Review Essay
Rabbi Moyses Aegyptius in Holland

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A review of Aaron L. Katchen, *Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis,* Harvard University Press, 1984

Dum docent, discunt
[While they teach, they learn]
Seneca

Introduction

Christianity and Judaism for most of their history have had a rough and uneasy relationship. When it comes to honest communication and open dialogue between both religions, this relationship has often been clouded by biases and misconceptions due to the very nature of our different epistemologies; in the core ways we derive knowledge and belief. But there have been times, though rare and far apart in time, when both Christian and Jews have met with a like-minded purpose to know each other, despite our differences and turbulent history. The encounter of cultures (not their clashes) over time has proven to be a guiding light that mends our past. This light never shone brighter for Jews and Christians than in Renaissance Netherlands, and whose radiating scintillations reach us to this very day.

Professor Katchen's *Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis* opens a window into this seminal period of the Modern age, where seventeenth-century Sephardic Rabbis and Dutch Protestant Christian Intellectuals and Jurists met eye to eye through the historic figure of Moses Maimonides and his *magnus opus*, the *Mishnéh Toráh.*

In his introduction, Katchen traces the impact Maimonides' publications had on the Christian world from the very start. Hearkening back to the Middle-Ages, Maimonides came at just the time the Christian world was beginning to shy away its anti-rationalistic mores and a Jew could speak in the Greco-Roman set of ideas and values, exposing Judaism through a philosophical medium Christians and Arabs could understand.

The central work that immediately drew the attention of non-Jews, of course, was Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* (1190), which was translated into Latin – the *lingua franca* of educated Europeans – within three decades after its first appearance in Arabic. The *Dux Neutrorum*, as the *Guide* was called, would catapult Maimonides' fame throughout the scholastic capitals of Europe.

The *Mishnéh Toráh,* published in the 1170s, would still have to wait another five hundred years to share the limelight.

Unlike the *Guide,* the *Mishnéh Toráh* is primarily dedicated to the legalistic aspects of Judaism, whose dialectics and lexical dichotomies were deeply foreign to Christian thinkers. Besides meeting virulent opposition within German and French Jewries, the *Mishnéh Toráh* would find itself demonized by Jewish converts to Christianity, who had been Rabbinically trained in the Kabbalistic circles of Catalunya, Aragon and Castile. This in itself created a complex set of ironies, as it was these very Jews who both directly and indirectly implanted a bias against Maimonides' legal code – and as a consequence the rest of Talmudic law – in the Christian mind.

The *Mishnéh Toráh* is basically a short compendium of all Jewish Law as found in the Talmud and other writings from the rabbinic period. It is a core summary of each law in Judaism engendered by a careful, critical and fastidious analysis of all the available sources. Maimónides, or ha-RaMBaM as known among observant Jews, wrote it so all Jewish people could know everything that needed to be known about their legal corpus in a short and concise

manner, thus making Jews independent from a clerical elite – some of whom, according to Maimonides, had erred in their interpretation, and thus allowing wrong observance and beliefs among the Jews of his time.

The controversies that its publication provoked among the Jews of central Europe would stamp the attitudes towards this work, and eventually transferred to non-Jews via Jewish converts to Christianity. This upheaval created for the first time the burning of Jewish boos, first starting with Maimonides' opus, ending with the Talmud. From this point on, Europeans would not allow the publication of the Talmud and the *Mishnéh Toráh* without heavy editing sanctions imposed on Jews by the Church. It would also shift the attention of Christian polemicists from biblical literalism to Talmudic literalism, whereby to prove Jewish "errors."

It was, for example, the likes of the Jewish apostate Alfonso de Valladolid, the former Rabbi Abner de Burgos, who wrote a polemic using Maimonides' code, where he tried to prove that Christian morality and customs were superior to Jewish law and ethics. From this controversy and in subsequent years it was the Kabbalah that would be the medium of Christian and Jewish inter-religious dialogue.

> *The Christian kabbalism of the Renaissance was a further manifestation of this attitude. It grew in part out of the renewed emphasis on spirituality in certain Christian quarters, new ways having been sought through which Christianity might be validated or affirmed. Christian kabbalism was thus the successor in some respects to the scholastics' recourse to Jewish philosophy. If there were Christian kabbalists in Martin's time,* ***many of them were converted Jews who had rebelled against philosophy and also followed their own antinomian [i.e. anti-legal] tendencies through Jewish mysticism and on out of Judaism.*** *By the mid-to late fifteenth century, even native Christians began to consider the kabbalistic teachings more than just proofs of Christianity: they saw them as guides to magic, the occult and even the future, in line with newly revived Pythagorean and neo-Platonist modes of thought. In this way, the kabbalah became more specifically part of the reaction to scholasticism and the revolt against it.* [my brackets and emphasis]

In any case, no serious attempt was ever made during the earlier period to translate the *Mishnéh Toráh* into Latin, or any other vernacular, except for the few excerpts utilized by Christian polemicists to engage Jews in matters of doctrine. But the changing attitudes of European thinkers in antiquities and study of language during the Renaissance would bring them much closer to an unbiased interest in studying Hebrew, and as a consequence too, the corpus of Jewish legal thought.

In an era when the religious had not yet been separated from the secular, a concern for *veritas* brought these thinkers to peruse the biblical text in their Latin, Greek and Hebrew versions. As Reformation swept across Europe, the old modes of thinking Christian doctrine were reassessed which brought the need for a new literalism outside canonical Catholic interpretation. No place in sixteenth-century Europe was more pregnant with this need than the newly formed Dutch Republic.

Caught in the moment of triumph against the Spaniards and a new religious autonomy, Dutch thinkers moved towards finding a new sense of direction and national consciousness. The formation of educational institutions was at the center of this project and the relationship of Dutch Humanists with Sephardic Rabbis became a force behind the molding of the new pluralist Dutch political character.

Katchen parses this specific period through the range of personalities and political situations that brought Christian and Jewish minds together, each having a different set of motives and expectations. To our modern eye, the scholarly pursuits of these individuals would not be seen precisely as purely learning for learning sake. Yet, we can see the growing pains these relationships brought to the historical actors at play which eventually would give unexpected turn of events in the minds and attitudes of these personalities.

Dutch Humanism

Part One of the book deals with the development of Dutch Humanism, amidst the Pan-European political changes and competition for the soul within Dutch religious groups. Katchen displays a conciseness and fluidity, not an easy task to achieve, bringing the reader a detailed bird's-eye view and easy read of a very complex stage.

Katchen leaves no rock unturned, describing the culture and politics of the Dutch Republic, to effect a transition to the humanistic and theological endeavors of key protagonists that would set the tenor for its future. The tendencies that led to the study of the *Mishnéh Toráh*, marked by a serious effort towards independence, were informed by a renewed effort to create a center of Dutch scholarship at the newly-founded University of Leiden (1575), and a deep concern for the humanist and scientific understanding of reality:

There was a practical as well as a spiritual purpose implicit in this foundation, one that soon allowed Leiden to develop the strong tradition of humanistic scholarship that made it a center of learning second to none in its day. It attracted the greatest scholars of the day in both the arts and the sciences.

Religion, though, was still at the forefront of peoples' minds, and the Bible at the center for the recreation of Dutch self-identity.

The conflicts that arose between the religious groups, multi-layered through the three centers of Dutch influence – the Regent class (the ruling class and leaders of Dutch cities), the House of Orange (the Dutch crown) and the Reformed Church – created the stage and the need for learning Rabbinic tradition.

