

From Expulsion (1290) to Readmission (1656): Jews and England

In June 1655 a newspaper reported that some Jews had been seen meeting in Hackney on a Saturday.* Because it was their Sabbath they were said to be at prayer, ‘all very clean and neat, in the corner of a garden by a house, all of them with their faces towards the East’. This account, however, was probably false because there were as yet no openly practising Jews in England. In fact, it was not until September 1655 that Oliver Cromwell revived discussions about the readmission of Jews to England. This coincided with the arrival in London of Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel (1604–1657), who had come from Amsterdam ‘to solicit a freedom for his nation to live in England’. During his stay Menasseh lodged in the Strand close to a new commercial exchange, perhaps at the house of Antonio de Oliveyra who may have been a Portuguese crypto-Jew. Menasseh was to recall that he was ‘very courteously received, and treated with much respect’. Even so, letters written by a Royalist exile – they had been on the losing side during the two Civil Wars of the 1640s that had ended with the execution of Charles I and the establishment of a republic in England – claimed that because the Jews ‘were a very crafty and worldly-wise generation’ they were unlikely to settle in England at a time of such political uncertainty. He was to be proved wrong.

Menasseh ben Israel did not come to England as a stranger for among his numerous correspondents and acquaintances were eminent academics, scientists, politicians, soldiers and churchmen. Menasseh, moreover, was a renowned scholar and soon

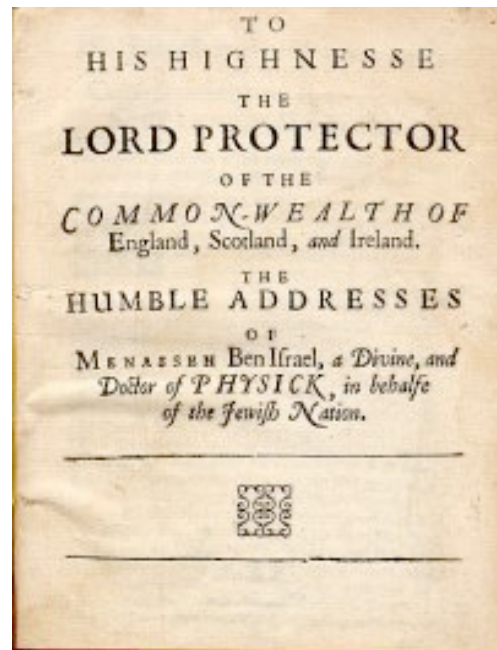
* This lecture was delivered at the Annual conference of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain on 29 October 2006 and at Goldsmiths, University of London on 6 December 2006. I was encouraged by the large audience on both occasions (150 people at the Jewish Genealogical conference and 200 people at Goldsmiths), and am grateful to all who attended both for their enthusiastic reception and the stimulating questions that followed. I would also like to thank Professor John Morrill, Dr Philip Broadhead and Dr Matthew Reeve for their helpful comments and suggestions. As this lecture was aimed at a general audience spelling, capitalization and punctuation have been modernized. Similarly, references have been omitted so as to make the text more accessible to the non-specialized reader. Those who would like to explore this topic in greater depth are referred to my forthcoming book ‘*Gold tried in the fire*’. *The prophet Theaurau John Tany and the English Revolution* (Ashgate, 2007).

From Expulsion (1290) to Readmission (1656): Jews and England
Ariel Hessayon

began receiving a number of learned visitors including the professor of Hebrew at Cambridge University, a future secretary of the Royal Society, and the principal editor of a multi-lingual edition of the Bible. Another person familiar with Menasseh was the chemist Robert Boyle, who had visited Menasseh at his house in Amsterdam in the spring of 1648. Boyle regarded Menasseh as ‘the greatest rabbi of this age’ and on hearing of his arrival at London he went and spoke to him about Biblical Hebrew and the rites and customs of modern Jews.



Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel



Title-page of Menasseh's *Humble Addresses*

Images reproduced by kind permission of the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Special Collections Department University Library – UvA (Amsterdam)

At the end of October Menasseh waited outside the door as the Council of State – a group elected by Parliament to advise Cromwell – sat in session. Menasseh hoped to present copies of his books to members of the Council and eventually a Baptist minister with whom he had corresponded went out to receive them. Among these books was probably a recently written work arguing the case for Jewish readmission addressed to *His Highness the Lord Protector of the Common-Wealth* – that was Cromwell's official title – and entitled *The Humble Addresses of Menasseh Ben Israel ... on behalf of the Jewish Nation* (1655). Two weeks later, on 13 November Menasseh presented a petition written in French to the Council on behalf of the ‘Hebrew nation’ requesting:

1. To take us as citizens under your protection; and to defend us on all occasions
2. To allow us public synagogues in England and its dominions
3. To give us a cemetery to bury our dead
4. To allow us to trade freely in all sorts of merchandise
5. To elect a respectable person to receive our passports upon arrival and hear us swear an oath of loyalty to the Lord Protector
6. To allow our rabbis to settle internal disputes according to Mosaic law, with right of appeal to the civil law
7. To revoke all laws against the Jewish nation, thereby enabling us to remain securely in England under the protection of the Lord Protector.

Objections, however, were raised immediately. For example, it was feared that some Christians might convert to Judaism, while having synagogues was considered scandalous to Christian churches. Some Londoners even suggested that their trade would suffer because of Jewish competition. In the end a number of conditions were attached which included barring Jews from public office and prohibiting them from having Christian servants. In addition, Jews were not permitted to mock the Christian religion, to profane the Christian Sabbath, to prevent efforts to convert them or to print anything in English against Christianity. The last restriction was cleverly worded since it enabled Jews to continue printing Hebrew books including the Talmud, which many continental Christians – especially Catholics – found offensive. After further discussion a conference was begun at Whitehall on 4 December to discuss Menasseh's proposals. Cromwell himself opened proceedings, which were attended by politicians, soldiers, clergymen, lawyers and merchants.

