national church. We thus have on our hands yet another example of the origins of Enlightenment in the Orthodox centre as opposed to the radical fringe. The reception of Maimonides in this period speaks to a coming together of a whole host of scholarly traditions, biblical, rabbinic, patristic, oriental and classical, all in support of a conformist agenda, which could be marshalled very successfully in opposition to the ‘unlearned’ religious claims which had very recently torn the country apart.

Russell, *A Connection of Sacred and profane history: from the Death of Joshua to the Decline of the Kingdoms of Judah*, (London, 1685), I, p. 247.

Conclusion

Moses Aegyptius. *Idem nonnunquam* Rambam i. Rabbi Moses Ben Maimoni, & Maimonides
*appellatur apud Scriptores.*¹⁰²¹

This thesis has situated the study of Maimonides's writings right at the heart of the intellectual developments that made mid-late seventeenth century England such an exciting place to be. It has placed him in conversation with cutting edge legal, biblical, historical, theological and philological scholarship. Given the breadth of Maimonides significance for this period I have made a conscious choice with this thesis to reject the categorisation of the study of Maimonides's writings by Christians as 'Christian Hebraism' for two reasons. Firstly, this thesis showcases the transition of Maimonides's writings from Latin to Hebrew and back into Latin again only for these to be reencountered in Judeo-Arabic and then again in Latin translation. The term 'Christian Hebraism', which implies a centring of the Hebrew language thus felt entirely inappropriate. The findings of this thesis, upset the category of 'Christian Hebraism', by revealing the extent to which the most important Jewish scholar, for Christians, was read in Latin translation. Secondly, this thesis has showcased the breadth of scholarly engagement with the writings of Moses Maimonides over the course of the seventeenth century, some of which is captured by the term 'Christian Hebraism', the commentaries of Ainsworth, for example, but much of which is not. I have therefore chosen to eschew the term altogether as one which is not particularly useful. Where I have used the word 'Hebraism' I have done so only to connote the study of Hebrew, not the broader consumption of Jewish texts, which is implied by the term 'Christian Hebraism'.

¹⁰²¹ John Selden 'The Authors', *Titles of Honour* (London, 1614).

My tripartite conception of Maimonides's reception in this period as the Latin, Hebraic and then the multilingual Maimonides has allowed me to disaggregate the different influences Maimonides had upon early modern scholarship. Maimonides's English readers, who accessed the *Guide* in the Latin of Giustiniani, would have been largely ignorant of his cultural context. They were thus easily persuaded of Giustiniani's portrayal of him as a crypto-Christian difficult to dispute. The rise of English Hebraism, however, gave rise to a new reception of Maimonides, this time as an exemplary Jew, whose *Mishneh Torah* gave Christians access to the Jewish legal tradition in its purest form. In this guise Maimonides was a conduit for the study of Jewish law by Christians. Two students of this new 'Hebraic' Maimonides would emerge as central to his growing fame in England. The first was the legal scholar, John Selden, who developed his conception of the Noachide laws as the ultimate expression of natural law, through his study of the *Mishneh Torah*. The second was the Bible commentator, John Lightfoot, whose 'Talmudic' commentary on the New Testament, the *Horae Hebraicae*, secured the reputation of Maimonides as the most important source by which the New Testament could be understood for generations to come.¹⁰²² Further to their work, the popularity of Buxtorf's translation of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, which was published in Basle in 1629, would stimulate further demand for new translations of Maimonides. One translation of *Hilkhot Avodah Zarah*, by Dionysius Vossius would prove particularly influential in England where Maimonides's accounts of ancient idolatries seem to have really captured the imagination. This work, together with the third book of the *Moreh Nebukhim* and the Arabic scholarship of Edward Pococke, would give rise to a new Maimonides, the multilingual. This Maimonides was an historian and orientalist as much as he was a Jewish legal authority. He had traced the history of the ancient Near-east, apparently making fascinating discoveries as to the origins of the Mosaic law, the contextualisation of which would appeal greatly to scholars of the Restored English establishment who were seeking, at one and the same time, to both defend

¹⁰²² Most recent edition is John Lightfoot, *A commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica, Matthew- I Corinthians* (Baker Book House, 1979).

the historicity of the Old Testament and to clamp down on the contemporary observance of its laws.