. . . there were ongoing attempts by the Gomarists . . . to exclude their more liberal Calvinist counterparts, that is, the Remonstrants . . . from Dutch society. Their goal, never realized, was to make their own Dutch Reformed Church the sole legitimate religious body of the Netherlands . . . Dutch Christian Hebraism drew some of its forcefulness from this strife. The foremost propagandists on either side were often Hebraists whose interest in and use of rabbinic literature stemmed as much from their internal squabbles as it did from any of the other purposes of Christian humanist scholarship.

Strong traditions of local autonomy continued to ward off the establishment of a strong central power such as the House of Orange. The firm opposition of the Church prevented the Regents from really gaining the upper hand. It was the Church that usually held the balance of power, though; responsiveness to its dictates demanded, even from the Regent class, a certain degree of external orthodoxy, particularly in view of the firm support from the Church among the lower classes.

Though the need for Judaic instruction started merely as a means to settle internal doctrinal disputes and competition between the Protestant sects, it eventually evolved to become a study to know Judaism proper. But this learning, coupled with the Messianic-Millenarian thrust of the seventeenth century, was not without its risks.

Echoing endeavors from the past, the Protestant Christians engaged in Jewish learning not only to clarify and justify their own tradition, but continue the latent missionizing purpose behind it.

While attempts to convert Jews had gone through several stages since the dawn of Christian Orthodoxy – from literalist Biblical and Talmudic manipulations, and the subsequent use of Kabbalistic theology – this new threshold at the juncture of Christian and Jewish scholarship in Amsterdam opened the core of Jewish thought like never before.

Having gained a taste for scientific study of the Hebrew language, scholarship inaugura-ted by Johannan Reuchlin's *Rudimentis Hebraicis* (1522), Christian scholars turned their atten-tion to the body of Jewish Law in order to deepen their understanding of Jesus' world, the world of late Second Temple Judaism. When Christians rediscovered Maimonides' works read in the original Hebrew, away from Christian and Ashkenazi centuries-old censorship, the impression this made on them was nothing less than pure marvel and astonishment.

We thus find statements from these scholars, like the student of Law at Leiden, French-born Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540-1609):

The Moreh Nevukhim can not be commended enough. I rate not only that book but also all the works of that master so highly that I would say that he alone among the Jews has given up talking nonsense.

And this from forerunner of the Plymouth colony in North America, the English jurist Henry Ainsworth (1571-1622):

. . . I allege their exposition for two causes; the one, to give light to the ordinances of Moses touching the external practice of them in the commonwealth of Israel, which the Rabbines did record, and without whose help many of those legal rights (especially in Exodus and Leviticus) wil not wel be understood. . . An other reason why I cite the Rabbines, is to shew how in many words, phrases, and points of doctrine, they approve of the new Testament . . . wherefore the evidence brought frô the learned Iewes, will help both to understand some scriptures, and to end some controversies.

It was this English jurist, as Katchen notes, who through his Hebraic studies at Leiden would "exercise specific influence on the form of religion and society of the new colony."

Yet, with each succeeding generation, the appreciation for Maimonides would grow to new heights, as Scaliger's own pupil – Petrus Cunaeus (1585-1638) – would show:

. . . at the Hague during that time . . . I ran through the splendid treatises of Rabbi Maimonides with great enthusiasm in the most pleasant and leisurely fashion . . . I was so affected that I nearly turned my pen around and erased all my previous animadversions on things Jewish..

Admired among men is a great writer, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, who has put aside the nonsense and successfully grasped hold of the teaching of the Talmud in that divine work that he himself calls Mishneh Torah. We can never speak so highly about that author that his own excellence will not surpass it. By a certain fate and accident of birth he first and he alone among that people rightly perceive what is not to talk nonsense. We shall often cite him in these [three] books as a most distinguished witness . . . His authority will be most useful for us.

And despite certain biases these scholars still had about Jews and Judaism, all in all, European intellectuals trained at Leiden would find their encounter with Judaism proper refreshing, exhilarating and enlightening.

The Spanish & Portuguese Rabbis in Amsterdam

Part Two deals with Sephardic Rabbis overseeing the still-forming Jewish community of Amsterdam, and their pivotal role in teaching *halakháh* to Dutch intellectuals. There were three Rabbis primarily engaging with them, namely, Isaac Aboab de Fonseca, Moshé Raphael d'Aguilar, and the most influential and dedicated of them all, Menasséh ben Israel.

At the heart of this intellectual engagement there was a deep conviction from the rabbis of the value of Jewish instruction for diplomacy and betterment of the Jewish position *vis-à-vis* non-Jews.

The Jews' social and political situation in Dutch society becomes crystal clear through Katchen's research, exploring the possible motives for Sephardic Rabbis to engage in Jewish legal instruction with non-Jews.

Contrary to what historians generally say about Jewish settlement in the Netherlands, Katchen shows several elements that made the situation of Jews there so very delicate; a situation which had to be addressed. Despite the pluralistic religious character of the Dutch Republic there was not tolerance for all. As it concerned Christianity, Calvinist positions ruled in matters of faith, and any deviancy from its general principles usually translated into persecution and eventual expulsion from the Dutch realm. Therefore sects and individuals who rebelled against the *status quo* were not at all immune from banishment, and Jews were no exception.

The ability of Jews to worship publicly – a privilege not granted to Dutch Catholics at the time – was attained through a careful orchestration of the Jewish position *vis-à-vis* its existential place within Christianity and the utility Jews brought to the burgeoning intellectualism of their educational institutions.

Sephardic Rabbis spearheaded the complex dialectical relationship that evolved over time; one that was not without controversy within the Spanish and Portuguese community. A 1639 ordinance of the Ma'amad, the community's lay governing body, set the tone for the community's behavior *vis-à-vis* Christians:

No one may discuss matters of religion with a non-Jew in order that he may come out to our Holy Law, nor may one speak scandalously of his faith to him; ***this would be contrary [to our interest and] disturb the liberty which we enjoy and make us hated for something that is neither a law nor an obligation.*** [My emphasis]

Yet European Rabbis (mainly Italian and Sephardic), since the 16th century, had a different outlook in mind. Thus we see Rabbis such as Obadiáh ben Jacob Sforno (1475-1550) who declared circa 1500 that Jews have the duty to teach mankind. Elias Levita saw the teaching of Hebrew beneficial, as "the very knowledge of our language among Christians has actually been to our advantage."

These very Rabbis too, on the other side of the coin, did not see any trouble in receiving secular and scientific instruction from Christians. Yosef Shelomó Delmedigo, Hakham of Amsterdam's Bet Yisrael (1626-1629), expressed his support for secular learning as, "the best means to safeguard a Jew's standing and honor in a foreign milieu." These words were sanctioned by no less than Jacob leVet haLevi, Simone Luzzato and Leone de Modena, himself an instructor to Christians.

Katchen views this overall attitude to teach Judaism at its source with the intention to render "null and void" any misapprehension Christians might have had held about Jews and their religion.

Of all the Rabbis, Hakham Menasséh ben Israel went far beyond such efforts to teach halakháh – the legal corpus of Judaism – to Dutch scholars, even at the expense of both his community's criticism and possible ban, and upsetting the conservative Dutch Protestant powerhouses.

It is Hakham Ben Israel and his involvement with Dutch scholars, coupled with his publishing activity that draws the most attention. According to Katchen, Millenarian and Kabbalistic speculations launched the Amsterdam Rabbis into teaching *halakháh* to Christians. In his words:

. . .[I]n this consideration of ulterior motivations to the instruction of Christians are the eschatological presuppositions of the age. Menasseh, Aboab, and Aguilar all would become involved in messianic speculations, Menasseh through kabbalists

and other visionaries both Christian and Jewish, Aboab and Aguilar also through kabbalah, the two of them becoming the most enthusiastic Amsterdam supporters of Shabbetai Tsevi, the messianic pretender, in 1665-66. Commonly associated with Jewish eschatological thinking in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a hope that the general spread of the knowledge of Torah, via both the Reformation and the activities of Christian missionaries in the newly discovered lands, was a harbinger of the Messiah.