During several meetings, 'some more private, and some more public' an important legal point was established: although Jews had been banished from England in 1290 there was no law – either of the land or ordained by God – forbidding their return. Consequently, Jewish immigration could be connived at so long as it was expedient. Indeed, it was argued that Jewish trading networks would lower the price of imports and provide new markets for exports. Furthermore, a theologian insisted that kindness to strangers – particularly Jews – was a religious duty. But the majority of the clergy, fearful of proselytism, were against readmission. Similarly, the anti-

Semitic lawyer William Prynne insisted that now was '*a very ill time to bring in the Jews, when the people were so dangerously and generally bent to apostasy, and all sorts of novelties and errors in religion*'. Nonetheless, it was observed that throughout the duration of the conference, which met until 18 December, Cromwell showed himself favourably inclined towards readmitting the Jews. Perhaps, like some delegates, the Protector desired the conversion of the Jews to Protestantism. A few Englishmen went further, believing that the following year would see 'the fall of Antichrist, and the Jews conversion' – two key apocalyptic events which according to certain Protestant interpreters of the Bible preceded the destruction of the world by fire and the beginning of the 1000 year reign of Christ on earth with his Saints.

But the world did not end in 1656; not even after one sect caused thousands of pounds of damage when they deliberately burned a number of buildings in London. Instead, Jews were tacitly readmitted to England after a supposed absence of 366 years. Yet that is not to say that things were straightforward. The Whitehall Conference had ended without a definite conclusion. Moreover, according to the reports of two Italian envoys from Venice and Tuscany, the majority of English people opposed readmission. Clergymen preached against it as boldly as they dared, while in private one complained that Menasseh's demands were great and it was best to be wary of the Jews since they had 'ways beyond all other men, to undermine a state'. Similarly, a Royalist rebel declared that he was opposed to religious toleration if it meant living among those who blasphemed Christ. There were even stories that Jewish gold was being used to buy the support of wavering ministers. Cromwell therefore proceeded with deliberation – 'warily & by degrees', giving his implicit permission rather than openly declaring his position. At the same time Menasseh met with the Dutch ambassador to reassure him that he was not scheming to get extra privileges for the Jews in Holland, only that he sought to turn Protestant England into a safe haven for those Jews fleeing from Catholic Spain and Portugal where the Inquisition operated. And then other events brought matters to a head.

On 13 March 1656 legal proceedings were begun against Antonio Rodrigues Robles, a wealthy merchant of Duke's Place, London who was accused of being a Spanish national. As England was at war with Spain at this time the goods and property of enemy Spaniards were liable for confiscation. In his defence Robles claimed that he

was actually a Portuguese Jew who had fled to Spain with his family, where the Inquisition had murdered his father and tortured his mother. A number of witnesses were examined in the case, a few of whom were Iberian Jews like Domingo de la Cerda. Their depositions together with the questioning of Robles himself revealed that Robles, who had been living in England for four years, was uncircumcised and had attended mass at the Spanish Ambassador's house. Even so, the affair forced other members of London's secret Jewish community out into the open – for many either had Spanish origins or had resided there. Accordingly, on 24 March Menasseh and six other men – Manuel Martinez Dormido (also known as David Abrabanel), Antonio Ferdinando (Abraham Israel) Carvajal, Abraham Coen Gonsales, Simon (Jacob) de Caceres, Domingo Vaez (Abraham Israel) de Brito and Isak Lopes Chillon – petitioned Cromwell for permission to practise Judaism privately in their homes, to go about unmolested and to have a burial place outside the City of London for their dead. Cromwell referred it to the consideration of the Council of State.

In April Menasseh issued a pamphlet vindicating the Jewish people from several 'strange and horrid' accusations that Christians had levelled at them. These included the notorious libel that Jews celebrated Passover by feasting on matzoth mixed with the blood of murdered Christians and the rumour that the Jews intended to buy St. Paul's cathedral and convert it into a synagogue. Yet despite Menasseh's efforts the smears continued, spread by word of mouth both in his own day and to future generations. They also became more elaborate: Jews had offered £200,000 for St. Paul's; £500,000 for St. Paul's and the Bodleian Library, Oxford; unknown sums for a beautiful room in Whitehall and Hebrew manuscripts in Cambridge University Library; £500,000 for the town of Brentford; £100,000 fine and £50,000 per annum for the privilege of resettlement.

Meanwhile evidence continued to be taken in Robles's case and by mid-May he had his ships, merchandise and other property which had been seized restored to him. Then on 26 June 1656 the Council returned the Jews' petition to Cromwell, apparently without recording the details of their discussion. This is important because a few famous historians of Anglo-Jewry such as Albert Hyamson and Cecil Roth have argued that the Council responded positively to the petition but that the crucial document was subsequently destroyed. Sceptics like H.S.Q. Henriques, Moses Gaster

and more recently David Katz, however, are right to dismiss this as baseless speculation. In fact, it needs to be emphasized that there was no Act of Parliament, no proclamation from Cromwell, no order from the Council of State either welcoming Jews to England or changing their legal status from aliens to denizens (foreigners granted certain rights). The only evidence we have suggests that publicly Cromwell remained undecided on the issue. We can only deduce – as Lucien Wolf and others since have done – that Cromwell gave Menasseh a verbal assurance that Jews would be permitted to worship privately in their homes. While this was not the same as allowing them to build a public synagogue, it was in keeping with the spirit of certain clauses of the Instrument of Government of December 1653 which had extended religious toleration to those Protestant sects that did not disturb the peace. But if the actual purpose of Menasseh's mission was to gain official state approval for the readmission of Jews to England – rather than merely asking the authorities to turn a blind eye to their presence – then it must be judged a failure.

