

DE GRUYTER

*David B. Ruderman*

# THE MAKING OF AN ANGLO-JEWISH SCHOLAR

THE UNCONVENTIONAL LIFE AND THOUGHT  
OF SOLOMON YOM TOV BENNETT (1767-1838)

PERSPECTIVES ON JEWISH  
TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

DE  
|  
G



David B. Ruderman

**The Making of an Anglo-Jewish Scholar**

# Perspectives on Jewish Texts and Contexts

---

**Edited by**  
Vivian Liska

Editorial Board

Robert Alter, Steven E. Aschheim, Leora Batnitzky, Richard I. Cohen,  
Mark H. Gelber, Moshe Halbertal, Christine Hayes, Moshe Idel,  
Menachem Lorberbaum, Samuel Moyn, Ilana Pardes, Alvin Rosenfeld,  
David Ruderman

## Volume 29

David B. Ruderman

# **The Making of an Anglo-Jewish Scholar**



The Unconventional Life and Thought of Solomon Yom  
Tov Bennett (1767–1838)

**DE GRUYTER**

ISBN 978-3-11-033693-1  
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-169892-2  
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-169901-1  
ISSN 2199-6962  
DOI <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111698922>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. For details go to <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

Creative Commons license terms for re-use do not apply to any content (such as graphs, figures, photos, excerpts, etc.) not original to the Open Access publication and further permission may be required from the rights holder. The obligation to research and clear permission lies solely with the party re-using the material.

**Library of Congress Control Number: 2025933108**

**Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2025 the author(s), published by Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston, Genthiner Straße 13, 10785 Berlin

The book is published open access at [www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com).

Cover image: Self-engraving of Solomon Yom Tov Bennett (1767–1838), based on a painting by G. Fraser; courtesy of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS),

Typesetting: Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

[www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com)

Questions about General Product Safety Regulation:  
[productsafety@degruyterbrill.com](mailto:productsafety@degruyterbrill.com)



For Phyllis



# Acknowledgements

I began this book during the recent pandemic. I had just retired from almost fifty years of university teaching in 2020 and instead of a gradual transition to a new stage of life for me and my wife, we entered precipitously a new and unexpected phase of relative isolation and seclusion. The research for this book became my constant preoccupation and companion. It also became an enormous source of joy and sanity in a world that seemed and continues to seem in some ways out of kilter.

I had long valued the internet, despite its shortcomings, as a goldmine of information and intellectual stimulation. But I never expected it to yield so many instant discoveries and investigative leads. To enter digitally libraries and archives all over the world; to discover hardly read arcane books, pamphlets, and manuscripts online; and to be led from one clue to another while constantly sitting at my study desk were incredibly satisfying and exhilarating. I had previously spent decades traveling to Europe and Israel in search of hidden rare documents and manuscripts. Working exclusively at home could not replicate these learning experiences. But it did demonstrate, beyond a doubt, how much the practices of this historian have changed over the years and how these different tools of historical research could lead to exciting results.

The internet also facilitated constant contact with the larger circle of historians around the world and with librarians willing to respond to every query I made and to provide me with materials even my well-stocked university library could not supply. Authoring a book in a time of pandemic was truly a wonderful experiment in overcoming intellectual and social isolation and in connecting with books and with people.

I am so grateful to the community of colleagues who helped me write this book. First and foremost are those who read the entire manuscript and kindly offered me their astute comments: Iris Idelson-Shein, Arthur Kiron, Marsha Rozenblit, and Beth Wenger. Other scholars responded graciously to my many queries, especially about materials beyond my reach or subjects beyond my expertise: Israel Bartal, Maria Cieśla, Yaacob Dweck, Todd Endelman, David Fishman, Michael Ledger-Lomas, Claire Le Foll, Sharon Liberman-Mintz, Gabriel Moshenska, Ben Nathans, Stefan Rohdewald, Larry Silver, Adam Teller, Joanna Weinberg, and Marcin Wodziński. A special word of thanks to Eria Zimmels, librarian of the London College for Jewish Studies; Konstanze Kunst, Judaic Librarian of Yale University Library; and Havva Zellner of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, for their great efforts in acquiring for me copies of rare books, manuscripts, and digital images essential to my research.

It is an enormous honor and pleasure to be publishing my book in a series edited by my dear friend and colleague Vivian Liska. I am indebted to the gracious and efficient editorial support of the De Gruyter team who worked with me: Katja Lehming and Ulrike Krauss. Alice Falk's work as copyeditor was excellent and meticulous in every respect. Sophia Spielmann worked diligently in helping me prepare the bibliography for the book.

The following institutions sent me materials and information critical to the writing of this book: The libraries of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the Herbert D. Katz Center, University of Pennsylvania, Yale University, the British Library, the London School of Jewish Studies; as well as the National Archives United Kingdom, The British Museum, The National Portrait Gallery, United Kingdom, The Bath [United Kingdom] Record Office, and CemeteryScribes.com.

Several of my recently published articles represent earlier drafts of chapters of this book. A general overview of the book first appeared as "A Native of Poland Professing the Arts in London: The Unconventional Jewish Life and Thought of Solomon Yom Tov Bennett (1767–1838)," *European Journal of Jewish Studies*, 17 (2023): 176–203. Chapter 5 draws from "Two English Ladies and a Jew from Poland: A Chapter in the History of Jewish-Christian Interactions in Nineteenth-Century London," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 114 (2024), 569–601. Chapter 2 is an expansion of the Hebrew article "Polemic, History, and Self-Fashioning in Early Nineteenth-Century England: Solomon Yom Tov Bennett's *The Constancy of Israel* (1809)," *Chidushim* 26 (2024): 43–72, and Chapter 6 appeared in a preliminary form in "A Jewish Vision of the Jerusalem Temple From Nineteenth-Century London: Solomon Yom Tov Bennett's Temple of Ezekiel (Torat Ha-Bayit) [1824]," *Counting the Miracles. Jewish Thought, Mysticism, and the Arts from Late Antiquity to the Present: A Festschrift for Giulio Busi*, eds. Silvana Greco and Judith Schlanger, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2025) 55–70.

I dedicate this book to my wife Phyllis on the occasion of our fifty-fifth wedding anniversary. What a wonderful journey we have traveled together! I thank her once again for her love and support. This is her book as well.

David B. Ruderman

# Contents

Acknowledgements — VII

Introduction — 1

**1 Continental Beginnings — 13**

- 1.1 Polotsk — 13
- 1.2 Copenhagen and Berlin — 24

**2 Finding a Jewish Voice on British Soil: Bennett's *The Constancy of Israel* (1809) — 35**

- 2.1 The publication of Bennett's first book — 39
- 2.2 Refuting Charles Crawford and John Xeres — 43
- 2.3 The Jewish diaspora is a blessing, not a curse — 47
- 2.4 Christian reactions — 53
- 2.5 A final thought — 55

**3 Jewish Adversaries — 57**

**4 Christian Admirers — 78**

**5 Two English Ladies and a Jew from Polotsk — 98**

- 5.1 Mrs. Lee, the Baroness Le Despenser — 99
- 5.2 Mrs. Catherine Housman of Bath — 110
- 5.3 On the interactions between Bennett, Lee, and Housman — 120

**6 The Artist as Exegete: Bennett's *Temple of Ezekiel (Torat Ha-Bayit)* (1824) — 123**

- 6.1 The English preface — 126
- 6.2 The Hebrew preface — 130
- 6.3 The commentary and its legacy — 137

**7 On the Singularity and Sanctity of the Hebrew Language — 140**

- 7.1 *A Critical Investigation into the Merits of the Lecture [ . . . ] by Hyman Hurwitz* (1829) — 140
- 7.2 *A Theological and Critical Treatise on the Primogeniture and Integrity of the Holy Language* (1835) — 148

<b>8</b>	<b>A Jewish Gift to British Civilization: A New Translation of the English Bible — 155</b>
8.1	Earlier Jewish translations of the Hebrew Bible in England — <b>155</b>
8.2	Bennett's first announcement: critical remarks on the Authorized Version — <b>158</b>
8.3	The publication of a specimen of Bennett's new translation — <b>162</b>
8.4	The working copy of the complete translation and commentary — <b>170</b>
8.5	German and English Bible translations — <b>184</b>
	<b>Afterword — 187</b>
A.1	The aftermath of Solomon's death — <b>187</b>
A.2	The value of Solomon Bennett's biography — <b>189</b>
A.3	The biography of Solomon Bennett and its connection to my previous works — <b>193</b>
	<b>Appendix I: Two Early Treatises of Solomon Bennett — 197</b>
I.1	<i>A Discourse on Sacrifices</i> (1815) — <b>197</b>
I.2	<i>On The Molten Sea [Yam shel Shlomo]</i> (1821) — <b>203</b>
	<b>Appendix II: The Engravings of Solomon Bennett — 207</b>
II.1	The list of engravings — <b>208</b>
	<b>Appendix III: A Note on the German Translation of <i>The Constancy of Israel</i> — 213</b>
	<b>List of Figures — 217</b>
	<b>Bibliography — 219</b>
	<b>Index — 231</b>

# Introduction

“Native of Poland and Professing the Arts in London” was the way Solomon Yom Tov Bennett (1767–1838) described himself on the title page of his first book published in 1809. As an immigrant from Polotsk in Belarus, formally Poland before 1772 but subsequently under Russian rule, he still saw himself as a Polish native. His self-promotion as an artist was his way of introducing himself to his readers as a skilled copper engraver. What was missing in this title was a self-acknowledgment of his Jewish origin and, with it, the significant biblical and Judaic learning that informed the rest of the book he was presenting to the English public. What was important to him at that moment as a relative newcomer to England was to underscore his birthplace and his artistic credentials. His Jewish identity would become self-evident from the opening pages of his composition.

Bennett was indeed an accomplished biblical scholar and a Jewish thinker as well as an artist of considerable talent, and, as we shall see, he did not conceal his Jewish identity; in fact, he brandished it. But acknowledging his past as a Pole and his status as an artist in England was also vital in defining his selfhood. This book is a study of his life and thought as it evolved from Polotsk to Copenhagen and Berlin through his arrival and long tenure in London. In his yearning to acquire secular learning and live in open societies, he could be labeled a *maskil* [a Jewish proponent of the Enlightenment]; however, his experience was different from that of most *maskilim* because it was ultimately shaped in an English environment where social intercourse with the non-Jewish world was made easier and more accessible in a relatively liberal and open cultural environment, in which certain elites had a keen interest in biblical and Hebraic studies. Bennett could not tolerate the arrogance and ignorance of the rabbinic establishment that he perceived and he acted defiantly against it, attempting to usurp its prerogatives and authority. Both for economic and social reasons, he felt the need to seek out and legitimate his expertise before a highly educated group of English literati who found him knowledgeable and useful for their own intellectual purposes. He entered their circle and sought their support without radically assimilating or even considering conversion. On the contrary, he was a committed Jew and a man of faith who had little interest in orthopraxis but held strong feelings about the moral and literary integrity of Judaism, its spiritual mission, and its contribution to Western civilization. He was fascinated by Second Temple Judaism, not unlike other *maskilim*; but for unique reasons, he considered this period in Jewish history as a political and spiritual return to the original core of Abrahamic belief and a repudiation of the excesses of First Temple monarchy. He saw the

ideal and most authentic Jewish polity to be like that of the English: a limited monarchy based on democratic principles, neither an absolute monarchy nor a theocracy. His biblicism, his anti-monarchical views, and his emphasis on the spiritual essence of Judaism mark the very core of his proud Jewish identity. His abiding sense of the moral mission of Jews to the world along with an appreciation of diasporic Jewish life—a preference to be a stranger in a foreign land rather than a ruler of one's own, as he put it—also made him stand out among other contemporary thinkers.

Modern scholarship has hardly noticed Solomon Yom Tov Bennett. Some seventy years ago, Arthur Barnett did reclaim Bennett from oblivion in a well-researched and pioneering essay on his life, written for fellow Anglo-Jewish historians;<sup>1</sup> and more than one hundred years ago, Salli Kirschstein, the art collector and historian, devoted a chapter in his book on Jewish engravers to some of Bennett's copper engravings created during the four years he lived in Berlin.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, he has been mentioned in several different overviews of Anglo-Jewish history, including my own, based heavily on Barnett's more thorough account.<sup>3</sup>

In returning to Bennett's life and thought, I wish to make a case for the significance of this singular writer, artist, and public figure based on a deeper immersion in his writings and those of some of his contemporaries, both already known and more recently discovered. Bennett well exemplifies the intellectual path of several notable Polish Jewish immigrants to western Europe, in this case, to Great Britain.<sup>4</sup>

---

1 Arthur Barnett, "Solomon Bennett 1761–1838: Artist, Hebraist, and Controversialist," *Jewish Historical Society of England Transactions* 17 (1951–1952): 91–111. Note that I do not give the same birthdate; on this see below. See also Arthur Barnett, *The Western Synagogue through Two Centuries (1781–1961)* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1961), 51–55.

2 Salli Kirschstein, *Juedische graphiker aus der zeit von 1625– 1825* (Berlin: Der Zirkel Architektur-Verlag, 1918), 15–27. See also Alfred Rubens, *A Jewish Iconography*, rev. edn. (London: Jewish Museum, 1981), index, and his "Early Anglo-Jewish Artists," *Jewish Historical Society of England Transactions* 14 (1935–1939): 112–117.

3 Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714– 1830* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), index, s.v. "Bennett, Solomon"; David S. Katz, *The Jews in the History of England, 1484– 1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), index, s.v. "Bennett, Solomon"; David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), index, s.v. "Bennett, Solomon." See most recently David B. Ruderman, "'A Native of Poland Professing the Arts in London': The Unconventional Jewish Life and Thought of Solomon Yom Tov Bennett (1767–1838)," *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 17 (2023): 176–203.

4 This is not the place to develop the point, but I have in mind the need for a future comparative study of a collective group of eastern European Jews who migrated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to western Europe, their cultural similarities and differences: Jews such as Zalkind Hourwitz, Solomon Dubno, Israel Zamosh, Solomon Maimon, Isaac Satanov, and others. To this list might be added such converts as Moses Margoloth, Stanislas Hoga, and Ridley Haim Herschell, to

He is also distinctive for his remarkable dual interests in art and thought, being equally comfortable with icons and words; for his distinct focus on biblical grammar, philology, history, and exegesis in his writing; for opening social and intellectual connections with some of the most famous and accomplished Christian intellectuals of London while simultaneously evoking suspicion and alienation from the Jewish rabbinic establishment of the city; and finally, for his self-determination and drive to complete his lifelong ambition of serving Western civilization by re-writing and correcting the entire standard edition of the English Old Testament, a task of translation, he fervently believed, that could be fulfilled only by a learned Jewish Hebraist like himself.

Bennett's deepest commitment to Jewish civilization was to language. For him Hebrew, the divine language, never deviated from its primitive state. This provoked him to attack his Jewish colleague Hyman Hurwitz on the latter's alleged misunderstanding of the language of the Bible. For Bennett, the gift of language by some mode of writing communicated to posterity a universal history rather than mere tradition. It is this linguistic connection that motivated him to write one of his most important works, defined his Jewish identity, and stimulated his need to polemicize with uninformed Christians. It also led him into a career as biblical critic and translator.

The capstone of Bennett's career was the project of an authentic English translation of the Old Testament. Only a Jew could do this right, so he believed; and it was the holy task of the Jew to improve and perfect an imperfect Christianity based on a faulty transmission of its biblical foundations. This ultimately became his calling, one never fulfilled because of his death.

Ironically, his contentious personality and his inability to abide by the norms of a Jewish community he could not respect and found oppressive served him better in the non-Jewish world. He was seen as suspicious in the eyes of fellow Jews, who snubbed him as non-orthodox, a deserter of his wife and family in Belarus, and he defiantly acknowledged his independence of rabbinical authority. Although he referred to himself as merely "an untitled layman," he usurped the power of the local rabbis of London in several contested cases, even challenging the vaunted authority of several Continental rabbis. He went so far as to perform a wedding between a Jew of priestly descent and a convert against the wishes of both chief rabbis.

---

mention only a few. I am indebted to Marcin Wodziński for a discussion on the place of Polish Jewish émigrés in the Polish Haskalah and how might one contextualize Bennett in this mix.

His Christian friends were oblivious to his criticisms of their theological stances and their Hebrew learning; in a strange way, his outspokenness made him more attractive to them. Some of the most elite of the literary community respected his written work, supported its publication, and even recommended him for economic support during years of personal hardship. He spoke of his friendships with English gentlemen who lacked prejudice and were literary figures of the highest order. He certainly never thrived economically as a writer but he did gain some notice and appreciation for his efforts.

This intellectual biography grew out of my previous books on the cultural life of Anglo-Jewry in the early modern and modern periods, and the intense and significant interactions between Jews and Christians, especially in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. My work on Bennett represents an extension of two previous books: *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key* and *Missionaries, Converts, and Rabbis*.<sup>5</sup> The first considers the intellectual lives of a cluster of Anglo-Jewish thinkers in London during this period, among whom Bennett already appeared as a minor character. The second further examines the interactions between Jews and Christians by focusing on the prominent English missionary Alexander McCaul and his critique of the rabbis, several of the converts who initially fell under his influence, and several Jews who read McCaul's work, were alarmed by its influence, and sought to refute it. By completing my biography of Bennett, I see the two previous books and this one as a kind of trilogy of studies of English Jewish thought especially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an area previously neglected by earlier scholarship. By considering Bennett's life primarily in its English context but also through his Continental origins, specifically in eastern and central Europe, I hope to compare Anglo-Jewish intellectual developments with those more fully studied among German and other Jews. I also hope that the reconstruction of his scholarly and artistic world offers a greater insight into the English Protestant religious and literary culture of his day, especially its conspicuous passion for biblical scholarship and Hebraic learning, even that pursued by proud Jews entrenched in their own ancestral traditions.

As I have mentioned those previous two books, it seems important to recall briefly the context they describe and its relevance to Bennett's life and thought. *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, written some twenty-five years ago, represented in part a reaction to the pioneering work of Todd Endelman on the his-

---

<sup>5</sup> Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, and David B. Ruderman, *Missionaries, Converts, and Rabbis: The Evangelical Alexander McCaul and Jewish-Christian Debate in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

tory of the Jews of Georgian England. Endelman singularly set out to refute two notions: that the origins of Jewish history in modern Europe could be found in Berlin, and that the primary agents of change in this era were intellectuals. Both assumptions, promoted by the well-known Israeli historian Jacob Katz, had dominated modern Jewish historiography until then. Endelman instead chose to focus on non-elites comprising the overwhelming majority of the twenty thousand Jews living in London at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, consisting of some prominent acculturated aristocratic and middle-class businessmen but mainly of the poor and indigent—rag merchants, pickpockets, and beggars—and in all cases non-intellectuals, either in a traditional or a secular sense. There were no seminal figures in Great Britain, so he maintained, who contributed to modern Jewish thought or traditional Jewish learning. Unlike the elites of Germany and eastern Europe, Anglo-Jews were not vocal in articulating any distinct ideology of modern Judaism.<sup>6</sup>

My book both agreed and disagreed with Endelman's assertions. I argued that England did create a small coterie of Jewish thinkers with an intellectual style indigenous to England and unrelated to German developments. Like Endelman, accordingly, I challenged the Germanocentric model and argued that Jewish intellectual life needs to be studied regionally and pluralistically, taking into account the specific social, political, and intellectual stimulants of Jewish cultural formation. On the other hand, I maintained that there still existed a unique intellectual life of Anglo-Jews in dialogue with English thought and that the overly simple portrait of nonreflective Jewish modernization painted by Endelman was misleading. There was no version of the Haskalah in England imported from Germany and copied from German Jewish thinkers from Mendelssohn on, nor was there a recognizable movement or ideology shared by a collective elite. There were only individuals who absorbed and reflected on contemporary English thought and were loosely connected to each other—men such as David Levi or Abraham Tang, and certainly, as I now fully appreciate, Solomon Bennett.<sup>7</sup>

What were the primary features of English life and thought during the nearly four decades Bennett lived in London at the beginning of the nineteenth century that stimulated thinkers like him? In the first place, the language of discourse was almost exclusively English. When Bennett arrived as an immigrant in 1800, he had to contend immediately with the fact that Anglo-Jews, to a degree unprecedented in the rest of Europe, were monolingual like the Protestant majority. In a

---

6 See Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, especially the new preface to the paperback edition (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), ix–xxiii; Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656–2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 79–126.

7 Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 3–22.

society that allowed the Jewish minority a relatively high degree of social integration despite the lack of full citizenship, linguistic assimilation into the English language proceeded rapidly across all sectors of the Anglo-Jewish community. With the diminution of Jewish knowledge and Hebraic literacy in England, Jewish educators had no recourse but to translate their prayer books, their Bibles, their rabbinic anthologies, and their elementary handbooks into English. Through translations, Jewish religious attitudes and behavior resembled to an unparalleled degree those of their Protestant neighbors. The Englishing of Anglo-Jewish culture, a development not unlike what would take place in North America, would set the Jews of Great Britain considerably apart from their contemporaries in Germany and eastern Europe.<sup>8</sup>

More than any other factor, the Jewish community ultimately viewed itself as closer and more connected to its Christian neighbors because it expressed itself almost exclusively in English. This was especially the case with respect to the Bible, perhaps the most important document in defining the common character of the nation as a whole. The King James English translation of the Bible was the primary textbook of English schools, the essential path to literacy; it was read aloud extensively in the home and church, and it profoundly affected contemporary art and literature.<sup>9</sup> Jews were not immune to the pervasive influence of this single text, at least the Old Testament, on their own religious and cultural lives. Some voiced concern that the English Bible was not necessarily an authentic Jewish one and that its numerous deviations from the original Hebrew version distorted the original meaning of the divine revelation, blurring the boundaries that had separated Jewish from Christian readers. The problem was compounded in an age when Christian scholars such as Benjamin Kennicott claimed that they could produce a more authentic Bible than the Masoretic Bible of the Jewish tradition and that they could understand the text even better than did Jews, its original guardians. The new Christian scholarship on the Bible affected Jews on the Continent as well, especially in Germany, but English Jews encountered the threat more profoundly than others given their considerable stake in reading and studying the Bible primarily in English translation.<sup>10</sup>

---

8 Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 6–8, 215–268.

9 On the place of the Bible in English culture, the literature is vast. See, for example, Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), for the eighteenth century; Scott Mandelbrote and Michael Ledger-Lomas, eds., *Dissent and the Bible, c. 1650–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Timothy Larson, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

10 Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 7–8, 23–88.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the challenge of Anglican and dissenting clergy equipped with Hebrew knowledge and eager to engage in religious polemics and debates with Jews was heightened even more by a new offensive generated by evangelical missionaries: it sought to convert all peoples to Christianity but especially targeted Jews in England and throughout the Continent. In 1809, Joseph Frey founded the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews, which would become the largest and most heavily funded missionary society in the history of Jewish–Christian relations. Missionizing to the Jews was hardly a novelty by the nineteenth century, but the London Society’s range of activities, its army of proselytizing clerics, its impressive publication program of English and translated Bibles and their worldwide distribution, its extensive schools for missionary training (especially in London at Bethnal Green), and the moral and financial support it garnered from political and clerical elites were without precedent. The entire Anglo-Jewish community in Bennett’s time felt particularly threatened by this new missionary offensive.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond the challenges particularly affecting the Jewish minority in England were those confronting all religious orthodoxy, Christian and Jewish alike. The threats of atheism, deism, and Newtonianism that had alarmed clerical circles throughout the eighteenth century persisted into the nineteenth century as well. They proved particularly combustible during a period of evangelical awakening and fervor such as that of the early nineteenth century. Of course, German Jews faced similar concerns in confronting the intellectual world of their contemporaries. But the challenges English Jews faced in examining their faith and its continued relevance were freshly and uniquely shaped by their new environment, not simply imported or rehashed from the Continent. Some English Jews read Locke and Newton in English publications as well as an array of other local philosophers and exegetes. They were acquainted with radical ideas about God, revelation, nature, and history. Their contact with the radical and religious Enlightenment in England was unmediated and intense. Their response to Newton and Locke was a unique and original response to the secularizing forces of modernity that were particularly prominent in England.<sup>12</sup>

English Jews were also aware of a novel political ambience hardly ever encountered previously in the absolutist regimes of the Continent. Given the relatively open society that Great Britain offered minorities like the Jews and the opportunity for social and legal privileges generally denied their counterparts in

---

<sup>11</sup> Ruderman, *Missionaries, Converts, and Rabbis*, especially 1–12.

<sup>12</sup> Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 89–134, 184–214; David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 310–368.

other European countries, Anglo-Jews experienced firsthand new opportunities available in a modern democracy. They mixed more freely with Christians in scientific societies, in Masonic lodges, in taverns, and even in Christian homes and other social settings. Living under a democratic regime, they familiarized themselves with new theories of government, new attitudes about the authority of the state and the rights of citizens, and they expressed a newfound loyalty to a tolerant government and its royal crown. Most significantly, they enjoyed the ability to express themselves freely in the sometimes-acrimonious public sphere of English culture, even regarding Jewish rights and liabilities in a manner unlike that of any other contemporary Jewish community in Europe.<sup>13</sup>

Each of these elements of English culture and society—the ubiquitous status of the English language; the centrality of the English Bible; the Christian study of Hebrew Scripture and its hegemonic claims of religious superiority; the intellectual challenges of Locke, Newton, and other indigenous philosophers and clerics; the unique democratic political structures; and the prevalence of religious tolerance and free speech—is particularly relevant to the life and thought of Solomon Bennett and each is echoed in his writing shaped by his own encounter with this relatively benevolent and inviting English environment. A study of his self-formation as a Jewish thinker in England is accordingly a case study of how the particular ambience of English society affected deeply his own perception of self and the other in the almost four decades of his residency in London.

The book is structured around two general intersecting themes: The first is the evolution of Bennett's writings from his first publication in 1809 until his almost completed translation of the Hebrew Bible of 1838. The other theme is the colorful history of his social interactions with contemporary Jews and Christians throughout his lifetime and their impact on his understanding of Jews and of Judaism and its legacy. He began his literary career as a polemicist against Christian exegesis or Christian misrepresentation of biblical texts; then he shifted to a more direct study of biblical texts and, finally, to the bold aspiration of retranslating the entire Hebrew Bible into English. Bennett's literary career was clearly accelerated by his inability to continue as an engraver because of eye problems. But while his craft had initially led him into a Christian world of artists and literary people, the latter were ultimately more interested in engaging him on the meaning of the biblical text, and he enjoyed their company and their financial and moral support. At the same time, he alienated himself from the chief rabbi and the leadership of the Jewish community, who saw him as a threat to their mandate. He became a Jew more comfortable with at least some Christians than with his own co-religionists.

---

13 Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 8–10, 135–183.

In chapter 1, I consider Bennett's life in his hometown of Polotsk, his departure for Copenhagen to study engraving, and the shaping of his career in Berlin as a fellow of the Royal Academy. Chapter 2 examines the context and significance of Bennett's first book, *The Constancy of Israel*, the shift from polemics to history and autobiography, and the relatively positive responses to the book among Christians. Chapters 3 and 4 change the focus to Bennett's social relations, first with Jews and then with Christians in the city of London. I reconstruct the long series of skirmishes between Bennett and the chief Ashkenazic rabbi of London, Solomon Hirschell, and his supporters. The battle between the two Solomons had a major impact on Bennett's view of Jews and rabbis in general and certainly contributed to public acrimony and distrust among the elites of the Anglo-Jewish community toward him. I then take up Bennett's multiple interactions with several well-known Christian elites of all persuasions during his illustrious career, demonstrating both how his encounters affected his Christian benefactors and how they shaped his self-understanding as a Jew. Chapter 5 continues the account of Bennett's Christian associates with a detailed consideration of his fascinating interactions with two Christian women open to Bennett's Hebraic learning and social contact.

In chapter 6, I take up Bennett's other major work, his commentary on the Temple of Ezekiel, both in the English printed edition and in the unpublished Hebrew version. By inserting two engraved plates of the temple he had created, Bennett demonstrated in this work how his artistic sensibilities as an engraver and architect could contribute to solving major issues of biblical exegesis. Chapter 7 considers Bennett's deep commitment to the Hebrew language, its antiquity and constancy, generating his biting critique of how his Jewish colleague (Hyman Hurwitz) understood the roots of biblical Hebrew, as well as his own excursus on the origins, continuity, and sacred status of the Hebrew language until the present day.

Chapter 8 finally considers Bennett's major albeit unfinished translation or retranslation of the King James Version of the Hebrew Bible, drawing on my discovery and first reading of the extant 1,600-page working copy that he left for posterity. It demonstrates how this ambitious project was the culmination of his literary and intellectual career as a Jewish thinker and artist and how it well illustrates the blended aspirations of its author/editor and the Protestant literary community he tried to serve so faithfully. I close with some brief final thoughts about Bennett and his legacy and about this book and its connection with my previous ones. The book also concludes with three appendixes: a consideration of two early discourses penned by Bennett, a complete list of his engravings known to me, and a note on the German translation of Bennett's *Constancy of Israel*.