Yet, in the subsequent development of his thesis, Katchen does not offer what specific kabbal-istic speculations prompted these Rabbis to engage in this type of instruction to Christians, and stranger still is that none of the intellectual exchange Spanish and Portuguese Rabbis pursued with Christians–as we shall see particularly with Menasséh–were kabbalistic in form and substance. The only thing that Katchen offers to support his statements is the Maimonedean concept of messianic redemption.[1]

Accordingly, in Maimonides' MT Hilkhot Melakhim, Chapter 11, we read:

. . . And everything that came about in respect to Jesus and the Ishmaelite who arose after him [i.e. Muhammad] only did so to smooth the way for the Messianic King and to prepare the whole world to worship God together, as it is said, "For then I will turn to the peoples a pure language that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve Him with one consent"[Zeph. 3:9] How [is this so]? The world has already become full of talk about the Messiah and about the Torah and about the commandments, and this has spread into far islands and among many uncircumcised peoples. And they are discussing these things and the commandments of the Torah. Some say, these commandments were true but they have become null and void at the present time and were not binding for all generations; others say, there are mysteries in them and they are not [to be interpreted] according to their literal meaning, and the Messianic King has already come and revealed their secret sense. But, when the Messianic King will arise in truth and be successful and be exalted and lifted up, they immediately reconsider and know that their fathers inherited falsehood, and that their prophets and Fathers deceived them.

Even though Katchen notices the Maimonedean approach in Menasséh ben Israel, he does not set out to question why he chose this scientific approach against the highly speculative nature of kabbalah. By Menasséh's time there was plenty of kabbalistic literature available from which to take advantage, and proven to be extremely popular in Christian circles, particularly messianist ones.

The picture that emerges of Menasséh is one of a Hakham being a teacher and printer of Jewish law and commentaries, aimed to promote the Jewish view of things, without trying to offend his Christian audience.

One of his primary works that attempted to temper the opinion of Christians towards Jews, and to clarify traditional Jewish hermeneutics, was the *Conciliator*. As its name suggests, the Conciliator reconciles the apparent contradictions found in Hebrew Scripture, allowing Menasséh to utilize a wide range of Jewish and non-Jewish commentaries:

The writings consulted by Menasseh were many and varied, Jewish and non-Jewish; he placed them side by side without distinguishing between their authority. All was grist for the mill of Menasseh's mind, and all, in his view, served to extricate him from his supposed difficulties. Included among the authorities (a list of both Jewish and the non-Jewish ones is appended in the Spanish edition; in the Latin edition, the non-Jewish ones are omitted) are church fathers, medieval and later scholastics, and, of course, the broad range of classical authors.

Originally written in Spanish – with the obvious intention to aid Conversos returning to Judaism – the *Conciliator* was soon translated into Latin.

This work was not, however, without controversy in the Christian camp, as it became obvious to them that Menasséh omitted Christian commentaries aimed at proving Jesus' messianic mission and traditional Trinitarian theology. *Conciliator* disarmed many key points of Christian doctrine via "Old Testament" interpretation, without ever wavering from the classic Rabbinic views on the matter:

. . . then Menasseh goes on to say: "We find, if we examine the Talmud well, that this kind of study was . . . held in esteem even [by] several gentile princes, [who] raised [such] doubts to the ancients among our fellow [Jews]. These [Jewish sages] alone, as the disciples of the prophets, could find a way out and a solution for many passages that, on account of their difficulty, would remain completely unintelligible."

The publication of *Conciliator* was a resounding success. After securing the approval of his com-munity Parnassim (lay governing body), Hakham Ben Israel went to procure the publication approval of the Ashkenazi Rabbis at Frankfurt (Germany), where it was received enthusiastically in both its Spanish and Latin versions. Being a non-kabbalistic work written in two languages foreign to Ashkenazim (the Frankfurt Rabbis depended on an

interpreter who translated it *viva voce* from the Spanish version), it is remarkable that *Conciliator* would find unwavering support, even from the least likely places, as two recent adepts of Lurianic kabbalah were part of the Rabbinic board. Their differing comments commending Mennaséh's work should be carefully noted.

The first one from Rabbi Joseph Hahn-Nördlingen (1570-1670), who supported the use of the vernacular:

> *[Hahn] recognized that "our brethren, the Portuguese House of Israel," had appointed Menasseh to guide them in the correct way and that he was their "melits," their 'interpreter,' to teach them the Jewish books ("le-lammedam sefer"). Menasseh's aim, as Hahn understood it, was to an effective teacher to his nation ("le-lammedam le-ho'il"), "so it was necessary to compose [the work] in a language they know well."*

And Rabbi Simeon ben Jacob Günzburg, who in support of Jewish-Gentile relations – with a thoroughly Maimonidean ring – said,

> *Because in this manner the wisdom of the sages of Israel will become recognized in the eyes of the nations and understanding of its wise men will become known among a broad public, and all the nations of the earth will see that God has named us as His own. For this is a sign of the truth: that there will not be found in her [the Torah's parts] things that contradict one another. And, in this way, honor, esteem, and respect for our holy Torah will be magnified, and it will become public knowledge that we are her children, her believing children, and that we have the* ***true kabbalah****[2] and that 'they shall become one' through us [var. on Ezek. 37:17].*

Menasséh ben Israelwould go on to author three more works, then translated into Latin, *De Resurecctione Mortuorum, De Creatione Problemata XXX,* and *De Fragilitate Humana*. However, because of the controversies which erupted from the publication of the *Conciliator*, Menasséh had a harder time in getting the approvals he needed, even sometimes recurring to clandestine publishing. Indeed, Menasséh did not find favor among the Calvinists and Remonstrants, and the unwillingness of the Parnassim to approve his subsequent works (even though he had strong support from key members as Dr. Zacuto), perhaps was a reflection that they found Menasséh's boldness incendiary to Christians, and preferred to keep a low profile.

Still, the works saw the light of day in Latin versions intended for the wider non-Jewish public, but not without omitting, rephrasing or even altering certain parts of the text to suit Christian sensibilities, or to appease and ease the Parnassim. Of the last three, *De Creatione Problemata XXX* was particularly intended to mend any public relations "damage" he might have caused with *Conciliator,* written at the behest of his two closest non-Jewish allies, Barlaeus and Vossius.

A much shorter work, *De Creatione* is less technical and more philosophical, drawing attention to the things that Jews and Christians can agree on, but not without losing sight of the core principles of Judaism. In fact, the Introduction is a discussion of Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith, and any subsequent developments were appended to his introductory remarks. This work, however, would cause trouble to Barlaeus with his peers, as he dedicated a very flattering poem to Menasséh as part of the edition, where Barlaeus would give Jews the same standing as Christians favored by God. Dutch Christians could tolerate Jews on the basis of their utilitarian benefits, not as being equals before the Divine grace.

Katchen captures the complex, dynamic and versatile personality of Hakham Menasséh ben Israel. He presents a man who not only stood his ground the best he could, both before Christian society and his fellow Jews, but did so in a way that would not compromise his Jewish principles, even at the expense of his own livelihood and respect.

For those who have falsely pictured Menasséh as a manipulator of public opinion for his own gain to fame and money, Katchen's detailed review on his works, his students and surrounding environment puts any doubts to rest. There was plenty of opportunity, had it been the case, for Menasséh to take advantage of kabbalistic and apocalyptic themes to lure his Christian audience. And with the exception of his pamphleteering during the Oliver Cromwell affair, Menasséh was not much of a propagandist.