For all these set-backs Menasseh was to suffer further still. In August 1656 the wardens of the united congregation of the Sephardic community in Amsterdam agreed to loan 'a scroll of the Law' to him. He appears, however, to have quarrelled with the leaders of the London community and was not chosen to lead their congregation. Instead Rabbi Moses Athias from Hamburg was appointed and the Torah returned. On 19 December Antonio Carvajal signed a twenty-one year lease for a brick tenement on Creechurch Lane which by March 1657 was being converted into a synagogue. Five years later a Christian visitor described it as having three doors, 'one beyond another', with services conducted upstairs. In the mean time Menasseh, alone in a 'land of strangers', was forced to petition Cromwell for financial assistance. He was granted a state pension of £100 per annum and at least two quarterly payments of £25 were made to him. In September 1657 his only son Samuel died. Although negotiations had begun for acquiring a burial plot at Mile End in Stepney, Menasseh decided to return to Holland with Samuel's body. But on reaching Middelburg, where he had relatives, Menasseh died. Samuel was buried there while Menasseh was laid to rest in the Jewish cemetery at Oudekerk near Amsterdam. In September 1658 Cromwell followed them to the grave. It was during his Protectorate that theological considerations – the necessity of converting the Jews before Christ's reappearance – and, to a much lesser extent, economic advantages had overcome widespread hostility

to tacit readmission. With his death and the subsequent Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 the tiny Jewish community, which had been considered under Cromwell's personal protection, was once more exposed to full-blown prejudice: intermingled accusations revolving around the repulsive if familiar themes of blasphemy, blood, diabolism, magic and money. Before exploring their fate during the reign of Charles II, however, we need to trace the long-term developments that culminated in the Resettlement.

*

The question of when Jews first came to England had been raised by William Prynne during the bitter pamphlet war sparked by debate about Jewish readmission at the Whitehall conference. Over a century ago historians returned to this issue, noting that Jews were referred to in seventh- and eighth-century ecclesiastical decrees as well as a law of Edward the Confessor – unless, as Prynne had suggested, this was an interpolation. Even so, the evidence we have suggests that Jews arrived in significant numbers after the Norman Conquest, emigrating from Rouen and probably settling in London about 1070. Moreover, if later seventeenth-century sources are correct, there were Jews at Cambridge in 1073 and Oxford in 1075. This is certainly possible for the Domesday Book of 1086 mentions a man named Manasses living at Oxford. By the mid-twelfth century an important community had been established at London in the area now known as Old Jewry, with smaller if sometimes densely populated Jewish neighbourhoods at Norwich, Lincoln, Cambridge, Thetford, Bungay, Northampton and Oxford. Like Castile and Aragon, where there was no legislation requiring them to dwell within a walled quarter, urban Jews lived among rather than separated from Christians. Although we lack precise figures, modern estimates of the size of medieval England's Jewish population at its peak range between 3,000–5,000. Following mass emigration and conversion to Christianity in the 1250s, however, this number fell sharply. So much so, that by the 1280s the adult Jewish population may have been fewer than 1,200; far smaller than the 16,511 Jews that one chronicler reckoned were expelled in 1290.

We know that English Jews were described as physicians, goldsmiths, soldiers, vintners and fishmongers, and that a significant number were merchants. Royal

charters issued by Henry II and confirmed by his successors granted them freedom of residence, passage, the right to possess and inherit land, loans and property, as well as nominal judicial privileges. With time, however, Jews generally became associated with lending money at interest because the Papacy condemned usury as a sin (Exodus 22:25–27, Leviticus 25:35–37, Deuteronomy 23:19–20, Luke 6:35); Church councils later compared it to homicide, sodomy and incest.

Unfortunately, the history of medieval English Jewry contains many instances of religious persecution. In 1189 the Archbishop of Canterbury recommended that Jews should not attend Richard I's coronation at Westminster for fear of witchcraft. When they were sighted bringing presents to the new King a riot ensued during which some were murdered, one forcibly baptized and their London homes looted and burned. The following year a mob led by barons, clergymen and soldiers recruited for the Third Crusade massacred most of the Jewish population of York. Similar pogroms were perpetrated at Lincoln, Dunstable, Colchester, Lynn, Stamford, Thetford, Ospringe and Bury St. Edmunds – from where, at the abbot's instigation, Jews were expelled. Afterwards there were expulsions from Leicester in 1231, Newcastle in 1234, Wycombe in 1235, Southampton in 1236, Berkhamsted in 1242, Newbury in 1244, Derby in 1263 and Marlborough, Gloucester, Worcester and Cambridge in 1275. Added to this was the imposition by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 of distinctive clothing on Jews; a piece of saffron-coloured fabric in the shape of the two tables of the law. Though initially not widely observed this regulation must be seen in the context of increasingly aggressive preaching by Dominicans and Franciscans; the foundation in 1232 of a House for Jewish Converts (*Domus Conversorum*); and severe anti-Jewish legislation proclaimed in 1253 and renewed with the Statute of *de Judaismo* in 1275. Furthermore, during the Baron's Wars of 1263–67 Simon de Montfort's supporters killed Jews and destroyed their properties in London, Canterbury, Worcester, Ely and Northampton. Rumours even circulated that Jewish women accepted baptism to save themselves. According to contemporary accounts in 1278–79 Edward I had about 290 Jews indicted, convicted and executed in London for coin clipping. Equally horrific were accusations of ritual murder, notably following the disappearance of William of Norwich just before Easter 1144. Similar charges were made at Gloucester (1168), Bury St. Edmunds (1181), Winchester (1192, 1225, 1232), Norwich (1230), London (1244) and Northampton (1279). But

the most famous case was the alleged crucifixion of Hugh of Lincoln in 1255, which resulted in the execution of nineteen Jews.

Several reasons have been suggested for why Edward I expelled Jews from England in 1290. Observers variously attributed it to the influence of the Queen Mother, baronial complaints in Parliament and advice from the King's council. Among modern historians the traditional view was that the Crown benefited financially: since Jews were legally the King's property debts due to them became payable to him. Yet the contrary has also been maintained: once Jews were barred from usury in 1275 their wealth declined and consequently they became less useful to the Crown as a source of revenue through taxation. This argument is supported by the growing importance of foreign financiers, above all Lombards, Cahorsins and Gascons, upon whom Edward I became increasingly dependent for borrowing money. Nonetheless, it must be noted that after 1275 Jews – particularly in Norwich, Lincoln and Canterbury – were still engaged in usury disguised as trading in grain and wool. Indeed, some scholars think the practice was so widespread that Edward's response was to force out Jews from his realm. Moreover, there is a European dimension to consider: King Philip Augustus of France had driven Jews from his lands in 1182 (only to readmit them in 1198), while Edward himself had expelled Jews from Gascony in 1287. Precedents had been set, but monarchs do not live forever.