Maimonides's Restoration-era reception is relatively familiar to historians of scholarship thanks to several recent studies of the influential work of John Spencer, whose *De legibus hebraeorum* represents a very extensive application of Maimonides's Sabeian theory to Christian theology.¹⁰²³ Such studies tend to tell the story of Maimonides's earlier English readers, John Selden, chief amongst them in terms of their anticipating the contextual-historical method, which comes to fruition in this later work. The *Mishneh Torah*, so the story goes, introduced the concept of the Noahide laws, which provided scholars with an entirely new framework through which to interpret the Mosaic law as one legal system amongst many that flourished in the Ancient World. This connecting up of the reception of the *Mishneh Torah* with the later reception of the *Moreh Nebukhim*, overlooks both the role of Arabic scholarship in Maimonides's Restoration-era reception and the earlier role of the *Mishneh Torah* as a tremendous resource for biblical interpretation.

This thesis thus separates out Maimonides's Hebraic reception, of which Selden's *De Jure Naturali* is a prime example and his multilingual reception, to which Selden's own *De diis Syris* was a precursor. My distinction between the Hebraic and multilingual Maimonides is straightforward.

¹⁰²³ Guy G. Stroumsa, 'John Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry', *History of Religions*, 2001, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Aug, 2001), pp. 1-23; Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science: the discovery of religion in the Age of Reason* (HUP, 2010); Fausto Parente, 'Spencer, Maimonides and the History of Religion; Spencer's *De Legibus Hebraeorum* and its Modern Evaluation' in Christopher Ligota and Jean-Louis Quantin, *A Selection of Papers from the seminar on the History of Scholarship Held Annually at the Warburg Institute* (OUP, 2006) pp. 277-304; Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, (HUP,1998; Dmitri Levitin, 'From Sacred History to the History of Religion: Paganism, Judaism, and Christianity in European Historiography from Reformation to Enlightenment', *The Historical Journal*, December 2012, Vol. 55, No. 4 (December 2012), pp. 1117-1160; Dmitri Levitin, 'John Spencer's *De Legibus Hebraeorum* (1683-85) and Enlightened Sacred History: A New Interpretation', *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institute*, vol. 76 (2013), pp. 49-92; Daniel Stolzenberg, 'John Spencer and the Perils of Sacred Philology', *Past and Present*, (February 2012), pp. 129-163; Martin Mulsow, 'Orientalistik im Kontext der sozinianischen und deistischen Debatten um 1700; Spencer, Crell, Locke und Newton', *Scientia Poetica* 2 (1998), pp. 27-57.

The Hebraic Maimonides's reception was fuelled by the accessibility of his writings in Hebrew and in translations from Hebrew. The multilingual Maimonides's reception was fuelled by translations of his writings and other relevant source material from Arabic. Whilst I do contend that the reception of the multilingual Maimonides was more complex and sophisticated than that of his Hebraic predecessor and counterpart, this is not merely on account of the greater philological skill demanded by the relevant source material.

The Hebraic Maimonides is the Maimonides who emerges from Buxtorf's introduction to his translation of the *Moreh Nebukhim*. His is a complex character, admired, and yet controversial within parts of his own community where his rational approach to religion felt foreign. The multilingual Maimonides, however, rises from Pococke's introduction to the *Porta Mosis*. He is a very different character, so universally loved and admired, not just among his fellow Jews and now Christians, but amongst Muslims too, who held him in very high esteem, despite their religious differences. Pococke's discovery, not only of Maimonides's writings in Arabic but of writings about him in that language, cast Maimonides in a completely different light. The small number of Western European Jews who rejected the *Moreh Nebukhim* pale in comparison to the vast Judeo-Arabic literary sphere, of which he was the prime exemplar. More crucially, Pococke had himself traced the historical sources by which Maimonides's account of the law could be verified and, in this sense, he gave way to the investigation of the 'history of idolatry' which had its theoretical basis in the *Moreh Nebukhim*.