As we shall see more fully below, Bennett was different than most of his other Jewish contemporaries because of his special passion for art, architecture,

and especially copper engraving. After gaining the proper credentials to pursue a career in this profession from his studies in Copenhagen, he then rose to the status of fellow at the Royal Academy of Art in Berlin. He continued to work as an engraver in London, but within a decade he was pursuing a career as simultaneously a writer and biblical scholar and finally as a translator. He presented himself in a unique pose in a self-engraving (Figure 1) that adorned several of his books after a painting by a yet-unidentified artist named G. Fraser. When Salli Kirschstein first commented on this work of art, he waxed eloquent on what he saw and even placed it at the opening of his book on Jewish engravers. Studying Bennett's self-image, he witnessed the entire history of this Jewish man: "In the eyes are a penetrating spirituality and a quiet pensive melancholy. You can read from his face all his wanderings and strivings, all his intellectual and artistic powers, and all his lone battle with life, far from home and kinsfolk."<sup>14</sup> Kirschstein observed in Bennett's face a deeply committed Jew seared by the trials and tribulations of his wanderings and hardships. Does this portrait indeed yield so much insight into the man? The reader may judge for herself. I view Bennett's countenance more as a testimony to his independence and his defiance of his narrow Jewish upbringing. He appears with an uncovered head and he dresses elegantly as an English gentleman. His spirituality seems too elusive to discern; he does, however, appear sad and melancholic.

Besides this portrait of Bennett at a relatively young age, there exists another portrait of him preserved by family members for several generations (Figure 2). We observe an older gentleman, formally dressed with fuller but graying hair. He is pensive here as well, but the degree of sadness and introspection seems less intense. He again appears as a secular person, self-confident and self-important as the subject of a recipient of a second portrait might feel.

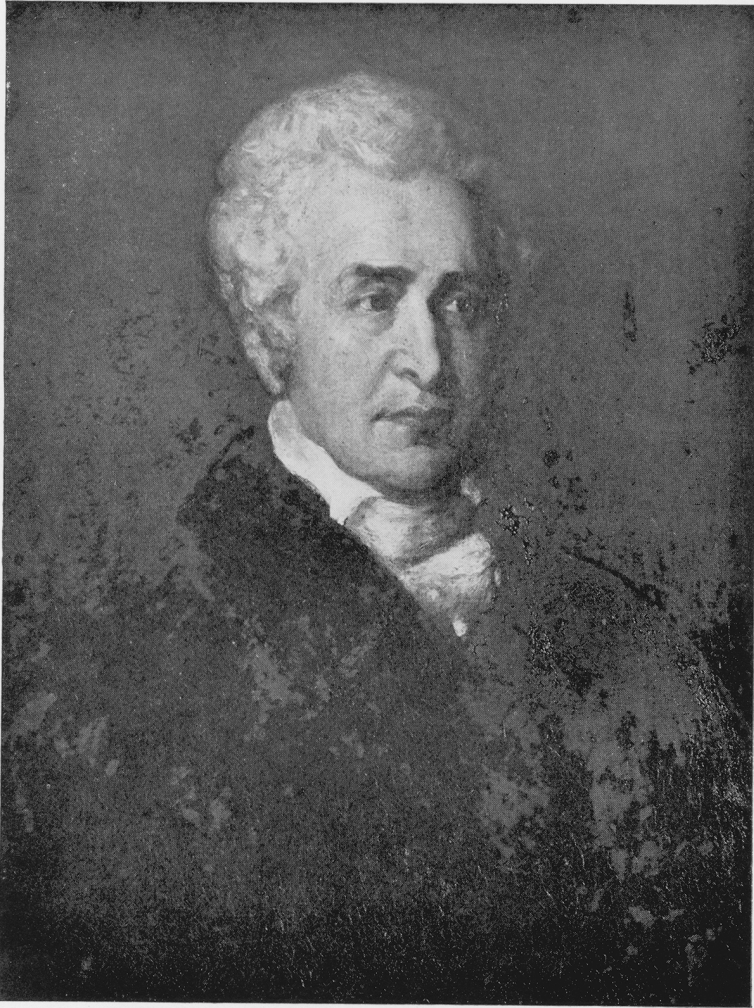
Can one or two pictures capture the essence of an author of many books and creator of many engravings, an immigrant, an indigent writer, a brittle and contentious man among friends and foes alike, a proficient translator and introspective person who thought deeply about his ancestral tradition and its relationship to others, especially to Christianity? These precious portraits might provide a very preliminary glimpse, at the very least, of the fascinating narrative of Bennett's prodigious intellectual life and his tempestuous as well as his fulfilling social life in the early decades of the nineteenth century, unfolding in fuller view in the chapters that follow.

---

<sup>14</sup> Kirschstein, *Juedische graphiker*, 26 (all translations are my own, unless otherwise specified); see also Barnett, "Solomon Bennett," 96. The artist of the portrait upon which Bennett based his engraving (G. Fraser) has not yet been identified. My guess is that it could be the well-known artist Alexander George Fraser (1786–1865).



**Figure 0.1:** Engraving of Solomon Bennett, self-portrait.



*Solomon Bennett, 1761-1838  
Artist, Hebraist and Controversialist*

*From a painting in the possession of Hubert Meredith, his great-great grandson*

**Figure 0.2:** Engraving of Solomon Bennett, possibly a self-portrait.

# 1 Continental Beginnings

By the time Solomon Bennett arrived in London as an immigrant in 1800, he was 33 years old and no longer a young man. He had grown to adulthood in his native city of Polotsk, in what was called Poland then but Belarus after 1772, then traveled to Copenhagen to pursue professional training as an engraver, and finally arrived in Berlin, where he gained employment and a modicum of recognition in his field before departing only four years later. These Continental experiences proved to be critical in the shaping of his subsequent professional and intellectual life in England. Unfortunately, in contrast to the relatively rich documentation of the thirty-eight years he spent in London until his death, the record of his early life in Europe is scanty. One must rely almost exclusively on Bennett's own recollections of his pre-London experiences, written several decades later in England; on several engravings he produced primarily in Berlin; and on a few official documents that he preserved and carried with him to chart the high points of his early life in all three European cities. While Bennett's own biases in presenting himself as well as the passage of time and place that had elapsed must be taken into account, these materials still constitute valuable sources of his early aspirations and values.

## 1.1 Polotsk

Bennett was born in Polotsk in 1767, since he explicitly tells us he left in 1792 when he was twenty-five years old.<sup>1</sup> Whether he lived in the city proper or in the surrounding region, also known as Polotsk, is difficult to determine. Polotsk was situated after 1772 in the district [*oblast*] of Vitebsk in Belarus. It was a bustling commercial center, located where the Dvina River connects to the Polota River, whence Polotsk took its name (see Figure 1.1). Beginning in the fifteenth century, Polotsk was under the authority of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; it became known as the Polock Voivodeship, an administrative unit and local government in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth until the first partition of Poland in 1772, when Russia gained sovereignty over the region. As an important economic and

---

1 Salomon Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place Displayed, in a Series of Critical, Theological and Rabbinical Discussions, on a Hebrew Pamphlet, Entitled "Minḥat Kena'ot" (Avenge Offer)* (London: the author, 1818), 2. The entire passage is cited below, at note 18. Note that throughout, words written in Hebrew (e.g., *Minḥat Kena'ot*) are transliterated into English characters.

cultural hub of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the city was also known for its multilingual, multireligious, and multinational character, a home not only to significant Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish communities but also to notable numbers of Armenians and Muslims.<sup>2</sup>

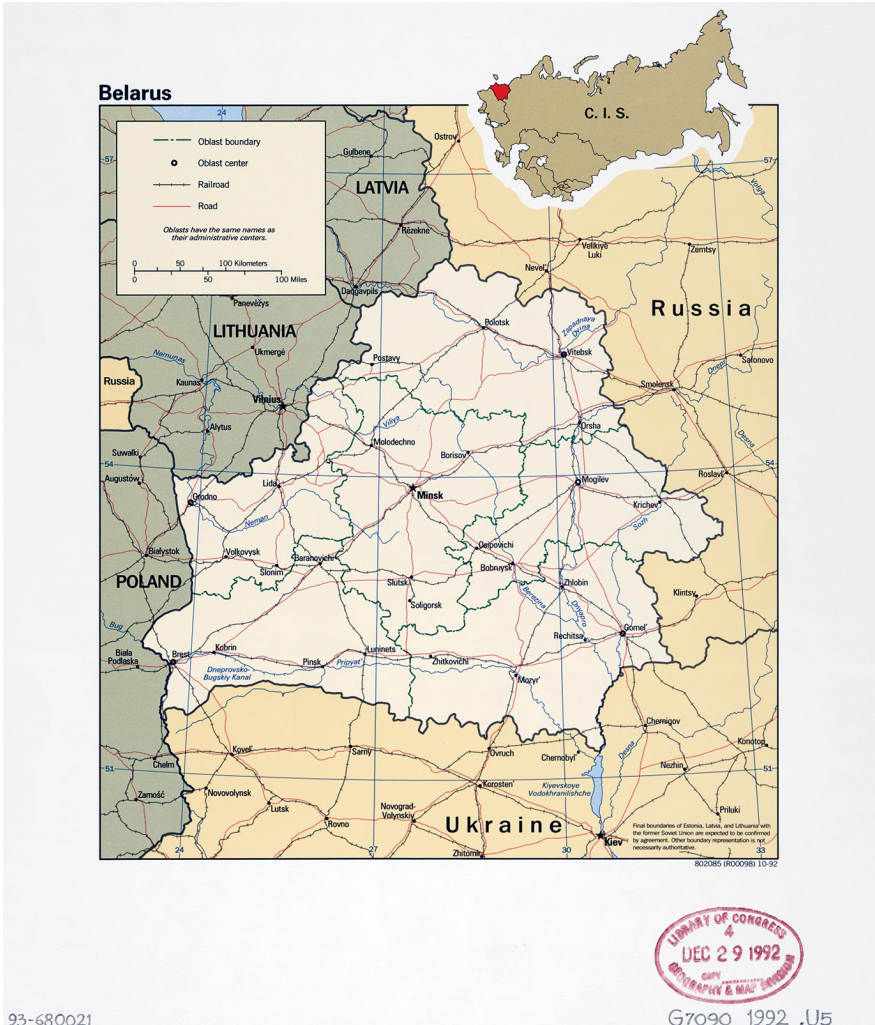
From at least the sixteenth century on, Polotsk had a sizable Jewish community. In the years of Bennett's youth, most of its citizens were Jews. In 1780, the town had 360 wooden houses, of which 100 belonged to Jews; but the number of Jewish families amounted to 478, with a large minority of 437 Christian families. In this same period, Polotsk became a major center of Hasidism in Lithuania and subsequently a battleground between Hasidim and their opponents, the followers of Elijah Gaon. Despite the conspicuous Jewish presence in the town, it was never a major center of rabbinical learning and did not boast many significant Judaic scholars.<sup>3</sup>

Bennett's observations of his early years in Polotsk comprise six pages of his first book published in London in 1809 called *The Constancy of Israel*, a work to be examined more closely in the next chapter. This small section follows previous discussions of Christian missionary texts and Bennett's rebuttal of their misleading arguments and misrepresentations of Scripture, as well as a long excursus on Jewish history and its profound religious legacy. It constitutes part of Bennett's overview of the Jewish contemporary world – a fascinating transition from his-

---

2 On the cultural significance of Polotsk, see the important book and essays by Stefan Rohdewald, especially *Vom Polocker Venedig: Kollektives Handeln sozialer Gruppen einer Stadt zwischen Ost- und Mitteleuropa (Mittelalter, frühe Neuzeit, 19. Jh. bis 1914)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005); "Eine Mischung von Menschen und Sprachen wie beim Turmbau zu Babel: Die russländische Vielvölkerstadt Polock im Kaleidoskop von Augenzeugenberichten," in *Ein weißer Fleck in Europa . . . : Die Imagination der Belarus als Kontaktzone zwischen Ost und West*, ed. Thomas M. Bohn and Victor Shadurski (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2011), 127–138 (Bennett is mentioned on 130; see also the report of the London missionary John Christian Moritz on his engagements with the Jews of Polotz in 1818, "Extracts from Letters of the Rev. L. Way," in *The Jewish Expositor and the Friend of Israel* 4 [1818]: 116–117, also mentioned by Rohdewald on 130); "Schwache unter Schwachen: Zur Aushandlung jüdische Raumes in Städten des Grossfürstentums Litauen im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert am Beispiel von Polock," in *Machträume der frühneuzeitlichen Stadt*, ed. Christian Hochmuth and Susanne Rau (Konstanz: UVK Verlag, 2006), 259–281; and "Durch Mikroskop und Fernglas: Belarussische gesamt-europäische und andere Geschichte(n)," in *Belarus-Reisen: Empfehlungen aus der deutschen Wissenschaft*, ed. Thomas Bohn and Marion Rutz (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020), 181–195 (Bennett is mentioned on 190). My thanks to Professor Rohdewald for his assistance.

3 Herman Rosenthal, A. S. Waldstein, and Peter Wiernick, "Polotsk (Polotzk)," in *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901–1906), <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12257-polotsk-polotzk>.



**Figure 1.1:** Historical boundaries in the Lithuanian–Belarusian lands, eighteenth–twentieth centuries.

tory to autobiography, reminiscent in some ways of the famous autobiography and depiction of eastern European Jewry by Solomon Maimon, Bennett’s early contemporary.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *The Autobiography of Solomon Maimon: The Complete Translation*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Abraham Socher, trans. Paul Reitter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

Bennett introduces his account of Poland in general and Polotsk in particular as follows: “I will give here a short account of the present state of my dispersed brethren in Europe, according to experience in my native country, and in my travels; an intimate and practical knowledge of their existence, related without prejudice, must be far more preferable than the narrations of theoretical observers, or the superficial accounts given by some gentlemen travelers.” Recalling the ancient prejudice of Roman Catholics against Jews, Bennett makes clear that the situation was no different in Poland, even though it once “served as the principal asylum for the Jews in Europe.” Jews inhabited “cities, towns, villages, farms or inns [. . .]; indeed, it was commonly calculated, that above two million Jews were resident in Poland.”<sup>5</sup>

His first recollection of his homeland is a bitter one: “The memory of my infancy is still struck with horror, at the oppressions and cruelties, individually inflicted on the Jews in that kingdom, and the shedding of their blood for false accusations, by the inducement of the Priests; the principal and most absurd one was, to charge the Jew with murder, in order to procure Christian blood to put in their Holy Passover Cakes; this was a general opinion, and a malicious doctrine propagated in all the Catholic dominions[.]” The accusation is then generalized to include all Catholic countries, directly addressing his Protestant readership, although he does admit similar sentiments once existed in England as well. In the end, however, the last king of Poland and his government rejected these accusations and tolerated Jews in their midst.<sup>6</sup>

Bennett also offers a portrait of the culture and economic life of his co-religionists:

As to the civilization and moral conduct of the Jews in Poland, they are principally distinguished by their dress, religious application to the Hebrew theological Studies; as the Talmud, Ritual and Juridical Laws; they are also men of acute minds, very much inclined to philosophical and scientific Studies; notwithstanding the Country is not yet cultivated for these sublime knowledges; they produce able Physicians, Surgeons, Rhetoricians, &c. (They possess also the advantage, that these insignificant reptiles who pass by the name of Rabbies, whose faculties are not superior to those of the Roman Catholic Monks, form no figure

---

5 Solomon Bennett, *Nezah Yisra'el: The Constancy of Israel: An Unprejudiced Illustration of Some of the Most Important Texts of the Bible: or, A Polemical, Critical, and Theological Reply to a Public Letter, by Lord Crawford, Addressed to the Hebrew Nation* (London: W. H. Wyatt, 1809), 215. The more reliable figure for the population of Polish Jews in the late eighteenth century was about 750,000. See Moshe Rosman, “Poland before 1795,” *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, <https://encyclopedia.yivo.org/article/17>, and Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 20.

6 Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 215–216.

at all in these Countries.) As to their domestic occupations, the rich class carry on an extensive commerce wholesale and retail; some carry on Breweries and Distilleries of all kinds; some are Publicans and Innkeepers; the poorer class are mechanics of all branches, from a Blacksmith to a Jeweller; in short they are active in all occupations, chaste, modest, and sober in their domestic concerns, (though a little unclean, also improper in their dwellings,) strict in religion, sociable, hospitable, and kind, especially to strangers of any persuasion.<sup>7</sup>

Some of these observations surely invite comment. That the Jews of Polotsk dress differently and engage in traditional ritual observance is expected; that they possess acute minds to engage in philosophy and science, especially medicine and rhetoric, is more surprising. Bennett's reference to rabbis as reptiles and equivalent to Catholic monks is in line with other negative comments regarding the rabbinic he made throughout his life. It might also suggest the relatively low status of rabbinic studies and institutions in the city in his day. His mention of Jewish breweries, distilleries, taverns, and inns reflects the knowledge of Jewish economic life we know from other sources. It also might suggest the business of the Bennett family, given his admission that when this group was threatened with harassment and excessive taxation, it harmed him directly, as we shall soon observe.<sup>8</sup>

Bennett's narrative suddenly shifts from the general to a specific set of events that precipitated a crisis for his co-religionists but ultimately led to their relief and deliverance. The considerable attention Bennett devotes to this part of his narrative testifies to the personal significance it held for him. It begins with his recounting of the first partition of Poland in 1772 by Russia:

a great part of that country fell under the dominion of Russia, under the opulent and wise Empress Catherine II. This newly captured Territory (which is my native Country) was divided into two departments, i.e., Polotzk, and Mohiloff.<sup>9</sup> The long-established Jews in these two Departments were calculated according to the Government List at 40,000 families, con-

---

7 Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 216–217.

8 On the economic diversity of the Jews of Belarus, see John Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews: The Origins of the Jewish Question in Russia, 1772–1825* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), 57. As Klier points out (57, 67), Russian legislation focused on two groups—merchants and townspeople—although a substantial number of Jews did not fit either category. On the depiction of the Jews as unclean, see the report on the Jews written by M. V. Kakhovskii, the governor of Mogilev province, in 1773, as summarized by Klier (62).

9 In 1772, the Russian government of Catherine I appointed Z. G. Chernychez the new governor-general of Belarus. His district included two provinces, Mogilev and Polotsk, each with its own military governor. See Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews*, 59. Klier (53–55) well explains Catherine's conception of the proper social structure of the regime, and particularly the new area of Belarus she acquired where each legal group had its clearly defined rights and responsibilities, and which became the site of her test area for administrative reforms initiated in 1775.

tributing to the duties, besides the Clergy and poor Families, who were exempted from paying duties. Possession being taken, a general and equal liberty was granted to subjects of every religion.<sup>10</sup>

This all came to an end more than a decade later, as Bennett describes with great emotion:

But in the year 1786 [actually 1782–1785] mines were digged under the House of Jacob in that country; the ancient hostility of the Catholics towards the Jews was not yet forgotten; conspiracies were formed between the Polish Nobility, Gentry, the Russian General, Governors and Superintendents, to deprive the Jews of their liberties, under the pretext of the benefits which would thence accrue to the Nobility, Gentry, and even to the Crown itself; (an imitation of the Prussian and German Constitution towards the Jews) on the first attack they were deprived of their Breweries, Distilleries, Public-houses, Inns, &c. which was a great part of their business; (I myself was also a sufferer by these innovations) thousands of families were reduced to poverty for want of their usual business; besides other innovations took place in regard to Trade, Mechanics, &c. But the assault on their genealogy, morals, and good conscience, was more horrible to them than the former attack; it was also decided not to receive the testimony of a Jew, neither administer to him an Oath in any Court of Justice. What was there then more to expect? but a general destruction!<sup>11</sup>

Bennett proceeds to describe the unprecedented response of the Jews to these changes threatening their economic and civil welfare: the convening of a Jewish congress, the selection of delegates to represent their interests before the Russian government in St. Petersburg, and their effective presentation pointing out the vital economic contribution of the Jews and, especially, the Jewish innkeepers and distilleries. Bennett concludes: “In short, the dexterity of the Deputies attracted the favourable attention of the Ministers at that Court, and the affair was taken into consideration.”<sup>12</sup>

---

**10** Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 227. The figure of 40,000 is also the estimate given by Simon Dubnov, which is based on Bennett (whom Dubnov merely designates as a “contemporary”). See Simon M. Dubnov, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland: From the Earliest Times Until the Present Day*, trans. I. Friedlaender, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1916–1920), 1:307; but see Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews*, 55–56, for a discussion of other historical estimates that reduce this number. On the *plakat* of 1772 addressed to the native population, assuring that all would be free to express their religious beliefs and would receive all the rights of citizens of the Russian Empire, see Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews*, 59–60.

**11** Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 217–218. Bennett describes the actions of Governor-general Passek (Passicoff) that began as early as 1782 and 1783, including the resettlement of Jews, the severe regulations on the distillation of alcohol, and the erosion of their political rights. The petitions of the Jews against Passek took place in 1784–1785, not 1786. See Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews*, 68–70.

**12** Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 219.

At this point Bennett introduces the villain of the affair: the governor-general of the region, who had been responsible for causing the radical deterioration of the Jewish condition in the first place. In a kind of modern evocation of the book of Esther and the holiday of Purim, he offers a dramatic and exhilarating denouement to the threat posed by the Russian Haman, who is prevented from conducting his evil decree by none other than Catherine II herself:

An immediate order was issued to the General Governor (at that time Pieter Bogdanowitch Passicoff) with some of the Superintendents, to appear before the Court at Petersburg, to give a full and proper explanation of those innovations; to answer the objections made against them, and to give a reason for reviling the moral and civil character of the Jews. The answers being cold and dry, and incompatible with the questions put to them, the merciful Empress advanced towards the General Governor and expressed herself in these terms: "Passicoff! I placed you in these Countries to guard my Subjects, to endeavour for the Commonwealth and benefit of my citizens; but, by no means to oppress or to distress; I will not treat you according to your deserts, for I respect your age, and the many services you have performed in your former time; but return back and accommodate the business that no complaints or the tears of my Citizens may appear before my Throne." Permission was then granted for the speedy departure of the General Governor, and two of the Deputies, and mediations took place.<sup>13</sup>

Bennett concludes by proclaiming that "a new Charter was granted to the Jews in all the conquered dominions, to be incorporated Citizens, like the Russians and Poles, either in bearing public burdens and duties, or in enjoying all the benefits of the Commonwealth without exception; [ . . . ] in which happy state the Jews in that Empire continue until the present moment."<sup>14</sup> It is interesting that Bennett ends on this positive note, without mention of any of the limitations placed on the Jews by the subsequent partitions of Poland following his own departure from Polotsk, especially the emergence of the Pale of Settlement. Nor is this aborted calamity at all connected in his narrative to his coincidental departure from the city in the late spring of 1792, immediately before the second partition.

Bennett's description of the events of the 1780s and their aftermath appears to coincide with the historical account of them drawn by Simon Dubnov and more recent scholars.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Dubnov referred to Governor Passek (Passicoff) as

---

<sup>13</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 219–220.

<sup>14</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 220.

<sup>15</sup> See Dubnov, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, 1:310–314. Note that Dubnov cites Bennett (310) without mentioning him by name. Especially helpful in contextualizing the background of this incident with Passek and its outcome is Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews*, 67–70. (Klier also quotes the scholarly essays of Iulii I. Gessen listed in his bibliography.) Klier describes the motives of the Jewish representatives in St. Petersburg as threefold: to cease all Jewish resettlement; to defend the economic position of the Jews, ensuring their ability to lease distillation rights and even acquire them; and to gain representation for Jews in the urban estate courts. While the Jew-

anti-Jewish and even cites from Bennett's account as his primary source ("a contemporary who had himself been affected by these measures informs us [ . . .]"). Bennett had begun his account of his homeland by referring to anti-Semitism generated by Catholic attitudes. As he addressed his Protestant English readers, the Passek affair was similarly linked in his mind to "the ancient hostility of the Catholics towards the Jews [that] was not yet forgotten."<sup>16</sup>

When Bennett decided to leave his birthplace, however, he was motivated by reasons having little to do with hostility toward Jews and their economic interests. He recounts his departure from Polotsk in two different instances, each complementing the other and also adding interesting details to a seminal moment of his life. The first immediately follows his description of the threatening situation just depicted:

In May 1792, I undertook to travel abroad, to pursue studies; leaving behind me in White Russia, my wife, children, parents, and relations, together with some property. I departed in pursuit of studies which were known to me merely nominal, but not particularly; to study at my own hazard and expence, though incompatible with my fortune; to visit countries, nations, and languages, that I scarce knew by their names; an undertaking seldom practised in our climate, and particularly by those of our persuasion. Yet my natural zeal for study, which at that time surpassed my understanding, fortune, and the natural tendency towards my family, parents, and relations, impelled me to prepare for my journey. On the above date, I set off from my abode in Polotzk, in White Russia, for Riga, in Courland; from Riga I embarked for Copenhagen, the metropolis of Denmark; in which city I laid the foundation of my studies: and the Arts became my principal object.<sup>17</sup>

The second account of his departure appeared nine years later in a highly polemical English work meant as a defense against his detractors, especially the chief rabbi of London, a work we shall also consider more fully in a later chapter:

An earnest desire for studies in my adolescent state, was brought to a conclusion in the twenty-fifth year of my age, at which time I was able to undertake the task of travelling to foreign countries, and thus on my expenses, for pursuing literary studies, and of arts. Thus, I left my place of abode, viz. Polotzk, in White Russia, in June 1792, by the full permission and assistance of my family and relations, as is evident from my passports of that government, and the magistrate to foreign countries for the pursuance of studies of arts &c. without which no subject of that empire is allowed to go to foreign countries, unless bail be given from his relations to the government, for the security of the person. The revolution which then raged in Poland induced me to go to Riga, from thence by sea, and accordingly

---

ish petitioners failed to win all their demands, the Senate did act in their favor in regularizing their legal position and in barring Passek from limiting or regulating the Jewish leasing of distillation rights.

<sup>16</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 217.

<sup>17</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 220–221.

Copenhagen was the first station for my views. In this metropolis, I was three years, as is evident from those documents I obtained at the Academy of Arts.<sup>18</sup>

There is much to glean from these two passages. He first tells us that he left Polotsk either in May or June of 1792. He openly admits that in addition to leaving his parents and other relatives, he also deserted his wife and children. He came from a family of some means, who provided him with the necessary support to leave the country legally. He also had acquired some property, which he was obliged to relinquish. I have speculated that he and his family were innkeepers or distillers, considering his preoccupation with the events related to this profession and his own acknowledgment that he had suffered some losses related to the decrees directed at the liquor business in the 1780s. He claims that his family did not stand in his way but assisted his departure without hesitation. Yet it is hard to imagine that his wife and children – or, for that matter, his parents – accepted his decision. During his later feud with the allies of Rabbi Solomon Hirschell (to be discussed in chapter 3, below), his critics pounced on the fact that he had left his wife an *agunah* [an abandoned wife] and that she lived with sorrow and bitterness until her death.<sup>19</sup> Bennett offers no apology and displays no remorse for leaving her and apparently several children. Nor is it clear how he successfully remarried according to Jewish law and even raised nine additional children with his English wife. Yet the official documents, which we shall examine shortly, approving his departure to Riga and Copenhagen are in fact extant, documents that he carried with him wherever he went.<sup>20</sup> They appear to confirm the truthfulness

---

18 Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place*, 2. "The revolution that then raged in Poland" apparently refers to the debate over and eventual adoption of the Polish constitution of May 3, 1791, its aftermath, and the final partitions of 1793 and 1795 by Russia. See Samuel Fizsman, *Constitution and Reform in Eighteenth-Century Poland: The Constitution of 3 May 1791* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Jerzy Lukowski, *The Partitions of Poland: 1772, 1793, 1795* (London: Longman, 1999); and Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews*. I am indebted to Dr. Maria Cieśla for her valuable input on this and various other points of Belarusian Jewish history. On the Jews of Belarus in general, see Claire Le Foll, *La Biélorussie dans l'histoire et l'imaginaire des Juifs de l'Empire russe (1772–1905)*, Collection Etudes juives (Paris: Honore Champion, 2017).

19 See Meir Rintel, *Minhat Kena'ot* (London: Jechiel Hanoi, 1816–1817), 22–23; Arthur Barnett, "Solomon Bennett 1761–1838: Artist, Hebraist, and Controversialist," *Jewish Historical Society of England Transactions* 17 (1951–1952): 94.

20 These documents are preserved in MS Jews College 116, now housed in the library of the London School of Jewish Studies. I am indebted to the librarian of that institution, Eria Zimmels, who secured a copy of the manuscript for me. The oldest external sources of Bennett's early life located so far (other than his own writing), they offer some indication of the earliest forms of his name. In the documents approving his departure from Polotsk in Russian, the name appears as Benet Szlomowitz; his graduate certificate (in French translation) from Copenhagen has "Salo-

of his assertion that he had material and legal support to desert his family and friends, despite the moral impropriety of such an act.

Most importantly, like other Jewish contemporaries, Bennett felt compelled to leave Poland in pursuit of knowledge, which in his case meant literary studies and the arts. The learning he sought was clearly not religious but secular, since his primary destination was the Academy of the Arts in Copenhagen, where he pursued a degree in copper engraving; his unique aspiration, for which he was willing to uproot himself from home and family, was to become an artist/engraver.

One might ask the obvious question of how he acquired such a deep yearning to pursue secular learning even at the expense of disrupting his life and destroying familial relationships. Bennett never discussed his education in Polotsk, neither his Jewish nor his secular learning. He mentions, as quoted above, that he initially knew no foreign languages nor much of anything about the countries to which he was traveling. We might assume that he had received a traditional education in Hebraic studies, allowing him fluency in writing in Hebrew and citing Scripture. He certainly was familiar with Talmud and rabbinic law. But how did he master secular studies, at least enough to yearn for more, prior to his departure in 1792 at the age of twenty-five?