Following Edward I's death six Jews led by a physician or Rabbi named Master Elias returned to England pleading for readmission. Although unsuccessful, there is a tradition that Jews secretly re-established themselves in England until their discovery in 1358. Similarly, for much of the fourteenth century Jews were periodically ejected from French territory – usually by royal edict – only to be readmitted; once to recover Jewish debts; once in return for large payments to the Crown and on condition that they did not practise usury; once to help pay an enormous ransom. Therefore it is no surprise to learn that we have fragmentary evidence for the presence of Jews or people of Jewish origin in England during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

In 1290 more than eighty Jewish converts to Christianity were living in the building provided for them in London. Though food and winter fuel appear to have been scarce many chose to remain and by 1308 over fifty were still there. Indeed, it was

not until 1356 that the last known survivor on English soil of the pre-expulsion community, Claricia of Exeter, died. Another interesting example is a Jew named Hagin who was baptized at Nottingham in June 1325 and as Walter of Nottingham later became chaplain of the Domus Conversorum. Also noteworthy are the handful of Lancashire deeds from 1298, the 1320s and 1331 witnessed by John le Ju, Hugh le Jew and Thomas le Jew. As Thomas was a parish clerk it is likely that these men were either converts to Christianity or descendants of apostates. Furthermore, Edward III granted one John de Castello an annual income in 1358 for renouncing Judaism. Similarly, in 1389 Richard II gave money to Richard de Cicilia, a former Jew recently baptized into the Christian faith. In 1391 a physician and surgeon known as Charles le Convers received royal protection that extended to his servants and property. The following year Richard II pensioned William Piers, another Jewish convert. In October 1410 Richard Whittington, twice former Mayor of London who would become immortalized in the legendary story of Dick Whittington and his cat, obtained license to have a Jewish doctor attend his sick wife. The Jewish physician's name was Sampson of Mirabeau (probably in Vacluse), and though granted permission to stay in London for one year his patient died before this elapsed. In December 1410 Henry IV issued a safe-conduct for Elias Sabot (Elijah ben Sabbetai), an important Jewish doctor from Bologna. He arrived with a retinue of ten servants and was granted royal protection for two years. In February 1412 Henry IV naturalized another physician, David de Nigarellis of Lucca. He may have been of Jewish origin and was afterwards made Warden of the Royal Mint. In 1421 during the reign of Henry V an Italian apothecary named Job and his son John settled in England. They too were naturalized, but only after submitting to baptism. Doubtless they were among the five residents of the House for Jewish Converts recorded that year. However, it was not only Jewish medical practitioners who travelled to England. About 1468 a Portuguese adventurer arrived who on converting to Christianity was named Edward Brampton. He fought for Edward IV and later served Richard III before returning to Portugal.

These various cases illustrate why people of Jewish birth or origin were sometimes discovered in England between the Expulsion and the accession of the Tudor dynasty. Conversion from Judaism to Christianity ensured shelter and occasionally brought financial reward. Jewish physicians, moreover, seem to have been highly valued. Yet

small-scale Jewish emigration to England was not economically motivated but rather a consequence of the expulsion of Jews from Castile, Aragon and Sicily in 1492, Portugal in 1497 and Navarre in 1498. The majority fled and over the next century dispersed to North Africa (Tlemcen, Tunis, Cairo), France (Bordeaux, Bayonne, Nantes, Rouen, Montpellier), the Netherlands (Antwerp, Amsterdam), the Italian States (Ferrara, Rome, Turin, Venice, Ragusa, Ancona), Poland and the Ottoman Empire (Salonika, Constantinople). Among the few who made their way to England was Elizabeth of Portugal, admitted to the *Domus Conversorum* in 1492. Others may have reached Ireland for it was claimed that a physician named Fernandes had been born there. He has been identified with Pedro Fernandes, a successful London medical practitioner. Besides these individual instances Jews participated in a significant episode of English history as advocates of Henry VIII's divorce from Katherine of Aragon. There is an excellent modern account of this affair by David Katz who has shown how from 1530 Italian Jews such as Marco Raphael were consulted by the King's solicitor in an effort to prove from Leviticus that Henry's marriage to Katherine – his brother Arthur's widow – had been unlawful.

Further European events also played a part in bringing Jews to England. Thus it has been estimated that between 1388 and 1520 more than ninety German-speaking towns and cities expelled Jews. Moreover, Johann Gutenberg's invention of movable printing type enabled the enemies of Judaism to mass-produce well-known anti-Jewish libels and circulate them to larger audiences than ever before. Among the most fanatical of these pamphleteers were Ulrich Zasius, a professor of civil law, and the apostate Johannes Pfefferkorn. Zasius defended the forced baptism of Jewish children and advised Christian princes to expel Jews from their territories. Pfefferkorn attacked supposed Jewish blasphemies, proposed confiscating all Hebrew books except the Scriptures, burning the Talmud and converting Jews. In the same vein, Johannes Eck, a professor of theology and leading defender of the Papacy, repeated allegations of Jewish ritual murder claiming to have placed his own fingers in the wounds of a child killed by Jews. He even denounced Jew-lovers as products of the Reformation. This was certainly inaccurate for Martin Luther, who had hoped to convert Jews to a purified church, caught the vicious mood as well. He wrote a bitter tract *On the Jews and their Lies* (1543) and preached a sermon against those 'miserable and accursed people' the day before his death. Among the exceptions to

these waves of German anti-Jewish sentiment was Philip I, Landgrave of Hesse, who supported several proposals for tolerating Jews in Kassel, even rejecting advice from Protestant theologians like Martin Bucer on the matter. Afterwards the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V not only condemned ritual murder trials but reaffirmed previous imperial and papal privileges granted to Jews, placing all Jews in the empire under his personal protection.