Whilst recognising the vital role played by the *Moreh Nebukhim* in stimulating the contextual historical scholarship of the Old Testament, in particular, this thesis has sought to distinguish between the reception of that work, which evolved as the resources by which it could be understood became more readily available and the earlier reception of the *Mishneh Torah*. By disaggregating these two different receptions of Maimonides's writings I have sought to

undermine the unduly teleological account of Maimonides's English readers which has traced a direct line between John Selden's Noahide law concept and the embrace of Maimonides's history of the law by John Spencer.

Selden's *De jure naturali* represents a particularly sophisticated example of the reception of the Hebraic Maimonides. It was the result of many years of study of the *Mishneh Torah* and, through it, the Talmud. Selden's deep interest in the *Mishneh Torah*, by the 1630s, was not his alone. As this thesis has shown the publication of Buxtorf's *Moreh Nebukhim* in 1629, in the same year that Selden released his new edition of *De diis syris* stimulated a flurry of translations of the *Mishneh Torah*, which brought that work to much wider attention. Whilst the reception of the concept of the Noahide laws via the *Mishneh Torah* was fundamental to the studies of idolatry inspired by Maimonides's writings more broadly, it is important not to overstate the impact of these. As Johann Sommerville has shown, few of Selden's contemporaries and still not enough of his successors have fully appreciated the novelty of his theory of natural law praising instead the succinctness of his overview of the Jewish legal system.¹⁰²⁴ The significance of Selden's study of the Noahide laws, the first of its kind, for the development of contextual historical scholarship has been much exaggerated. Whilst Selden's scholarship was celebrated in the most enthusiastic terms, it is not clear that this furthered the study of Maimonides's writings any more than it gave Selden's concept a solid basis in the Jewish tradition. The impetus to the development of the study of ancient idolatry in the second half of the seventeenth century came more through Edward Pococke's Arabist scholarship than it did through Selden's legal scholarship. Pococke's unveiling of a vast array of never-before-seen sources in his *Specimen historiae arabum*, *Naẓm al-jawhar*, *Porta Mosis* and *Historia compendiosa dynastiarum* revealed Maimonides to have been a prominent and highly respected figure in the Arab world as well as within his native Jewish

¹⁰²⁴ Johann P. Sommerville, 'Selden, Grotius, and the Seventeenth-Century Intellectual revolution in Moral and Political Theory' in *Rhetoric and Law in Early Modern Europe* (YUP, 2001), pp. 318-344.

community. Thanks to Pococke's discoveries Maimonides's arguments as to the Law's ancient Near-eastern origins could be tested and thus developed.

The impetus for treating the mid-century reception of the *Mishneh Torah* as a mere prelude to the truly radical reception of the *Moreh Nebukhim* some decades later, likely came from Aaron Katchen's magisterial *Dutch Rabbis and Christian Hebraists*, which he published in 1984.¹⁰²⁵ Therein Katchen argued that from the 1630s onwards interest in the *Mishneh Torah* outstripped interest in the *Moreh Nebukhim*, to the extent that the former, access to which was vastly expanded by students of Menasseh ben Israel, might be said to have had a 'far greater impact than that of the *Guide*.'¹⁰²⁶ Building on Katchen's work, later scholars have sought to integrate translations of the *Mishneh Torah* into the pre-history of the 'history of idolatry', which largely proceeded through the reception of the *Guide*.

To my mind it is impossible to disaggregate the reception of the *Guide* and the *Mishneh Torah*. Whilst there were certainly some scholars who relied on one more than the other, the reception histories of these two works are inextricably linked. It was the publication of the *Guide* in a new translation and with unprecedented contextualisation in 1629 that stimulated demand for further works by Maimonides. These could be easily supplied through the selection of one of the *Mishneh Torah*'s many short sections, which could be translated with the help of a teacher. In fact, three of the four translations of the *Mishneh Torah* which emerged in the decade following the 1629 publication of the *Guide* were produced by students of Menasseh Ben Israel. The most important of these for our purposes is the translation of *Hilkhot Avodah Zarah*, by Dionysius Vossius, son of G.J. Vossius, completed in 1633 and yet published in 1641 alongside a mammoth commentary by the author's father entitled *De Theologia gentili*. This enormous work, which was

¹⁰²⁵ Aaron Katchen, *Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis* (HUP, 1984)