He offers one clue in *The Constancy of Israel* when discussing his fascination with the physical structure of the Temple as described in the book of Ezekiel, which eventually led to a published book: “I have in my possession two different plans of the Temple described by Ezekiel, which I performed in the earlier part of my life for the Bible Society when in my native Country, according to different Commentators, executed in a proper manner, with all dimensions, geometrically represented, and fully described, agreeable to the text of the Bible, (which at a more successful period, I intend to engrave and publish).”<sup>21</sup> I am not sure to what Bible Society Bennett was referring. It seems likely that it was connected to the famous Jesuit College of Polotsk [*Collegium Polocense*], which was established by the Jesuit Order in 1580 and continued to function until 1820, when the Jesuits were banished from the Russian Empire. The college was particularly well-known for its important library and printing press. It seems that Bennett, in his quest for general knowledge, took full advantage of this significant resource to the extent that he could. It might be reasonable to assume that he omitted mention of a Jesuit institution in writing to Protestant readers, simply referring instead to a

---

mon Bennet,” which is identical with the German certificate from the Prussian academy. While the name “Benet” or “Bennett” might appear unusual for a Polish Jew, it is worth recalling the well-known Banet (Benet) family of the nineteenth century stemming from Moravia, especially the rabbis Mordechai and his son Naphtali.

21 Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 156–157.

Bible society. If this assumption is correct, Bennett's quest for knowledge and particularly his interest in art and engraving had already begun when he was living in his native town. He was accustomed to interacting with Christians on matters pertaining to the Bible long before his frequent encounters with them in London. This is the only time he mentions his biblical studies prior to the publication in London of his first book, in 1809.

We have already noted the existence of official documents that Bennett carried with him throughout his European travels and kept in his possession for the rest of his life. Two are pertinent to Bennett's life in Polotsk and offer an additional glimpse into his activity before and during his departure. The first is Bennett's handwritten application to travel to Reval in 1790, requesting a passport from the Polotsk city magistrate, who took his case to the governor's chancellery. The official response then follows:

By order of Her Excellency Empress Ekaterina Alekseevna, All-Russian Sovereign, [etc. . . .] Permission is granted to the Polotsk town-dweller, the Jew Benet Shlomovich, from Polotsk to Reval and back, to lodge three horses at the post offices [along the way?], with driver and cattle. This certificate is issued in the well-to-do regional capital of Polotsk, signed by hand and accompanied by the insignia of my imprint on Dec. 1 [7?], 1790. General in service of her imperial majesty and most merciful ruler, Administrator of the Polotsk land holdings, Director of the Order of the Holy Apostolic Prince Vladimir, Cavalier of the Great Cross of the Second Order.<sup>22</sup>

The document appears to be a kind of official passport authorizing Bennett to travel to Reval, which is the old name for the city of Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, some 394 miles away, proceeding due north through Latvia and Estonia to the Baltic Sea. The document is given to Benet Shlomovich (Szlomowicz), who is called a Jewish burgher of Polotsk. He is even granted the benefit of lodging three horses in every post office along the way, with "driver and cattle." How many burghers of Polotsk were entitled to such privileges, let alone a Jew? Was Bennett employed by or an agent of the government or a nobleman?

The second document, issued two years later, grants Bennett permission to travel to Riga and back:

To the Polotsk town-dweller, the Jew Benet Shlomovich, following the permission granted by the Polotsk city magistrate, for the duration of one year, for the production of Rechitsky textiles in the foreign Polish territories [i.e., the ones not annexed by the Russian Empire] and the German lands, from Polotsk via Riga to Czechia [?], has permission to pass [travel] freely

---

<sup>22</sup> MS Jews College 116. The translation is from the first of two Russian documents. My sincere thanks to Professor Benjamin Nathans for translating the two documents.

and without hindrance, in recognition of which I certify with my own hand, in the regional capital of Polotsk [ . . . ] on the 21st of May 1792, The Polotsk deputy of Her Imperial Majesty[.]<sup>23</sup>

While the purpose of Bennett's first trip is not stated, this trip to Riga is approved to "produce" or sell Russian textiles originally made in the Minsk region of Belarus for export to Poland, Germany, and perhaps Czechia (Bohemia). As in the first document, permission is also granted for a return to Polotsk. Should we assume that Bennett used this document to journey to Riga on his way to Copenhagen, or was this meant to be an entirely different trip for the purpose of producing or selling merchandise abroad? The economic dimensions of this trip revealed in the document seem totally unrelated to Bennett's own lofty claim that he was departing his home in pursuit of an artistic education. It seems impossible to determine whether this was simply another planned round trip, such as the one in 1790, or was a pretext for moving westward to Denmark absent the intention of ever returning. In any case, these two documents carefully preserved by Bennett complicate the narrative he offered his English readers.

Further, they underscore even more the moral ambiguity of his departure from his native home. Was he planning his final departure under the false premises that he was engaged in a business trip abroad? Could he have been hiding his real intentions of studying abroad and even deceiving the authorities who had approved only a limited excursion? If so, how did he get away with this deception, and how was it possible that his family condoned such deceit? Together with the severe damage he was inflicting on his own family by deserting them, the entire circumstances of his exit from Polotsk paint Solomon Bennett as a seemingly insincere and flawed character, a judgment that he would have to endure for the remainder of his life.

## 1.2 Copenhagen and Berlin

What remains clear is that Bennett left Polotsk for Copenhagen via Riga in May or June 1792. He studied for at least one year at Det Kongelig Danske Skildre- Bildhugger- og Bygnings-Academie i Kiøbenhavn [the Royal Danish Academy of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in Copenhagen] and received a certificate of graduation, a French copy of which he kept in his possession (see Figure 1.2). The letter is signed by the director of the Royal Academy, Johannes Wiedewelt, and the secretary, Christian Faedder Hoyer, both distinguished Danish artists. The handwritten document, dated 1793, declares that Bennett was in residence for one year. During that period, he successfully completed all his requirements in

---

23 MS Jewish College 116, translation of second Russian document.



Physicians, Surgeons, and Artists.” He apparently meant that Copenhagen was not remarkable for its Jewish learning but nevertheless attracted Jews in medicine and the arts, and thus he was not totally unique in his professional pursuits. He also observes that he had conversed with Jews from Sweden present in the city who also enjoyed the benefits of their new surroundings. From these brief observations, it appears that Bennett was unaware of or indifferent to the seeds of the Haskalah budding in the city and the emerging conflict between Jews of a new order and those of the old.<sup>25</sup> During his stay in Copenhagen, he apparently finished the engraving of the well-known seventeenth-century Danish alchemist Lorenz Weiskopf (whom he called Lorenz Werskoss), perhaps Bennett’s earliest extant work (Figure 1.3), based on an original painting by Henrich Dittmers (ca. 1625–1677). The painting is still located in Copenhagen in the National Gallery of Denmark.<sup>26</sup>

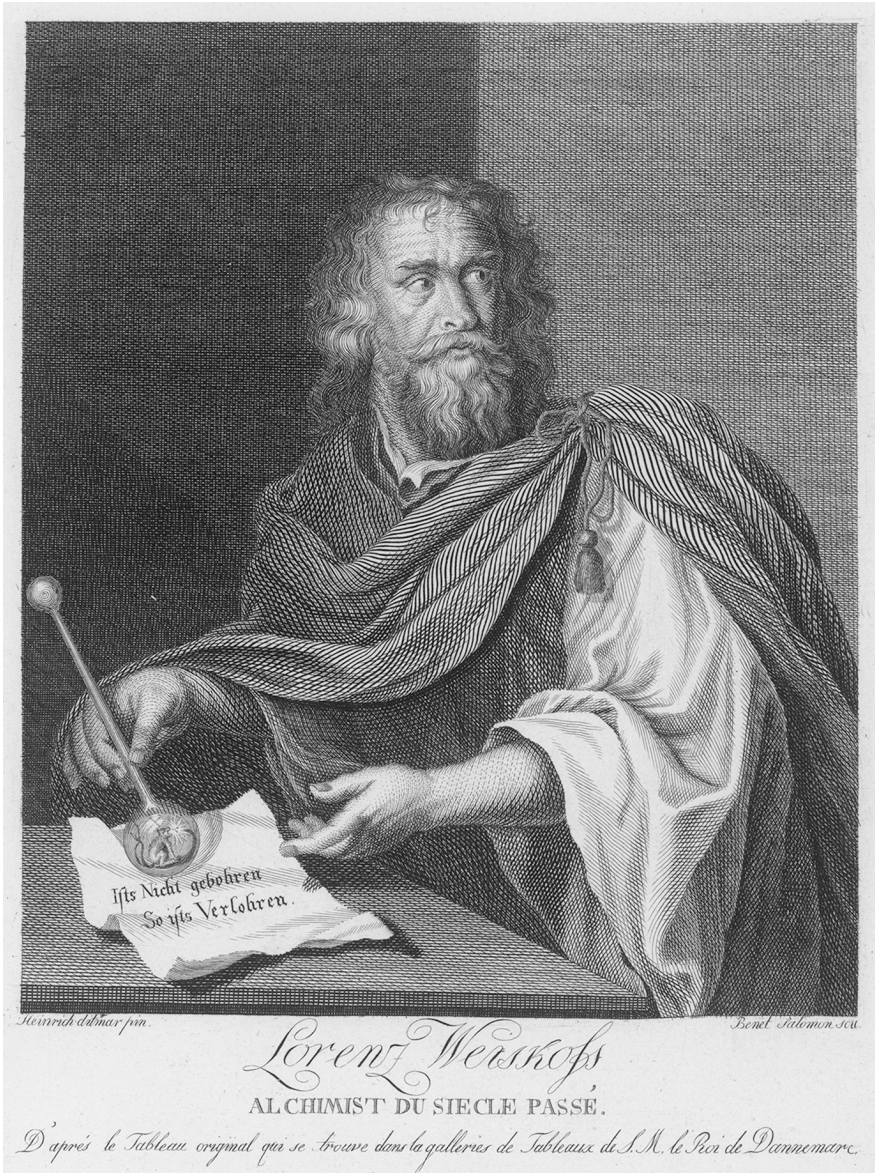
Bennett departed Copenhagen in 1795, some two years after his graduation from the academy. His exit was precipitated, so he claims, by the great fire of that year that left the city a desolate “heap of stones.”<sup>27</sup> The next stop on his journey was Berlin; now armed with professional credentials, he took full advantage of his new artistic surroundings to launch his career as an engraver. His engravings were quickly noticed by the artistic elites of the city, especially his copper engraved portraits of the late king Frederick the Great (Figure 1.4); Louisa Augusta, the wife of King Frederick William III (Figure 1.5); Frederick William III himself; Field-Marshal Moellendorf, the governor of Berlin; Ewald Friedrich von Hertzberg, the Prussian statesman; and Daniel Chodowiecki, the famous artist and head of the Royal Academy

---

25 Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 221–222. Keren, “From Berlin and Amsterdam to Copenhagen,” points out that there were 1,901 Jews in the city in 1801, comprising 341 households. The first Jewish immigrants were Portuguese who maintained ties with other Sephardim in German areas. The Jews of Copenhagen also maintained strong connections with the Berlin Haskalah. Two significant leaders of the movement, Hartvig Wessely and Isaac Euchel, both had Danish roots—especially Euchel through his younger brother Gottleib Yehiel, who was active in Copenhagen in cultural and educational activities just after Bennett’s departure from the city. But during Bennett’s three years in the city, the Jewish community was already split between reformers and defenders of the old order of Jewish ritual life and education. In 1795, in Bennett’s last year in the city, a government committee was formed to investigate the administration of the Jewish community in the light of this internal conflict; and in that same year of the horrible fire that destroyed much of the city, including the synagogue, the rabbinic leadership was weakened.

26 An image of the painting is available on Wikipedia: [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Heinrich\\_Dittmers\\_-\\_The\\_Alchemist\\_Lorenz\\_Weiskopf\\_-\\_KMSsp818\\_-\\_Statens\\_Museum\\_for\\_Kunst.jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Heinrich_Dittmers_-_The_Alchemist_Lorenz_Weiskopf_-_KMSsp818_-_Statens_Museum_for_Kunst.jpg). The engraving is located at the Kupferstichkabinett [Museum of Prints, Drawings, and Fine Manuscripts], Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, no. 213–130.

27 Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 222.



**Figure 1.3:** Bennett's engraving of Lorenz Weiskopf (Lorenz Wershoff).



**Figure 1.4:** Bennett's engraving of Frederick II dedicated to the Russian Tsar Paul I.



Figure 1.5: Bennett's engraving of Queen Louisa Augusta.



**Figure 1.6:** Bennett's engraving of the artist Daniel Chodowiecki, president of the Royal Academy.

(Figure 1.6). He became a fellow of the Königlische Akademie der bildenden Künste und mechanischen Wissenschaften zu Berlin [Royal Academy of Fine Arts and Mechanical Sciences of Berlin] in 1796 and is listed in their records as a *Kupferstecher* [copper engraver]. On October 14, 1797, he was granted a patent by the Royal Academy that was signed by Daniel Chodowiecki (the director), Johann Christoph Frisch, Johann Wilhelm Meil, and Daniel Berger, all prominent artists in the Academy. He also received complimentary private letters and promises from Queen Louisa Augusta and King Frederick William III, along with a monetary gift.<sup>28</sup>

Among these engravings, that of Frederick the Great received the greatest attention and led to Bennett's affiliation with the elite artists of the Academy.<sup>29</sup> Among the curiosities of the painting is the dedication written in French: "Dédié très respectueusement à Sa Majette, Paul I, Empereur des toutes les Russies, par son très homble et très soumis sujet et serviteur – Bennett Salomon." Barnett, who first noticed this line, speculated that Bennett, writing in 1797 (only five years after leaving Polotsk), still regarded himself as a Russian subject and still might have been considering a return home. Barnett adds apologetically that this might be further proof that Bennett had no intention of deserting his first wife.<sup>30</sup> Paul's short rule as emperor (1796–1801) ended abruptly with his assassination but coincided

---

<sup>28</sup> Bennett's Berlin documents are in MS Jews College 116. Several of his engravings created in Berlin are printed and discussed by Salli Kirschstein, *Juedische graphiker aus der zeit von 1625– 1825* (Berlin: Der Zirkel Architektur-Verlag, 1918), 15–27. See also the comments of Barnett, "Solomon Bennett," 95–96. They are still located in the Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. The engraving of King Frederick the Great is listed as no. 776–93; additional copies are 109–101 and 775–95. The engraving of Louisa Augusta, based on a painting by Nikolaus Lauer (1753–1824), is listed as no. 686–121; additional copies are 727–96, 110–101. The engraving of King Frederick William III, based on a painting by Nikolaus Lauer, is listed as no. 97–1883. The engraving of Field-Marshal Moellendorf, based on a painting by Jean Marc Pascal (active 1784), is listed as no. 212–130 as well as 211–130. The engraving of Ewald Friedrich von Hertzberg, based on a painting by Johann Heinrich Schröder (1757–1812), is listed as no. 210–130. The engraving of Daniel Chodowiecki, based on the painting by Johann Christoph Frisch (1738–1815), is listed as no. 209–130. On Bennett's membership in the Academy, see Historisches Archiv, Preussischen Akademie der Künste, Berlin, PrAdk 0137, "Salomon Benet Kupferstecher," p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> One additional letter Bennett preserved for posterity, found in MS Jews College 116, relates to his engraving of Frederick the Great. On November 9, 1797, he had sent copies of the celebrated engraving to two professors at Copenhagen's Royal Academy: Johannes Wiedewelt, its former director and then secretary, and Peter Meyn, a new director. They responded on March 10, 1798, in a letter addressed to Bennett in Danish; in it they thanked "Bennet Salomon," as they called him. They were also pleased by Bennett's evident progress "in the art you practice, the foundation of which was laid here at the Academy." My gratitude to Professor Finn-Einar Eliassen of the University of South-Eastern Norway for translating this text, and to my colleague Carsten Wilke for connecting me with Professor Eliassen.

<sup>30</sup> See Barnett, "Solomon Bennett," 95–96.

with Bennett's years in Berlin. It is indeed interesting that Bennett demonstrates a kind of political loyalty ("sujet et serviteur") to Russia and its czar (as distinct from Poland, to which he later associates himself as "Native of Poland"). But what seems most bizarre is dedicating an engraving of the heroic Prussian emperor to a Russian one! How might his German associates have viewed such an irreverent gesture?<sup>31</sup>

Despite his professional success and relative prestige, Bennett's view of Jewish life in Berlin was markedly negative. He remarks that Jews had few liberties there and were excluded from the natural rights of "mankind." Rich Jews admittedly had privileges of keeping "Manufactories of Silk, Cotton, Leather, and Manchester Goods but cannot employ any Jewish workman in their Fabricks." Moreover, their birth rate was limited, and they were heavily taxed. "Notwithstanding their oppressed state," Bennett wrote, "yet their sagacity of mind, industry, and application to Classic Studies, made them worthy of acceptance among the most refined class of mankind."<sup>32</sup>

Bennett was also not impressed by the level of Jewish learning in Berlin; as he puts it, they were "not very partial to theological study." Jews nevertheless were attracted to universities, where they could study with the support of rich families. Bennett was certainly familiar with some of the Jewish celebrities of eighteenth-century Berlin, beginning with Moses Mendelssohn and including the physicians Marcus Hertz and Marcus Bloch, a certain Professor Leoneny at the Cadet School in Berlin, the Hebraic scholars Joel Brill (Löwe) and Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn, and someone named Abrahamson, the king's and government's *Madaillier* (i.e., *médailleur* [medal maker]). Without mentioning them by name, he also singled out Jewish artists as well as scholars "in the various branches of academical performances, ingenious Jews in Geometry, Algebra, Mathematics, Geography and Philosophy."<sup>33</sup>

Bennett's lack of high regard for the rabbinic learning of the city was surely influenced by the following incident involving its chief rabbi, who happened to be the father of his later chief nemesis in London, Rabbi Solomon Hirschell:

---

31 On Bennett's apparent loyalty to Russia, compare Rohdewald, "Durch Mikroskop und Fernglas," 190.

32 Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 223–224. In Bennett's notes on *The Holy Bible*, MS Jews College 105, note his comment on Ezekiel 20:25, which refers to "the oppression of the house of Israel by our modern cultivated barbarians of Europe, deprived of their own laws but subjected to the laws of the different nations of their abode, as if the house of Israel are ignorant and void of any law peculiar to human welfare, deprived of liberties, even marriage are restrained from them in some countries and what more! (this latter I experienced during the 4 years of my abode at the Royal Academy of Berlin from 1796–1800). How this liberal act stands in that country, I cannot tell" (2:725).

33 Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 225–226.

Know therefore! While I was at Berlin in connection with my work at the academy, I nevertheless mixed with the Polaks, learned in Torah, and took an interest in their affairs. During all that time I did not hear one word that the Rav of Berlin, Rabbi Zwi [Zevi Hirsch Berlin, or Hirschell Lewin (1721–1800)], had a son by the name of R. Solomon [Hirschell], capable of holding a rabbinic position or a scholar. It happened that I had some dispute with R. Yitzchak Satanov and R. Moses Slotover which compelled me to appear before the Rav, R. Zwi, the local spiritual head. But, because this family, when they speak, do so in a haughty manner, the Rav, R. Zwi, frightened me and spoke harshly about me, contrary to the facts. However, as my name was known and noted in Berlin among both the Jews and the Princes and the distinguished in the land, and I had the advantage in this matter, I kept away from the Rav. There arose also some discord and controversy between us and this caused the rupture of our relations.<sup>34</sup>

After four years in Berlin, Bennett exited the city in 1799, explaining that “the oppressed state of the Jews in that kingdom caused me to abhor staying there any longer, and far less from thinking of a settlement in that kingdom; I then prepared for my journey to England.”<sup>35</sup> Thus ends his rather sketchy description of a Jewish community in which he spent four years of his life, enjoying the privilege of a successful career as an engraver while seeming to have maintained minimal social contacts with fellow Jews. The only exception, he tells us, was that he socialized with Polish Jews like himself, learned in Torah, and took an interest in their affairs.

To what might we attribute his lack of enthusiasm for the other members of this distinguished Jewish community? Note again the list of Jewish cultural luminaries he offers his readers. Mendelssohn was first, although he had died a decade earlier. Was Bennett familiar with his writing, especially his biblical translation, since Bennett would devote himself to a similar project years later in London? This is the only time he mentions Mendelssohn and never brings up his writings; rather he seems to have known him by name only. Marcus Hertz and Marcus Bloch were distinguished physicians, while Joel Brill and Aaron Wolfsohn were Hebrew scholars and the co-editors of the Hebrew journal *ha-Me’asef*, which had ceased publication by the time Bennett was in Berlin. These four were all legitimate cultural figures of their community, although the other two, the Jewish professor and government *Madalier*, as well as the unnamed Jewish artists and academics, appear unconnected to Jewish life and learning. Also mentioned is Isaac Satanov, another luminary of the German Haskalah, but Bennett’s relationship with him appears to be negative. As an inventory of the major intellec-

---

<sup>34</sup> Solomon Bennett to David Meldola, March 6, 1817, quoted in Richard Barnett, “Haham Meldola and Hazan de Sola,” *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 21 (1962–1967): 15–17. Satanov is the well-known Polish-Jewish *maskil* and poet. I have not yet identified Moses Slotover. See also chapter 3 below.

<sup>35</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 226.

tuals of what had been the major center of the German Haskalah, Bennett's list is incomplete and provides little indication that he knew any of these men personally, except Satanov. Might one be entitled to conclude that he had little or no knowledge of their writings as well?

The dichotomy between his relatively successful professional career and his generally negative assessment of Jewish life raises the obvious question of why Bennett soured on Berlin Jews so quickly and why their intellectual life seems to have left almost no impression on him. I can offer only two observations that might partially answer this question. The first is his explicit complaint about the social and economic restrictions of Jewish life in Berlin and his genuine desire to seek a refuge where he could live more freely as an artist and Jew, a desire ultimately fulfilled by his settlement in London. Second is the timing of his sojourn in Berlin. By the time of Bennett's arrival, the moderate Haskalah of Mendelssohn had passed, Hebrew scholarship had declined, and signs of social and cultural stress were readily visible in the period of the so-called radical German Haskalah – a period of enhanced assimilation and intermarriage, a period perhaps less attractive to a Polish Jewish outsider who still felt more comfortable with Polish Jews and their traditional community of his childhood, whether a practicing Jew or not.<sup>36</sup>

Whether these explanations are persuasive or not, one thing is clear. Bennett lived and worked in Berlin, and before that in Copenhagen, in pursuit of his artistic craft. With the exception of his one reference to working in Polotsk on drawings of the Temple of Ezekiel, he was never explicitly involved in Jewish matters until his arrival in London in 1800. According to the available evidence on his life and thought, he never wrote a word on the Bible and Judaism until 1809, nine years after arriving in London. His “Jewish (re-)awakening,” so to speak, was generated exclusively by the English environment to which he immigrated. The home of Mendelssohn and his learned disciples seems to have left little impression on Bennett's Jewish soul!

Bennett arrived in London in November 1800, after traveling through Dresden, Leipzig, and finally Hamburg. In England, he felt more connected, as he later wrote, “with Arts, literary subjects, and mankind at large.” He was also humbled by his newly adopted country and its traditions of liberty, tolerance, and civility.<sup>37</sup> Finally, it seemed, Bennett had arrived in an environment where he could flourish as a Jew while fully identifying with the political, literary, and artistic culture of the society.

---

<sup>36</sup> For an overview of the “crisis” of Berlin Jewish culture and society in the 1790s, see Steven Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community: Enlightenment, Family, and Crisis, 1770–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), parts III and IV, and Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), part IV.

<sup>37</sup> See Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 227, and chapter 2 below.

## 2 Finding a Jewish Voice on British Soil: Bennett's *The Constancy of Israel* (1809)

After arriving in England as a new immigrant, Bennett remained silent about his new life for almost a decade. One can only speculate on the challenges he faced as a foreigner in London, his acclimation to the economic and cultural life of the city, and the relative speed with which he mastered the English language. He, of course, continued to earn a living as a copper engraver. Besides the collection of Bennett's engravings from Berlin, one can locate at least another twelve in British or American libraries that he produced in London for at least the first two decades of his settlement in the city (see Figures 2.1–2.3). At some point in the 1820s, problems with his sight prevented him from continuing to work as an artist. Following that juncture, his writing and his translation would occupy his time exclusively, and his income would decline precipitously.<sup>1</sup>

Having left his wife and family behind in Polotsk, as we have seen, Bennett remained a single man in London for almost two decades. Finally, in 1818 he married his second wife, Elizabeth (Pescha bat Asher Angel was her Hebrew name), at the Western Synagogue, London, when he was already fifty-one and she was only seventeen. How they met, and how they built a relationship despite the huge gap in their ages, remains a mystery. So too are the unfortunate circumstances of Bennett's separation from his first wife and family and his self-proclaimed bachelor status during the first eighteen years of his residence in London. According to one report, his first wife died in 1815; whether he had previously divorced her or not, he appeared to be free to marry Elizabeth by 1818. What happened to the children of the first marriage is unknown.<sup>2</sup>

Solomon and Elizabeth had nine children, seven boys and two girls. The youngest was born in 1837, a year before the death of her father.<sup>3</sup> Their names were Angelo (Asher ben Moreno Yom Tov, born 1819), Solomon and Charles (both born 1821), Isaac (Newton, born 1822), Moses (born 1825), Sarah (born 1826), Israel (born 1827), Nathaniel (born 1829), and Eve (born 1837). One of the children must have died by the time of Solomon's death, since his wife refers to their eight children in a letter written shortly thereafter (see the afterword, below).

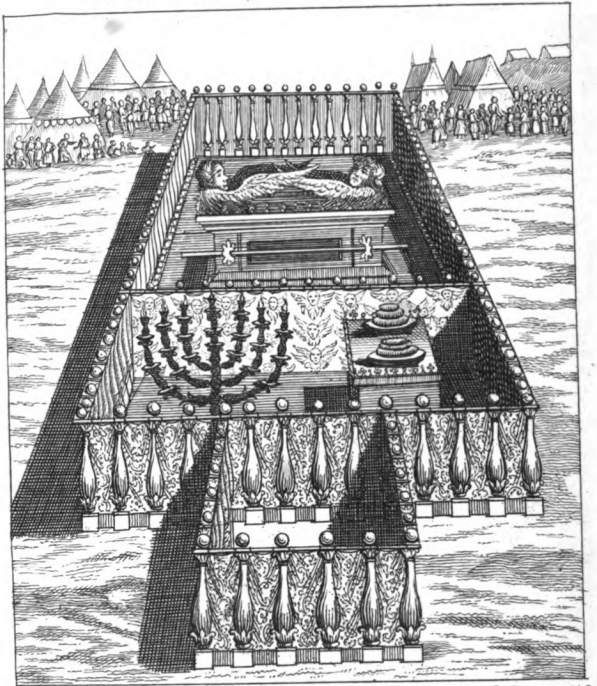
---

<sup>1</sup> A full list of his engravings can be found below in appendix II.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Barnett, "Solomon Bennett 1761–1838: Artist, Hebraist, and Controversialist," *Jewish Historical Society of England Transactions* 17 (1951–1952): 94.

<sup>3</sup> For information on Bennett's family, see the useful entry in Cemetery Scribes, last updated in 2013: <http://www.cemeteryscribes.com/getperson.php?personID=I2941&tree=Cemeteries>.

The form of the Tabernacle .



EXODUS 25. Verfe 9 .

*According to all that I shew thee after  
the pattern of the Tabernacle and y<sup>e</sup> pat-  
tern of all the Instruments thereof etc*

**Figure 2.1:** Bennett’s engraving of the Tabernacle.

Five of the Bennett sons became shorthand writers and reporters. Angelo, the eldest, was the most famous, a master of the system of shorthand writing advocated by Samuel Taylor.<sup>4</sup> At the infamous trial of Palmer the poisoner in 1856, Angelo Bennett was the reporter.<sup>5</sup> Several of the sons are also mentioned in the records of the Western Synagogue. Two of them, as late as 1849–1850, took an interest in

<sup>4</sup> On Taylor’s method, see Jeremy Norman, “Samuel Taylor Develops the First System of Shorthand Used Throughout the English Speaking World: 1786,” *Jeremy Norman’s HistoryofInformation.com* (last updated December 9, 2024), <https://historyofinformation.com/detail.php?id=3234>.

<sup>5</sup> *The Queen v. Palmer: Verbatim Report of the Trial of William Palmer [ . . . ],* Transcribed from the Short-Hand Notes of Mr. Angelo Bennett (London: J. Allen, 1856).



**Figure 2.2:** Bennett's engraving of Hannah presenting Samuel to Eli.

Jewish matters. A fundraising event on behalf of the Western Jewish Free Schools for Boys and Girls was held on January, 3, 1850, and the names of two of his sons, Angelo Bennett and Isaac Newton Bennett, appear in the Committee list. His son Charles attended the Synagogue in St. Alban's Place, and another son, Moses, also attended, though not so frequently in later years.<sup>6</sup>

When still living as a bachelor almost a decade earlier, at the age of forty-two and in his ninth year of residency in London, Solomon Bennett published his first book. Having studied and practiced the craft of copper engraving in Copenhagen and Berlin before arriving in London, as we have seen, his decision to compose this work on Jewish history, biblical exegesis, and Jewish-Christian dispute, while even including his own personal memoir in the language of his newly adopted country, albeit in a less than elegant style, was audacious. He was certainly not yet abandoning his primary career as an engraver; he identified himself on the

<sup>6</sup> See the entry of Cemetery Scribes, note 3 above, and Arthur Barnett, *The Western Synagogue through Two Centuries (1781–1961)* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1961), 133, 219.