The fact that most of the works he published, and particularly the type of instruction he offered to non-Jews kept a strict Rabbinic and Maimonidean stance, speaks of a Jew who knew all too well the distinction between living to increase the Torah for Israel and the Nations, and not have the Torah increase your living. Even after having several life reversals, he kept to this immutable principle.

Hakham Menasséh fiercely stood by the Jewish truth, and hoped that by having a smattering of supporters among Dutch intellectuals would eventually have Jewish principles and ideals spread among other non-Jews, and with this support be able to further secure the standing and safety of the Jewish community. His dreams, as well as those of his peers, did not crystallized during his lifetime, but nonetheless created a lasting impact that would be manifest in generations to come.

Menasseh reveals quite a bit about his view of the instruction of Christians: "the long way," he says, adducing Seneca, "is through rules; the short and effective one, through examples." We must come to know something about the student in order to teach him; we must have human contact, using all our senses; instruction by example and viva voce too (Aguilar's words as well) is the best method for communicating knowledge.

Legis Hebraicum

Part Three is a critical parsing of the translations and commentaries on the *Mishnéh Toráh*, primarily done by Menasséh's Christian pupils, who were also translators of his other works. This section is by far Katchen's most impressive, careful and meticulous analysis; moving well beyond the preceding sections as he expertly takes us into the work and mental processes each translation entails.

Before we look into these translations, we should visit the *personae* of each Christian Hebraist that made the study of the Mishnéh Toráh possible in Holland, prior and after the intersession of the Rabbis.

As the colossus of learning associated with the early years of Leiden, Scaliger exercised a role, to be sure, but the real impetus to the study of Hebrew and rabbinics there was provided by Johannes Drusius (1550-1616), though he would move from Leiden to Franeker in 1584-85. Moreover, Drusius and Scaliger only laid the foundations. On their work other scholars would build, from such generalists as Hugo Grotius (1586-1638) and Petrus Cunaeus (1603-69) and Constantijn l'Empereur, right down to the very first translators and commentators of the Mishneh Torah.

It is Johaness Drusius the Elder who pioneered rabbinics in Holland. Rebelling against the theological positions of fellow Hebraists at the time, Drusius sought to establish Hebraic studies based on the philological attention to the Hebrew Bible.

He himself specifically rejected the designation "theologus," aspiring instead to the appellation "grammaticus," implying with this that different methods and even different spheres of activity belonged to each area.

Drusius was self-taught in rabbinics, thanks to his acquisition of Jewish books through a Jewish bookseller at Emden. Thanks to a series of letters between him and the bookseller that have been preserved, we know what Jewish works were part of his library aside from the Talmud. He cites

. . . the Turim, the halakhic code of Jacob ben Asher (1290-c. 1343); Abraham ibn Daud's (c. 1110 - c. 1181) historical overview of the chain of rabbinic tradition, Sefer hak-Kabbalah (1161) . . . Sefer Yuhasin (c. 1510) of Abraham Zacuto (1450-1515), also a historical work on the rabbinic tradition; and repeatedly, the kabbalistic and ethical treatise Sefer ham-Musar by the Spanish exile Judah Kalats (16th century) of Tlemçen [?], Algeria.

Though having no rabbinic coaching whatsoever, Drusius proved himself a serious student of rabbinics. He hardly ever made polemics with the material he studied, and overall he was very objective. He wrote a treatise, published after his death, entitled *Commentarium ad loca difficiliora Pentateuchi* (1617), where his grammatical and lexical preoccupations are evident, distancing himself from any spiritual explanation of the material. Indeed, in a very humble note he explained,

What I deal with pertains mostly to grammar. I do not claim for myself any deeper knowledge. I do know this: I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet.

Katchen views Drusius both as a forerunner of modern Biblical criticism and a Humanist "holdover" from the Renaissance, in a Dutch era where theology was of a much deeper concern. In any case, Drusius' hand-picked successor Sixtinus Amama (1593-1629) would continue his work, rallying for the study of Hebrew as a "proper foundation for theology," and criticizing his contemporaries for their ignorance of such language.

The other key Leiden Hebraist precursor was Julius-Caesar Scaliger, who began to rally for direct Jewish instruction via Rabbis, and as a result having a positive attitude for Jewish settlement in the Netherlands. He had a brief encounter with a Jew converted to Christianity, a Polish Jew by the name of Phillipus Ferdinandus (c. 1555-1599), who had come to teach Arabic at Leiden, but who died quite shortly after his arrival. Scaliger deeply lamented his loss.

At this point however, the *Mishnéh Toráh* had not yet come to their attention.

The first to bring the *Mishnéh Torah* into central use was the future Pilgrim of the Plymouth Plantation and Bible commentator, the English Jurist Henry Ainsworth (1571-1622), who led a separatist movement both in Amsterdam and Leiden. He is thought to have had contact with the Sephardi rabbis in the very young community of Amsterdam. The way he put Maimonides' code to

use was to exemplify the affinities between Judaism and Christianity via the Sefer haMaddáh, the Book of Science.

But it was not until the arrival of Petrus Cunaeus when the *Mishnéh Toráh* became part of Leiden's Academy. Cunaeus was a scholar or jurisprudence by profession, whose learning had taken place under Scaliger's tutelage.

Under Scaliger's recommendation, Cunaeus went to study Hebrew with Drusius, whose philological and erudition in rabbinics influenced him greatly.

Cunaeus obtained his first copy of the *Mishnéh Toráh* as a gift by Johanes Boreel, his personal friend. As we have said before, his encounter with the *Mishnéh Toráh* was a watershed. This experience would shape Cunaeus' major work *De Republica Habraerum*, which he wrote with the intention to serve as a guide for the Magistrates of Holland and West Frisia. In this book he calls attention to the fact that whszile the Dutch delve into Spanish, French, Italian and even American Indigenous knowledge and language, not so with the Hebrews; in his words,

> *We have learned the words and the sayings of the Spaniards, the French, and the Italians: and since our fleets went out to discover another world, we even speak in the barbarian language with the Indians. As talented as we are, the one language we do not understand is the one that it would truly have been worth while learning. For, if there are any who turn their intellects to this most noble pursuit, it is for the most part in an entirely perfunctory fashion. In fact, the majority approach the gates of Hebraism, which is the easiest thing, but do not wish in the least to enter into the interior of the sanctuary, the study of Syriac and Rabbinic. Certainly it is not for them to judge how many and how great the treasures are in Hebraism, not for those who, content to know only the words of the biblical text, consider themselves sufficiently learned that they even wish to teach others. They are mistaken, to my mind at least. One must proceed further, one must investigate and see what the Jews, the vernacular interpreters of the Bible, already said long ago, either rightly or wrongly.*

As a scholar of jurisprudence, Cunaeus had a deep concern for the philosophies of governing, and saw no other "republic" more praiseworthy in this regard than that of the Hebrews.

The controversies then lived by the young Dutch Republic was ripping apart the Dutch people, most of which were driven by obscure theological "mysteries." Cunaeus saw this attitude as absolute nonsense and unproductive for the unity of a people. As such, he rallied for the imitation of the Israelite commonwealth, who he saw as most perfect, having achieved a harmony, and inseparable bond between the "Church" and the state.

The next heir to Cunaeus' scholarship was Hugo Grotius. Katchen asserts while Grotius "never achieved Cunaeus's'proficiency in either Hebrew or rabbinics, his was certainly the more original mind."

Grotius had written a tractate called *Remonstrantie* (1616), where he argued for the acceptance and rights of Jews, already based on the charters provided in Harleem and Rotterdam. Due to its lack of quotes of Jewish sources, Katchen speculates this publica-tion took place before his induction into rabbinics. Nonetheless, his chief reason for favoring Jews was their utility as teachers to Christians.