¹⁰²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

marketed particularly aggressively in England gave scholars access to Maimonides's conception of the Law as a series of carefully designed impediments to idol worship, essential to the salvation of a people particularly inclined to such things. This surprising thesis, which was better developed in the *Guide* than it had been in the *Mishneh Torah* was now affirmed in tremendous detail by Vossius stimulating the appetite of the scholarly public for further work on the history of idolatry. Henry Hammond would produce his contribution to this emerging canon in 1646 with an account of idolatry which relied very heavily indeed on Vossius's *De idololatria*. The major turning point in the development of this sub-field, however, was the publication of the *Specimen historiae Arabum* in 1650. This work, ostensibly a short account of Arabic culture was published with a vast array of notes drawn from Pococke's remarkable Arabic manuscript collection. This work, which has been deservedly characterised as 'a revolution in Arabic studies, would prove catalytic.¹⁰²⁷ Scholars concerned with the verification and development of Maimonides's account of idolatry now discovered that such authors as Abulfeda, al-Shahrestani and Bar-Hebraeus himself had confirmed and indeed expanded upon much of what Maimonides had had to say about ancient Near-eastern practices. That Maimonides could be shown to have been participating in a thoroughly documented vibrant near-Eastern medieval intellectual culture transformed his reception, ushering in a new phase characterised by an appreciation for his multilingualism.

The multilingual Maimonides, much like his Latin predecessor and counterpart was not a particularly Jewish figure. It is important to stress here that Maimonides's Jewishness was fundamental to Pococke, who sought to understand Judaism on its own terms but to those for whom 'the search after the Sabeans', which Pococke did a great deal to advance, proved an engrossing intellectual project, that the thesis had its origins in the writings of a Jew was

¹⁰²⁷ G.J. Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth Century England* (OUP, 1996), pp. 160-161.

incidental. Their works cite Maimonides as an historical authority, confirming his accounts of Sabeanism and searching out evidence with which they could expand upon them. This mid-century embrace of the multilingual Maimonides stands in sharp contrast with the still-ongoing reception of the Hebraic Maimonides, which was concerned primarily with the decoding of Jewish law and its application to Christian biblical scholarship. It might also be contrasted with Spencer's reception of Maimonides which was very much as a rabbi. Indeed, the consonance of Maimonides's theory of the Law's origins which Spencer found useful for his own theological purposes, proved particularly compelling on the grounds that it had come from a rabbi. The Sabeian thesis as adopted by Spencer served to de-emphasise the role of the Jews in the history of the ancient Near-east. That a rabbinic authority would sanction this account suggested that it was particularly well evidenced. The emphasis Spencer placed upon Maimonides's Jewishness should serve as a clear indication that a confessional motive was at stake. Where the contextual-historical motive was stronger than the confessional, as in the case of Thomas Stanley's *History of the Chaldaick Philosophy*, for example, references to Maimonides's Jewishness are conspicuous by their absence. These works should not be taken, however, as evidence of historicising tendencies fuelled by the reception of the *Moreh Nebukhim* for whilst individual scholars might have read Maimonides thus, their larger audiences certainly had more conventional confessional motives.

I would conjecture that most seventeenth century English scholars who invested seriously in the study of Maimonides's writing, even if only in Latin, were motivated primarily by an interest in discovering the Jewish perspective on the Bible. That Maimonides's works came so highly recommended was on account of their confounding certain negative stereotypes about Jews. The popularity of the *Mishneh Torah*, first in the Netherlands and then in England, was undoubtedly driven by the marked absence therein of references to the much-maligned Talmud. The *Moreh Nebukhim* too offered a perspective on Judaism that proved remarkably friendly to the Christian commitment to supercessionism. Maimonides himself could not possibly have imagined that his