**Figure 2.3:** Bennett's engraving of William Shakespeare, after George Vertue's print.

title page of his book as a native of Poland professing the arts in London. But in writing and publishing his *Nezah Yisra'el: The Constancy of Israel*, he was for the very first time electing to publicize his private thoughts about being Jewish before a mainly Protestant readership, to defend his faith and community in the face of

intense missionary pressure, and to express his genuine appreciation for the politics and culture of his newly adopted country. And in composing his first work in the language of his adopted country, he was demonstrating his ability to write in a new language he had mastered in the course of less than a decade. Bennett's reflections are not only a dramatic turning point in his career and intellectual biography; they provide a valuable glimpse of the realities and possibilities of Jewish life and Jewish–Christian relations in Great Britain in the early decades of the nineteenth century. They also offer a preview of his great literary output to follow, including a revised translation of the standard English version of the Old Testament. And finally, they underscore the relative ease with which he gained acceptance as a Jewish intellectual among an impressive circle of Christian literati while ironically evoking suspicion and even contempt among some of his coreligionists.

## 2.1 The publication of Bennett's first book

Bennett self-published his book through the print shop of W. H. Wyatt of Picket Street, Temple Bar, London. Alongside the title page was a portrait of the author, which he had engraved himself and subsequently reproduced in most of his publications (for the title page, see Figure 2.4; for the portrait, see Figure 0.1). The title, *Nezah Yisra'el: The Constancy of Israel: An Unprejudiced Illustration of Some of the Most Important Texts of the Bible: or, A Polemical, Critical, and Theological Reply to a Public Letter, by Lord Crawford, Addressed to the Hebrew Nation*, underscores the primary incentive of the author in dealing with Jewish–Christian polemics. It also emphasizes his so-called unprejudiced perspective in cautiously presenting a Jewish reading of the Hebrew Bible as opposed to allegedly deficient Christian readings. The apologetic and humble tone stands out especially in the work's dedication, opening advertisement, and preface:

To the discerning readers of the clergy and laity of all denominations, either Christians or Jews, this impartial treatise is respectfully dedicated by the author. [ . . . ] I hope then that some of the Christians and Israelites, discerning Readers, although they will not dare to sanction my opinions or comments; yet they will not be too precipitate in forming their debates, before a close examination thereof; they will also indulge on some deficiencies of the Language, and attribute it to my being a Foreigner, and but a short time in this Metropolis.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Solomon Bennett, *Nezah Yisra'el: The Constancy of Israel* (London: W. H. Wyatt, 1809), title page, dedication, [i].

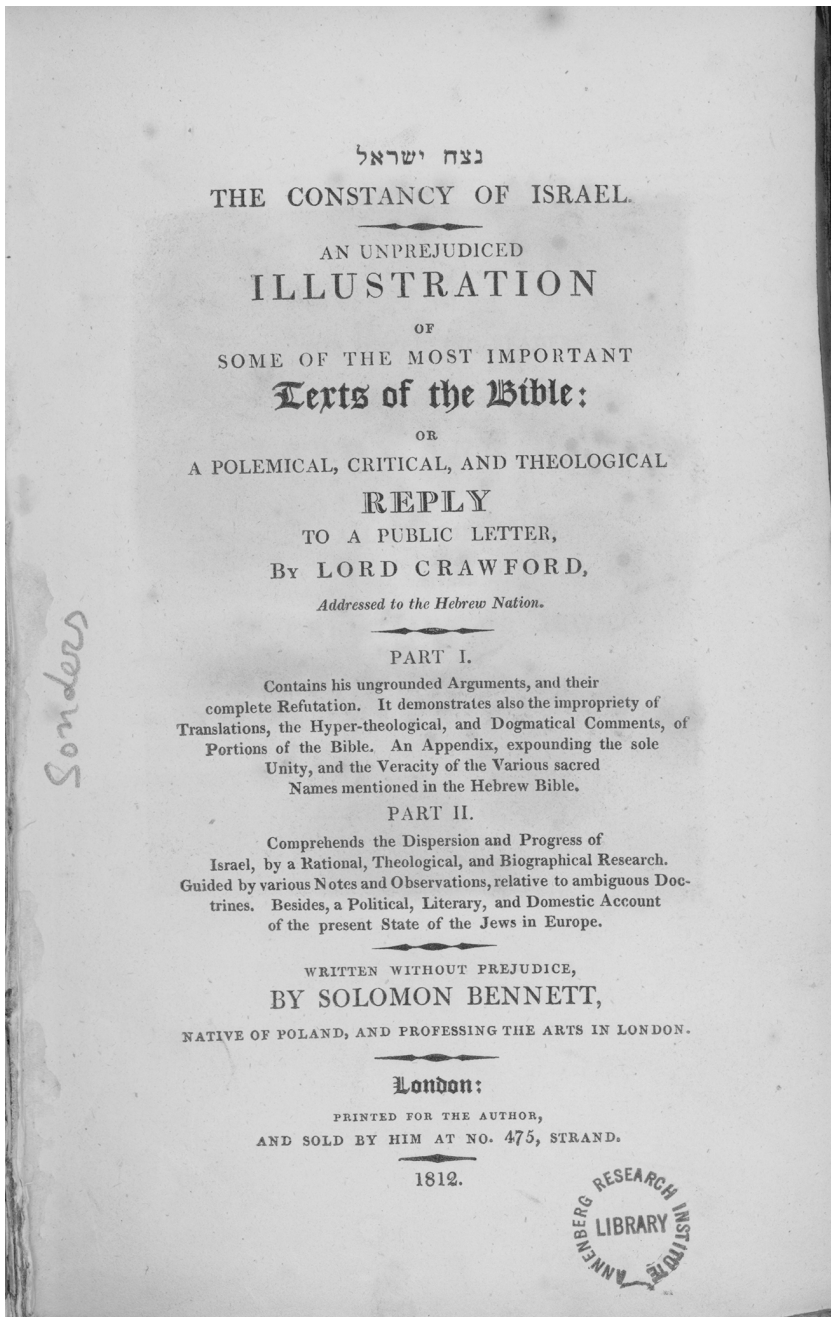


Figure 2.4: Title page of Bennett's *The Constancy of Israel* (London, 1809).

He openly admits his reluctance to criticize Christians: “though varied sometimes in opinions, yet, they are more nearly related in the sacred principles with us, than the other nations; but moreover a glorious nation in whose light my brethren are enlightened; and in their shadow constantly refreshed. [ . . . ] It might be esteemed an impious and ungrateful thing to express an opinion against their religious principles, which are so universally received in this part of the globe.”<sup>8</sup>

But Bennett was not merely offering polite flattery to his Christian readers; he was expressing sincere admiration for their particular form of worship and cultural creativity shaped in England in contrast to the more intolerant forms of Christianity he had encountered in his previous domiciles:

As for my own part, I freely confess, I am far from being affected with religious prejudices; the unbounded veneration I feel for our present Nazarenes with regard to their extensive capacities, active in all branches of human knowledge, particularly in the Arts and Sciences, and whose examples had made a strong impression on my mind; from my infancy I was constantly their admirer; and very much exerted myself to be their imitator; adding the benefit and liberal instructions I received in my travels abroad, but particularly here in London, from several Professors, Doctors, and Artists in the many branches of human Literature and Arts, in which noble pursuit I hope to live and die.<sup>9</sup>

For Bennett, it was the missionaries who have adversely affected English society and have unjustly harassed its Jewish minority. No longer can he

remain silent, to the roaring of the many Proselytes, who, with arrogance and pride, abuse the pure doctrine of the faith of the Hebrews, and constantly send forth meagre fruits, by printing books and pamphlets, in scorn of their erudition and knowledge of the Old Testament—And alas! not one of our brethren thought proper to give any answer to defend their principles, as if they are exposed to lay down under the burden of a continual shame and confusion. [ . . . ] [T]hose Proselytes are grown so numerous and overbearing that thinking themselves to be the Messengers of Christ, to bring all the inhabitants of the globe to a general conversion: like the Author of *the Letter addressed to the Hebrew Nation*, who no doubt thinks himself eminent in Divinity, skilful in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>10</sup>

Bennett undoubtedly referred to the beginnings of intense missionizing efforts among the Jews, culminating in the founding of the London Society for Promoting Christianity in 1809, the same year as the publication of his book. He refers more obliquely to proselytes while loosely including within this group the author of *The Letter Addressed to the Hebrew Nation*, the immediate target of his remarks, as we shall see below. In contrast to these practitioners of religious intolerance,

---

<sup>8</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, iv.

<sup>9</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, iv–v.

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, v–vi.

Bennett transparently declares the credo that guides him as a Jew and a new citizen of the English nation:

As to my own opinion, I think in reality that all the various religions are equally good, and all the national Testaments are beneficial to mankind; being, they all allude to one point, i.e. *Sur mera ve-aseh tov bakesh shalom ve radfehu*, “abhor the evil and embrace justice, seek for peace, and pursue it.” Psalm xxxiv. ver. 14. [ . . . ] Heavens grant that every nation may accomplish its Testament with righteousness! I have no doubt but mankind will soon agree, and will attain to an everlasting happiness,—Love, unity, and justice, are the chief points of the universe; as for the rest, I look upon merely as ceremonial affectations, which can make no difference with mankind at large; and still less to a Supreme Power abstractive from matter and Material affectations. In this principle I live, and in this principle I will continue.<sup>11</sup>

Such a strong statement of religious cosmopolitanism may have found favor among some liberal Christians but it could hardly have won the hearts of the Christian evangelical missionaries and especially of the rabbinic leadership of the Anglo-Jewish community, who were soon to accuse Bennett of deviance from traditional practice.

Charles Crawford (1752–1815) was the author of *The Letter Addressed to the Hebrew Nation* published in 1805 in London, the first of three letters that were eventually reprinted together in 1817. Crawford was born in Antigua, the son of a wealthy landowner who had emigrated to the West Indies in the early eighteenth century. He returned to England, where he was educated, and later spent considerable time in Philadelphia, gaining a name for himself as a prolific author and poet and assuming the unearned title “Earl of Crawford and Lindsay.” He was best known for a poem in six books called *The Christian*, which appeared in numerous editions, and for works on Plato’s *Phaedo*, on the Christian origins of the American Indians, and on the evils of slavery, as well as a new edition of George Fox’s *A Looking-Glass for the Jews*, among many other popular books.<sup>12</sup> Crawford’s three letters, of which Bennett noticed only the first, were made up of conventional Christian readings of Old Testament verses utilized to demonstrate the truths of Christianity and the deficiencies of Jewish belief and practice.

Crawford had previously written numerous works on Christian beliefs, both in prose and in poetry, but his *Letters* display little originality and no apparent firsthand knowledge of the Hebrew language.<sup>13</sup> It seems unclear why Bennett

<sup>11</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, viii–ix.

<sup>12</sup> Louis Leary, “Charles Crawford: A Forgotten Poet of Early Philadelphia,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 83 (1959): 293–306.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Crawford, *Three Letters to the Hebrew Nation by the Author of “The Christian,” a Poem* (London: W. Whittemore, 1817). Bennett saw only the first volume, *A Letter to the Hebrew*

singled out this unexceptional work for serious consideration in his first publication and why he assumed that Crawford, a relatively unaccomplished theologian, should be considered as part of a new missionary surge in London instigated by the “proselytes.” The only plausible answer seems to be timing. Crawford’s work appeared in London only four years before Bennett’s publication appeared. It provided Bennett a specific and easy target for his defense of the integrity of Jewish belief and exegesis at a moment when no other Jew, so he declares, had spoken up against the book. Having gone unnoticed by Christian and Jewish readers alike, Crawford’s letter provided Bennett the opportunity to display his formidable skills as a biblical scholar and to promote his larger vision of the place of Judaism in world civilization.

*The Constancy of Israel* is divided into two parts. The first presents a refutation of Crawford with an appendix focusing on yet another Christian polemic, this one composed by John Xeres, brought to Bennett’s attention by a Christian associate. The second part is considerably more expansive, providing a panoramic view of Jewish cultural history, particularly the continuity of its core beliefs throughout the diaspora, culminating in a portrait of contemporary Jewish life, especially in Poland until the time of Bennett’s departure in 1792. Bennett’s survey concludes with the telling of his own life story, as I have already discussed—that is, his departure from Poland, his education and professional activities in Copenhagen and Berlin, and his ultimate arrival in Great Britain.

## 2.2 Refuting Charles Crawford and John Xeres

Bennett begins his refutation of Crawford’s first letter with some ground rules. In interpreting Scripture, the simplest interpretation is the most acceptable. Moreover, biblical prophecy always focuses on one subject, not “a confusion of comprehensions,” and certainly not on figurative allegorical meanings meant to assign a fixed time to the coming of the messiah. To understand Scripture precisely, one needs to know Hebrew grammar well, a skill lacked even by many rabbis, who “are very little Orthographists and Etymologists.” In so articulating the right way to read the biblical text, Bennett was differentiating his scholarly credentials not only from those of his Christian opponent but even from those of the rabbis themselves.<sup>14</sup>

---

*Nation* (London: T. Becket, 1805); there are two copies of this rare edition in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York.

<sup>14</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, x–xviii.

On the basis of these principles, Bennett discounts assigning the prophecies of Daniel, Isaiah, Zechariah, Amos, and other prophets to Jesus, following the approach of earlier Jewish exegetes who had instead elucidated the historical context of their words. Crawford had paid special attention to Isaiah 53 as an unmistakable allusion to Jesus, and Bennett responds in a particularly biting manner:

I have often listened in some Chapels to a crow from the pulpit, with a human voice, saying, "The Jews never read the fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah, for fear they should be converted by this vision, and are strictly prohibited by their Rabbies from reading it." I testify, that I never have heard of such a prohibition; yet there is some truth in it, that the Jews (i.e. English), do neither read this Chapter, nor the whole Bible: Novels and Romances being more to their taste than their sacred Records, that they scarce comprehend their common Hebrew Prayers; but with respect to the innumerable Israelites throughout our dispersion, to my knowledge they read, understand, and reflect on it also.

Isaiah refers not to Jesus, Bennett declares, but to the restoration of Israel.<sup>15</sup>

The derogatory passage regarding "a crow on the pulpit" was later noticed by several reviewers of Bennett's work who subsequently could not take seriously his claim of being "unprejudiced." The passage is also interesting in suggesting that Bennett frequented Protestant churches and listened to preachers' sermons, and that he had little patience for what he considered ignorant homiletics. But his spleen was directed not only toward Christians but toward English Jews as well who, so he claimed, never read Isaiah 53 because they never read the Bible or even their prayer book. The passage well represents Bennett at his most mocking and confrontational, reminiscent of some of his other polemical writings and singled out especially by his Jewish detractors.

In the course of his remarks on Isaiah 53, Bennett quotes the famous passage of Matthew 3:19, "I will make you fishers of men." For Bennett, the statement contradicts the depiction of the suffering servant in the chapter as one who lacked deceit in his mouth, for indeed this immoral utterance did great harm to the Jews:

This doctrine, was zealously executed throughout all the Nazarene era. The Roman Catholics fished in many parts of the Globe with the net of sword, fire, and water; they oppressed in all their dominions, (to their everlasting shame!) the Jews as well as other persuasions of mankind. Our modern reformed Nazarenes continue still the above doctrine, but with good prospects and humanity, and not without a beneficial view towards mankind; they formed themselves into a Fisher Society to support Fishers or Proselytes, and to support in some measure the poor and unintelligent fishes which fall in their net. Indeed, such a command or doctrine is not to be found in any place of the Bible, neither in the Talmudical treatises of the Hebrews.

---

15 Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 33–35.

In Bennett's cautious interpretation, the bad fishers of Christian faith were the Catholics, while Protestants held "a [more] beneficial view towards mankind," although they still embraced the same notion as the present English missionaries.<sup>16</sup>

In turning to consider the proofs of Jesus that Crawford derives from the Psalms, Bennett is similarly dismissive, since "the Nazarene Commentators select terms and phrases, fabricate new words in the Hebrew Language, and form a new syntax in the poetical style, merely to support their opinion; they force visions from the most simple texts, of prayers, hymns, and poetry, tho' their Authors had not the smallest intention of describing visions."<sup>17</sup>

Bennett's other comments on Crawford's reading of biblical texts do not stray from the ordinary except for two unusual formulations at the close of this section of his work. The first, following a statement about the high level of Jewish cultural creativity over the centuries, addresses the reason for Christian success in Europe, especially after the era of Constantine: "its present glorious state is not owing to the principles of that religion; on the contrary, the wide extent of that religion is owing to its glorious state and Politic, and the extensive knowledge of many of its professors in all branches of the arts and sciences, and the improvement of all their intellectual capacities, which embellished also their religious principles."<sup>18</sup> One wonders how Bennett's Christian readers might have reacted to such a declaration.

Bennett might have similarly evoked the ire of his Christian and Jewish readers with the following provocative passage:

Upon mature reflection, we will conclude, that any *tradition* or *dogma*, (not having the support of reason and proper demonstrations,) though it has been generally received and asserted to for thousands and centuries of years; yet, in the present enlightened age has reached its last period of decay and dissolution and is treated as a chimera: as for example, the action of an *antipode*, which from eternity was entirely a secret, and was treated as the utmost absurdity and heresy. Moreover, our inhabited hemisphere was also asserted by the ancients to be barren in the frigid and torrid zones. Who would have dared to think that the universal system of the celestial bodies would be overthrown, and a new one formed? [. . .] The prophane doctrines of invisible beings who act on mankind, faith in sorcerers, visionaries, dreamers, &c. which had been but too successful on the human mind are now exploded, except in the brains of some chimerical individuals, or hypocrites, to dazzle the lowest class of the community. It cannot then appear strange to us, if the traditions or dogmas of a triumphant or suffering Messiah met with the same fate as all hyperbolic doctrines before mentioned[.]<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 42 and n.

<sup>17</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 55.

<sup>18</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 70.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 76–77.

He notes finally that he could have supported this hypothesis with various texts from “the Talmudical Doctors, and some of the ancient Hebrew Philosophers but I am sensible of the roaring of our modern religious Doctors, who are more partial to their traditions than to their intellectual capacities.”<sup>20</sup> With these two aggressive digs at Christian doctrine, Bennett concludes his observations on Crawford’s *Letter*.

Before closing the first part of *The Constancy of Israel*, Bennett offers a brief appendix, which he added for the following reason: “I was induced by a Gentleman, a friend of mine, to answer other questions which were made against the religious principles and the doctrine of the Hebrews. That Gentleman presented me a book published in the year 1719 intitled ‘an Address to the Jews by John [Jonah] Xeres, containing his reasons for leaving the Jews, and for embracing the Christian religion.’”<sup>21</sup>

Xeres and his book certainly were hardly well known in England or elsewhere almost a century after its publication. Bennett apparently examined the work superficially and concluded it was not worthy of a long refutation on his part. He did admit that Xeres had slightly better Hebraic skills than most Christian polemicists but he still found his arguments weak and unoriginal. Had Bennett more deeply investigated Xeres, he might have learned that he was originally a North African Jew who had immigrated to England and was persuaded by several English associates to convert to Christianity. He was a devoted student of the Huguenot pastor Pierre Allix, then living in England, a gifted scholar of Hebrew and rabbinic texts who was especially adept at deploying the latter for the purpose of conversion. It seems likely, as Matt Goldish has convincingly argued, that Xeres composed his book under Allix’s influence (Allix’s letter approving Xeres’ conversion under his supervision is printed in the volume), closely following his teacher’s method of finding alleged Christian truth in postbiblical rabbinic writing, and most likely he circulated Allix’s arguments among the Sephardic Jews of London. Allix’s works and that of Xeres provide valuable background for under-

---

20 Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 77n.

21 Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 92; the book was *An Address to the Jews, by John Xeres: Containing His Reasons for Leaving the Jewish, and Embracing the Christian Religion* (London: J. Heptinstall, for Anthony Barker, 1710). On Jonah Xeres and his prominent mentor Pierre Allix, see Matt Goldish, “A Convert Among the London Conversos: New Light on the Oral Law Debate,” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Jewish Studies, Boston, MA, December 22, 2003, and his “The Battle for ‘True’ Jewish Christianity: Peter Allix’s Polemics Against the Unitarians and Millenarians,” in *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin*, ed. James Force and David Katz (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 143–162. My thanks to Professor Goldish for sending me his unpublished paper. See also Michal Aziza Ohana, “A Moroccan Jew’s Journey into Anglican Christianity,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 75, no. 2 (Autumn 2024): 337–360.

standing the motivation of David Nieto, the towering Sephardic leader of the London community, in publishing his famous defense of rabbinic Judaism, the *Matteh Dan-Kuzari ha-Sheni* in 1714, only five years after Xeres converted.

In the end, Bennett offered no more than a rather conventional refutation of Xeres' less original argument that the plural names of God in the Bible alluded to the Trinity. Whether because he lacked interest or ran out of steam, Bennett determined that "this converted wretch,"<sup>22</sup> as he called him, deserved no more attention on his part.

### 2.3 The Jewish diaspora is a blessing, not a curse

Bennett calls part 2 of his book "*Tefusat Yisrael*, the Dispersion and Progress of Israel." It is a sweeping review of the history of humanity, initially focusing largely on Abraham and his legacy:

Just as the stars which give light, brightness, and animation to all creatures, and exhibit the glory of an Omnipotence; so, might it be with the posterity of Abraham, that the true principles of divinity, law, and morals of the sacred Code, were exhibited by the Israelites, by means of their dispersion. [ . . . ] Indeed gentlemen, we must acknowledge that the promise to Abraham, "And in thy seed shall be blessed all the nations of the earth," does not allude to their mercantile state, their stock-dealing, or eating good roast beef; neither does it allude to any mortal vain glory, no! [ . . . ] [T]he blessings then must consequently be referred to some sublime, spiritual subjects; agreeable to the mind, beneficial to mankind at large, as well as individuals[.]<sup>23</sup>

Abraham's legacy was ensured for future generations by the leadership of Moses ("He combined all the philosophical principles of divinity, morals, rituals, husbandry, jurisdiction, and ceremonial laws, in his sacred extensive and public records"), and of Joshua and Samuel, but was diminished by the appointment of a monarch over Israel: "It is then to conclude, that the imitation of Royalty among Israel, was really against the will of God, the principles of the Patriarch, and the Mosaical code." Because of the unfortunate introduction of kings, "idolatry, robbery, bribery, and murder" plagued Israel, but the prophets and their rhetoric "brought people back to the religious principles of their ancestors."<sup>24</sup>

It is at this point in Bennett's retelling of ancient Jewish history that he first enunciates a major theme of his entire work: "their dispersion in strange coun-

---

<sup>22</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 112.

<sup>23</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 120, 122.

<sup>24</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 151–152.

tries was a most salutary event that could take place; not only for their personal welfare, but for the preservation of their religious principles. Divine Providence found it more proper, for the safety of the posterity of Abraham to put them under the protection of other nations, than to be their own masters and to be governed by arbitrary vile Kings[.]”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, dispersion was never a punishment for the crimes committed against Jesus, as Christian theologians claim. On the contrary, long before the time of Jesus, Jews enjoyed the bounties of diaspora and preferred them over living under the kings of Israel. Many noble families settled in Egypt, forsaking Jerusalem. Those dispersed in Assyria and Egypt

found it more proper to their safety, to enjoy the principles of their Patriarchs with regard to religion and policy, as subjects of other Monarchies and Kingdoms, to be incorporated citizens adapted to the politics and customs of the dominions where they were settled, rather than to be their own masters, and to form a dominant nation; [ . . . ] the ill conduct and management of their Kings and Princes, the jealousy of neighbouring dominions, the intrigues of the nobles and chiefs, the treasons among allies, and the many commotions arising in State affairs; all those inconveniences caused the above dispersed Israelites to resign all the dominant authorities, and prefer living in a manner like strangers, and under the subjection of other princes, as it is expressed “for we are strangers before thee[.]” [ . . . ] And so, they neglected and refrained entirely from their Mother country, till the present day.<sup>26</sup>

Bennett’s point thus is twofold. It is a repudiation of the Christian accusation that the diaspora is a punishment for the sin of killing Christ. It is also a full-throated endorsement of how living among the nations as opposed to living as a nation-state is desirable, indeed necessary to preserve and transmit the moral ideals of the Abrahamic legacy to European civilization. Only in the diaspora, free of the excesses of political sovereignty, are Jews entitled to bear the title of the chosen people:

Let us now turn to Europe, to reflect in general on the progress of the principles of religion, the proper fruit of the Patriarchs, and the chief object of the divine blessing to Abraham, “In thy seed shall be blessed all the nations of the earth,” &c. Although, in the theological sense, some may vitiate, scoff, or satirize, as they please, at the common expression, “God’s chosen People;” (and as I myself, who am not much intoxicated with this holy Title) yet, in a historical sense, none can deny, but the authentic history, and the Code of the Patriarchal posterity, must be acknowledged, as a foundation and archetype to all posterior persuasions, doctrines of divinity, and moral philosophy, &c.; and their dispersion as an unextinguished *Monument*, replaced in all parts of the Globe, and in particular in Europe.<sup>27</sup>

---

25 Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 153.

26 Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 164–166.

27 Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 178.

Bennett next turns to the history of the rabbis of the Mishnah and Talmud and acknowledges the value of their religious commentaries, although he expresses his ambivalence toward rabbinic literature:

[H]owever “no granary is pure of chaff,” and many whimsical and nonsensical ideas, phrases, and allegories, have been interpolated and crept into this extensive work, from some insignificant disciples of the great. I oftentimes reflect on it with vehemence, that those interpolations were the cause of degrading, and throwing a rustic and corrosive liquid on the whole doctrine of the Rabbies, by the pretended doctors of our adversaries. I without scruple maintain, that a purification of the Talmudical Dogmas, and the allegorical phrases, is at our present time requisite, and perhaps more useful for the preservation of our faith, and the patriarchal principles.<sup>28</sup>

It would appear from this statement that Bennett at least partially accepted the Christian charges against the culture of rabbinic learning.

Yet Bennett devotes considerable space to challenging the authenticity of ancient Christianity, its fallacious interpretations of Scripture, the insincere conversion of Constantine, and the internal disputes among various Christian sects. In contrast, the medieval and early modern heirs of rabbinic Judaism were highly cultured and made major contributions to the societies in which they lived, particularly the philosophers Maimonides, Crescas, Ibn Ezra, Levi Ben Gershon, Abarbanel, Saadia, Alfasi, Karo, Joseph Delmedigo, David Ganz, and Menasseh ben Israel. And “they were honoured some time to share in Politic and State affairs; they were also often chosen Ministers, Physicians, and Philosophers to their respective Kings, as at Naples, Spain, and Portugal (though these Kingdoms have now for the space of 350 Years been vacant of Jews.)”<sup>29</sup>

Bennett adds, based on his own scholarly endeavors, that though much of their writing was preserved and published,

the greater parts of their doctrines are still in manuscript, preserved in several Museums. I have had myself the satisfaction to see in my travels numerous Hebrew manuscripts in national and private libraries, and very ancient, most of them treating on Philosophy and Science; but partly are unfortunately transmigrated, and not without corruption, into other European languages, and the name of its ancient Author changed into a modern. I have myself very often had the satisfaction, abroad as well as in England, of meeting with works, which we may authentically observe, were mere translations from some Hebrew manuscripts[.]<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 182–183.

<sup>29</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 200.

<sup>30</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 200–201.

Bennett also mentions the rise of Islam and its indebtedness to Judaism and its doctrinal struggle with Christianity during the Crusade period. But it is Christians' still intense obsession with enticing non-Christians to convert that irritates him the most. He reserves his harshest criticisms for the missionaries, especially the former Jews who work in their ranks, and their shameful activities of harassing and snaring vulnerable English Jews. His highly personal testimony is worth citing in full:

Specimens of such [missionizing] proceedings (or religious barterers) are still prevailing now a-day among the Schisms of the Reformed Church; though in a more moderate way, and an expensive manner, under the mask of Religion and Humanity; yet not without insidiousness and seduction. Brokers are sent to spy among the poor, illiterate, and distressed families, or individuals of the Jews, (like those of Petticoat-lane, Frying pan-alley, &c.) hand-sel is given, and the bargain is concluded. The converts of the latter are also applicable to different denominations, partly *mumar lehehayot* on account of necessity, partly *mumar lete'avon* on account of voluptuousness or vanity to live free and easy, or to be intermarried with Christians; and others from motives to avoid oppression and scorn, which prevail between the two sectaries. But there is a third sort of Converts, which are more pernicious and hypocritical, i. e. *mumar lehachis to irritate or to provoke*; hence the Scholastic Theology degenerates into mere Sophism; while those possess no other object, but like Sutlers of the word of God, to gain by the Christian public, credit and money; strolling from Religion to Religion, starting futile questions, framing hyperbolical opinions, forcing the Scripture by introducing strange senses on intricate words, more sounding than argumentative; out of which cavilling Sophists gain matter of contention; they draw arguments from authors whose authority they do not acknowledge, and whose doctrines thus have entirely resigned, going from chapel to chapel, amusing their hearers with stories and legendaries of their opponents, merely in spite of their former persuasion. In short, they pretend to assert what they really do not believe. Those miserables have no other object in view, than to gain from their protectors, credit, honour, and to enrich their pockets from the ignorance of their adherents. I then have full reason to say, that all such mutual endeavours are not from motives of humanity or moral accomplishments, but rather from political views, to infuse into the minds of the illiterate dissention and fatal prejudice.<sup>31</sup>

Bennett continues to relate to his readers the lamentable record of forced conversions, missionary harassment, and expulsions in Catholic countries, including the

---

<sup>31</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 206–207n. Of the three categories of *mumarim* (Bennett calls them “denominations”; *mumarim* is generally translated as “apostates”), the last two are well-known types discussed in rabbinic literature. See B.T. *Avodah Zarah* 26b; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Teshuvah*, 3:9; and the useful discussion of Jacob J. Petuchowski, “The Mumar: A Study in Rabbinic Psychology,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 30 (1959): 179–190. The first category, containing the *mumar* who leaves the Jewish fold out of economic necessity, surely reflects what Bennett saw in London during his lifetime.

deprivation of Jewish political and economic opportunities “as I myself was an eye-witness on my travels in those dominions, O! to their everlasting shame!!!”<sup>32</sup>

The record in Protestant countries with respect to the treatment of the Jews is certainly better but far from unblemished. A particularly egregious example, according to Bennett, is the following:

in a Work published under the title of “*The Manners of the Ancient Israelites, by Claud Fleury, translated and enlarged by Adam Clarke*” [the following quote appears]: “The Jews hate all the rest of mankind, they even think themselves obliged to kill them, unless they submit to the *precepts, given to Noah*; and nobody is with them [i.e., is recognized by them as] their neighbours, but an Israelite. [ . . . ] As this is an avowed sentiment of all the ancient and modern Jews, we may see how dangerous it might be to permit them to have any rule or influence in any nation under the Sun. Had they strength and authority, their career would be like that of Mahommed, everyone must be butchered who would not submit to be *circumcised*.”<sup>33</sup>

Bennett’s reference is to a translation from French of a work by the famous French jurist and ecclesiastical historian Claude Fleury (1640–1723), first published as *A Short History of the Ancient Israelites, with an Account of Their Manners, Customs, Laws* (1802) and then printed in a second edition in 1805 as *The Manners of the Ancient Israelites*, translated and “the whole much enlarged” by “A. Clarke.” Adam Clarke was a vaunted British Methodist theologian, author of a multivolume commentary on the Bible, and a contemporary of Bennett. On more than one occasion throughout his career, Bennett challenged Clarke’s biblical scholarship and mocked his Hebraic learning. Clarke was considered by many the leading biblical scholar of his day, but he was clearly deficient in the eyes of this Jewish exegete. But the issue here for Bennett was not merely Clarke’s professional incompetence; it was his moral depravity in unjustly accusing the Jews of a crime, owing to a misreading of a Maimonidean text on the Noahide laws. Bennett quickly offered a correction of the Fleury/Clarke statement with the proper rabbinic references and then furiously added: “If these Prelates were ignorant of the particulars described in the above text of Mymonides [Maimonides], silence would then become more honourable to them, than to expose their illusive minds; which tends only to furnish the illiterate with matters of contention and dissention. [ . . . ] If Mr. Adam Clarke, with his adherents, should have authority

---

<sup>32</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 208.