The picture in Iberia was even grimmer. Spanish poets from the twelfth to the fifteenth century had generally depicted Jews negatively as avaricious, treacherous deicides, combining these conventional racial slurs with an emphasis on the strangeness of Jewish laws and customs. In 1391 the Jewish quarters of Castilian and Aragonese cities were sacked, their inhabitants massacred and survivors forced to convert to Christianity. Known variously as *conversos* (Spanish for converts), *Marranos* (meaning pigs in Spanish) or New Christians they were permitted to take up public office and with time a number became prominent in the royal administrations of Castile and Aragon. Though wealthy New Christian families intermarried with the Castilian nobility the sincerity of their new-found beliefs was soon questioned by Old Christians. This resentment became violent and atrocities were perpetrated against New Christians at Toledo (1467), Sepúlveda (1468), Cordoba (1473), Jaén and Segovia (1474). To prevent New Christians from reverting to Judaism the Inquisition was established in Castile in 1478. Although Jewish sources, particularly rabbinic documents – which were mainly concerned with questions of marriage and inheritance of property – tended to regard New Christians as willing apostates rather than forced converts, the earliest phase of the Spanish Inquisition was clearly directed against them.

In Portugal, by contrast, there were comparatively few New Christians until 1497 when the remnant of Portuguese Jewry were baptized *en masse*. However, following an inflammatory sermon preached at Lisbon by a Dominican on Easter Sunday 1506 more than 2,000 New Christians were massacred over several days and their bodies, according to a contemporary chronicle, burned on a bonfire. New Christians were later accused of causing an earthquake and their situation became even more dangerous in 1536 when Pope Paul III relented to political pressure and issued a bull establishing the Inquisition in Portugal. That same year Charles V granted New

Christians permission to settle in the Netherlands. Although the Inquisition had already been established there, its principal target was Lutherans rather than crypto-Jews. Overcoming the difficulties of emigrating from Portugal, where their property was liable for confiscation, some New Christians eventually reached Antwerp. Others, however, were either detained by customs officials or interrogated at Middelburg. In 1541 two New Christians were burned alive there for refusing to accept that Christ had been crucified by Jews. The religious beliefs of the new arrivals at Antwerp were also investigated and an Imperial decree issued preventing further Portuguese immigration. Despite sixty-five arrests and a hastily rescinded Imperial order of 1549 declaring all recent Portuguese New Christian immigrants impenitent Judaizers, there were an estimated 800–900 Portuguese New Christians living at Antwerp by the mid-sixteenth century.

Among the earliest New Christian settlers in Antwerp was a merchant named Diogo Mendes (Bemveniste), whose extremely wealthy brother Francisco was a key member of a consortium that had purchased the rights to import pepper and spices from the Indies to Portugal. In 1537 Francisco Mendes's widow Beatriz de Luna (the future Grácia Nasci) together with her daughter, sister and two nephews departed Lisbon on an English ship bound for London. Eventually they sailed to Antwerp, arriving by late February 1538. Judging from this and other incidents there seems to have been an organized network for transporting Portuguese New Christian refugees to the Netherlands. Using the spice trade as cover they headed initially to an English port where they awaited news of the situation at their destination. If this was unfavourable they usually disembarked at Southampton and then proceeded to London. While the length of their stay varied, we know of several New Christian merchants and physicians resident in England during Henry VIII's reign. Nor was the Crown blind to their presence for about Christmas 1541 'certain persons suspected to be Jews' were apprehended and their goods inventoried. The Imperial ambassador observed that even if they fully confessed, their freedom would come at a price. During the investigation the prisoners appealed to João III of Portugal and Maria, Regent of the Netherlands, who interceded with Charles V to secure their release. As the same family alliance (João was Charles's brother-in-law and Maria his sister) had intervened when Diogo Mendes was charged at Antwerp with secretly practising Judaism, it is likely that their financial affairs were bound up with the fortunes of

these crypto-Jews. Likewise, when the Portuguese New Christian Henry Alvaros (Alvarez?) had his money and merchandise seized by two officials from Exeter because he was ‘supposed to be a Jew’, he obtained a testimonial from Antwerp – confirmed by the Imperial ambassador – asserting that he was reputedly a Christian. This was presented at Hampton Court in January 1546.

Portuguese New Christians, of course, were not the only foreigners in Henrician England. Besides the famous portrait painter Hans Holbein there was a group of musicians active at court between the 1520s and early 1540s. Drawn from Iberia and particularly northern Italian towns and cities like Bassano, Milan, Vicenza and Venice, they included viol and sackbut players. Though one scholar has ingeniously suggested that some of these musicians – notably Ambrose Lupo and the five Bassano brothers – were crypto-Jews, the evidence is questionable. Nonetheless, in 1550 we learn of Dr Arnande, a physician accused of Judaism, sentenced for his ‘devilish practises’ to ride through the streets of London in a cart and then banished from the realm. Furthermore, in 1575 a Portuguese surgeon living in Bristol was denounced for observing an important Jewish fast (*Yom Kippur*), while four Portuguese New Christians resident in London were accused of deliberate sacrilege. Also noteworthy is the case of Joachim Gaunz, a Prague-born Jew and mining engineer dwelling at Blackfriars who in 1589 was apprehended following an apparent conversation with a minister in Hebrew. Gaunz was charged with blasphemously denying Jesus Christ to be the son of God and expelled.

A more successful figure was Dr Hector Nuñez, a Portuguese-born New Christian who was made a fellow of the College of Physicians and Royal College of Surgeons. From surviving correspondence – especially with Queen Elizabeth’s spymaster Sir Francis Walsingham – it is clear that Nuñez became involved in intelligence gathering, receiving letters in cipher from Iberia concealed within cargoes of wine, raisins, cochineal, figs and wax. Nuñez was also engaged in covert diplomatic activity, trying to secure an Anglo-Ottoman alliance against Spain and promoting the cause of the exiled Don Antonio to the Portuguese throne, which had been claimed by Philip II of Spain following his victory at the battle of Alcantara in 1580. Moreover, according to depositions taken before the Inquisition at Lisbon and at Madrid in 1588 – the year of the Spanish Armada, Nuñez was not acting alone but in concert with

several crypto-Jews. Based in London, where they publicly attended Lutheran churches, listened to sermons and took communion, this group was connected by marriage alliances, secretly observed Jewish rites and had ties with a clandestine synagogue in Antwerp. Among them was Benjamin George (Gonsalvo or Dunstan Añes), a freeman of the Grocers' Company, spice trader, financial agent of the Portuguese pretender Don Antonio and father-in-law of Dr Rodrigo Lopez. An importer of aniseed and sumac, Lopez was appointed Queen Elizabeth's chief physician about 1586. Within a year he seems to have been bribed and turned into a Spanish agent. Following Walsingham's death in 1590 Lopez became embroiled in a power struggle between rival intelligence agencies headed by Lord Burghley – which utilized a number of crypto-Jewish merchants – and the Earl of Essex. At Essex's instigation Lopez was arrested in January 1594 and examined about his part in an alleged plot to poison Elizabeth. A signed confession was extracted under torture and a guilty verdict obtained on the opening day of his trial. Then along with two supposed Portuguese accomplices Lopez – portrayed as 'worse than Judas himself' – was executed.