His most enduring work, *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (1625) would show a growing interest in the use of rabbinic works and the *Mishnéh Toráh*. This treatise would go through several editions, and it would show the Grotius' increasing knowledge of rabbinics, particularly between its first publication and 1642. Although the work was of religious character

> *. . . it is based on the principles of law and is itself, of course, the foundation of modern international law. Grotius rests his case not only on natural law, but also on the mutual respect of nations . . . Already in the first edition of 1625, there are several references to the Guide of the Perplexed (as Dux dubitantium) and at least one, thought not by title, to the Mishnéh Toráh.*

His growing Maimonedean citations would make use of Melakhim, 'Akkum, Yesodei ha-Toráh and Tefiláh. Gentius, like his predecessors, did not go beyond the simple sense of the texts he utilized.

When all the aforementioned proofed the Hebraist intellectual soil at Leiden, Johannes Coccejus and l'Empereur were the first deserving scholars of rabbinics, well surpassing their predecessors. According to Katchen, "(t)heir editions of the Mishaic tractates (Sanhedrin and Makkot) are landmarks," and a "virtual, though not total elimination of polemic and controversy from their commentaries is the remarkable result." Yet their ulterior motives were driven purely by conversionist aims, and particularly bold in the case of l'Empereur. [My parenthesis]

In 1625, a young 22-year-old Coccejus went to study with a Jew at Hamburg (who he never identifies), and in 1626 with Amama, Drusius' pupil. It was Amama who would supervise Coccejus edition and commentaries

to the Mishnaic tractates, and who would dedicate a commendatory poem for its introduction.

Katchen carefully analyses all sources utilized by Coccejus in his Mishnaic commentaries. Primarily into focus is the use of commentaries made by Italian and Sephardic Rabbis, particularly Obadiah Bertinoro and Maimonides. Coccejus goal was to bring out the logic for the Mishnaic dictum, layered through the Gemaráh, the Talmudic discussions and the post-rabbinic commentaries.

> *He often adds a brief discussion of the halakhic reasoning or process involved. He examines how the different authorities line up on a given question: "Maimonides approves of this opinion" (ad Makk. 2:5). The issue is the murderer by accident who is banished to a city of refuge; the road must be cleared of any obstacles to his swift passage there, and he must be accompanied by two scholars lest the avenger of the deceased kill him in route . . . Coch writes, first quoting the Gemara in Aramaic, then in translation:*
>
> *The Gemara adds: ". . . what, then, [are the scholars to speak]? Not a warning to [the avenger] that if he kills [the slayer] he is going to lose his own life as a penalty, but, as it has been taught, they shall speak to him things that are appropriate to him, such as: 'and you shall not act like shedders of blood'; 'he did it inadvertently'" [The accompanying scholars] should calm the avenger's rage with words. For, in the opinion of the majority, the avenger is indeed able to kill [the slayer] with impunity, along the way as the latter flees or is led back or sent back [to the city of refuge]. Their opinion is based on this: that the words ". . . and there is no sentence of death upon him" [refer] to the avenger; moreover, the words "for he did not hate, etc."in Deut. 19:6 apply to the beginning of the verse: "lest the avenger pursue." This opinion is approved by Maimonides.*

Coccejus brilliance lies in his ability to bring the sources and make the connections among all of them. His self-acquired erudition in working through rabbinic logic, without the assistance of the Rabbis, is absolutely astonishing. And yet, as it was natural of most Renaissance scholars, a measure of humility and acceptance of human error was of the essence.

> *Coch's observations are sometimes directed more expressly to "quo sensu hoc capiendum" ['the sense in which this is to be taken'] of the "ratio" ['the sense in which is to be taken'] or to the "ratio" [the 'rationale' or 'principle behind'] or "causa" [the 'reason for'] a Mishnaic statement. These are not always halakhic judgements, and are sometimes his own understandings.*

His passion and exclusive use of rabbinics even run contrary to the Sephardic approach. "'On the person 'who reads external books,' is the same Mishnah, Coch, ignoring the example of Aristotle chosen by Bertinoro (and by others), writes:"

> *Among them he reckons even Ben Sira, for whose proverbs we have the elucidations of the prince of sacred philology, the illustrious Drusius. Their reading is not prohibited altogether; (Why, then, would [the rabbis] themselves have included maxims of his, maxims that surely find the greatest fault with, in [the Talmud]?) But it is prohibited to read them with such esteem that you prefer them to the study of the divine word.*

Coccejus' passion for rabbinics was not without criticism from his peers. After his death, his son had to defend him from the charge that he had overindulged in "Jewish-talmudic exegesis."

But whatever lack of anti-Jewish animus Coccejus lacked, Constantine l'Emper-eur (1591-1648) certainly made up for it. A native of Bremen, as was Coccejus, his family had fled religious persecution. He studied both at Franeker and Leiden, yet he does not seem to have had the influence of the already established Hebraists, Drusius and Amama. His teachers were Orientalist scholars outside the pro-rabbinic circle. In l'Empereur's inaugural lecture at Leiden, he already makes clear his anti-Semitic views, without losing hold of Hebraic utilitarian learning to make polemics with the Jews.

> *He impugns the "Talmud, Midrashim and other commentaries" for their "old wives" tales ("anles istas fabulas") and cites many examples, all loci classici such as Genesis 49:10, of how Jews have misunderstood and misconstrued Scripture . . . however, l'Empereur turns to place himself in the tradition of the great Reuchlin, of whom he says: "He was the first to take up the Hebrew language after it had long lain buried. We must give him the credit for all our progress and advancement."*

As we had mentioned before, Reuchlin was a lauded German humanist who had inaugurated the study of Hebrew among his Christian peers. He had Hakham Obadiah Sforno (1470-1550) among his rabbinic teachers, with whom he studied in Rome between 1498 and 1500. Reuchlin was a staunch defender of the Talmud, even going against Jewish apostates (e.g. Pfefferkorn), though he still hoped for the conversion of Jews. However, Reuchlin's Talmudic learning, as l'Empereur's after him, was to acquire its techniques to be used later on against the Jews themselves. But unlike Recuhlin, l'Empereur was far more aggressive.

Many of l'Empereur's commentaries on his Latin edition of *Middot* are aimed at defending Christian doctrine wherever it clashed with the Jewish view. Furthermore, it pandered to the Calvinists, and their desire to become the supreme ecclesiastical authority in the Netherlands, thereby crushing the Arian and Socinian "heresies". As part of the national program, the Calvinists are compared to

> *. . . a living tabernacle. It has wondered through Germany and France, just as the tabernacle of the Israelites had wandered through the wilderness; it has now found a home "sub vestries auspiciis" ('under your authority') in the Netherlands, "transmuted, as it were, into an utterly immovable edifice, a temple."*

L'Empereur was not a friend of religious diversity, and utilized Temple metaphors to bring about his Orthodox program of absolute control. Besides targeting the Jews, l'Empereur proved himself to be an equal-opportunity religious dictator.

But the Sephardic Jews at Amsterdam would not put up with his antics, and would soon be cut off from socializing and debating with members of the community. The Ma'amad forbade the community to teach l'Empereur. He recorded the event:

> *I remember when I formerly used to debate with Jews in the synagogue and in private homes. Even then they begrudged me further progress in my study of Talmud and related literature. My teacher was summoned by the leadership of the community and prohibited from rendering further assistance in these works, since my purpose in pursuing these studies was not unknown to him.*

Dionysius Vossius is the first Hebraist prodigy under Rabbinic tutelage that Katchen brings to fore. Dionysius was first trained by his father, Gerhard Johann Vossius, a meticulous scholar in classic antiquities famed through all Europe.