Guide, which was written for Jewish audiences in order to strengthen them in their Jewish faith, would be read in this way. His novel account of the Law's origins which makes up a substantial part of Book three was intended to persuade doubting Jews of the rational historical basis for their practices. That its most enthusiastic readers would be Christian is one of those ironies of history. Like the reception of the *Mishneh Torah*, that which Jews found problematic served to appeal to Christian audiences. Maimonides's situating of himself outside of his own tradition, which he appeared to be strangely willing to criticise, was central to his appeal to those for whom the Jewish tradition held very little appeal. The treasure trove of letters relating to the Maimonidean controversy which are appended to the second edition of the *Instituto Epistolaris* reveal that Maimonides's chief crime was his seeming disregard for the Talmud. Whilst, as these letters also reveal, Maimonides had sought to refute such accusations, Buxtorf's introduction to his *Moreh Nebukhim* centred them. Maimonides, he claimed, 'was not at all devoted to the myths and traditions of the Talmud'. In fact, in one letter, he had said to have 'derived little benefit' from the 'exposition and laborious consideration of the Gemara'.¹⁰²⁸ To a Jewish reader such a complaint would have sounded bizarrely heretical, though for Buxtorf, nothing could recommend Maimonides more. This surely confirmed what Scaliger had said about him, that he was 'the only Jew who had ceased talking nonsense'.¹⁰²⁹ That which ignited Jewish anti-Maimonidean feeling was central to his overwhelmingly positive reception among seventeenth-century Protestant scholars who relied upon him for authoritative access to the Law and to its pre-history.

Access to the Law was vital both for New Testament scholarship and for drawing connections between the Old and New Testaments. The utility of the Sabeian theory as a means of

¹⁰²⁸ Johannes Buxtorf, *Liber Moreh Nebukhim* (Basle, 1629), sig. *3v: "in exposition et operose consideration Generae; ego enim in illis multum temporis perdidit, et parum utilitatis hausit."

¹⁰²⁹ Joseph Scaliger to Isaac Casaubon' in Joseph Scaliger, *Epistolae* (Leiden, 1627), pp. 193-197: "solum illum inter Iudaeos desisse nugari".

uncovering the pre-history of the Law presaged the possibility of a thorough reinterpretation of the Old Testament. That this might threaten Christian orthodoxy was not immediately obvious especially as the explosive potential of this theory was initially undersold on account of its ostensible alignment with patristic accommodationist reading of the Law. Spencer's study of the Law through the lens of the Sabeian theory, however, made plain the extent to which it threatened established hermeneutical principles. The earlier emphasis on the utility of the *Mishneh Torah* for connecting up the Old and New Testaments would be completely upended if the Old Testament Law did not primarily serve to prefigure its fulfilment in the Gospels but rather to coerce the ancient Hebrews out of their prior idolatrous practices. Whilst Spencer saw this development as a necessary corrective to the frailties of prior frameworks, many of his readers sensed danger. He was essentially arguing, in the words of John Edwards, that the origins of the Law which Christ came to fulfil were to be found in 'the most barbarous Gentiles, the Scum of the World, the Dregs of Mankind'.¹⁰³⁰ On this account even the Eucharist was 'an Imitation of a Pagan Barbarous usage' and Socinus was quite right to deny the typological significance of the temple cult.¹⁰³¹ Spencer's attempts at re-engineering, what he perceived to be, the faulty means by which the Old and New Testaments were linked up, clearly failed. This is reflected in the inability of even contemporary historians to recognise that these were his intentions. Spencer has thus been characterised by recent scholarship as, if not a pioneering proto-comparativist then either a closet-Socinian or a defender of the Church of England's recently restored establishment.¹⁰³² His thoroughly Maimonidean rationalisation of Christianity, which was designed to appeal to an

¹⁰³⁰ John Edwards, *Polypoikilos Sophia, a compleat history or survey of all the dispensations and methods of religion, from the beginning of the world to the consummation of all things, as represented in the Old and New Testament shewing the several reasons and designs of those different administrations, and the wisdom and good ness of God in the government of His church, through all the ages of it* (London, 1699), I, p. 251.

¹⁰³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 240; *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹⁰³² On Spencer as proto-comparativist see Stroumsa, 'Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry'; Stroumsa, *New Science*. On Spencer as closet Socinian see Parente, 'Spencer's *De legibus*'; Mulsow 'Orientalistik'. On Spencer as defender of the Restoration establishment see Levitin, 'John Spencer'; Stolzenberg, 'John Spencer'.

emerging coterie of doubters for whom the endless allegorising which characterised much contemporary religious literature, held little appeal.