Rodrigo Lopez (c.1517–1594) [right, with a Spanish gentleman], by Frederik van Hulsen, 1627

Image reproduced by kind permission of the British Library

Yet the two most famous Jews of Elizabethan England appeared only on stage as villains – and neither was English. First performed in February 1592, Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* had a Machiavellian figure as its central character: Barabas. Named after the New Testament thief and murderer whom the Jews saved from crucifixion instead of Jesus (Matthew 27:16–26, Mark 15:7–15), Barabas has been regarded by one critic as representing an inversion of qualities associated with both Job and Christ. Certainly his nose and diet are mocked, while there is an allusion to his odour – a repulsive smell known as *foetor judaicus* which Jews were believed to emit. In addition, he is depicted as a deceitful, avaricious, Christian-hating usurer; a poisoner of wells, murderous physician and suspected crucifier of children. At the play's conclusion Barabas suffers a terrible death, boiled in a cauldron – a traditional image of hell. Revived to coincide with Lopez's trial, Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* together with *The Jew of Venice* – a lost play probably derived from Ser Giovanni Fiorentino's *Il Pecorone* (Milan, 1558) – influenced Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Arguably completed after August 1596, this featured Shylock; a malicious, vengeful Christian-hating usurer who is seen as a kind of devil and likened to a dog. Critics have noted that the Jewish characters' names are adapted or taken from Genesis 10–11 and that the word 'Jew' is used 58 times (variants occur an extra 14 times). Furthermore, Shylock's famous remark 'If you prick us, do we not bleed' (III.i.59) has been interpreted as an allusion to the commonplace belief that Jewish males menstruated. Unlike Barabas, Shylock escapes death but only for the baptismal font.

In 1607 Sir Thomas Sherley the younger, a pirate and adventurer recently returned to England after having been captured, imprisoned and tortured by the Turks, proposed a project to James I. Sherley planned to settle Jews in Ireland, claiming they would willingly pay an annual tribute for the privilege. He also suggested granting Jewish merchants permission to trade within English ports in exchange for payment of a fine. But rather than profiting at the Jews' expense, Sherley was dispatched to the Tower of London for infringing the Levant Company's trading monopoly with the Ottoman Empire. About two years later, according to reports by the Venetian and Tuscan envoys, crypto-Jews were expelled from England. This may have been connected with a patent granted the Earl of Suffolk for discovering Jews, 'which made the ablest of them fly out' of the kingdom. Even so, Jewish converts to Christianity remained.

These included Jacob Wolfgang, a reader at the Bodleian Library and Paul Jacob, who petitioned James I ‘true King of the Jews’ for money. By contrast a Hebrew teacher at Oxford who fled the day before his baptism was taken into custody and subsequently expelled. Also noteworthy is the case of Samuel Palache, envoy of the Sultan of Morocco to the States-General of the Dutch Republic and a member of the Jewish community of Amsterdam. In 1614 having docked at Plymouth with three captured Spanish ships he was arrested and accused of piracy by the Spanish ambassador. Palache was tried in the Court of Admiralty, declared a Moroccan subject at war with Spain and released. Some months later a Jewish trader had his cargo of sugar seized and temporarily impounded in a warehouse.

Though crypto-Jews of Iberian origin seem to have resettled in London during the remainder of James’s reign, while English merchants continued having commercial dealings with Jews overseas, there was another significant development during this period – Judaizing. First known to have been used in 1582, the verb Judaize means to follow Jewish customs or religious rites. One notable instance of this phenomenon was the Somerset-born minister John Traske, who emphasized the applicability of Old Testament laws to Christians, kept Jewish dietary rules and observed the Sabbath on Saturday. He was periodically imprisoned in London as were his wife and several followers. Another woman was gaoled in Clerkenwell for claiming to be a Jew and having children circumcised. She may have been the widow of a disciple of two artisans – possibly Colchester weavers – who allegedly claimed to be ‘great prophets’ and the two witnesses foretold in the Revelation of Saint John. Further examples indicate that Judaizing was particularly associated with radical Protestant sects. It can be viewed as an offshoot of mainstream puritanism which had a tendency to fragment when internal conflicts could not be resolved. Moreover, it must be set in context: after the Reformation speculation increased about the timing of the second coming of Christ and the nature of his messianic kingdom on earth, which he would reign over for a thousand years before the Last Judgment. Known as millenarianism, this belief rested upon the interpretation of portents such as earthquakes, comets and eclipses, and sacred texts – especially the prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah; the epistle of Paul to the Romans; and the Revelation. Although millenarians failed to agree on what these omens and scriptures meant, the role that the Jews would play in the divine drama began to dominate their discussions.

In August 1642 Civil War broke out between Charles I and Parliament. Though the first battle was inconclusive, Parliament's armies slowly gained the upper hand in several regions of conflict, eventually defeating the Royalists at Marston Moor (2 July 1644). Thereafter aristocratic leaders were purged and the Parliamentary forces merged into the highly disciplined New Model Army, which triumphed at Naseby (14 June 1645) and elsewhere. While the extent of religious radicalism among the rank and file has been hotly debated, it is clear that a number of Parliamentary army chaplains preached millenarian sermons. These helped instil the belief that the victorious soldiers had acted as providential instruments upon earth. Thus one sectary declared that God 'clothes himself with the Army ... the executioners of that beast (monarchy) which they had formerly wounded'. Then on 30 January 1649 England's King was publicly beheaded, his blood spilled by the blow of an executioner's axe. Regicide stoked the fires of apocalyptic expectation as pseudo-Christ, prophets and prophetesses – prominent Judaizers among them – took to the streets proclaiming the end of the world and 'many other wonderful things'. Jesus, however, failed to reappear.