> *His scholarship was uncompromising in its search for factual accuracy; he paid great attention to details and to the truth of his reporting, but history was for him nothing but useful. His general aim in history was a pragmatic one: the public welfare.*

It was Vossius senior who put his son Dionysius to study with Hakham Menasséh ben Israel. Dionysius in turn would teach his brothers.

Even before he was a teenager, Dionysius entered Leiden to study with its finest. His course studies included Roman law and political science, the classics, oriental studies and theology. He mastered all the major Oriental languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Armenian, and Ethiopic.

In 1630, he accompanied his father to a trip to England, where he met scholars at Oxford and Cambridge, who would encourage his intellectual pursuits even further. It is here where Dionysius studies in religion would become more into focus.

Back in Amsterdam in 1631, Dionysius was elected first librarian of the new Athenaeum Illustre (where Menasséh had hoped for a Hebrew chair). He was offered a professorship of history and rhetoric in the new University at Dorpat, but he declined because he had to take care of his ailing mother, and his incomplete projects at home. Offers also came from England, but settled to become the official historiographer to Queen Christina of Sweden.

He died victim of small pox in 1633, but he had already weakened his constitu-tion through his obsessive studies. Katchen describes his scholarship in the following:

> *Dionysius Vossius's most distinguishing characteristics was perhaps the lively, self-aware posture he maintained throughout his work . . . if the rabbis were intentionally precise for halakhic reasons, Vossius's precision was to be a demonstration of his competence. Finally, it must have been because he did not prove himself doctrinaire in his approach that he earned the respect of Menasseh.*

Next in line is Guglielmus Vorstius, a Remonstrant Pastor at Leiden. He obtained a diploma in theology at Leiden in 1640, and was limited in his knowledge of general culture. Apparently, he self-taught himself Hebrew, language he already knew when he met Menasséh, which was put to use to translate *De Creatione*. For sure, he was the least talented of Menasséh's pupils.

Unusual talent, however, would come from Georgius Gentius (1618-87), a Menasséh favorite. Gentius was born a Lutheran in Saxony, and began to study Oriental languages at an early age both in Hamburg and Bremen. He was one of the first Germans to study at Leiden. He too would become a Leiden prodigy, under the tutelage of Heinsius, de Dieu, Golius and l'Empereur. Anslo and de Wilhem became his patrons to undertake a trip to the Middle East, where he stayed in Constantinople between 1642 and 1648, and served the Dutch embassy in that region.

The least known and discussed of Menasséh ben Israel's pupils is Genebrand Anslo (1612-1643). "A cloth merchant of Norwegian ancestry, the son of the famous Mennonite preacher Cornelis Anslo (1592-1646)," of whom Rembrandt painted a portrait. An avid Orientalist, Anslo collected a wide range Arabic and Hebrew manuscripts, which he himself said was envied by the Jews.

Although not a pupil of Menasséh, Barlaeus is another elusive character of whom Katchen does not bring any biographical details. This is unfortunate, given that Barlaeus was one of his strongest supporters, and the force behind many political maneuvers that would benefit Menasséh. Caspar Barlaeus (1584-1648) was born in Antwerp, and was a Leiden graduate of theology before holding chair of Logic in that institution. He is considered an accomplished polymath and humanist, who wrote works of poetry, history and geography.

Katchen does not spare a single detail in comparing the Latin texts and the Hebrew originals, showing us the amount of care and Jewish erudition Menasseh's Christian pupils were able to acquire under his wing.

> *In conveying the sense of the original, Vossius employed a vast reserve of vocabulary. He brought in extra words as the sense required and substituted a variety of particles for the simple connective in Hebrew, giving expression to the different nuances contained therein. If he deemed his rendering open to dispute, he regularly took pains to supply the authority for a given translation. And yet, he regularly used alternative choices of vocabulary or different forms of expression when a previously used Hebrew word or phrase recurred. Even the simplest terms appear in multiple forms in Latin. Mitsvah, commandment, can be "praeceptum," "mandatum," "in mandatis est," or in periphrasis, "jubemur."*

This care went as far as trying to reconstruct the original sense of the text from different available sources:

> *Maimonides places the witness "be-makom afel," 'in a dimly lit place,' while the Mishnah has them "ahore hag-gader, post paritem." . . . Both Coch and Vossius construe the adverbial "be-yihud" as belonging specifically to the main clause, whereas the Hebrew seems to leave the word dangling. The two translations are as follows:*
>
> *Coch: Tum, qui ab ipso facto ad idololatriam inviatus fuerat, jubet eum repetere in secreto, quod ei dixerat [p. 56]*
>
> *Vossius: Deinde seductori, inquiet: Dic age hîc seorsim mihi, quod ante retulsi.*
>
> *For "be-yihud," Coch uses "in secreto" to mean 'in private', without witnesses'; Vossius uses "hîc seorsim"as 'here seperately'or 'in private,' i.e, "Come tell me here in private what you proposed before." Both of these interpretations accord with those of Jewish Mishnaic commentators. Vossius's "ante" sounds close to the "kevar" in Bertinoro's paraphrase.*

And,

> *Moreover, the text that Vossius has reconstructed is more complete than any found in a Rabbinic edition.*

In other instances however Menasséh's instruction ran contrary to these expectations.

Such is the case of Gurgilielmus Vorstius, Remonstrant pastor at Leiden, and translator to Menasséh's *De Creatione*. Vorstius rendered the Latin version of *Hilkhot Yesodei haTorâh*, published as *Constitutiones de Fundamentis Legis* (Amsterdam 1638). Such work, however, was utilized to mock Judaism rather than present it with a dispassionate academic interest.

> *"That we may assert the wonderful teaching of Jesus against the obstinate incredulity of these mortals: for virtually everything that is alleged in this chapter is directed at weakening the force of the most divine works of our Messiah . . ."*

Furthermore, Vorstius not only tried to build a case against Judaism using the Rabbinic texts, but even went as far as trying to discredit Moses:

> *"It would indeed not only have been absurd long ago but it would even be absurd now for the Jews to have confidence in a messenger of such a sort that he himself does not know by whom he has send [according to this midrash, among the features that distinguish the prophecy of Moses from that of Balaam was that Moses did not know who was speaking with him, while Balaam did]: [the Jews] will now find Christians fairer judges of Mosaic prophecy."*

Nonetheless, it would be his pupil Georgius Gentius, with whom Menasséh had the most satisfaction as a teacher, who became the closest to his ideal of a non-Jewish ally. His dedication was even appreciated by Rabbis as far as Constantinople.

Gentius authored the translation to Maimonides' *Hilkhot De'ot*, titled *Canones Ethici*. His reverence for the works of Maimonides was very deep, and the appreciation for the acquired learning, immense. In his preface to the Latin edition, Gentius wrote the following praise in Hebrew:

"After I entered into the inner chambers of the Hebrew language, I saw things never imagined, never having conceived that a people humbled and despised by the whole world such as the Jews was wise and understanding. I saw that they were."

Gentius' passing references to Christianity are but few. With his reticence to insert Christological elements in his work he seems to have been the least encumbered Latin translator and commentator of this period.

Virtually all of Gentius's observations and comments are of such a nondoctrinaire variety. He often waxes enthusiastic, in fact. He quotes with satisfaction, for example (ad 4:3, p. 152), the "elegantissumum proverbium" of the Hebraei, "mah she-haav shokheah hab-ben meshebeah," though the context he had established was merely a discussion of certain maladies and their treatment, this one being the strengthening of the memory.