Spencer's *De legibus* is so central to our story for its very temperate renunciation of the hermeneutical framework by which Maimonides's writings came to appeal so greatly to Christians in the first place. For Ainsworth, Lightfoot and Owtram, Maimonides's significance for biblical scholarship lay in his thorough explication of the Law. They were convinced that the Law, properly understood, consistently typified Christ and was therefore an entirely appropriate object of study for a pious Christian. Their studies of the temple cult, in particular, they believed, were absolutely essential to the grounding of Christian dogma in the Bible.

The impetus for first Ainsworth and then Lightfoot to attempt such thorough explications of the Gospel in terms of the Law was the realisation of their marked absence from the writings of the Fathers, both Greek and Latin. Advances in philological scholarship had alerted Reformed Protestants to the limitations of patristic sources. Painfully aware of the threat these posed to the typological enterprise, in its entirety, which had historically been rooted in patristic interpretation, these authors took it upon themselves to root typology in a supposedly much older source, rabbinic law. Whilst the works of Ainsworth and Lightfoot have both been interpreted as embodiments of a typically puritan philosemitism, such characterisations do not take account of the centrality of typology to their enterprise. Both scholars were deeply concerned with preserving established interpretative methods in an age in which their validity was coming under threat. The importance of rabbinic law, for both, was a direct result of their having come to understand the limitations of patristic sources. However much they appreciated Maimonides's helpful presentation of the subject matter, the necessity of its application to biblical scholarship was impressed upon them by the threats to Christian orthodoxy that their immersion in their respective scholarly contexts allowed them to observe. Put simply,

Maimonides's significance for New Testament interpretation was an outcome of the perceived threats to the typological framework posed by the increasing sophistication of philological scholarship.

The application of the *Mishneh Torah* to New Testament exegesis, however, proved so successful, that even later scholars like William Owtram, who did not share in the anti-patristic sentiments that so-animated Lightfoot, sought to integrate it. Rather than pitting the rabbis against the Fathers, Owtram sought to show just how well their descriptions of the temple cult aligned with patristic readings of the same. He rooted the typological enterprise in rabbinic scholarship in order to prove that the Fathers had, in fact, thoroughly understood ancient Judaism. Their conception of Christ as sacrificial lamb, sacrificing priest and atoning sinner was born of a deep appreciation for the way each of these was defined by the Law, as it was explained by the *Mishneh Torah*. The Sabean theory's capacity to completely eradicate this typological framework seems to have gone unnoticed by Owtram. Even Spencer himself in his *Urim* of 1669 seems to have been unaware of this looming threat which would become the central preoccupation of *De legibus*. Where Ainsworth, Lightfoot and then Owtram had looked to Maimonides to confirm the biblical typologies to which they were so committed, Spencer took an opposite view. He saw in the *Moreh Nebukhim* an alternative hermeneutic, which, if adopted, would allow orthodoxy to establish itself on a much more solid historical foundation. Spencer found the typological method wanting not because of his closet-Socinianism but because of his commitment to upholding Christian orthodoxy. He had found in the *Guide* an account of the Law which was far more compelling than anything the Fathers, the reformers or indeed contemporary commentators had to offer. His *De legibus* presents the Sabean theory therefore as a much more rational and better evidenced approach to the Old Testament which aimed to compel those flirting with Socinianism back to orthodoxy. The typological method, Spencer recognised, which the *Mishneh Torah* had so-often been used to affirm, could be largely displaced by the Sabean

theory thus saving orthodoxy from the limitations of the hermeneutics upon which it had historically relied.