<sup>33</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 209n. See Claude Fleury, *The Manners of the Ancient Israelites*, translated and “much enlarged” by A. Clarke, 2nd edn. (Manchester: S. Russell for W. Baynes, 1805), 342.

and influence in Government affairs, their career would surpass those of the Roman Catholic Church!”<sup>34</sup>

Bennett finally returns to his historical overview and the ultimate dissemination of the Abrahamic principles in the modern world. He reviews the new geographic and mechanical discoveries and the rise of science, so that “Religion itself became refined and embellished with Moral Philosophy and Reason; and a general Toleration to the different persuasions in Europe was granted.” These transformative developments also spelled an improved situation for the Jewish minority: “In this last century when superstition and prejudice has been evaporated and extirpated from mankind, the house of Jacob then became also more considerable; the gross oppressions, insults, derision were rejected with shame; and with true humanity liberties were granted them to share in some realms in Europe[.]”<sup>35</sup>

Bennett’s measured observation that liberties were granted the Jews only in some realms of Europe leads him finally to consider the present era and provide, as he calls it, “a short account of the present state of my dispersed brethren in Europe, according to experience in my native country, and in my travels.”<sup>36</sup> The focus is Poland, the principal asylum of the Jews in Europe, numbering some two million, and so he claims, his birthplace.

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, his first memories are mixed. On the one hand, “The memory of my infancy is still struck with horror, at the oppressions and cruelties, individually inflicted on the Jews in that kingdom, and the shedding of their blood for *false accusations*, by the inducement of the Priests[.]” On the other hand, the Jews are highly proficient in “Hebrew theological Studies,” possessing “acute minds” and “very much inclined to philosophical and scientific Studies.”<sup>37</sup>

As also mentioned, Bennett provides an overview of the events leading up to and following the first partition of Poland, the imposition of restrictive legislation by Peter Bogdanovich Passek, and the successful petition of a Jewish delegation to Catherine II to rescind his harsh decrees. The narrative now shifts from the communal to the personal: his departure to study in Copenhagen, the completion of his degree, his residency in Berlin, and his ultimate departure to London, described above.

---

<sup>34</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 211n. For more on Bennett and Clarke, see below, chapter 7. See also Simon Mayers, “Monuments to the Truth of Christianity: Anti-Judaism in the Works of Adam Clarke,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 93 (2017): 45–66.

<sup>35</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 212–214.

<sup>36</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 214.

<sup>37</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 215, 216.

Bennett closes his work with an optimistic hope for the future and a plea for virtue and humanity among the diverse communities of Western civilization: “The variety of national opinions or religious Ceremonies, can by no means prejudice the law of natural virtue and good qualities. [ . . . ] [T]he *Universe* is not framed with uniformity, [ . . . ] every part having its place, virtue and scope in the Creation.”<sup>38</sup>

In the final analysis, the Jews in their dispersion have a vital role to play in the future of humanity: “dispersion was the absolute will of God, for the progress and preservation of the seed of Abraham, with the pure principles of Divinity received from the Patriarchs; whose laws and records were a light and guide to mankind at large” and never meant as a punishment for the crucifying of Christ. The posterity of Adam changed over time but they continued “still in their true principles of the patriarchal religion, law, and manners, adapted to the Mosaical Code, and the prophetic Records.” In light of this fact, it is beyond doubt, Bennett concludes, “that mankind will arrive to a still more progressive state, and more glorious to human welfare: which is pointed out by the prophet Zephaniah, iii. ch. 9. v. ‘For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they all may call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent.’ Amen.”<sup>39</sup>

## 2.4 Christian reactions

Solomon Bennett had hoped that his first publishing venture would be widely noticed and appreciated for its learned arguments against Christian misinterpretations of Scripture and for articulating a special place for diasporic Judaism in the larger Christian culture of England and Europe. His hopes were not fully realized, and he later expressed regret that the work was not more widely reviewed. Nevertheless, several reviews were printed in the years following the publication of *The Constancy of Israel*, and one is of particular interest.<sup>40</sup> Appearing in a prestigious journal, *The Monthly Review*, it was penned by the Reverend Dr. Christo-

---

<sup>38</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 231–233.

<sup>39</sup> Bennett, *The Constancy of Israel*, 232, 234, 335.

<sup>40</sup> Other reviews of Bennett’s work include “Mr. Bennett’s Constancy of Israel,” *The Literary Panorama* (London) 7 (December 1, 1809): 460–469, perhaps written by the editor Charles Taylor; see especially 464: “We have given these extracts, partly because we would willingly provoke the sons of Israel to better things; partly because we would put on their guard those very worthy persons, who patronize endeavours to convert the Jewish people; and partly because it contributes to complete the picture of the present state and character of the Jewish nation, at large, which, as our author speaks as an eye-witness of it, we consider as the most important part of his volume, to our general purpose of giving information.” See also S. Newton, “Remarks on Mr. S. Bennett’s Translation of 110th Psalm,” *The Jewish Repository on Monthly Communications Re-*

pher Lake Moody (1753–1815), a regular contributor. Moody became active as a reviewer during the journal's second series (1790–1815), especially after the death in 1803 of its founder, Ralph Griffiths. Moody's wife, the well-known poet Elizabeth Greenly Moody (1737–1814), was also an occasional contributor to the journal. Here is a small part of Moody's reactions to Bennett's book:

A truly curious publication is here offered to us, which we are sorry that we have so long delayed to notice, and which we would not recommend to the attention of the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews; since in arguing with the race of Israel to effect their conversion, it is of the first importance to ascertain the precise ground which they occupy, and the interpretations which they give of those prophecies in the Bible which we refer to the New Dispensation. Hitherto, our commentators have not paid sufficient regard to this very material circumstance, and to such neglect perhaps is owing the little impression which they have made on the minds of Jews. The volume before us, though by no means so "unprejudiced" as the author supposes, though written in very imperfect English (which we readily excuse in a native of Poland, who has resided only a few years in this country,) and though fraught with a kind of spleen against "the Nazarene commentators" [. . .] is intitled to consideration for this particular reason, that it unveils the principles and arguments of the Jews in reference to the mission and doctrines of the Savior. Jews have preserved a kind of silence but this Polish Jew speaks his sentiments without concealment. [. . .] Notwithstanding the incorrect language in which this work is written, it ought not to be thrown by with a laugh. If this Polish Jew has developed the views of Jews in general, and their common mode of interpreting the prophecies, the addresses which Christians have hitherto offered to the race of Abraham are little adapted to the purpose, and we cannot wonder that they have failed. Mr. Bennett has taught us that our controversy with them must be differently conducted, before we can make any impression on them.<sup>41</sup>

Moody had certainly offered a respectful and even appreciative reaction to Bennett's heartfelt refutation of the standard Christian arguments against Judaism. Bennett's response, published a year later in *The New Review* as "A Defence of S. Bennett Against the Monthly Review," might appropriately have acknowledged the favorable tone of his reviewer and perhaps even reciprocated in kind. But Bennett was sharply focused instead on articulating his own position as forcefully as he could. He began by citing two other dismissive reviews that both claimed his skills as an engraver (as displayed by his self-portrait printed in the book)

---

*specting the Jews and the Proceedings of the London Society* 1 (1813): 132–137, and "The Constancy of Israel," *The Jewish Expositor and the Friend of Israel* 1 (1816): 272–276.

<sup>41</sup> "The Constancy of Israel," *The Monthly Review or the Literary Journal Enlarged* 68 (August 1812): 396–401 (article 8); quotation, 396–397. On Moody, see Benjamin Colbert, "Christopher Lake Moody," *British Travel Writing*, University of Wolverhampton (2017), <https://btw.wlv.ac.uk/authors/1004>. Moody is identified as the author of the review by Benjamin C. Nangle in *The Monthly Review Second Series, 1790–1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 45, 88. My sincere thanks to Professor Yaacob Dweck for his assistance in obtaining this information.

were far superior to his theological arguments. How was it possible to fathom his argument based on sound philology and scholarship, he contended, given such snide remarks? It was the fault of such reviewers, he claimed, that his book did not sell more copies. In turning finally to Moody's review, Bennett referred to his brief rehearsal of the standard Christian argument that the dispersion of the Jews was the result of their rejection of Jesus. Reiterating what was, as we have seen, a major theme of his entire book, Bennett vigorously rejected Moody's comment while ignoring his positive posture on Jewish exegesis and his plea for Christians to familiarize themselves with the book's point of view.<sup>42</sup> In so doing, Bennett appears to have missed an opportunity for respectful mutual exchange; but he clearly took advantage of the open playing field he had gained to express his most severe criticisms of regnant Christian attitudes toward the Jews.

## 2.5 A final thought

Writing in 1979, Harvey Meirovich, in a well-researched essay on English Ashkenazic reactions to the nineteenth-century missionaries, noticed Solomon Bennett's work and suggested that his diaspora-centered theory of Jewish history adumbrated a similar notion held by the later German Jewish reformers.<sup>43</sup> The parallel is worthy of mention, though Bennett, despite his critique of rabbinic praxis and the rabbinate itself, would hardly have considered himself a precursor of Reform Judaism. In sharp contrast to the reformers first in Germany and then in Great Britain, Bennett had no ideological stake in reforming Jewish law; he was strongly against biblical criticism and any deviation from a literalist reading of the Bible; he had no interest in rewriting and abbreviating Jewish liturgy; and he had no opinions about the aesthetics of the organ and mixed seating in the synagogue or the use of the vernacular in preaching. Contextualizing him in this way appears to me to pigeonhole him within an ideology to which he would strongly object. If anything, he was more a *maskil* than a reformer.

Meirovich was correct, however, in underscoring the centrality of this notion of diaspora in Bennett's work of Jewish polemic and advocacy. The book represents a unique blend of praise and critique of Christianity as well as of Judaism. How fascinating it appears that this author, without any contradiction in his mind, could juxtapose his admiration for English Protestant culture and politics

---

42 "Defence of Mr. S. Bennett against the Monthly Review," *New Review: Or Monthly Analysis of General Literature* 1, no. 2 (February 1813): 246–249.

43 Harvey Meirovich, "Ashkenazic Reactions to the Conversionists, 1800–1850," *Transactions and Miscellanies, Jewish Historical Society of England* 26 (1974–1978): 21, n. 3.

with his disgust for “the crows in the pulpit” and the missionaries and converts; or his devotion to the moral legacy of Abraham and Moses and its continued relevance with his disdain for rabbis and superficial and ignorant Anglo-Jews. Yet despite these ambiguities and tensions vis-à-vis both religions, he boldly articulated a vision of how Jews and their cultural legacy contribute to the world and how Christians could be spiritually enriched by including the Jewish minority in the modern body politic and civilization they were creating in Great Britain.

Intertwined with Bennett’s grand message heralding the Jewish contribution to contemporary Christian culture is the presence of a personal story, marking a critical moment in the author’s life—a transition from his former Jewish existence in eastern and central Europe to his new identity as an immigrant in England. How meaningful it was for Bennett to recall in this book the memories of his childhood in Poland and his subsequent European wanderings at the same time that he was shaping his new professional and cultural life in London.

The work also marked a different kind of transition, a gradual one, from engraver to Jewish writer and public intellectual. Bennett’s composition was a declaration that its author was more than a professional artist, that he had something to say to both Christians and Jews alike in the English language, a mixture of both criticism and praise, and that his expertise as a Jewish and biblical scholar was of great value to both communities. Ultimately, there was a direct line of argument from *The Constancy of Israel* in 1809 to the completion of Bennett’s revision of the Protestant Bible right before his death in 1838. In sum, Bennett’s first book offers the modern reader a fascinating ego-document situating a Polish Jewish immigrant in a new land of challenge and opportunity, attempting to promote himself as a learned author, establish a public image, and open a dialogue with other intellectuals like himself.

### 3 Jewish Adversaries

A significant dimension of Solomon Bennett's life and thought was the complex web of relationships he forged with Jews and Christians alike over almost four decades living in London. What makes the interpersonal feature of his life experience so intriguing is that most of these associations with fellow Jews were negative while those with Christians were generally positive. This is not to say that all his encounters with Christians were constructive or that he totally lacked Jewish friends. But it might be accurate to suggest, given his own testimony, that he felt more appreciated and respected by Christians than by Jews and that his Jewish sense of self was profoundly shaped by these personal impressions. Engaging with Christians in dialogue about their shared and diverging values uniquely enhanced rather than diminished his Jewish identity. In this chapter, I consider Bennett's Jewish adversaries; in the next, his Christian admirers.

Bennett's chief nemesis was the Ashkenazic chief rabbi of London, Solomon Hirschell, who succeeded in generating the fragile and cold relations Bennett experienced with Anglo-Jews in general.<sup>1</sup> Bennett's predicament apparently originated in Berlin, where he first encountered Hirschell's father, the chief rabbi of Berlin, and their meeting did not go well, as Bennett later revealed in a 1807 letter written to his friend David Meldola (already quoted in chapter 1, above). Bennett explains that during his sojourn in Berlin he was in close contact with the "Polaks learned in Torah." During this period, he never imagined that the chief rabbi of Berlin, Zvi Hirsch Berlin,<sup>2</sup> had a son who could hold a rabbinic position. When Bennett became involved in a dispute with several other Jews, he was obliged to appear before the Berlin rabbi but the meeting went poorly, the rabbi was haughty and frightened him, and he subsequently remained distant from him. At that time, he adds, "I saw R. Solomon at his father's home for the first time, but I

---

1 On Hirschell, see Jeremy I. Pfeffer, *"From One End of the Earth to the Other": The London Bet Din, 1805–1855, and the Jewish Convicts Transported to Australia* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), index; Raymond Apple, "Solomon Hirschel—'High Priest of the Jews,'" 2006 Rabbi LA Falk Memorial Lecture, Delivered at the Great Synagogue, Sydney, *OzTorah*, <https://oztorah.com/2010/06/solomon-hirschel-high-priest-of-the-jews/>; Hilary L. Rubinstein, "Hirschell [Hirschel, Herschell], Solomon (1762–1842)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, October 8, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13363>; and Cecil Roth, "Rabbi Solomon Hirschell and His Contemporaries," chap. 13 of *History of the Great Synagogue* (1950), available at JCR-UK, <https://www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/susser/roth/chthirteen.htm>.

2 On Berlin or Lewin, see Hilary L. Rubinstein, "Lyon, Hart [Hirsch Lewin or Loebel], (1721–1800)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 28, 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17275>.

did not exchange any word with that man.”<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, Bennett repeats his point that Hirschell’s venom against him already emerged “still from my abode at Berlin, on account of some trivial dissension befallen between me and his father Rabbi of Berlin. [. . .] [H]e [Hirschell] always squinted with a vengeful eye upon Mr. Bennett, for not paying obedience to him in his exalted station, for not bowing and kneeling before his throne among all his audiences.”<sup>4</sup>

The feud between him and Solomon Hirschell first broke out in public view some eight years after Bennett’s arrival in London. Sometime before 1807, he became entangled in a business arrangement involving the rabbi that hurt him deeply. Bennett was hired to make an engraving of a portrait of the rabbi painted by Frederick Benjamin Barlin (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2), to be published by I. Josephs and Hyam Barnett in a prayer book for the High Holy Days. The publishers did not get the painter’s permission to copy his work, and fearing a suit they reneged on their agreement to pay Bennett twenty pounds, after he had spent two months working on the engraving. Bennett appealed to the rabbi to resolve the injustice and alleviate the hardship he had experienced. Instead, the rabbi supported the publishers—and after Bennett was sued for one hundred pounds, which he could not pay, he was thrown into debtor’s prison. He was ultimately saved by some of his Christian friends. He concludes:

From that time R. Solomon was invested with the spirit of favouritism and all who cover themselves with his shadow and the shadow of his roof continue to treat me with contempt and shame in the eyes of the multitude of Duke’s Place [the rabbi’s residence]. They have locked and barred doors so that I should not come under the shadow of their roofs, expel me from the borders of Israel, and from being attached to the inheritance of Israel.<sup>5</sup>

When Bennett published his second book, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, in 1815, Hirschell noticed it and gave a copy to his rabbinic colleague Raphael Meldola, seeking a condemnation of it. Meldola didn’t know English, so he gave the book to a

---

3 Solomon Bennett to David Meldola, March 6, 1817, quoted in Richard Barnett, “Haham Meldola and Hazan de Meldola,” *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 21 (1962–1967): 15–17; quotations, 15–16.

4 Salomon Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke’s Place, Displayed, in a Series of Critical, Theological and Rabbinical Discussions, on a Hebrew Pamphlet, Entitled “Minḥat Kena’ot” (Avenge Offer)* (London: the author, 1818), 8.

5 Bennett, quoted in Barnett, “Haham Meldola and Hazan de Sola,” 16. For their prayer book, the two publishers used an engraving by William Holl of a painting of Hirschell by Joseph Slater Sr.: see frontispiece of David Levi, trans., *The Form of Prayers, for the New Year: According to the Custom of the German and Polish Jews*, rev. Isaac Levi (London: E. Justins, 5567 [1807]), available at <https://jewishmiscellanies.com/2020/03/19/machzor-for-rosh-hashana-the-form-of-prayers-for-the-new-year-according-to-the-custom-of-the-german-and-polish-jews-david-levi-1807/>.



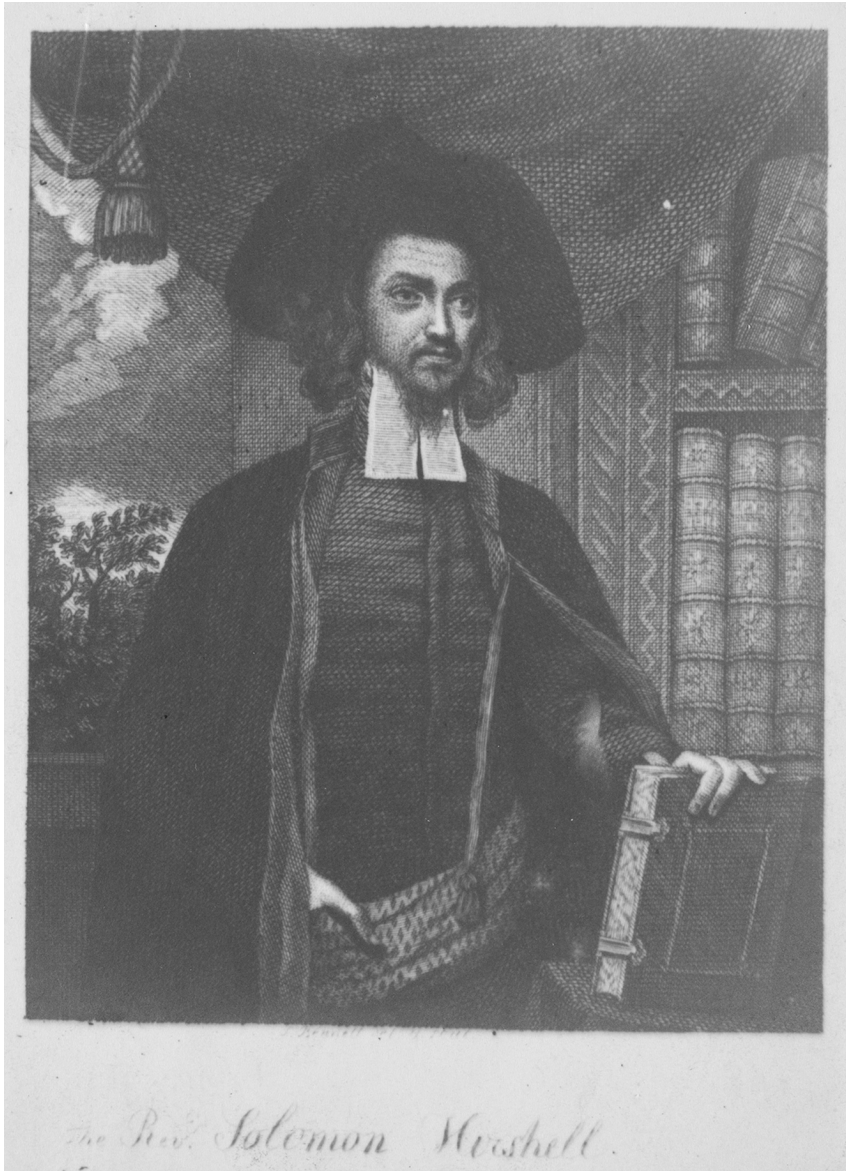
**Figure 3.1:** Rabbi Solomon Hirschell, painting by Frederick Benjamin Barlin.

Mr. Luria of his synagogue: “Mr. Luria returned it to the Rev. Meldola with surprise, asserting that Rabbi Sol. Hirschell must be either ignorant of the merits of this discourse, or that he possessed an inherent hatred and jealousy against Mr. Bennett.”<sup>6</sup> According to Luria, nothing in the book was offensive or inconsistent with Hebrew liturgy.

In the same year, Hirschell commissioned S. I. Cohen, a well-known German rabbi, to prepare a Hebrew catechism called *Shorshei Emunah* for the use of Jewish children in England. It was published in 1815 with the eloquent English translation of Joshua Ben Oven as *The Elements of the Jewish Faith for the Use of Jewish Youth of Both Sexes*. Although Cohen had previously prepared a German edition

---

<sup>6</sup> Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke’s Place*, 9.



**Figure 3.2:** Photograph of Bennett's engraving of Barlin's painting.

of this work, the version he offered Hirschell was longer and written with its English audience in mind.<sup>7</sup>

The preface and subsequent dialogue between teacher and student are relatively innocuous and unoriginal. Cohen reflects on the universality of belief in one God known through the awe of his creation. He stresses the moral nature of all religion, singling out the Noahide laws accessible to all humanity. In Cohen's view, these laws reflect three grand principles: the refinement of thought and understanding "whereby we cling to truth and avoid falsehood and deceit, which comprehends the love of intellectual purity, and the negation of the grosser corporeal speculations"; the love of creation; and "a sacred observance of the laws of nature and a repugnance to any act that shall tend to derange them." Although anyone upholding these commandments is considered a religious person, God treated the Jews with special affection by bestowing on them a special law. Nevertheless, they are instructed never to missionize and even to dissuade potential converts. This stands in contrast to the Christian missionaries now active in Great Britain, who pose a threat to the Jewish community: "It is therefore a strange thing in our eyes, that persons should be found who lay in wait for the members of the Jewish faith [ . . . ] to entice them by flattery, lures, and tempting gifts, to abandon the religion wherein they were born and educated, in order to embrace Christianity!"<sup>8</sup>

Cohen's preface ends on a more positive note, however, as it underscores the universalizing tendencies among the religions of his day:

Behold the light of truth is now illuminating all Europe; peace and brotherly love is prevailing among nations of various religious persuasions; the sword of persecution has been returned to its sheath, and those dark ages, when nations strove with nations, and made human blood flow in streams, on account of the different modes of worship, have passed away; all nations now acknowledge one universal Father; and virtues, justice, and righteousness are the only tests whereby men are estimated.<sup>9</sup>

---

7 S. I. Cohen, *Elements of the Jewish Faith* (Richmond, VA: William W. Gray, 5577 [1817]); the text is identical with that of the first edition. I have already summarized the debate over this work in David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 250–256, from which I draw in part. For previous accounts of this debate, see Arthur Barnett, "Solomon Bennett 1761–1838: Artist, Hebraist, and Controversialist," *Jewish Historical Society of England Transactions* 17 (1951–1952): 101–106; David S. Katz, *The Jews in the History of England, 1484–1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 328–329; and Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714–1830* (1979; reprint, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 142–145.

8 Cohen, *Elements of the Jewish Faith*, 5, 7–8.

9 Cohen, *Elements of the Jewish Faith*, 8.

So the author sets the tone for the rest of the catechism: an introduction to the notion of religion in general and the existence of God as creator and sustainer of all the universe. Then Judaism is presented as a particular manifestation of religion based on the thirteen principles of faith articulated by Maimonides and the Decalogue, the civic responsibilities of all Jews to honor the king, and their duty to love humanity.

Apart from its criticism of Christian missionizing, Cohen's booklet seems to be nothing more than an innocent, bland, and highly uncontroversial presentation of the Jewish faith meant for the education of Jewish youth and intended to win the approval of Christians as well. But Solomon Bennett was incensed by its publication and opted to publish a most uncomplimentary account of its author, its translator, and especially its official rabbinic sponsors—primarily Solomon Hirschell and, secondarily, the chief Sephardic rabbi of London, Raphael Meldola. In 1817, Bennett published *Tene Bikkurim* [A basket of criticism], written in Hebrew, obviously directed toward a Continental readership of rabbis and other educated Hebrew readers, and meant to embarrass the English Ashkenazic rabbi before his Continental peers. It immediately incurred the wrath of Rabbi Hirschell, who apparently sanctioned a vicious attack on Bennett's work and character in another Hebrew pamphlet titled *Minḥat Kena'ot* [An offering of jealousy/vengeance], written by a certain Meir Rintel and published in the same year. As if this wasn't sufficient, also in 1817 someone named Meir Hahn published several Hebrew letters against Bennett in a volume appearing in Hamburg called *Shot Lashon* [The whip of the tongue]. In the following year, Bennett responded to his Hebrew critics, but most prominently Rabbi Solomon Hirschell, in an English book published in London: *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place*. What had begun as a skirmish confined to readers of the Hebrew language ended as a most unflattering portrait of the London rabbi and his community broadcast to the larger reading community of English Christians and Jews.<sup>10</sup>

There is no doubt, as Arthur Barnett once argued, that the debate between Bennett and Hirschell was based on a clash of strong personalities, of two people who clearly did not like or respect each other. The more Bennett attacked, the more Hirschell counterattacked through his representatives. Bennett was especially critical of Hirschell as a deficient representative of the rabbinate—unlightened, inarticulate, and incapable of leading his assimilated Jewish community. But Bennett's attack also emerged from his own text-based understanding of

---

<sup>10</sup> Solomon Bennett, *Tene Bikkurim* (London: L. Alexander, 1817); Meir Rintel, *Minḥat Kena'ot* (London: Jechiel Hanau, 1816–1817); Meir Hahn, *Shot Lashon* (Hamburg/Altona: Samuel and Judah Bun Segal, 1817); and Bennett, *Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place*.

Judaism, and particularly what he believed was required for presenting a catechism of the Jewish faith in the English language to young students.

Bennett's intellectual critique is leveled first in his Hebrew work and repeated in the expanded English text he published a year later (see Figure 3.3). He begins by acknowledging the positive aspect of Cohen's work: "I own conscientiously, that the book, *The Elements of Faith* [ . . . ] contains a good stock of religious and moral principles suitable for the purpose intended; the Hebrew language thereof, is also plain and easy, agreeable to the taste of Jewish youth; God, that they might only practice it." But a difficulty arises, because Cohen failed to base those principles on clear and precise biblical and rabbinic sources:

He did not care whether his lessons were agreeable with the text of the Pentateuch or not; if its precepts were of the nature of a general accord with the Hebrew forms, or that of mere private and individual sentiments, if it be consistent with Scripture, with reason, and matters of fact, or only sentimental, and but matters of opinion; proper reference to some of his lessons to the original text, ought also to have been strictly observed, in a book which is adapted for youth.<sup>11</sup>

The catechism was *nimusiyyut* [general morality] but not *halacha* [Jewish law]. According to Bennett, the author had merely adapted a kind of "gentile morality from the street" and labeled it improperly the foundations of the Jewish faith.<sup>12</sup> Bennett deemed Meldola relatively innocent in this flawed endeavor, but not Cohen and Van Oven and especially not Hirschell.