Amsterdam's Rabbinical leaders appreciated Gentius' dedication and objective output; so much so that they wrote panegyrics to praise his efforts. The one from Hakham Aboab de Fonseca is particularly touching,

The day a bow appeared in the palm of your pure hand,
I rushed my gift and my tribute.
For I thought it a splendorous display of your power, dear friend.
A stranger interpreting my religion amid my congregation.
Therefore I shall come opposite your threshold
With praises, and not be still till my words
Open its doors in a lyrical song,
To raise your fame above the stars.

Despite the fact that most of Menasséh's pupils still held reservations about Jews and Judaism, the collaboration between the two representatives of each religion was of a very high caliber. Katchen demonstrates how the commentaries on the translations not only showed a consummated expertise in Rabbinics, but a mastery of the Hebrew language. Adding to this, they utilized a considerable range of Rabbinic and post-Talmudic works, the classics, and even Arabic authors to elucidate points, bridge opinions, and in the case of Vorstius, to just run contrary arguments.

The Neutral Society

Part Four is the conclusion of the book where Katchen explains how the teaching of non-Jewish and Latin renditions of Jewish works functioned in the political realm.

On the one hand, he quickly speculates how Jewish relations in Hamburg (Germany) effected Gentius' *persona*; and on the other, he tries to reconstruct a scenario that worked towards the advantage of Hakham Menasséh ben Israel, stemming from his interactions with Dutch intellectuals. However marginal these successes might seem to us, considering the time and environments where the historical actors developed, the events marked a watershed moment of Jewish history in Christian Europe.

After having finished his academic tour in Constantinople, Gentius ended up in Hamburg on his way back to Holland. For reasons that Katchen does not clarify, Gentius sought a chair to teach Oriental languages in Hamburg. After having finished his translation of Ibn Verga's *Shebet Yehudáh*, titled *Historia Judaica*, he sought to have this text be his letter of introduction for securing the position.

On the one hand we have the precarious state of Hamburg's Jewry: when Gentius arrived in Hamburg in 1650, the Ashkenazi Jews had been expelled (Katchen does not say under what circumstances), but the Sephardi Jews – all descendants of and recent Conversos via Amsterdam – were allowed to remain. These Sephardi Jews were under increasing pressure from the Lutherans to convert, but this pressure was mitigated by Hamburg's Senate and Magistrates.

Gentius, a Lutheran, presented his credentials and wishes to the Senate, not the Ministerium (i.e., the Lutheran hierarchy). Not only these credentials included *Historia Judaica*, but also the translation of *Gulistan* by the Persian writer Sa'di, titled in Latin *Rosarium*.

Katchen takes a particular interest in the dedication of this book. Written for Hamburg's Senate, the dedication is clearly meant to pander to Christian biases, to the detriment of Jews, though he argued for the protection of Jews as Jews.

"the Jews were, of old, the noblest people, indeed, but now, as their fate has it, they are the most despised throughout the whole world. Not having done anything outstanding for several centuries prior, they provided the author with only scanty opportunity for praising them."

Katchen views this as a setback in Menasséh's work, and portrays it as a surfacing of Gentius' true feelings concerning the Jews, who in the end he claims ought to be convert-ed. In this he presents a "mixed blessing" for Jews; a politically savvy move for Gentius to achieve his professional goals.

Whatever Gentius' motives were, the Senate was resolute in giving the Sephardi community of Hamburg greater rights. In 1652, they were granted further

privileges, the right to build a public synagogue, and be exempted from listening to conversionist sermons. In the end, Gentius' dedication did not sit well with the Lutheran extremists and he fell out of favor from the Senate, and (perhaps as a result) could not resume his scholarly career.

By contrast, Menasséh's star was on the ascendant. Thanks to the fame gained through his publishing endeavors, he became more involved with intellectual exchanges with both Christian and Converso scholars, continued publishing his works, and had a diplomatic foray in England.

Key to his diplomatic enterprise was the translation of his *La Esperança de Israel* into Latin. This is perhaps the only work where Menasséh turns wholly propagandistic, flaring all kind of messianic and kabbalistic colors. His language and aim certainly played into the apocalyptic feelings of English Millinerians.

Published in Spanish long before his excursion to England, Katchen reveals that Menasséh might have written Esperança to "forestall criticism by the Parnassim," but he does not explain what that criticism might have been. In any case, utilized as a tool for his English diplomacy, Menasséh turned again to Vossius to edit the dedication for the English Parliament.

Although Katchen does not discuss why Hakham Ben Israel changed tactics quite drastically, from the subtly intellectual to the aggressive marketer, there are several questions he also cannot fully answer as to why Menasséh decided to seek support for opening the doors to Jews in England.

He points out that there was already an active Sephardi Jewish community in England, albeit functioning in secret, and he speculates his translation of Esperança was to advocate for strengthening the Jewish presence already there, and perhaps too to seek a post. Conversos had been part of the English mercantile scene since the Elizabethan period (1558-1603), and this was no secret to either the English or the Jews.

Ultimately, it appears, there were strong personal financial and professional reasons, and the English Sephardim behind this enterprise. But contrary to Cecil Roth's assertions, this new venture was not taken because Menasséh was considered *persona non grata* in Amsterdam. Katchen discovers that the Ma'amad had just provided him with new financial accommodations, and insisted that he stay. Professionally, he did not see eye to eye with Hakham Saul Levi de Morteira, head of Amsterdam's Bet Din (rabbinical court).

What became of Menasséh's legacy is open to speculation. His pupils would engender further generations of philo-Semites who, at least at the academic level, would eventually come to respect Jews as Jews, and fully argue in benefit of Jews. Also, a tantalizing window Katchen opens for us is how the works of Dutch Maimonedeans might have influenced Western jurisprudence; one left fully unexplored.

The Universal stand of unbiased tolerance would be reflected in the writings of French Jesuit Pierre Jurieu and the German writer Gotthold Lessing half a century later.

Conclusions and Opinions

Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis is a book that explores the positive intellectual exchange between Jews and Christians at the dusk of the Renaissance. The engagement was profound in some areas, limited in others. The fact that it happened between two believing, yet antagonistic, communities should be of note. It is a seminal book that reveals the intellectual activity of Sephardi Rabbis in 17th c. Europe. Sadly the book did not see a third and further reprinting since 1985 and remains out of print. Its initial high price tag too made it out of popular reach, as are many excellent Harvard publications.

In my opinion, Katchen is rather unforgiving when judging Menasséh's closest allies: Vossius, Gentius and Anslo. For him, even their slightest public mention contra Jews is exploited to the point of hyperbole. Though he perfectly understands the political and academic risks these men were taking by being overly enthusiast for Jewish studies, Katchen does not allow them the benefit of the doubt in the end – and given the circum-stances of 17th c. Dutch scholars living in the highly volatile religious environment of Reformation Europe, he is rather unfair. Not even Harvard professors are completely free in democratic America, and the halls of Academia, as any PhD would tell you, filled with *Realpolitick*. Here, entire careers can be gained or lost in a bat of an eye. Peer pressure was much of a reality in 17th c. Holland as it is today.

Katchen does not seriously entertain the special circumstances of the Sephardi Rabbis involved in this inter-religious arena. Guiding communities who had escaped a major persecution and repression from Spain and Portugal, these Rabbis clearly felt that they might be facing a catastrophe of similar proportions in Protestant Europe.

But my observations to his shortcomings are marginal to the importance of his thesis. In that for a brief period of time, rabbinic tradition enjoyed a welcoming of sorts into Western Academia; not as an object of curiosity and scholarly exercise, but as an integral part of shaping the intellectual character of a nation, and indeed a whole continental block. Jews and Judaism has not had this opportunity before or after this experience since. Katchen opens before us a luminous scenario where high intellect and adherence to tradition were central to communication between Jews and Christians.