For Ainsworth, Lightfoot, Owtram and Spencer, despite the disagreements between them, the study of Maimonides's writings served the same purpose. Recourse to Maimonides enabled them to identify solutions to problems within their own tradition that were not otherwise being addressed. Ainsworth and Lightfoot, cognizant of the limitations of patristic sources, looked to Maimonides for an account of the Law which could be trusted. Owtram too, mindful of the limitations of much counter-Socinian literature, found in Maimonides a detailed guide to the inner workings of the temple, which proved remarkably friendly to the typological analysis of the Fathers. Pococke, who like Lightfoot was most productive during the interregnum years, identified in Maimonides's *halakhic* writings and indeed in his correspondences, a wealth of resources by which he felt able to combat what he identified as one of the chief scourges of his age, philosemitic millenarianism. The very tendentious accounts of Jewish belief offered by Menasseh ben Israel, in particular, were at issue here. For Pococke this surprisingly influential rabbi was guilty of thoroughly misrepresenting Jewish teaching on the Messiah in order to build common cause with both Dutch and English Protestants. The minimal Jewish creed that is the thirteen principles of faith was taken by him as an expression of the limits of Jewish dogma. This understanding allowed Pococke to point his readers away from Jewish sources which, despite the claims of Menasseh, were remarkably inconclusive on the core questions of eschatology, towards the Gospels where such matters were given pride of place. For Pococke as for Lightfoot and earlier Ainsworth Maimonides served as an arbiter of normative Jewish belief. Whilst many Jewish sources, the Talmud chief amongst them, were not to be trusted, Maimonides's principles of faith, much like his *halakhic* opus, the *Mishneh Torah*, cut through the confusions of intra-Jewish debate, allowing Christian scholars to thus clearly establish what was and indeed what was not essential to normative Judaism. A common theme that emerges across all of the scholarship

we have encountered is the role of Maimonides as a synthesiser and simplifier. Where the Talmud confounded, the *Mishneh Torah* clarified. Where Menasseh expounded, the thirteen principles excised. In Maimonides the primitive core of Jewish law and philosophy was to be found. The rest was at best, commentary, or, at worst, confusion.

Pococke's rendering of Maimonides, not only in his proper historical context but also in his proper theological context allowed him to make a number of very pungent, if well-hidden critiques of Catholics, Puritans, especially those of the millenarian variety and Socinians. Often cast as a quietist, the precarity of Pococke's position during the English interregnum forced him to make alliances on all sides. These served him in that they saved his career, though they have also served to hide from history his very great commitments to academic freedom, to battling perceived theological illiteracy, which he saw everywhere and to taking seriously Jewish critiques of Christianity.

Pococke's multilingual Maimonides was a vital resource in his campaign against the misrepresentations of Menasseh ben Israel. He was first and foremost, however, Pococke's discovery. A close student of the *Guide*, it fascinated Pococke to learn that Maimonides was just as well-known in the Islamic world as he was amongst Jews. That his Sabean theory could be corroborated through the accumulation of further manuscript evidence in the East was a subject of further fascination. The theological implications of these discoveries were not Pococke's immediate priority and indeed may never have been truly realised had they not drawn the obsessive attention of John Spencer. I expect that Pococke's promised new translation of the *Guide* from Arabic manuscripts, had he embarked upon it, would have addressed these issues in some depth. As things stand, however, the multilingual Maimonides which arose from the work of Pococke would come to full fruition in the work of others.

Spencer, in particular, identified in the sources which Pococke had unveiled tremendous potential for recentring the whole enterprise of Old Testament scholarship, away from the texts themselves and towards the contexts in which those texts had been written. An overemphasis on the texts themselves had led both to the twin-evils of Sabbatarianism and Socinianism.

Sabbatarianism was an outcome of biblical literalism, of a certain insensitivity to historical context. Socinianism, on the other hand, was a grave threat on account of the tiredness of the allegorical interpretive paradigm, which was leading educated rationalists away from Christian orthodoxy. The thorough contextualisation of the Old Testament on Maimonidean grounds, which was only possible thanks to the discoveries of Pococke, could solve both of these problems. It would render the Sabbatarian position untenable on account of its utter ignorance as to the reasons behind the Jewish Sabbath and re-engage those sceptics for whom appeals to unprovable allegories were easily dismissed.

Spencer, like Pococke and Lightfoot and earlier Ainsworth found within the Maimonidean corpus copious resources by which they could confront the intellectual challenges of their day. The appeal of the Hebraic Maimonides is inconceivable without the anti-patristic scholarly context in which he emerged, and the full significance of the multilingual Maimonides might never have been realised were it not for the Socinianism and Sabbatarianism that Spencer sought to combat. I have, over the course of this thesis sought to identify the contextual factors by which seventeenth century English scholars were compelled to turn to Maimonides and have determined that these were usually threats to orthodoxy. Despite the radical implications of the embrace of Maimonides by these various coteries of scholars, this was almost always taken as a defensive measure.