Bennett then presents nine specific criticisms of Cohen's text, including his imprecise reproduction of the Noahide laws, his omission of the biblical basis for Sabbath observance, his failure to mention the biblical name of the holiday of Shevuot, his extension of the commandment to honor parents to include siblings (a "Talmudic ethic," not a biblical one), and his sloppy derivation of the festivals not from the Pentateuch but from a logical inference regarding Sabbath worship. There is clearly a consistent theme throughout: the foundation of Judaism for Bennett is the Bible. If one is to present an accurate formulation of what Jewish faith is for young people, the principles of Judaism must be directly linked with biblical proof texts. Lacking the latter, those principles represent only the opinion of educators or rabbis.<sup>13</sup>

Rintel's rebuttal focuses more on the character of Bennett, casting aspersions on his orthodoxy. He is accused of having no religion; he had deserted his family and country and he is generally a man of poor character and poor manners. Most

---

11 Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place*, 20.

12 Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place*, 20.

13 Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place*, 22–47.

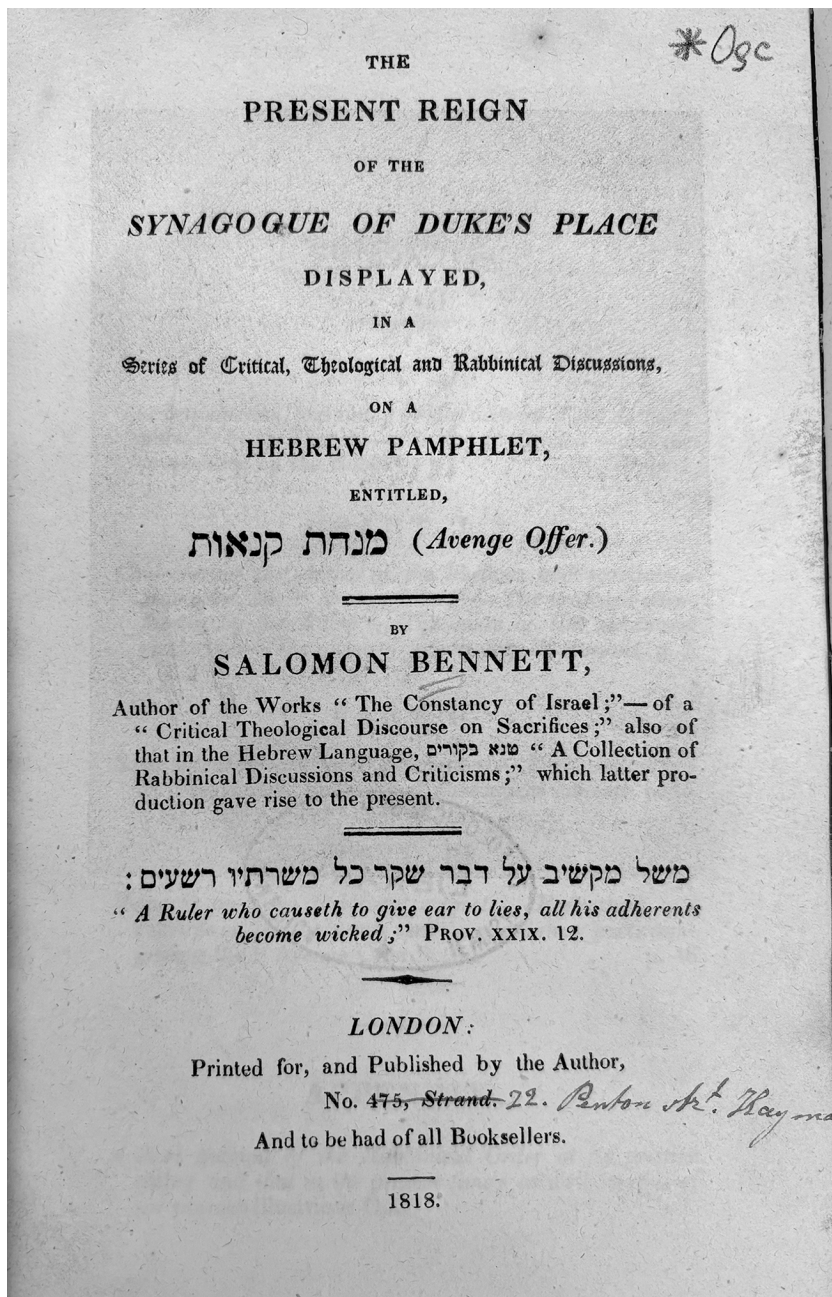


Figure 3.3: Title page of Bennett's *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place* (London, 1818).

prominent is the charge that Bennett had deserted the wife of his youth when he was twenty-five, leaving her an abandoned woman (*agunah*) without material support who in her sorrow had died only two years earlier. Bennett is further portrayed as living among gentiles (*goyim*) who do not observe the ritual commandments of Judaism (*mitsvot*).

He also carefully reviews Bennett's nine points, arguing in each case that Cohen's articulation of Jewish articles of faith is fully in line with tradition. He substantiates this view by regularly citing the Talmud and medieval codes. At one point, Rintel succinctly captures Bennett's position: "You have demonstrated how you prefer the opinion of the Karaites [a medieval Jewish sect] over the *midrashim* of the rabbis and also what the Men of the Great Assembly [the precursors of the rabbis] established." He concedes only "that some things in the prefaces to *The Elements of Faith* are of a questionable nature"; but since the prefaces were composed only after Rabbi Hirschell had inspected the text, the rabbi could not be held responsible for an indiscretion.<sup>14</sup> What he may have had in mind was the unrestrained attack on missionaries. But this concession was surely unnecessary, since Bennett never mentioned the prefaces. Elsewhere in his writing, Bennett had similarly voiced his strong opposition to the missionaries.

Hahn's collection of letters opens with a strong endorsement of Cohen and his catechism, singling out especially the remarks on missionaries and the utility of the book for Jews and Christians alike. The rest of the work is hardly of great consequence, except for an interesting short letter written by Cohen himself expressing his sense of shock and disappointment over Bennett's attack. He finds little merit in any of Bennett's specific charges and does not consider them worthy of his response. What is most intriguing is how he generally characterizes his approach in contrast to that of his opponent. For Cohen,

Most of our Torah consists of laws, testimonies, and statutes based on moral authority, especially good for Israel, given from God's love for his people in order that they will be enlightened and prosper in this world and the next. However, according to his [Bennett's] strange opinion, they are only a rod of chastisement to subdue and to sadden the hearts, saying: "Cease your activity from day to day, and if not, I will chastise you ruthlessly. Do this and that and don't ask why! And don't investigate the reason, and if not, I will blot out your memory from humanity for it is sufficient for you that this is a ruling in the *Gemarah* and codes." [ . . . ] He thus was incensed with me for mentioning the reason behind the essential commandments according to reason and morality.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Rintel, *Minhat Kena'ot*, 14, and English preface, ii.

<sup>15</sup> Hahn, *Shot Lashon*, 4–5.

Cohen's understanding of Bennett's position is generally consistent with Rintel's and with Bennett's own words. Bennett was a literalist who viewed the catechism as a precise formulation of the Jewish articles of faith. As such, each article required a strong scriptural grounding to be considered true—what Rintel called a “Karaites” position. Cohen's accusation that Bennett demanded blind obedience to the rules of the *Gemarah* and codes appears to contradict this position. But considering the totality of Bennett's writing, it would be more accurate to acknowledge that Bennett prioritized biblical over rabbinic texts. Yet, at the same time, he often consulted and cited the rabbis as well without demanding blind obedience to their rulings. His critique was directed primarily at contemporary ones holding positions of power, such as Hirschell, who lacked competency in the law and any serious exposure to general culture, but not at the classical rabbinic corpus that he studied and respected.

Bennett's criticism of Cohen's work was surely a strategy to attack Solomon Hirschell and the quality of his rabbinic supervision and leadership. But it was more than mere personal antagonism that motivated Bennett to challenge a book approved by the London rabbi. In light of his great scholarly investment in biblical exegesis, grammar, and accurate translation in his other writings, it is obvious that he also cared deeply about what Scripture said and prided himself on his Hebraic erudition to ascertain its correct reading. Being a Jewish intellectual meant defending the integrity of the biblical text and centering the latter as the cornerstone of Jewish faith. At the same time, as his opponents took pleasure in pointing out, Bennett was not an observant “rabbinical” Jew. He once declared that “love, unity, and justice are the chief points of the universe. The rest, I look upon merely as ceremonial affections, which can make no difference with mankind at large and less to a Supreme Power. In this principle I live, and in this principle I will continue.”<sup>16</sup>

Was Rintel's designation of Bennett as a kind of Karaites accurate? In his classic essay on the image of Karaites in eighteenth-century Judaism, Yosef Kaplan points to the pervasive influence of the idealization of the Karaites by the Catholic thinker Richard Simon, especially the correlation he made between Karaites and Protestants on the one hand and Catholics and rabbinic Jews on the other.<sup>17</sup> Per-

---

16 Solomon Bennett, *Nezah Yisra'el: The Constancy of Israel: An Unprejudiced Illustration of Some of the Most Important Texts of the Bible: or, A Polemical, Critical, and Theological Reply to a Public Letter, by Lord Crawford, Addressed to the Hebrew Nation* (London: W. H. Wyatt, 1809), viii–ix.

17 See Yosef Kaplan, “‘Karaites’ in Early Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam,” in *Sceptics, Millenarians, and Jews*, ed. David Katz and Jonathan Israel (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 221–229, especially 228–229.

haps Simon's insight fits in casting Bennett largely as a kind of "Protestant" Jew, affirming a universal notion of the deity while upholding a deep-seated biblicism reinforced by his textual studies and the conversations he held with his Christian associates. To him the English catechism for Jews was appropriate if it faithfully reflected positions clearly articulated in Scripture itself. As a digest of mere opinions of later rabbis loosely supported by the biblical text, it could do untold harm to innocent youth who were not proficient enough to consult the text directly. Bennett's stance, accordingly, reflected a position shared by his Protestant contemporaries, but at the same time it was meant to demarcate the Jewish principles of faith, not those of Christianity.

At the end of his *Tene Bikkurim* Bennett also included a collection of letters and notices written about or directed to Rabbi Solomon Hirschell. Two are worthy of mention, and the second is especially interesting as a kind of sequel to the episode involving the portrait of the rabbi. In the first instance, Bennett challenged the authority of several rabbis, including Rabbi Hirschell, because of their excessive leniency in the case of an affluent man from England living with a woman other than his wife. Bennett publishes several Hebrew letters on the case directed to Rabbi Hirschell and to the complaining party, Mannes Polack, in addition to an open letter to the community. Bennett claims that he was accused of mocking the family of Mannes Polack as well as speaking ill of the rabbis Akiva Eiger and Jacob ben Jacob Moses of Lissa regarding their decision to legitimize the wife and the progeny of Polack who were born in impurity. Moreover, Hirschell had also slandered Bennett in challenging the opinions of these eminent rabbis. All these charges were false, and he vigorously offers a defense of himself.

For Bennett, these rabbis were not in England and thus did not understand the matter and the shame of the family of Mannes Polack. Their judgments were based on the limited evidence they were shown and allowed to see. But the spokesman of the treasury, who had been living in Birmingham for fifty years, testified that

the father of impurity Isaac Itsik [the father of Polack's wife], may the name of the evil rot, lived with another woman of a well-known man known in Birmingham and gave birth to unkosher offspring. The unmarried woman continued to live in the house. The *parnasei ha-kehilah* [communal heads] commanded to remove the impure woman (*zonah*) but the husband refused, claiming that King David lived with the wife of Uzziah. Because of this imperfection, the community did not allow him to be one of the leaders of the congregation and to come into the community.

Thus, the conclusion is clear: "This happened here and the rabbis of London who were here never saw anything kosher in this case. And no witness who testifies outside the state [. . .] is reliable in a place where he does not adjudicate." Solo-

mon Hirschell did not agree with the decision of the rabbis to allow the offspring of Itsik to rejoin the congregation, yet he was afraid to challenge their ruling.

Bennett closes the defense of his position as follows:

Here then the house of Israel, my dear ones, and friends of value, is the essence of the matter that went out from my hand. There is no way of purifying the Mannes family. The rabbis of London found no solution and the Mannes family did not grow in Torah and in the mission of Israel but raised Christian children. The rest is known and does not have to be related. The *ḥametz* [the unleavened bread burned before Passover] does not need to be burned because it is already burnt.<sup>18</sup>

Bennett signs his declaration of 28 Sivan 1818 in London with the title “*Raḥim u-mokir rabanna* [One who loves and admires the rabbis, BT *Shabbat* 23], Yom Tov Bennett son of the late Solomon of Poland.” In this remarkable display of a non-rabbi asserting rabbinical authority, challenging the decision even of distinguished rabbinic scholars, there is a certain irony in claiming his affection and admiration for rabbis in general! We shall consider one additional display of Bennett’s challenge to rabbinic authority below.

The second case among the letters published by Bennett again involves the rabbi’s portrait printed in the prayer book, this time in a regular prayer book (*siddur*), which was published by the same men who had harmed Bennett some years earlier:

Sir, having been requested by a friend of mine (an English Gentleman), to provide him with some Hebrew books for his practice in that language, I could not think of any one more proper for that purpose than that of the annual common Hebrew prayer book, in Hebrew and in English, published under your inspection, by Barnett and Joseph (the miserable pabs of your Rabbiship). Having presented the Gentleman with the above-mentioned copy, I was at the first instance not a little embarrassed with the question suggested to me, on seeing your Portrait attached as a Frontispiece to the annual prayer book saying “Pray, Mr. Bennett, is that Rabbi the author of all these various prayers and hymns?” I replied in the absolute negative. The Gentleman pursued his investigation: “Who were then, the authors of them?” I informed him accordingly that they were composed by the men of the great synagogue, during the period of the Second Temple. I specified also to him that they are composed of parts out of the Pentateuch, of the Psalms. [ . . . ] The Gentleman, with an astonishing air, made the following bold observation: “But if this is a volume of prayers of such a high antiquity, and *ex ore prophetarum* (by the mouth of the prophets), what has a portrait of a modern rabbi to do with it? They might as well (and perhaps with more propriety) attach to it the portrait of the king of England, or that of the arch-bishop of Canterbury, as

---

<sup>18</sup> The letters appended to *Tene Bikkurim* are also catalogued separately as *Igrot* by the Jewish National Library in Jerusalem under Solomon’s Hebrew name, “Yom Tov Bennett.” They are signed by Bennett and dated 1817–1818. The quotations are all from the final letter, written in 1818.

being the protectors of Judaism, and religion in general.” This last query embarrassed me so far that I could not give him any satisfactory answer without wounding in some part, “Sir (said I), it is impossible for me to apologize for the follies, vanities, ignorance, and interest-edness of other people.” Upon which reply, the Gentleman took his Pen-knife and cut the portrait out of the prayer book and putting the same into my hand, said: “Please Mr. B. to return this to its owner.” To accomplish his desire, I take the liberty of addressing you with the sentiments entertained of common sense, with the enclosed valuable portrait of yours. S. Bennett, 475 Strand.<sup>19</sup>

Written in a mocking and ironic style, Bennett presents the rabbi with the ultimate humiliation of incurring the anger of a Christian gentleman offended by the egocentric gesture of the rabbi to “adorn” a prayer book with his own picture. Hirschell’s portrait was offensive not only to Jews but to respectable Christians as well. Indeed, it was necessary, so Bennett ultimately concluded, to publicize the rabbi’s boorishness and insensitivity in a language that enabled Christians too to take notice.

In 1818, Bennett published *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke’s Place* (see Figure 3.3), which, as noted above, transformed what had been an internal dispute among rabbis and educated Hebrew readers primarily on the Continent into a public spectacle meant for the eyes of an English reading public of Jews and Christians alike. Bennett was displaying dirty laundry in public, revealing intimate secrets about himself and his community as a way to defend himself against his adversaries and bolster his own stature among non-Jewish Englishmen. That Bennett expected this book to be read by the most distinguished of his Christian friends is suggested by his handwritten note to Lord Ellenborough (1766–1818), the Lord Chief Justice of England, found in a copy of *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke Place* located in the Cecil Roth collection at Leeds: “To the Rt. Hon. Lord Ellenborough, Presented by the author; requesting the honour of the reading and of taking the contents thereof into consideration.”<sup>20</sup>

Bennett indicates that the book is a defense against the libelous charges made by his detractors, particularly Rabbi Hirschell. But right from the start, Bennett’s bitterness ultimately extends beyond Hirschell and his minions to include Anglo-Jews in general and his snubbing by them as soon as he arrived in London. In a most revealing and intimate passage, he writes:

---

<sup>19</sup> This English letter follows the previous one addressed to Rabbi Hirschell. Like the others, it is not paginated. A similar letter was also sent to Mr. Samuel Joseph, parnas of the Duke’s Place Synagogue, requesting that the publishers not be allowed to print the prayer book with the rabbi’s portrait.

<sup>20</sup> On Lord Ellenborough, see Michael Lobban, “Law, Edward, first Baron Ellenborough (1750–1818),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, October 3, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16142>.

I was greatly deceived in my conjectures respecting my own nation; and notwithstanding the great recommendations from my brethren on the continent to those in London, in behalf of my pursuits, yet, in a short period I began to feel their characters, and the coldness towards me. Their doors became barred against me, with the answers, “Master is not at home.” “Master cannot speak to you.” Adding to which, it is a theme with their religious sentiments, if a Jew be not orthodox in the extreme, they proclaim him an infidel; on the other hand, a man may commit all depredations and immoralities, if he contributed and attended the synagogue, say they, “a good Idee Kiend.” As orthodoxy was not a favorite theme with me, particularly as a foreigner and a single man, who cannot abide by all the strictness of ceremonial laws, I was then declared a heretic; (a good pretext indeed to keep me off from their association). [ . . . ] Would I have been qualified to be a good companion to associate in their convivialities, to give an Italian, a French, or German song; would I possess that gallant politeness as to caress their ladies, and domestics, undoubtedly I might obtain their friendship; but alas! I was never educated to such fineries; and the ambition with which I was unfortunately charged in the course of my pursuits, could never allow me such debasements and meanness. An inherent hatred was then entertained against my person, and on which score I never have met with any cordiality from my brethren.<sup>21</sup>

Bennett proceeds to relate how his Christian associates, in contrast, treated him with kindness and respect though he was continually hindered by “that proud pontiff, Sol. Hirschell; prosecutions, and plans were formed by those who cringe under his government, to obstruct all intercourse among my nation, which might contribute to my temporal existence.” After Bennett published his *Tene Bikkurim*, “he [Hirschell] became enraged like a tiger,” attempting to defame Bennett’s character and censor and excommunicate him. Despite Hirschell’s continual efforts to harm him, Bennett remains defiant and still claims the right to criticize the rabbi’s learning and leadership when doing so is appropriate:

Any individual has the right to inquire into the learning of others, especially the rabbi. I claim the right. [ . . . ] I was brought up and educated among Rabbies, and literary men of my nation (Israel). I was always and am still a *rahim umokir rabanna* [the phrase he had used before,] [ . . . ] honourer of learned men of every description. At the second station of my career, I received also education and emoluments from different Academies and Christian colleges in different nations of Europe. Conscience induces me to own that the literary emoluments which I received in the colleges were in a great measure an enhancement to my Hebrew, and literary knowledge. (O! would to God, that our modern Rabbies were better acquainted with languages, the diversity of sciences, and literary forms, and no doubt that they might be of more advantage and add more honour to the house of Israel than in their present state.) I have now been a resident in this metropolis above seventeen years; the name of my nation was always an honour to me; our Hebrew liturgy was always my delight, the amusements of my vacant times, my comforts in times of adversity; all which, is far more open to the knowledge of my Christian gentlemen friends in this metropolis, than to

---

21 Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke’s Place*, 4–5.

my own brethren; it is to them, [Christians] being of more candour, and impartiality in my case, that I shall call for testimony in behalf of my character.<sup>22</sup>

Here then is a confident Jewish intellectual, claiming his accreditation as a scholar from the Christian world of learning and not from the *yeshivah*, and pitting his authority against that of the London rabbi and of other rabbis who are as ill-equipped for leadership of the Jewish congregations they serve.

Bennett then rehearses many of the same arguments he had voiced in his Hebrew tome against Solomon Cohen's catechism. He also defends himself against accusations related to his two English publications. He is especially sensitive to the personal slander voiced against him regarding the level of his religious observance and boldly offers a scathing response to his adversaries:

It is not worth my while to apologize for the mentioned accusations, vomited by that malevolent scribbler against me; my thoughts are open before the Omniscient, and my actions before a respectable public who are better acquainted with my conduct, than those miserable spongers, the Rabbies of Duke's place, who scarcely know me in person; all that they say about me, is but by hearsay, and fictitious. But I shall not scruple to retort the mentioned accusations to the bulk of the Rabbi's adherents, the followers of his standard. And, as it is neither a mystery, nor an individual concomitance, so I hope that my brethren will not find themselves offended with my observation.<sup>23</sup>

Bennett had earlier castigated his Jewish co-religionists for their lack of hospitality and kindness to him. But it is their basic lack of commitment to Jewish practice that galls him and that the rabbi completely ignores and tolerates:

Why is he so scrutinous of the supposed conduct of one individual, and yet to be so indifferent to the bulk of his Synagogue the followers of his standard? Seeing that the Royal Exchange, the Stock Exchange, and the Coffee-houses adjoining are all filled with Jew merchants, transacting business on the Sabbaths and the holy day quite public, without being confused before the Christian world, the adversaries to Judaism. [. . .] I have often seen myself, Jewish Picture dealers of pretended piety, furniture and cloth-sellers, attend public sales on the Sabbath day, all without blushing before the Christian community.<sup>24</sup>

Their religion, their literature, and "everything essential to the house of Israel" are all in a state of degeneracy, degrading the name of God publicly. And throughout, the rabbi never rebukes but shuts his eyes to the sins of his congregation. Bennett, of course, acknowledges the challenges of earning a living and "find[s] myself under that predicament, like the most part of my brethren," so he cannot

---

<sup>22</sup> Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke Place*, 6, 16–17.

<sup>23</sup> Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke Place*, 55.

<sup>24</sup> Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke Place*, 55–56.

fault the laypersons for their economic challenges and limitations. Yet he cannot excuse “most of the rabbis [who] live on lucrative income without labor; they cringe before the rich, while tyrannizing over the lesser class of their numerous adherents.”<sup>25</sup>

Before closing his sensational portrait of Anglo-Jewry and its corrupt rabbinic leadership, Bennett discloses the salient facts about how Hirschell obtained his rabbinical post through the urging of his father and through the agency of the most affluent lay leadership. In this extraordinary critique of his rabbinic detractors and the chief “Jewish pontiff” Hirschell, Bennett offered the Christian world a bold defense of his fragile position within his newly adopted community as well as a withering attack on the superficiality and depravity of rabbinic and lay leadership alike. No doubt, in his emotional public outburst to defend his good name among English Christians, he had soiled the image of his Jewish community and reinforced for many the existing stereotype of the latter.<sup>26</sup>

In the years following the publication of his exposé on Hirschell and London Jewry, the tension between Bennett and the rabbi seems to have abated. In 1824, when Bennett published his commentary on the Temple of Ezekiel, Rabbis Hirschell and Meldola were both listed as subscribers, clearly indicating their endorsement of Bennett’s work. Bennett explicitly mentions his reconciliation with his archenemy in a pamphlet that he published in 1825 and that was only recently discovered:

Eight years ago, I entertained the literary public with two Pamphlets, the one entitled *Tene Bikkurim* i.e. A Collection of Theological and Rabbinic Literary Enquiries; and the other, *The Present Reign of Duke’s Place Synagogue*, comprising the same enquiries, in addition of other political and moral enquiries of our present much learned Reverend Dr. Solomon Hirschel, Grand Rabbi of Duke’s Place Synagogue; the first was published in the Rabbinical style of the Hebrew language, for the inspection of the Continental Rabbies, but the second was published in the English language, calculated merely for the English reader.

The animosity of our venerable Rabbi against my person, was carried on for many years; however, time brought about that by the mediation of some friends, a reconciliation between me and the Rabbi took place; I used to visit him, and always did pay him his due respect; he in return did treat me friendly. I have often received from him very polite Hebrew letters; in short when I flattered myself with the idea of having him for the head, I found that I have him not so much as for the tail; the ambition, and the hatred with which he was charged against me, evidently was ingrafted in his heart, and was lurking only for a

---

<sup>25</sup> Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke Place*, 57.

<sup>26</sup> Bennett’s biting criticism of the London rabbinate and the Anglo-Jewish upper and middle classes surely reflects his own personal experience. Nevertheless, it is also substantiated by other sources that testify to the London community’s superficiality, materiality, and cultural assimilation. See especially Endelman’s comprehensive account in *The Jews of Georgian England*, chap. 4.

vent to break out; and like the vomiting of the Etna, for an innocent action of mine, but not agreeable with his sovereign authority and pride, our virtuous Rabbi broke out his fury, and did send his sovereign *Mandate*, to call my name out publicly in the Synagogues, *and to excommunicate four families* from all the rights of the Synagogue. As very few are acquainted with the particulars of the *heinous transgression* I have committed, I therefore thought proper to present to the public the particulars thereof, that the judicious reader may judge for himself of the virtues of our *High Priest* (as called vulgarly).<sup>27</sup>

The incident that unleashed the old animosity between Hirschell and Bennett after a hiatus and seeming reconciliation of eight years was an irregular marriage ceremony conducted by Bennett and a colleague after the union of the couple had been deemed illegal by both chief rabbis of London, Hirschell and Meldola. Aaron, the son of Barukh and a Cohen, had turned to Hirschell to marry Rachel, the daughter of “Abraham our father,” whose father was Jacob Harris and whose mother was a non-Jewish woman. Although the prospective bride had converted, the bridegroom was of priestly descent, and therefore Rabbi Hirschell refused to sanction the marriage. Hirschell soon discovered that Bennett had performed the ceremony “not solemnized in accordance with the Law of Moses and of Israel.” In the Minute Book of the Great Synagogue is the following entry for August 3, 1825:

“27th July, 1825. To the worthy Pious and Respectable, the Elders, and other members of the Great Synagogue. [ . . . ] Whereas it cannot but be known unto that a certain person designated by the name of Solomon Bennet, an Engraver, together with a coadjutor called Rabb. Jacob Michalki [ . . . ] have joined themselves in an unlawful act, wherein the said S. Bennet has presumed to take upon himself the authority of officiating as Priest at a ceremony of marriage, of which he determined the ordinance, and signed as witness in conjunction with the said Rabbi Jacob, as appears from their joint signatures on the contract; and whereas the same S. Bennet, did after certain inquiries being made respecting such a proceeding cause to be presented before me a Document defending that measure upon reasons which he has fancied correct and legal, and to which he has affixed his signature. Now be it known unto you that both the learned and Reverend Meldola, Chief Rabbi of the Portuguese Congregation, and the *Beit Din* as well as myself have duly examined, and find that the same is founded on a miscomprehended or perverted explanation of the law as laid down by the Rambam, the words of which are decidedly contrary to the sense upon which the said marriage was allowed and celebrated, and that such proceedings had the appearance of an intention to gloss over the law by misrepresentation of its meaning, we have therefore thought it necessary to send herewith a copy of the said Document [ . . . ] in order to prevent

---

<sup>27</sup> Solomon Bennett, *An Appeal to the Judicious and Candid Class of the Hebrew Congregation* (1816), a four-page pamphlet signed by him and three others justifying his officiating at a wedding between a Kohen (a person born into a priestly family) and a convert's daughter, generally forbidden by Jewish law. A copy of this rare document can be found in the vast papers of the Baroness Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee (with her annotations) in the National Archives, Richmond, United Kingdom, TS 11/276/999/4. The quotation is from the first page.

the propagation of the sin contracted by a Kohen wedding with a female contrary to the regulations of purity made and provided for such cases by our venerable Rabbies as founded on the sacred law.

We therefore think it highly requisite that a publication should be made in every Synagogue respecting this circumstance, [. . .] and we do not question but that the religious feeling and good sense that prevails among the leaders of Israel will accord with this measure, and thereby present in future any illegal and unauthorized procedure of this kind and put a stop to the presumption of unlettered and unordained persons ever attempting to act in so sacred a matter as this[.]<sup>28</sup>

A similar proclamation, which need not be reproduced here, can be found in the minutes of the *Mahamad* of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue. What is entirely novel is Bennett's response and justification of his act in his pamphlet *An Appeal to the Judicious and Candid Class of the Hebrew Congregation* (1816)—evidently a different document than the one mentioned in the minutes above that contained a defense based allegedly on the arguments of Maimonides. To the best of my knowledge, only one copy of the pamphlet, which apparently circulated among the members of the Ashkenazic synagogue, is extant. I discovered the printed text in the personal archive of Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee, one of Bennett's employers and Christian associates, with a few of her own annotations. Bennett had obviously given her a personal copy, which she preserved.<sup>29</sup>

Bennett opens this work with the background of his relationship with Rabbi Hirschell, quoted above. Then he turns to the case at hand with some relevant information that the minutes of the two synagogues omitted:

A gentleman, by the name of Mr. Harris, of our Israelitish community, a man who bears a good character, having, in his primitive state of life, married a young woman who had become a proselyte to Judaism, (agreeable to our ritual laws, which has been performed, as testified from abroad) with whom he had a daughter previous to his marriage, but who became a proselyte with her mother, in her infant state, between two and three years old, and since her nativity, she has been under the care of her parents. I have also to notice, that Mr. Harris did marry his proselytish lady in the Synagogue of Duke's Place, with the then sanction of our present Rabbi, Solomon Hirschel.<sup>30</sup>

The daughter grew up and fell in love with a man named Aaron Cohen. The father Harris turned to Rabbi Hirschell to approve their union but he refused, arguing (on the basis of Numbers 31:18) that Jewish law prohibits the marriage of a Jew of priestly heritage and a proselyte. Bennett immediately challenged this rul-

---

<sup>28</sup> The text is quoted in Barnett, "Solomon Bennett," 107; see also Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, 144–145.