It is highly significant that the main Rabbi heading this discourse, Menasséh, was born a New Christian in Portugal as Manoel Dias Soeiro. Considering this we would be well to note that none of the anti-Christian animus typical of Conversos seems to flare-up in the work of Hakham Ben Israel. His character was one of the utmost finesse and diplomacy.

The ironies vis-à-vis the Maimonidean oeuvre rest in part to the fact that the Iberian Jews-turned-Christians implanted a bias against his works. A few centuries later, it was to be the descendants of these very New Christians who would rectify the matter and thereby reinstall the Maimonedean legacy in Western Europe.

Although there has been new scholarship regarding the role of Spanish & Portuguese Jews in the Western World, Katchen's *Christian Hebraists* is unique not only from its historical value, but the value of positive Jewish intellectual interaction with non-Jews, something that most scholars do not delve in any depth at all. This last aspect, yet to be fully developed, deserves much attention due to the lessons we can obtain from this research.

In his classic work *In the Shadow of History* Jose Faur argues that the Conversos were the harbingers of a neutral society thanks to their skepticism of Christian dogma and dislike of Church hierarchy, one that influenced the most important thinkers of the Renaissance and Modernity. Katchen in his book also argues that the Conversos as returning Jews spearheaded a neutral society via Maimonedean scholarship and attitudes. Neither the forced conversions, the Inquisition, nor the Expulsion cut Sephardi Jews from their essential cultural nature of speaking the truth with the highest of the highest standards of Humanistic and Jewish intellect.

Katchen like Faur provides a much-needed view into the world of Sephardim, and generally into the universe of normative Jewish thinking as transferred from the Ge'onim to Sefarad, and from there to our days. More importantly, it shows how Jews have successsfully negotiated their existence in the midst of precarious circumstances, always maintaining a high level of respect and erudition for themselves and others.

Western Sephardi Jewries grew in strength as a result:

> *The students increase the wisdom of the rav, and give him a bigger comprehension capacity. It was said [by one of] the Sages: "– Much was the wisdom I acquired from my colleagues, more than what I acquired from my instructors. In regard to the one acquired from my students – more than anybody else!" Just as a small wedge lifts a huge piece of wood – the same too a small student makes the rav sharper, bringing out of him ineffable wisdom through his questions!*
>
> -- MT Yesodei haToráh, Hilkhot Talmud Toráh 5:18

Afterword

As I prepared the present article, I could not help to keep thinking of the state of Jewish and Christian relations in this new millennium. One thing that became clear to me as I was writing, much to my dismay, is that we have retreated to an atavistic Jurassic era – no offense to the Darwinists.

Despite the brilliant and forward research into Jewish and rabbinic antiquities made in the halls of Academia, our present political reality is beneath the Dark Ages.

Although there have been many attempts at interfaith dialogue, the vast majority of Jews and Christians do not understand one another on a firm intellectual basis. Orthodox Jews are as contemptuously oblivious of Christians as Evangelical Christians are regarding traditional Judaism. Even more pathetic is the alliance between Right Wing Jews and Evangelical Christians who seek to cynically appeal to the Messianic feelings of Christians via Zionism. An alliance of convenience, this is a potential mega-atomic bomb in the making.

In the realm of politics and law, perhaps U.S. Justice Benjamin Cardozo, a pupil of Hakham Henry Pereira Mendes of Shearith Israel (New York), was the last of Jews leaving a Sephardic stamp in Western jurisprudence, at least in attitudes though not in rabbinics. (Cardozo abandoned Jewish practice soon after he began his higher education). His legal decisions are still among the most respected, studied and admired in U.S. legal academia.

In the current Millennium, Jews as *Jews* have no substantial bridges with any of the non-Jewish religious or secular spheres.

We should also be cognizant to the fact that some Western secular intellectuals still hold Judaism in contempt via their dislike of and to Christianity, their first and primary lens to be critical of ancient monotheism. And yet another thing that we as Jews sorely forget, despite living in a still under-developed Neutral Society qua the moniker of democracy, is that ultimately Western attitudes toward Jews are still shaped and informed by Christian ideology.

Even after 200 years of Jewish "emancipation," the *Mishnéh Toráh* is a work not easily accessible or available to the English reader. Considering that nearly half of world Jewry lives in the Anglo sphere, this is deeply execrable and lamentable, and should be an object of our unfathomable embarrassment.

The costly Yale series, which completed 13 of the 14 books, is out of reach for the average reader, and still missing the centuries-old controversial *Sefer haMaddáh*, "the Book of Science."

How is one to argue in pro of the Maimonedean perspective if Maimonides himself is not available to a wider audience – not even to Jews themselves?

What does this tell us about Jewry today? While Jews of all stripes praise Maimonides *ad nauseum*, the last thing most do is to understand this watershed figure and his world; much less the impact he had in further Jewish and non-Jewish history.

For certain, the prohibition to teach *halakháh* to non-Jews did not stop Sephardic Rabbis from doing so in Christian Europe during the Renaissance, and sought much benefit from it. We can find more developed and longer historical instances among the Jews under Islam, where Imams and Rabbis deeply understood each other's traditions and laws, and had a profound respect for each other as a result. In our age, all these deserve much needed attention.

The fact is that we no longer recognize this as a vital part of Jewish welfare; Jewish culture at present having been over-run by Colonialist and existential politics, is something that should be of the greatest concern.

This is a profoundly vital matter that must be corrected.

Notes

1. The first problem with these statements is that Maimonides was not a kabbalist; no such thing as "kabbalah" – as we popularly know it today – yet existed in its fully developed form during Maimonides' lifetime, as it was still being taught secretly in small circles in the Ashkenazi world. Second, based on the author's assumptions, it is not clear how the Maimonedean perspective affected the eschatological concepts of messianism among kabbalists.

In fact, two points found in this very treatise of Hilkhot Melakhim fully contradict the general approach of kabbalistic messianism, namely:

A person should not involve himself with the homiletical statements – or protract on the Midrashim – speaking of these similar matters, nor is one to consider them fundamental; for they do not lead to either fear or love [of God].

Likewise, one is not to calculate "ends" [dates of the Messianic redemption]. The Sages said "May the spirit expire of those who calculate the 'ends.'" Rather, one is to await [the redemption] and believe the principle of this matter as we have explained.

[MT Hilkhot Melakhim 12: 2]

Bringing Maimonides into the equation confirms the Millenarian approach shared between Jews and Christians, but not the kabbalistic one. And despite being a kabbalist, Hakkham Ben Israel's engagements with non-Jewish scholars strictly adhered to the classical framework of Jewish teaching, namely, the legal and linguistic aspects of Judaism proper.

2. Apparently, Katchen does not know to difference between Qabbaláh, i.e., the received Oral tradition, and the neologism "Kabbaláh" as esoteric speculation ("It is clear that Günzburg intended to specify the esoteric 'tradition' in preference to, if not necessarily to the exclusion of, the normative exoteric one"). Later in the text he tries to prove this is nothing more than a support from one kabbalist (Günzburg) to a fellow kabbalist (Menasséh) based on the above. However, despite not finding a shred a proof within the context of his letter ("Günzburg does not appear to be articulating any specifically Lurianic doctrine or mythology") or in the text of the *Conciliator*, still Katchen hinges his opinion on the single phrase "u-ve-yadenu ha-kabbalah ha-'amitit". In my personal opinion, and despite being a recent student of Lurianic kabbalah, Günzburg used Qabbaláh in its proper Rabbinic sense, and not the esoteric one. Thus, any of Katchen's subsequent speculations hinged on this are merely flights of his own fancy.