Meanwhile in September 1644 Antonio Montezinos, a Portuguese New Christian and explorer, had visited Menasseh ben Israel at Amsterdam. Recently returned from an expedition to the Americas, Montezinos recounted an encounter with Indians in Quito province (modern day Colombia) who had informed him that they were Jews descended from Reuben, one of the ten lost tribes of Israel. The news spread rapidly within the Dutch Republic, but more slowly to England where in January 1647 plans were published for establishing a University in London. As the conversion of the Jews to Christianity was thought to be imminent it was considered desirable that clergymen converse with them in Hebrew when they returned to Palestine from their captivity in the East. Accordingly it was proposed that one College be for the 'Conversion of Jews and Advancement of Oriental Language-Learning'. On 5 January 1649 a petition was presented to the General Council of the Army requesting the repeal of the 'inhumane cruel' Parliamentary 'statute of banishment' made against the Jews and their readmission on the Dutch model. Apparently favourably received, it was nonetheless deferred as the Council turned to urgent political matters. That summer reports began circulating in London concerning the apparent discovery of

Jews in America. Responding to his correspondents' requests for further information Menasseh wrote a long letter about the ten tribes, subsequently expanded and published as *Esto es Esperança de Israel* (Amsterdam, 1650). A corrupt version of this Spanish text was badly translated into Latin as *Hoc est Spes Israelis* (Amsterdam, 1650). The first English edition *The Hope of Israel* (1650) contained all the uncorrected errors of the Latin version together with some additional mistakes made by the translator. Dedicated to Parliament and the Council of State, *Hoc est Spes Israelis* was widely read but frequently misunderstood. One MP thought it the work of a converted Jew, another prayed for the Jews' conversion, while far away in Rhode Island it was interpreted as a sign that the Jews were about to accept Christ as the Messiah. Little wonder that two years later Menasseh's efforts remained unrewarded by Parliament.

In May 1652 war broke out between England and the Dutch Republic. Despite hostilities the Council of State issued a passport to Menasseh in November permitting him to enter the country. Praised for his learning and 'good affection to the State', another pass was sent to Menasseh in December. A further one followed in September 1653. Even so, since the beginning of 1651 Menasseh had been seeking Queen Christina of Sweden's patronage. His correspondence with her librarian reveals Menasseh's willingness to purchase rare Hebrew books for Christina and dedicate one of his better known works to her. The books Menasseh bought, however, were only partly paid for on Christina's behalf, while her librarian fell out of and then returned to favour. But in June 1654 Christina abdicated in favour of her cousin Karl Gustavus putting an end to Menasseh's dream of becoming an agent for the scholar Queen. It is also noteworthy that an undated though most likely earlier proposal to settle Hamburg Jews in Gothenburg had failed. So when an Anglo-Dutch peace treaty was signed on 5 April 1654 Menasseh immediately turned his attention once more to arguing the case for Jewish readmission to England.

*

And thus we return to where we left off. In 1659, the year after Cromwell's death, a group of London merchants petitioned his son and successor demanding the expulsion of Jews and seizure of their trading profits. With the Restoration of monarchy in 1660

anti-Semitic voices became more strident for that same year the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London asked Charles II to recommend the enactment of Parliamentary legislation that would expel Jews and close 'the door after them'. Similarly, a London goldsmith named Thomas Violet published *A Petition Against the Jewes* (1661) in which he recommended destroying synagogues, suppressing Jewish religious rituals, ransoming and banishment. But the roughly hundred and sixty strong Jewish community fought back. Violet's proposals were condemned and his reputation attacked. Moreover, in December 1660 the principal Jewish merchants petitioned Charles II desiring continued residence in his dominions. At the Privy Council's recommendation the House of Commons then discussed measures for protecting Jews. Ultimately, however, the Jews' fate rested with Charles II and like Cromwell he showed himself favourably disposed. The reason probably dates to his exile at Bruges, for in September 1656 he had instructed Lieutenant-General John Middleton to negotiate with some leading Amsterdam Jews. Assuring Middleton that Menasseh's mission to Cromwell had been undertaken without their consent, they may have secretly contributed money to the depleted royal treasury in return for the promise of Charles's protection on his accession to the English throne. This seems a plausible explanation for why Charles II granted Jews religious toleration. Although a few notable advocates of Jewish readmission had been regicides, Cromwell's public stance made things easier for the King: there was no Parliamentary statute to invalidate, no proclamation to annul. Indeed, he too avoided grand gestures in favour of small measures. Hence instead of an act of Parliament Charles II naturalized forty-eight Sephardic Jews during his reign.

350 years after the tacit readmission of Jews to England we would do well to remember that there was no consensus about religious toleration during the seventeenth century. While no one had been burned at the stake for heresy in England since 1612 Catholics were still set on fire in effigy and seventy-five were executed between 1604 and 1680. As for Ireland, in 1641 an estimated 2,000–3,000 Protestant settlers were massacred by Catholics. In reprisal Cromwell's troops slaughtered thousands of soldiers and civilians at Drogheda and Wexford. There are also certain crimes to consider. Between 1542 and 1736 perhaps as many as 500 people were executed for witchcraft in England; of these more than 100 were hanged in the home counties. Furthermore, an Act of August 1650 against blasphemy prescribed six

From Expulsion (1290) to Readmission (1656): Jews and England
Ariel Hessayon

months imprisonment for a first offence– a more lenient sentence than the death penalty decreed by Mosaic Law and an Ordinance of May 1648.

We must never forget that religious persecution happened in the past – especially now that we have to yet again confront anti-Semitism both in its explicit guises and insidious disguises. Both are equally repugnant.