<sup>29</sup> Lee and her relationship with Bennett are discussed at length in chapter 5, below.

<sup>30</sup> Bennett, *An Appeal to the Judicious and Candid Class of the Hebrew Congregation*, 1.

ing, citing the Babylonian Talmud tractate *Yevamot*, where the rabbis infer that a child under the age of three is permitted to marry a priest.<sup>31</sup> Despite repeated approaches to the rabbi, Hirschell denied the parent his request. The courtship was unbreakable, Bennett adds, and the relationship continued for two years longer.

Bennett observed that separating the loving couple was impossible and the law, in his estimation, could have been bent. The rabbis could always find a means to allow the marriage, if there had been an adequate “stimulus”—that is, a bribe. Harris turned to Bennett for his opinion on the law, which Bennett believed was flexible enough to allow marriage. At the same time, Harris did not think a grant to the rabbi (“which opens the eyes of many learned men”) was appropriate. Bennett thought himself eminently qualified to present all the rabbinic texts in favor of the union but felt that doing so would not change the minds of the rabbi and his admirers. But two essential points are worthy of mention: the young woman was under the age of three when she became a proselyte, and she was raised all her life as a *bat Yisrael* [a daughter of Israel] by her Jewish father. Mr. Harris then asked Bennett to officiate at the wedding. Believing that the couple would continue to live together and their offspring would be considered illegitimate, Bennett agreed to perform the wedding according to the law of Israel. Hirschell was incensed, especially when he saw that Bennett was involved, and “without any enquiry after the parties concerned in it,” he drew up his *Mandate* to be issued in the Synagogues of London on different Sabbath days, excommunicating Aaron Cohen and his offspring, as well as Bennett and his co-officiant Jacob until they confessed to their offense against rabbinical authority.<sup>32</sup>

Bennett excoriated the rabbi for the severity of his judgment against Aaron Cohen and his family but took especial umbrage at Hirschell’s action against him. He declares his innocence

particularly, as my name and character (thanks to heaven) stands good, and if not among my Jewish brethren, yet it stands good with many literary gentlemen of the Christian community, from whose candour and bounty alone depends on the temporal existence of me and my family. Have I not a right to exclaim that such a *kruz/Mandate*, was calculated by our virtuous Rabbi, merely to defame my name among my nation, as not to receive any emolument from my brethren?

---

<sup>31</sup> I am not sure which text in *Yevamot* Bennett is citing; but compare BT *Kiddushin* 78a, the view of Shimon Bar Yochai: “It was taught, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said, ‘A woman who converted aged less than three years and a day is eligible to marry a *kohen*, as it is said [in the context of a battle against the Midianites], “kill every boy and every woman that has known man by lying with him,] but all the young women, who have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves” (Num. 31:17–18). And wasn’t Pinḥas [a *kohen*] among them?”

<sup>32</sup> Bennett, *An Appeal to the Judicious and Candid Class of the Hebrew Congregation*, 1–2.

He offers further examples of how others before him—such as Rev. Mr. Lyon of Cambridge and one Rabbi Nissan—performed “illegal” marriages but were never threatened with excommunication. Nor has the rabbi excommunicated his congregants married to non-Jews, or those who prefer “Westphalian ham to the beef of England,” or those who profane the Sabbath and festivals or who break the Ten Commandments. Instead, “they are indulged by our rabbi to keep offices and sacred functions in the Synagogues. [. . .] In short, our virtuous rabbi keeps a strict watch over the poor class of his adherents, but entirely shuts his eyes from the rich class of the Jews, who are the essence of his wealth, and the support of his vain dignity.” The rabbi threatens to leave his post over the impiety of his congregants, Bennett adds, but never will leave, since “he knows the value of the golden idols more than those of respectable and literary men[.]”<sup>33</sup>

Bennett also points out the wealth accumulated by the rabbi from his supporters,

which he possesses in the Bank of England, in the stocks, and in annuities—the splendid set of silver plate, and other effects, of the value of above three thousand pounds sterling! [. . .] What good, what improvements did our Rabbi introduce among his congregation. [. . .] What are his literary productions which he published, the religious disputes, and Rabbinical works, as to give lessons for the improvement of mankind, as to make him so rich and so populous?

He is rewarded for his silence and for ignoring the rich people who commit transgressions while punishing Bennett for an inoffensive act that touched his rabbinical pride and dignity. And with further sarcasm Bennett adds: “Oh what a sound it gave among my Jewish brethren—‘The rappi tit seclude Mr. Bennett from the Synacocks!!!,’” mocking the accented English of his fellow Jews.<sup>34</sup>

Bennett closes his aggressive assault on Rabbi Hirschell with gibes at his unsuccessful attempts to excommunicate him for his Hebrew book against the rabbi, as both Rabbi Meldola and the rabbis of Paris strongly denied Hirschell’s request to do so when approached. But despite his previous friendship with Meldola, Bennett is hurt by the latter’s participation in this present affair to punish him. He explains that this was probably the result of the recent tension between the two arising from the rabbi’s failure to pay Bennett for translating and editing his work, *The Thirteen Creeds*. Bennett finally assures Rabbi Hirschell that he will never make any confession of guilt; his livelihood is intact because he does not rely on other Jews to support him. He hopes that the matter will finally

---

33 Bennett, *An Appeal to the Judicious and Candid Class of the Hebrew Congregation*, 3.

34 Bennett, *An Appeal to the Judicious and Candid Class of the Hebrew Congregation*, 3–4.

be decided in a public court of justice—and as his annual grand sermon in the synagogue is soon approaching, the rabbi will have ample material upon which to preach on this matter “to give a good entertainment for his audience at large.” The document is signed by Solomon Bennett, Jacob Harris, Aaron Cohen, and Mr. Jacobs.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Bennett, *An Appeal to the Judicious and Candid Class of the Hebrew Congregation*, 4.

## 4 Christian Admirers

In sharp contrast to the hostility he encountered among Jews was Bennett's reception among Christians: "Notwithstanding the abhorrence of my brethren, yet I have always found in my distressed state some friends of the English Gentlemen, who were divested of religious and national prejudices; and with an eye of humanity and feeling were always ready to encourage me with their good recommendations in those branches of my occupations, to procure me a livelihood."<sup>1</sup> It was not only individual Christians Bennett admired but their culture and society that he discovered in London: "though varied sometimes in opinions, yet they are more nearly related in the sacred principles with us, than the other nations; but moreover, a glorious nation in whose light my brethren are enlightened; and in their shadow constantly refreshed[.]" He further expresses the

unbounded veneration I feel for our present Nazarenes with regard to their extensive capacities, active in all branches of human knowledge, particularly in the Arts and Sciences, and whose examples had made a strong impression on my mind; from my infancy I was constantly their admirer, and very much exerted myself to be their imitator: adding the benefit and liberal instructions I received in my travels abroad, but particularly here in London, from several Professors, Doctors, and Artists in the many branches of human Literature and Arts, in which noble pursuit I hope to live and die.<sup>2</sup>

He was particularly taken by the reception of *The Constancy of Israel*, his first book, as we have already noticed: "and although it [the publication of the book] did not affect my nation, in whose behalf of religion and liturgy it was calculated, yet it has had its good effect among many literary characters in this metropolis, which attracted their attention, and became my friends till the present day." Finally, he adds: "I have met with friends in trade, who supply me with work in my profession. I was honoured with some literary friends of the first rank and amiable characters in this metropolis." And at the same time, he was hindered by "that proud pontiff, [Rabbi] Sol. Hirschell, [. . .] to obstruct all intercourse among my nation, which might contribute to my temporal existence."<sup>3</sup>

Here then was a Jew with many intellectual and artistic talents rebuffed by the elites of his own community but embraced by an impressive number of pow-

---

1 Solomon Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place, Displayed, in a Series of Critical, Theological and Rabbinical Discussions, on a Hebrew Pamphlet, Entitled "Minhat Kena'ot" (Avenge Offer)* (London: the author, 1818), 5.

2 Solomon Bennett, *Nezah Yisra'el: The Constancy of Israel* (London: W. H. Wyatt, 1809), iv–v. I have quoted part of this strong statement earlier, in chapter 2.

3 Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place*, 5–6.

erful cultural and political figures from all corners of London's Christian community. Besides Bennett's testimony, we possess additional sources that reveal how wide and deep Bennett's Christian engagements were. There are of course a significant number of citations of his contemporaries in his writing, sometimes referring to them as his acquaintances or friends. There are the less frequent mentions of Bennett and his works in contemporary Christian writing. Lists of his patrons open each of his publications. There are his known engravings commissioned in London by various Christian donors. And most notably, Solomon Bennett is the subject of thirty-seven extant letters in the archives of the Royal Literary Fund requesting financial support for him and his family between 1824 and 1840, apparently from the time Bennett was unable to continue his work as an engraver. The letters represent both requests from individuals on behalf of Bennett and responses from the secretary of the society to those requests, as well as petitions and thank-you notes from Bennett himself when asking for or receiving a contribution from the fund.<sup>4</sup>

The individuals who wrote in support of Bennett were certainly among the elite cultural figures of London. I will first mention the three most prominent figures documented in the petitions to the Royal Literary Fund who genuinely stepped forward to support Solomon Bennett and his family: William Frend (1757–1841), a Unitarian reformer and close associate of Joseph Priestly;<sup>5</sup> James Christie the Younger (1773–1831), an English antiquarian, auctioneer, and the eldest son of James Christie, founder of Christie's auction house;<sup>6</sup> and Thomas Pettigrew (1791–1865), surgeon, librarian of the Duke of Sussex, and distinguished Egyptologist.<sup>7</sup>

---

4 British Library, London, Western Manuscripts: Loan 96 RLF 1/526. Applications to the Royal Literary Fund by Mr. Solomon Bennett and Mrs. Elizabeth Bennett, his widow: Oct. 5, 1824 (£30); Dec. 19, 1826 (£20); Apr. 9, 1828 (£10); Mar. 20, 1829 (-); Dec. 1, 1829 (£10); Oct. 25, 1830 (deferred); Dec. 3, 1830 (£10); Jan. 2, 1832 (-); Feb. 3, 1832 (£10); Dec. 30, 1832 (-); Jan. 1, 1833 (£10); Feb. 1, 1834 (-); Mar. 2, 1835 (-); Nov. 27, 1837 (£10); Dec. 12, 1838 (-); Jan. 5, 1839 (£20—to Elizabeth Bennett); Feb. 4, 1840 (Elizabeth Bennett; rejected).

5 On Frend, see Nicholas Roe, "Frend, William (1757–1841)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, June 8, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10169>; Frida Knight, *University Rebel: The Life of William Frend (1757–1841)* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1971).

6 On Christie, see H. R. Tedder, revised by Francis Russell, "Christie, James (1773–1831)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5363>; Frank Hermann, "Christie, James (1730–1803)," *Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5362>.

7 On Pettigrew, see Gabriel Moshenska, "Thomas 'Mummy' Pettigrew and the Study of Egypt in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain," in *History of Egyptology: Interdisciplinary Measures*, ed. William Carruthers (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 201–214; Gabriel Moshenska, "Selected Correspondence from the Papers of Thomas Pettigrew (1791–1865), Surgeon and Antiquary," *Journal of*

William Frend (see Figure 4.1) was a highly talented student at Christ's College, Cambridge, who was ordained in the priesthood of the Church of England in 1783. Four years later he left the church and, under the influence of a group of Cambridge dissenters, he declared himself a Unitarian. Frend was especially interested in the study of the Hebrew language and worked on a new translation of the Old Testament with his Unitarian colleagues and friends Theophilus Lindsey and Joseph Priestly. Frend's pamphlet *Peace and Union Recommended to the Associated Bodies of Republicans and Anti-Republicans*, written during the heat of controversy engendered by the French Revolution and published in 1793, led to his trial by university authorities, who banished him from Cambridge and forced him to relocate to London in the following year. He soon became prominent among the intellectual leaders of the reformist London Corresponding Society and one of the leading radicals of his day. His close friends included Charles Lamb, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, George Dyer, and William Blake.

Frend first mentioned Bennett in a letter of October 1824 to the officers of the Royal Literary Fund, requesting financial support for his Jewish associate, who was then in dire economic circumstances:

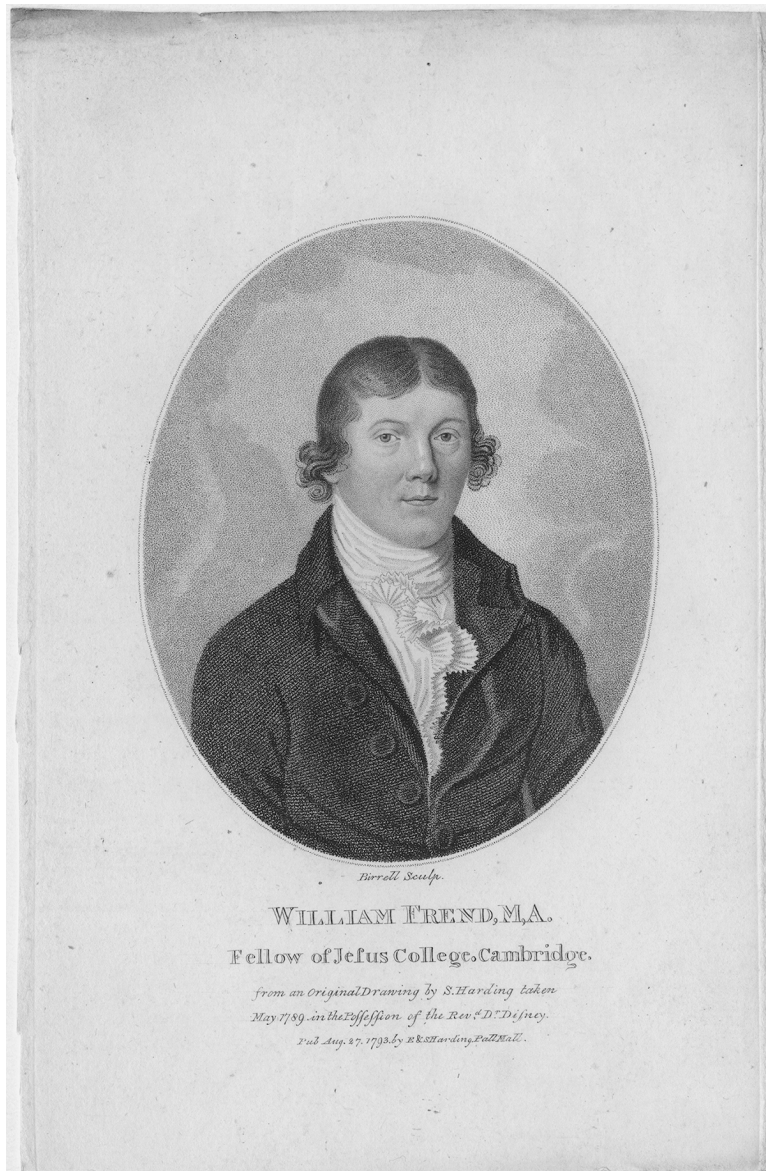
Mr. Frend begs leave to recommend to the notice of the literary fund the case of Mr. Solomon Bennett, author of a very ingenious work entitled the Temple of Ezekiel, of which he has given in two plates the ground plan of the elevation. He is one of the most learned Jews in this country but from a family and wife of four children, decreasing business, and attachment to literature is at present in considerable distress. A donation of twenty or thirty pounds would extricate him from his difficulties and the money could not in strict conformity to the rules of the Institution be better employed.<sup>8</sup>

Frend also sent another letter to the Fund's secretary, Joseph Snow, with a similar request, also mentioning that he had sent him two of Bennett's publications. Within a short time, the officers responded favorably to Frend's petition, and Bennett wrote on November 14, 1824, to thank them profusely:

---

*Open Archaeology Data* 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.5334/4f913ca0cbb89>; Gabriel Moshenska, "The Finest Theological Library in the World: The Rise and Fall of the Bibliotheca Sussexiana," in *Book Collecting in Ireland and Britain, 1650–1850*, ed. Elizabethanne Boren (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2018), 168–187; Andrew Lister, "The Duke of Sussex and T. J. Pettigrew's *Bibliotheca Sussexiana*," *Antiquarian Book Monthly Review* 14 (1987): 58–65; and John Symons, "Pettigrew, Thomas Joseph (1791–1865)," September 24, 2004, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22063>.

<sup>8</sup> Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, British Library, London, London, Western Manuscripts, Loan 96 RLF 1/526: 3.



**Figure 4.1:** William Frend, Unitarian clergyman.

Gentlemen! Of the Committee of the Literary Fund Society. I am to acknowledge in the most thankful manner your kindness in presenting to me through my worthy friend Wm. Frend Esq. the sum of thirty pounds as an assistance. Surely it will stimulate my literary pursuits

for the future *vehaba letaher mesayyin lo*, he that wishes to perfectionate himself finds always assistance (as the Rabbinic saying), and which kindness I cannot refrain from stating my sincere thanks; with true respect, I remain, Gentlemen your most obedient and humble sir, SBennett, 14 Panton St., Haymarket.<sup>9</sup>

Frend sent similar letters on behalf of Bennett at least twice more in 1834 and 1835.<sup>10</sup>

On the basis of these brief letters alone, it is hard to assess the nature of Frend's personal relationship with Bennett. Bennett did dedicate his book *The Molten Sea* (1821) to Frend, certainly a significant gesture. In addition, we might speculate about one reference in a letter written by Frend. The distinguished cleric's deep commitment to the study of Hebrew is well-known, but how he initially acquired his learning is less clear. Frend had seven children; the oldest daughter was Sophia Elizabeth De Morgan, who wrote *Threescore Years and Ten: Reminiscences of the Late Sophia Elizabeth De Morgan* (1895), edited by her daughter Mary. Mary offers the following introduction to a rather obscure letter written in 1830 by her grandfather, which she confesses not to fully understand: "The following letter from William Frend to Lady Noel Byron expresses his interest in the Hebrew language and religion. What the enclosure referred to was I have been unable to ascertain, but it must have reference to a supposed outbreak of incendiarism by Polish Jews." And here is the beginning of the letter:

My dear Lady Byron,

The enclosed confirms my opinion. Many books that you see in Hebrew characters are not written in the Hebrew language, but in that of the country where they were printed—German, Polish, Turkish, etc. A parchment found on the down of Cumberland once puzzled the learned, and after all it turned out to be merely a magic square, probably written by a Jew pedlar for his amusement. I do not blame, however, in these times of apprehensions of the turnpike people, but you may be sure of this, that, of all people in the world, the Jews are the least likely to be concerned with our conflagrations. My interpreter is a very learned Jew and if it falls in your way to recommend a Hebrew teacher to anyone, I beg you to remember him. I look upon it as a very great advantage of my early life that I came to town in one summer vacation on purpose to learn Hebrew. This led me to an acquaintance with the *nation*. I have dined in its booths on the Feast of Tabernacles, have several times taken the Pascal Supper—which, by the way, explains the New Testament better than all the commentary on the Lord's Supper—have spent hours upon hours in the synagogue on the days of the great atonement, have heard the Hosannahs repeatedly there; and the fruit of all this is that I think I see rather more clearly into the meaning of the prophet Ezekiel, chap. xxxvii., and of Rev. xv. 3 and xxi. 12 than the generality of my countrymen; and though the madness of the people should render England a scene of desolation, yet my last words will, I hope, be

<sup>9</sup> Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 7.

<sup>10</sup> Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 28, 30.

like those of Habakkuk iii. 17 ["Though the fig tree does not bud, and no yield is on the vine; [ . . . ] Yet I will rejoice in the Lord"; Hab. 3:17–18].<sup>11</sup>

Was Frennd referring to Bennett as his learned interpreter, his teacher? It is impossible to know for sure.

James Christie, in addition to his primary occupation as auctioneer, was also a scholar of sorts, publishing on chess, Etruscan vase painting, and the ancient worship of the elements. His business acumen did not quite equal that of his father, but under his leadership Christie's remained quite successful. He was also fascinated by poetical and biblical studies. His connection to Bennett was much more superficial than that of Frennd (and as we shall soon see, of Pettigrew as well) and emerged exclusively from his active involvement in the Royal Literary Fund as its registrar for several years. In January 1827, he wrote the following letter to Mr. Snow:

Dear Mr. Snow, I have inquired into the case of Solomon Bennett and have visited him in the White Cross St. Prison where I gave him the twenty pounds noted to him by the Literary Fund Committee. I have requested him to transmit his acknowledgments for the same to the society's chambers. [ . . . ] He Is Considered a Man of Much Learning among Those of His Own Nation but of an Unfortunate Temper by Which He Has Disobliged His Best Friends, and among them here Dr. Hirschell whom he attacked with illiteracy and acrimony. [ . . . ] He Therefore Seems to Have Cut Himself off from the Possibility of Receiving Pecuniary Relief from the Wealthy of His Own People. His most valuable friend, I believe, was the late Lord Stanhope who seemed to have contributed to his larger work and probably to the good style and the introductory parts of it. His sole employer and his proper profession is as a seal engraver[ , which, . . . ] it seems, could furnish him with full employment were his talent for engraving in that line equal to his knowledge of Hebrew literature. He may yet gain a livelihood as a teacher of that language or as an engraver[.]<sup>12</sup>

Christie adds two interesting bits of information: Bennett's confinement to a debtor's prison and the dire straits into which he had fallen only a few years after his initial gift from the Fund, and his alleged relationship with Charles Stanhope—apparently the third Earl Stanhope (1753–1816), since Christie mentions he had recently died. Stanhope, a colorful figure in politics with interests in science as well, was clearly connected with Protestant dissenters. But it is difficult to tie him to Bennett, Hebrew, or biblical interests. This is the only men-

---

<sup>11</sup> William Frennd, letter quoted in Sophia Elizabeth De Morgan, *Threescore Years and Ten: Reminiscences of the Late Sophia Elizabeth De Morgan*, ed. Mary A. De Morgan (London: R. Bentley, 1895), 59–62n.

<sup>12</sup> Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 13.

tion of his support of Bennett, and even of his possible editorial intervention in *The Constancy of Israel*.<sup>13</sup>

Thomas Pettigrew (see Figure 4.2) was perhaps the most interesting of the three supporters of Bennett, certainly because of his complementary interests in Hebrew and biblical studies, but also because of his intimate relationship with Augustus Frederick (1773–1843), the Duke of Sussex, as we shall explore. Pettigrew, who excelled in medicine and surgery, was appointed personal physician to Prince Edward (1767–1820), Duke of Kent and Strathearnthe, and even won acclaim for vaccinating Princess Victoria, his daughter. After an introduction by Edward to his brother, the Duke of Sussex, Pettigrew was soon appointed the latter's physician as well. Following a visit to the duke's vast personal library during which he offered suggestions on its reorganization, he was invited to become the duke's librarian and was primarily responsible for the supervision and expansion of this collection of some fifty thousand volumes, most famous for its vast holdings of Bibles in many languages. Under the duke's influence, Pettigrew also became a Freemason. In addition to his medical writings, Pettigrew became a distinguished Egyptologist, publishing his most famous work, *History of Egyptian Mummies*, in 1834. Pettigrew was also responsible for a scholarly catalogue of the duke's library, *Bibliotheca Sussexiana*, published in two parts in 1827, containing the religious manuscripts and printed editions of the Bible. A second volume appeared twelve years later after a falling-out between the duke and his librarian, which considerably curtailed this ambitious publication.

On April 29, 1828, Pettigrew wrote to the custodians of the Royal Literary Fund:

Gentlemen, I try to recommend to your notice Mr. Solomon Bennett [. . .] who is at present time suffering. [. . .] He has, I am informed, been an early recipient by your excellent institution but I believe is not a justification from further relief should his case be thought worthy of reexamination. He has a wife and [. . .] five or six children which are dependent upon him. He is a Profound Hebrew Scholar but His Knowledge of the English Language Is Too Imperfect to Render His Literary Powers of Much Relief to His Family. By some criticisms upon interpretations of the rabbinical law, he has incurred the antagonism of the high priest and is even excommunicated from the Synagogue. By this his livelihood as a seal engraver, which was principally among those of his own persuasion, was completely destroyed and the poor man's resources cut off. I am satisfied that he is a man of good, I believe, of exceptional character. I now felt it my duty to ascertain myself before I gave him

---

<sup>13</sup> See G. M. Ditchfield, "Stanhope, Charles, third Earl Stanhope (1753–1816)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, November 11, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26241>; John Opie, "Stanhope, Charles, third Earl Stanhope (1753–1816)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1001276>.



**Figure 4.2:** Thomas Joseph Pettigrew, librarian of the Duke of Sussex.

other relief myself or mention or insist it from others, and I feel too great an interest in your institution to recommend to it any individual who I am not most perfectly satisfied in deserving of attention. T. J. Pettigrew<sup>14</sup>

Pettigrew's endorsement yielded a ten-pound grant from the Royal Literary Fund, but Bennett's health and economic situation continued to decline and he wrote another letter over a year later, on March 20, 1829, begging for more. His reflections on his situation as a scholarly writer in London are quite revealing:

[. . .] I always devoted my time to the study of the fine arts in the different branches of engraving, for the support of my family; my vacancies of business I always devoted to the different branches of literary pursuits; parts of my literary productions are happily brought to light, and the public notice (the works of which cannot fail to escape your records) yet a great part are still preserved in my treasure of M.S. But unhappily, since seven months I became afflicted by a weakness in my sight, in so far as I am obliged to give over my engraving business (Dr. Pettigrew can bear testimony to my infirmity of sight). Happily, it has left me sight enough for the capability of reading and writing, which are the only means to draw from it a livelihood, though as most humble one for my [. . .] family. Nay to make a living from literary pursuits is the greatest question. For except those who have literary appointments in churches, synagogues, and public colleges, they are really exposed to beggary. As to receive emoluments from book sellers, these, to my knowledge, are the most unhappy views; as nothing but novels, books of Harriet Wilson, toilet books, satirical tracts etc. are the only current articles for publishers; literary productions do not suit their trade. The bookseller, like the baker and publican, calculates the consumption of the articles he undertakes; he even notices the quantity instead of the quality. Such are the hopes presenting to my views for the dayly support of me and my family to be squeezed out of the literary pursuits. Nay, even prejudice to not fail to have her share in the reduction of my temporal course. Having laid before your honourable society my real situation, I most humbly petition to forward your kind assistance on behalf of my present condition; viz., a small quarterly allowance in addition to the humble scrapings which I may gather from literary pursuits and with the other will enable me to preserve the humble condition of my family; to pursue my literary studies as well, as to attain to a promotion of a literary institution, which I have in view. Gentlemen, I do not forget that I have already received some of your bounteous assistance in times past. However, I have to notice that I have not yet proven richer and accordingly some small allowance may produce good effects too. Signed SBennett to the Honourable Council of the Literary Fund Society.<sup>15</sup>

Over the course of the next decade, Bennett regularly wrote to the society begging for support. Pettigrew also wrote follow-up letters in 1829 and 1832 on his behalf, but Bennett remained mired in financial debt and deep anxiety, as his letter of February 3, 1832, indicates:

---

<sup>14</sup> Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 8.

<sup>15</sup> Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 11.

I do not grow younger; my sight is not yet nor will it be restored; Accordingly, there is no hope of returning to my business of the art of engraving. Gentlemen! It is not an annual claim that makes me call on your laudable institution for relief, but it is the daily [. . .] grievances that urge me to appeal to you, at least once a year and I am to add, I suppose you gentlemen to be parents of families, no doubt that the emotions of your feelings give care to the calls of your tender offsprings, who call even for luxuries and paintings; how much more so be the feelings of parent when seven tender calls are daily crying for bread and other indispensable necessities of life like those of the present Petitioner? To erase from your mind suspicions and to corroborate facts. With vehemence and reluctance, I present you with my unfortunate credentials. Viz., a lot of small pawn broker tickets, which I am obliged to make money for the mere daily bread for my family!!<sup>16</sup>

Bennett's relationship with Pettigrew clearly extended beyond these letters to their shared scholarly interests. At about the same time, in November 1828, Bennett asked Pettigrew if he would allow him to examine a newly acquired manuscript Pettigrew had purchased for the duke's library, a manuscript of a Hebrew translation of the Arabic commentator Averroës (Ibn Rushd) on Aristotle: "I shall be thankful if you can let me have a glance of the Hebrew Mss. of Aristotle intituled *Ha-Shamayim ve-ha-Olam*, The Heavens and the Universe, which you bought for the duke's library. This work was frequently handled and mentioned by the Hebrew Rabbies such as Maimonides, Rabbi Levi Ben Gershon in his work intituled *Proelium Domini* [The Wars of the Lord], and many more of the antient Rabbinical philosophers."<sup>17</sup> Pettigrew not only agreed to this request but apparently asked Bennett to write a summary of the work in English, which he did and which he signed. The manuscript suggests a close working relationship between the Jewish scholar and the learned librarian; it also suggests that Bennett was familiar with the duke's library, had studied its books and manuscripts on other occasions, and was an ideal consultant to Pettigrew and to the duke himself on his Hebrew texts. It was understandably most appropriate for Pettigrew to reach out to support Bennett in dealing with his economic woes.