This thesis then serves to confirm much of what recent developments in the history of scholarship have led us to believe, with several caveats. The careful reconstruction of the origins

of seemingly radical Enlightenment ideas has, in many cases, shown these to have been outgrowths of decidedly orthodox scholarly pursuits.¹⁰³³ Whilst this serves as a helpful corrective to an older historiography which over-emphasises the intellectual-historical developments of the eighteenth century at the expense of those of the century prior, the case can be over-stated. Much recent work in the history of scholarship has sought to downplay the liberalising and historicising tendencies of the late seventeenth century in a bid to construe work which would ultimately have heterodox implications as motivated by ‘a programme of tying erudition to a particular confessional identity’.¹⁰³⁴ Whilst I accept, in line with both Simon Mills and Dmitri Levitin, that ‘liberal’ or ‘comparativist’ mentalities are often, inappropriately, read back into early modern texts, which give no indication of being motivated thus, I also think that one can push the point as to the long endurance of orthodox attitudes too far.¹⁰³⁵ I do not think that John Spencer was simply a particularly sophisticated apologist for ‘Anglican establishment’ as Levitin has claimed.¹⁰³⁶ I think of him rather as a critical friend to that establishment, who in Maimonides’s Sabeian theory, discovered an ingenious solution to the Socinian scepticism that was being fuelled by an over-reliance upon typological tools. John Selden, a close student of the Hebraic Maimonides, was a genuinely novel historical thinker, who was able to approach the Bible as an historical artefact and to recover through his studies in Jewish law, a highly sophisticated theory of natural law. As Levitin has argued in the case of the Restoration era reconstruction of Near-eastern philosophy, developments in early modern intellectual history, can often be traced back to a particular scholar’s ‘curiosity about [a] subject matter’ just as much as they might have been informed by broader confessional concerns. Scholarly curiosity is

¹⁰³³ See for example N.J.S. Hardy, *Criticism and Confession; The Bible and the Seventeenth Century Republic of Letters*, (OUP, 2017); Dmitri Levitin & Nicholas Hardy, *Confessionalisation and erudition in early modern Europe: an episode in the history of the humanities* (OUP, 2021); Noel Malcolm, ‘Hobbes, Ezra and the Bible: the History of a Subversive Idea’ in *Aspects of Hobbes* (OUP, 2004), pp. 317-431.

¹⁰³⁴ Levitin, ‘introduction in Levitin and Hardy, *Confessionalisation*, p. 71.

¹⁰³⁵ Dmitri Levitin, *Ancient wisdom in the age of the new science: histories of philosophy in England, 1640-1700* (CUP, 2015), p. 112; Simon Mills, ‘Edward Pococke (1604-1691), Comparative Arabic-Hebrew Philology, and the Bible’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 53:1, January 2023, pp. 117-147.

¹⁰³⁶ Levitin, ‘John Spencer’.

certainly absolutely central to Maimonides's early modern English reception.¹⁰³⁷ It is what led John Selden to construct a typology of biblical idolatries. It is what fuelled the fascination with the Sabeans, whatever the broader confessional implications of their lying at the roots of the Law and it is what led John Spencer to continue searching after the Pagan origins of Jewish rituals, long after he published the first edition of *De legibus*, which runs to over a thousand pages. Whilst the confessionalisation framework, that has become dominant within our field, is certainly useful here, it can be pushed too far, obscuring other, more individual motives, that are always at work in scholarship. In short, one need not be radical to be idiosyncratic.

Maimonides's idiosyncratic readers identified in him an authoritative source of Jewish Law and an ingenious guide to the pre-history of that law. To return to the quote with which we began this thesis then, Maimonides may have served his seventeenth century Protestant readers as 'their St. Thomas'. But he ultimately fulfilled a much more important function even than this. He was their Moses.¹⁰³⁸

חזק חזק ונתחזק

¹⁰³⁷ Dmitri Levitin, *Ancient wisdom in the age of the new science: histories of philosophy in England, 1640-1700* (CUP, 2015), pp. 111-112.

¹⁰³⁸ Richard Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Brill, 1992), p. 192.

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