Dr Ariel Hessayon
Goldsmiths
University of London
December 2006

Appendix

Names of Jews living secretly or openly in England c.1625-c.1675

Isaac Abendana [d.1699] ~ *Hebrew teacher at Oxford and Cambridge Universities*

Jacob Abendana [c.1630–d.1685] ~ *Rabbi, arrived about 1668*

Abraham, son of Samuel ~ *converted to Christianity 1652*

Duarte Henriques Alvares [fl.1660] ~ *arrived from the Canaries*

Diego Rodrigues Aries

Rabbi Moses Israel Athias [d.1666] ~ *arrived from Hamburg*

Sarah Athias [d.1657] ~ *wife or possibly mother of the Rabbi*

Jacob ben Augusto ~ *arrived 1658; converted to Christianity 1663*

Isaac de Azevedo [fl.1665]

Anthony Balderede

Jacob Baruh [fl.1660]

Moses Baruh [fl.1664]

Mr. Bellamy [fl.1660] ~ *converted to Judaism?*

Joseph Israel Mendes Bravo [d.1672] ~ *physician*

Domingo Vaez (Abraham Israel) de Brito [d.1656]

+ Judith de Brito [d.1657]

Manuel de Costa Brito [fl.1660]

Mr. Brow [fl.1660] ~ *converted to Judaism?*

Dr. Joseph Mendes Bueno [fl.1660] ~ *physician*

Bernard de Caceres (Casseres) [fl.1661] ~ *settled in Barbadoes*

Henrique de Caceres (Casseres) [fl.1661] ~ *settled in Barbadoes*

Simon (Jacob) de Caceres

Antonio Ferdinando (Abraham Israel) Carvajal [d.2 November 1659]

+ Mary (Esther) Carvajal [fl.1660]

* Alonzo Jorge Carvajal [fl.1660]

* Joseph Ferdinando Carvajal [fl.1660]

Domingo de la Cerda (de la Sella) [fl.1660] ~ *arrived from the Canaries*

Augustine Coronel Chacon ~ *converted to Christianity 1660*

Isak Lopes Chillon ~ *went to Amsterdam*

From Expulsion (1290) to Readmission (1656): Jews and England
Ariel Hessayon

Eva Cohan ~ *converted to Christianity; baptized as Elizabeth Verboon, 1680*

Bento de la Costa

David da Costa

Fernando Mendes da Costa [fl.1663]

Manuel Martinez Dormido (also known as David Abrabanel) [fl.1664]

+ Sarah Dormido

* Solomon Dormido (also known as Luis da Sylva) [fl.1657]

* Aron Dormido

Domingo Rodrigues Francia [fl.1660]

+ Rebecca Francia

Francisco Rodrigues Francia [fl.1660]

Solomon Franco [fl.1652] ~ *Jewish rabbi; converted to Christianity 1668*

Jacob Fraso [fl.1661] ~ *settled in Barbadoes*

Aaron Gabay [fl.1660] ~ *converted to Christianity*

David Gabay [fl.1660] ~ *converted to Christianity*

Jonas Gabay [fl.1676] ~ *converted to Christianity 1672*

Franco Gomes [fl.1660]

Paul Gomes ~ *converted to Christianity before about 1665*

Abraham Coen Gonsales [fl.1664]

Isaac Gosner ~ *converted to Christianity 1661*

Joseph Henriques

Meyer Isaac ~ *possibly Polish-born, converted to Christianity 1658?*

Paul Jacob ~ *converted to Christianity 1660*

Cirques Jobson ~ *said to have sold coffee and chocolate at Oxford in 1654*

Lazar, son of Isaiah ~ *Polish-born, converted to Christianity 1652*

Benjamin Levi [fl.1667]

Samuel Levi [d.1701] ~ *beadle of the congregation; of Cracow*

Elias (Eliahu) de Lima [fl.1664]

Selomoh Lopez

Moses Baruch Louzada [fl.1664]

Diego Rodrigues Marques (also known as José de la Fuente) [fl.1673]

* Isabel (Rachel) Marques ~ *married Fernando Mendes in 1678*

Fernando Mendes ~ *arrived in England 25 October 1669*

Henrique Jorge Mendes ~ *went to Antwerp*

From Expulsion (1290) to Readmission (1656): Jews and England
Ariel Hessayon

Jacob Franco Mendes

David Raphael de Mercado [d.1685?] ~ *endenized, 1661*

^ Alonzo da Fonseca Meza

^ Manuel da Fonseca Meza ~ *endenized, 1660*

David Mier [fl.1660]

Mr. Mordecai [fl.1660] ~ *clerk of the congregation*

Abraham de Morais [fl.1666]

* Esther de Morais [d.1665]

* Rahel de Morais [d.1665]

Manuel Musaphia ~ *treasurer of the congregation*

Isaac Alvarez (Israel) Nunez

Manuel Rodrigues Nunez [fl.1660] ~ *arrived from the Canaries*

Abraham de Oliveyra

Antonio de Oliveyra

^ Michael de Oliveyra [fl.1660]

^ Joseph de Oliveyra [fl.1664]

Aaron Pacheco

^ Isaac Lopez Pereiras [fl.1660]

^ Francisco Pereiras [fl.1660]

Aaron John Philips [d.1655]

Antonio (Abraham) de Porto

+ Sarah de Porto

Antonio Rodrigues Robles (Ishac Barzilai) [d.1688]

+ Leonora (Ribca) Robles

Gomes Rodrigues (Abraham Israel de Sequeira)

Stephen Rodrigues [fl.1660] ~ *arrived from the Canaries*

Peter Samuel ~ *converted to Christianity 1660*

Jacob Sasportas ~ *appointed Rabbi 1663; fled the plague to Amsterdam, 1666*

* Samuel Sasportas

^ Duarte da Silva [1596–1677] ~ *born in Lisbon; died at Antwerp*

^ Francisco da Silva

Jehoshua da Silva [d.1681]

Simon de Souza [fl.1660] ~ *arrived from the Canaries*

Samuel Swinock [fl.1660] ~ *converted to Judaism?*

From Expulsion (1290) to Readmission (1656): Jews and England
Ariel Hessayon

Abraham de Touar ~ *nephew of Carvajal; arrived from the Canaries*

Aharon da Veiga [*fl.*1662]

Samuel da Veiga [*fl.*1660]

Mr. Whitt [*fl.*1660] ~ *converted to Judaism?*

+ Wife of the above named

* Child or children of the above named

^ Siblings

Unnamed Jews living secretly or openly in England c.1625-c.1675

Jewess ~ *living at King's Street, Wapping in 1650*

Portuguese Jew ~ *physician, practising at Whitehall in 1655*