When one adds to these three the other intellectual figures in contact with Bennett from a variety of intellectual and political persuasions, the list of his associates is impressive. Among the more prominent are Thomas Burgess, Bishop of Salisbury (1756–1837); Edward King, Viscount Kingsborough (1795–1837); the aforementioned Prince Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex; William Drummond (1769–1828), Scottish diplomat, poet, and philosopher; and Francis Foster Barham (1808–1871), the religious writer and founder of the Society of Ailists.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 20.

<sup>17</sup> Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, MS München 371, end of manuscript.

<sup>18</sup> This list also includes two unusual female donors and associates of Bennett, Baroness Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee and Catherine Housman, who are discussed in the next chapter.

Thomas Burgess was a well-known high churchman, the Bishop of St. Davids and then Salisbury. His career began to blossom when he was first appointed examining chaplain to Bishop Shute Barrington of Salisbury. He published many works on Christian theology and antiquities in general, mastered Hebrew with a keen interest in Hebrew grammar, and was fascinated with biblical studies, as the holdings in his library testify.<sup>19</sup>

The sources suggesting personal contact between Burgess and Bennett are limited but nevertheless revealing. They consist of two mentions in Bennett's begging letters to the Royal Literary Fund. The first Bennett wrote on December 18, 1826: "As for references, your society may refer to my worthy friend Wm. Frend Esq., The R. Rev. the Lord Bishop of Salisbury as well as to your own records."<sup>20</sup> The extraordinary juxtaposition of the Unitarian Frend and the conservative Bishop Burgess as his primary references suggests the unique mixture of his Christian admirers. For indeed these two religious leaders could hardly have interacted with each other, let alone spoken with each other, given their polarized religious positions. But in their shared concern for this needy Jew, they were united. In another letter, dated January 14, 1831, Bennett mentions his gratitude to the Lord Bishop and indicates his intention to write to him: "I have something about a publication to write to him: The Bishop's address is Lord Bishop of Salisbury 17 Devonshire Place." The listing of Burgess's address does suggest a more intimate relationship between the two.<sup>21</sup>

Bennett also records a serious conversation he had with Burgess about the merits of the Kennicott project of restoring the original version of the Old Testament:

I once had a conversation with a worthy friend of mine, the Lord Bishop of Salisbury, having presented him with some instances of gross corruption in the standing versions. His Lordship candidly confessed, that the Old Testament required a thorough revision by He-

---

<sup>19</sup> On Burgess, see Nigel Yates, ed., *Bishop Burgess and His World: Culture, Religion, and Society in Britain, Europe, and North America in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), and William Owen, "Burgess, Thomas (1756–1857)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1009447>.

<sup>20</sup> Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 9.

<sup>21</sup> Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 17. In his "Editor's Preface" to Bennett's *The Hebrew and English Holy Bible* ([London: printed for the family of the late Solomon Bennett, 1841], 4), Francis Foster Barham wrote: "Solomon Bennett was known in his lifetime as one of the most eminent Hebrew scholars of his age. We believe he was the instructor of Dr. Burgess, Bishop of Salisbury, a prelate well calculated to estimate his merits and proficiency." Such testimony, if accurate, adds another dimension to Bennett's impact on his Christian associates and makes more credible my suggestion above that Bennett also tutored William Frend.

brew scholars, grammarians, and etymologists. The venerable bishop then asked my opinion with respect to the Hebrew and Samaritan Bible, edited by Dr. Kennicott, in reference to the collations he (Dr. Kennicott) made between the several MS copies which he collected from different parts, even from the Asian and African dominions, by means of the English ambassadors and consuls residing there (which, as I was informed, cost the Government about 24000 pounds), in which collations Dr. Kennicott thought he had discovered thousands of variations in the bulk of the MSS, which he styled different readings (the term different errors would be more becoming). I then demonstrated to his Lordship the impropriety, and the vagueness of the mode of his collations, and the unhallowed consequences resulting from it. “Dr. Kennicott,” said I, “would have done better to bestow his learning in behalf of a perfect version, instead of a collation of MSS which are without authority and correctness.” It is to be lamented, that the enormous sums of money devoted by Government to that religious, most sacred, and most essential subject, the possession of a perfect version of the Bible, have been all in vain.<sup>22</sup>

Edward King, Viscount Kingsborough, was an Irish antiquarian who was shown the great Mexican manuscript the *Codex Mendoza* in the Bodleian Library and eventually decided to devote his life to the study of the antiquities of Mexico. Kingsborough promoted and edited, with copious notes, a magnificent work titled *Antiquities of Mexico, Comprising Facsimiles of Ancient Mexican Paintings and Hieroglyphics* (9 vols., 1830–1848). Its major aim was to demonstrate that the indigenous peoples of America were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. He apparently developed a relationship with Bennett based on their common biblical interests. Bennett was especially interested in the rare Hebrew books in his library, and King invited Bennett to peruse and study them.<sup>23</sup>

In one instance, Bennett examined an extant manuscript of the Hebrew Bible from the late twelfth century. He was particularly excited by this discovery, since he thought it had been owned by the Jewish exegete David Kimḥi (ca. 1160–ca. 1235):

But happily for the literary world, the original MS. of the Old Testament of the most learned Rabbi David Kimchi (of Spain) which has contributed to posterity a treasure of learning in the knowledge of Scripture and grammar, has escaped those popish and hellish conflagrations [of many other medieval Hebrew manuscripts]. The original MS. is a most voluminous

---

<sup>22</sup> Solomon Bennett, *Critical Remarks on the Authorised Version of the Old Testament: Containing Some Examples of Its Errors, with Specimens of an Amended Translation* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1834), 6–7. On Kennicott and his Bible project, see David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), chap. 1.

<sup>23</sup> On Edward King, Viscount Kingsborough, see Alfred Webb, “Edward King, Viscount Kingsborough,” in *A Compendium of Irish Biography: Comprising Sketches of Distinguished Irishmen, and of Eminent Persons Connected with Ireland by Office or by Their Writings* (Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son, 1878), 275, and Gordon Goodwin, revised by Alan Bell, “King, Edward, Viscount Kingsborough (1795–1837).” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15560>.

folio volume, written on vellum, with the Massoretical annotations, and with Kimchi's minutiae in the grammatical and etymological indagations on Scripture, as we behold at the present day in our printed Bibles. This valuable MS. (written in the latter part of the 12th century,) now forms a portion of the library of the Right Hon. Lord Kingsborough. The MS. having been under my inspection, I took particular notice that at the end of that volume is a list of all Chaldaic words which are interspersed in the Holy Language of the Bible, which Kimchi introduced in an extra column, with the illustrations of the same in the Holy Language,—giving also his own testimony in the following terms: "*Amar David Bar Kimḥi ha-Sephardi z'l[.]*"<sup>24</sup>

Elsewhere, Bennett describes a letter he received from Lord Kingsborough about a Hebrew translation of Ptolemy's *Almagest*:

On this subject I shall quote a portion of a letter addressed to me by the learned Lord Kingsborough, respecting the *Almagest* rendered into the Hebrew language, with many additions and with most neatly executed astronomical designs of the Rabbies of old relative to it. The style of the language and the mode of writing exhibited in that volume vouch for its antiquity. His Lordship writes thus: "I was, however, not aware of its (viz. the *Almagest*) ever having been translated into Hebrew, although the fact does not in the least surprise me and I should even have inferred it from the varied and extensive erudition of the many eminent individuals of your nation who flourished in Spain several centuries ago[.]"<sup>25</sup>

Bennett does not indicate if Kingsborough owned the manuscript or not. What is clear from these two references is the kind of scholarly exchange that Kingsborough and Bennett enjoyed.

Augustus Frederick, the Duke of Sussex (see Figure 4.3), was connected to Bennett primarily through his librarian Thomas Pettigrew, as we have seen. But

---

<sup>24</sup> Solomon Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise on the Primogeniture and Integrity of the Holy Language: Showing Its Origin, in Unison with the Copiousness of Its Grammatical and Etymological System, to Have Been from Time Immemorial Retroceding to That of the Creation* (London: printed for the author by Richard Taylor, 1835), 44–45n. Charles Sharpe's catalogue of sale of the Viscount Kingsborough's library lists several of Bennett's books (*Catalogue of the Rare and Valuable Library of the Late Rt. Hon. Edward Lord Viscount Kingsborough* [Dublin: Webb and Chapman, 1842], 104) but does not mention this Kimḥi manuscript, which I cannot yet identify precisely. The list of Aramaic words is found in an appendix of Kimḥi's *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, and apparently this is what Bennett saw when inspecting the Kingsborough manuscript. Cf. the Cervera Bible, for example, where Kimḥi's work is copied together with the biblical text (images and a description of this Bible are available at the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021668000/>).

<sup>25</sup> Solomon Bennett, *Likuṭim me-ha'ataḥah ḥadashah 'al Torah, Nevi'im u-Ketuvim = Specimen of a New Version of the Hebrew Bible Translated from the Original Text, and Comprising Selected Chapters [ . . . ] Arranged in Three Columns, viz. the Authorized Version, the New Version, and the Original Hebrew Text* (London: printed for the author by Richard Taylor, 1836), iv.

the duke was clearly viewed by many contemporary Jews as a genuine hero because of his commitment to Hebrew learning and his liberal views regarding Jewish civic emancipation. At his death, he was mourned in the synagogues of London. He was also known for his progressive views regarding the abolition of the slave trade, Catholic emancipation, and parliamentary reform. He was a major figure as well in London Freemasonry and even supported studies of religious history by the esoteric scholar Godfrey Higgins (1773–1833), which he hoped might form the basis of a new world religion.<sup>26</sup>

It seems highly likely that while frequenting the duke's vast library, Bennett had more than one occasion to interact with him directly. There is no written evidence that such meetings occurred (although the duke is listed as a sponsor of several of Bennett's book projects), but a fascinating letter that Bennett addressed to the duke when presenting him with a copy of his *Specimen of a New Version of the Hebrew Bible* (1836) is extant. The handwritten letter, composed on February 22, 1837, less than two years before Bennett's death, was inserted into a copy of the book now located in the British Library.<sup>27</sup> Bennett opens:

It would be injustice done to your Royal Highness the zealous student and admirer of the holy language and its literature to withhold from you that great sacred design, so essential and universally desirous object as bliss of a New and judicious Version, with judicious critical illustrations of the Hebrew Bible, the specimen I am now submitting to the erudite judgement of your Royal Highness's consideration; the integrity of which has been suppressed and buried for the period of 1800 years past, not to let it sink anymore into oblivion.

While Bennett apologizes profusely for approaching the duke with a request for support, he justifies his appeal by noting his humble circumstances, the intensity of his labor, and the sacredness of the task. But he is fully aware of the im-

---

<sup>26</sup> On the Duke of Sussex, see T. F. Henderson, revised by John Van der Kiste, "Augustus Frederick, Prince, duke of Sussex (1783–1843)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, January 3, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/900>, and Adam Shear, "Footprints and the Duke of Sussex (Augustus, 1773–1843)," *Footprints: Jewish Books Through Time and Space*, April 24, 2020, <https://edblogs.columbia.edu/footprints/2020/04/24/footprints-and-the-duke-of-sussex-augustus>. The great affection shown the duke by the London Jewish community is illustrated by the eulogies offered at his death, such as Louis Loewe, *A Discourse [on Ps. cxix. 55] Delivered [ . . . ] on the Day of the Funeral of H.R.H. Prince Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex* (London: J. Wertheimer, 1843); *Tefilah ye-taḥananim: [ . . . ] be-vate kenesiyot ha-Ashkenazim be-London uve-khol malkhut Briṭanya be-yom ḳevurat ha-šar* (London, 1843); Abraham Belais, *Elegy on the Death of His Royal Highness Augustus Frederick Duke of Sussex: Also a Prayer for Her Majesty the Queen and All the Royal Family, Heb. & Eng.* (London: the author, 5603 [1843]).

<sup>27</sup> My thanks to Professor Joanna Weinberg for sending me a photograph of this letter (British Library Shelfmark 01903.e.5).



Figure 4.3: Augustus Frederick, the Duke of Sussex.

pact of the duke's opinion on any matter, including his influence on his Jewish subjects:

Considering therefore the magnitude of the work, and the great Spring of the audibility given to the voice of your Royal Highness at large, but of the wealthy members of the Synagogue in particular (among whom my humble situation can form no figure), to recommend and to stimulate them to take part in the object and design, which tends *likhvod ha-Torah u-likhvod Beit Yisrael* (In honor of the Torah and the House of Israel). Considering that is not in the power of my most humble circumstances to bring into the world a work of such magnitude, and so expensive as this is in the design of the account of,

he appeals to the duke for his assistance. He adds finally that the specimen has been already examined by Dr. Samuel Lee, the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge “and of some of his Cambridgian friends before it has been submitted to the press.”

Bennett's letter is interesting in that it appeals to a Christian duke to raise money particularly from the Jewish community, an ironic admission that Bennett's approach to his fellow co-religionists is ineffective. But with the duke's stamp of approval, his grandiose project of retranslating the Hebrew Bible might come to fruition. The involvement of a Christian scholar of Hebrew of the stature of Samuel Lee in approving Bennett's work is also revealing.<sup>28</sup>

In the English version of his commentary on Ezekiel's Temple, Bennett included some of his short remarks on the book of Daniel stimulated by questions addressed to him by an illustrious Christian friend, William Drummond (see Figure 4.4). Sir William Drummond of Logiealmond was a distinguished classical scholar and diplomat, serving in Italy and the Ottoman Empire. Besides his numerous scholarly studies, he also was well known for his radical religious views on Christianity. In 1811 he printed for private circulation his *Oedipus Judaicus*, in which he attempted to prove that the Old Testament was an extended astrological allegory. The book immediately incurred the wrath of several critics, including Mrs. Catherine Housman of Bath, who was one of Bennett's most enthusiastic supporters, as we shall see.<sup>29</sup> Using his vast knowledge of ancient pagan religions and archaeology, Drummond insisted that the Hebrews had invented the zodiac, that the zodiacal structure found at Palmyra was built by Solomon, and that multiple biblical passages could be reduced to an astrological explanation, especially those describing the Temple and Tabernacle.

---

<sup>28</sup> On Lee, see Thomas Hamilton, revised by John D. Haigh, “Lee, Samuel (1793–1852),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16309>.

<sup>29</sup> On Drummond, see Muriel E. Chamberlain, “Drummond, Sir William, of Logiealmond (1770?–1828),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, January 5, 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/8088>. On Housman's work against Drummond, see the next chapter.



**Figure 4.4:** Sir William Drummond of Logiealmond.

Bennett, along with his other Christian associates we have already mentioned, certainly would not have agreed with the radical thesis of Drummond's work.

Nevertheless, he respected his Christian interlocutor; and as the following conversation well illustrates, that respect was reciprocated. Here first is Bennett:

I was highly gratified with your approbation of my work, but still more so by the MS. *Remarks* I received from you, the sentiments and inquiries in which evince the liberality of your mind. It is truly gratifying to find men who are above religious and national prejudices, as such are the supporters of the whole of the human race, affording that counterbalance to general dogmas and hypothesis, without which moderation and truth would be crushed beneath the weight of misrepresentation and of error.

And here is Drummond's thoughtful response:

I have to thank you for your answer to my Remarks. My occupations at this moment make it impossible for me to enter into particulars. I must do you the justice, however, to say, that I think you defend the *Hagiographer*, not only with ability but with candour. I will fairly own to you, that the latter part of the *remarks* was written chiefly with the view of knowing your sentiments on the subject. Perhaps you are not aware, that we *N[otsrim]* (I dare not say plainer) seldom know the grounds on which you H[ebre]ws rest your defense. See an article in the last Monthly Review, in which you are openly attacked, (it is necessary and unavoidable for the fairest and most candid critic in our happy land of free opinion,) and yet, to those who look below the surface, you are secretly praised and encouraged.<sup>30</sup>

In 1841, three years after Bennett's death, Francis Foster Barham edited and published *The Hebrew and English Holy Bible* on behalf of his family.<sup>31</sup> This volume was only a small portion of a much larger project, intended to encompass the entire Hebrew Bible with Bennett's English translation and notes. By editing Bennett's manuscript and adding an approving introduction, Barham lent his prestigious name to the list of Christian acolytes who appreciated this Jew's efforts on behalf of the dissemination of the Hebraic legacy.

Barham was an accomplished and remarkably prolific writer, editor, and philosopher who articulated a theological system that strove to unite all the scattered truths of every religion without their errors. In 1843, he claimed to have discovered the supreme central doctrine and gave it the name of Alism, A, Al, or Alah

---

<sup>30</sup> Solomon Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel: viz. An Elucidation of the 40th, 41st, 42nd, &c. Chapters of Ezekiel, Consistently with the Hebrew Original; and a Minute Description of the Edifice, on Scientific Principles, Illustrated by a Ground-Plan and Bird's-Eye View, Illustrated by a Ground-Plan and Bird's-Eye View* (London: published by the author, R. Hunter, and M. Solomon, 1824), appendix, 132, 146. The article mentioned by Drummond is by the Reverend Dr. Christopher Lake Moody, in *The Monthly Review or the Literary Journal Enlarged* 68 (August 1812): 396–401 (article 8).

<sup>31</sup> The title page reads: *The Hebrew and English Holy Bible: The Hebrew reprinted from the text of Heidenheim / the English version [ . . . ] revised by the late Solomon Bennett [ . . . ] ; the Hebrew text [ . . . ] corrected by Mr. H. A. Henry; [ . . . ] edited by Francis Barham, Pts. 1–2.*

being the most ancient and universal title of the deity in Hebrew Scripture. In later years he devoted considerable energy to the preparation of new translations of the Old and New Testament in chronological order, a herculean task that he was unable to complete.<sup>32</sup> He learned of Bennett's unpublished translation of the Old Testament and decided to publish it alongside the Hebrew original. I return to this effort in chapter 8. Here I quote from the preface to this volume to demonstrate his great appreciation of Bennett and his work:

It is just because the translation is Mr. Bennett's, that it is so valuable in the eyes of unprejudiced truth-searchers. He was a Hebrew, "a Hebrew of the Hebrews," and with all the peculiar sagacity and learning of his nation he came to his work of translating its sacred documents. He brought to the study of the original a mind singularly erudite, yet free, bold, and unfettered. To translate the Hebrew Bible for himself, and to satisfy the critical aspiration of his own soul, was his favorite design for many a studious year. He knew that to please himself was the best way to please the world, and he never deserted a text till he conceived that he had perfectly understood and expressed its latent power in definite terms. [ . . . ] He translated the Bible as if no translation had been made before, as if he alone were High Priest of the Holy of Holies, and the first to reveal its mysterious and ceremonial sanctities to the eyes of an uninitiated world.<sup>33</sup>

Bennett never received sufficient monetary support from these individuals, especially after suspending his activities as an engraver, and thus endured chronic financial distress. But the three who wrote on his behalf for funds seemed genuine in their concern for him, and the others surely respected and appreciated him especially for his Jewish learning and integrity.

If anything seemed to unite some of these Christians at least with each other and with Bennett, it might have been a desire to revisit the scriptural foundations of Christianity with a view to challenging Trinitarian and ecclesiastical orthodoxy. This impulse was evident in William Frend, the Unitarian, and in Francis Foster Barham, the publisher of Bennett's translation of Genesis, who was animated by a syncretic determination to put Christianity into the much bigger frame of universal revelation. The Duke of Sussex, a strongly Whig liberal, was keen on the emancipation of Catholics and especially on greater rights for dissenters, and one assumes that the study of the Scriptures was for him a solvent of religious differences. He was also an ardent Freemason. So was Thomas Pettigrew, his librarian and a master of Egyptology, another Protestant libertarian, rather anti-clerical and at a distance from Anglican Toryism. With Drummond,

---

<sup>32</sup> On Barham, see Anne Taylor, "Barham, Francis Foster [known as Alist Francis Barnham] (1808–1871)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, October 10, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1373>.

<sup>33</sup> *The Hebrew and English Holy Bible*, "Editor's Preface," 1.

one leaves the world of Dissenting scholarship altogether for free thought. Another of Bennett's patrons not yet discussed fits here as well: Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee.

On the other hand, there were high churchmen and Tories among his supporters: Catherine Housman, Thomas Burgess, the Bishop of Salisbury, and Edward King, Viscount Kingsborough—all true conservatives who would have nothing to do with Drummond or Frend. Perhaps Bennett represented the figure of the Jewish scholar who could unify the fringes of the Christian world, where the Protestant impulse to seek the original meaning of the Scriptures shaded from orthodox to heterodoxy; he could be a kind of attractive neutral sage who might cover over the fractures and tensions in that community.<sup>34</sup> Certainly, in light of the extensive record of Bennett's meaningful Christian contacts, this dimension of interreligious dialogue and respectful exchange marks the highlight of Bennett's social life in London.

---

<sup>34</sup> I am most indebted to Dr. Michael Ledger-Lomas for help in formulating the last two paragraphs.

## 5 Two English Ladies and a Jew from Polotsk

In the previous chapter, we examined in some detail Bennett's male Christian associates along with his Jewish adversaries. Though almost all his Christian associates in London were men, two were women. This chapter is devoted to those two individuals and their unusual relationships with Bennett. Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee (1773?–1829) and Catherine Housman (1770–1855) both initially employed Solomon Bennett as a copper engraver, but both ultimately developed long-term relations with him that were based primarily on his Hebraic and biblical expertise. Both women wrote about Bennett in their published writings, and Bennett likewise had occasion to mention them both and, in the case of Lee, to write several personal letters. Both were women of means, both authors of multiple tomes, professing a strong attachment to their personal faith that naturally flowed into a genuine passion to master the Hebrew language and to comprehend the original biblical text. But the two were radically different individuals. Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee was a well-known public figure tarred in her youth by the allegation she had run away with two brothers who had taken advantage of her, a scandalous episode for which she was subsequently satirized in the press for her indiscretion. She also declared her opposition to her Anglican upbringing at her public trial. In contrast, Catherine Housman, a longtime resident of Bath, was hardly known outside her city, where she was renowned for her generous acts and literary activity. While Lee seemed to have accepted her notoriety, at least initially, Housman appears to have preferred a lower profile to pursue her biblical studies, although her extensive publications do attest to an aggressive and polemical style when the Christian faith, as she understood it, was threatened by its modern “pagan” defilers.

Devoting an entire chapter to these two women and their relationship to a Jewish artist and intellectual seems appropriate for several reasons. Both women left their mark on the social and intellectual worlds they inhabited through their writings and personal interactions and are fascinating historical subjects. Their interactions with Bennett are relatively well documented, at least in comparison to those with his male Christian associates. And most importantly, they offer a highly unusual glimpse into Jewish–Christian intellectual, professional, and social interactions between two Christian women and a Jewish man. Bennett never pointed to anything unusual in his relationship with these two because they were women, but it is certainly worth asking how in fact the power dynamics of these cross-gendered exchanges were different, particularly when both parties—the Christian women and the Jewish man—were themselves already marginalized in a society dominated by Christian men. Accordingly, the microhistory of Bennett

and his female associates offers a relatively novel perspective for examining the history of Jewish–Christian interreligious dialogue in the nineteenth century.

## 5.1 Mrs. Lee, the Baroness Le Despenser

Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee (see Figure 5.1) was an illegitimate daughter of Francis Dashwood (1708–1781), the eleventh Baron Le Despenser, an English politician and founder of the Hellfire Club (formally known as the Order of the Friars of St. Francis of Wycombe). She was sent off to France at a young age and educated at a convent, and on his death she inherited some forty thousand pounds. Returning to Great Britain around the outbreak of the French Revolution, she lived initially in London under the supervision of a Mrs. Catherine Gordon, the mother of two sons, Loudon and Lockhart, who were later to do serious damage to Lee’s life and public image. Soon after, she married Matthew Allen Lee (known as “Handsome Lee”), but they separated after two years and she never remarried.

Despite her beautiful looks and fine education, she did not fit well into the high society of her father. She moved to Manchester, but she was in London when she was allegedly abducted from her residence by the Gordon brothers in 1803 (see Figure 5.2). Both men had matriculated at Oxford, and the older of the two, Lockhart, was then a married clergyman. The brothers were arrested in Gloucester and tried at Oxford, where Lee was compelled to testify against them both. The trial ended abruptly when she refused to take an oath professing her Christian faith. The brothers were severely condemned by the judge but ultimately acquitted. Loudon quickly published an apology for his and his brother’s actions (1804), pleading their innocence and asserting Lee’s guilt. She subsequently defended herself by publishing her own version of the events, *A Vindication of Mrs. Lee’s Conduct* (1807).

The trial and the subsequent savaging of her public image in the press appear to have deeply affected Lee during the remaining twenty-two years of her life. She seemed uncomfortable with and suspicious of people with whom she was in contact; she lived in relative isolation as a spinster; and she hardly trusted even her own relatives and close associates. Her published investigation into the conduct, and her alleged jealousy, of her sister-in-law Lady Anne Dashwood, along with her various published charges against others who she claimed had wronged her, appear to have occupied much of her time and energy right up until her premature death in 1829. Only one of her books, published under the pseudonym Philopatria and titled *An Essay on Government* (1808), gave her some sense of satisfaction and pride. Drawing heavily on the legal theories of the English jurist Sir William Blackstone, Lee tried to balance her dissenting views of the English gov-



**Figure 5.1:** Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee, the Baroness Le Despenser.

ernment with a sincere English patriotism during a time of conflict with France. The respectable book was even noticed favorably by William Wordsworth and



**Figure 5.2:** The abduction of Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee by Loudon and Lockhart Gordon.

seems to have ensured a modest fame to this woman engaging in the heavily male-dominated genre of political writing.<sup>1</sup>

It is during these last two decades of her life that Lee made the acquaintance of the Jew Solomon Bennett. It was also during this period that she elected to study Hebrew to enhance her appreciation of the Old Testament. The ultimate result of this effort was the publication in 1822 of an original work, addressed to the

<sup>1</sup> On Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee, the Baroness Le Despenser, see the comprehensive biography by Anne M. Powers, *The Female Infidel: The Vindication of Fanny Dashwood* (United Kingdom: [author], 2018); Thomas de Quincey, "The Female Infidel," chap. 4 of *Autobiographic Sketches, 1790–1803*, De Quincey's Works 14 (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1862), 128–144; Cecil Roth, "Eccentric Englishwomen: III. 'Baroness Despenser,'" *The Spectator*, August 30, 1937, 792–793; Daniel S. Roberts, "Wordsworth's Reading of Rachel Lee: de Quincey's Evidence," *Notes and Queries* 49 (2002): 465–467; and Richard Garnett, revised by J. Gilliland, "Lee [née Dashwood], Rachel Fanny Antonina (1773?–1829)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, May 11, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16302>.

Jewish community, in the Hebrew language with an accompanying English translation by H. V. Bolaffey.

Haim Vita Bolaffey (1778/9–1835), a Sephardic Jew apparently from Florence and the brother-in-law of David Meldola, the son of the chief Sephardic rabbi Raphael Meldola, arrived in London a few years after Bennett, published several liturgical translations and two Hebrew grammars, and was a Hebrew tutor at Oxford and at Eton College.<sup>2</sup> Some years later, he became a Hebraic consultant and translator for Lee, a role which paralleled that of Bennett along with at least two other Jews also competent in the Hebrew language, as we shall soon see. That Lee, with all her other preoccupations, chose to support at least four different Jews all professing an expertise in the Hebrew language is interesting enough; that she seemed to develop a somewhat personal relationship with at least some of them is even more worthy of notice.

The work that Lee apparently composed on her own and then had translated into English by Bolaffey bore the full title *The Hebrew Epistle of Antonina Despensier etc. Entitled “Iggeret Ha-Kolel El Ha-Ivrim” or A Circular Epistle to the Hebrews*.<sup>3</sup> Bolaffey opens the work with a translator’s preface setting out the author’s intentions to present her Hebrew composition in an engaging epistolary manner rather than a formal discourse. He then makes explicit his conviction that she is perfectly capable of fulfilling this task: “From the honour I have of being personally acquainted with Philopatria [Lee’s earlier pseudonym, which she uses in this work], the author of the *Essay on Government*, I have had frequent opportunities to ascertain her great erudition in Hebrew Literature. I have had the satisfaction to see some commentaries, written in Hebrew, [. . .] which are highly creditable to the understanding and judgment of the noble author.”<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to justify Bolaffey’s testimony regarding Lee’s great erudition in Hebrew literature in light of the Hebrew text that follows. His explicit flattery more likely suggests an effort to win Lee’s approval of and appreciation for his work. As we shall soon see, Bennett offered her similar but more restrained compliments for her limited competence in Hebrew.

---

2 On Bolaffey, see Cecil Roth, “Two Livornese Jews in England: Michael Bolaffi, Musician, and Hayim Vita Bolaffey, Linguist,” *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 16 (1945–1951): 223–225, and Stephen Massil, “Two Hebrew Grammars and the Enlightenment,” *Jewish Historical Studies* 41 (2007): 99–143. The Hebrew grammar is Hayim Vita Bolaffey, *An Easy Grammar of the Primæval Language, Commonly Called Hebrew, Entitled “Orah meshor” or, The “Straight Path” to Real Knowledge, Fully Exemplified by Instructive and Elegant Extracts* (London: Hatchard and G. & W. B. Whittaker, 1820). He earlier published *The Aleph-Beth: or The First Step to the Hebrew Language* (London: Galabin and Marchand, 1811).

3 Published in London by H. N. and M. Solomon, 1822.

4 Bolaffey, preface to Lee, *The Hebrew Epistle*, iv (note).

It appears that Bolaffey was quite aware of the meager accomplishments of Lee in both the substance and style of her remarks but sought to inflate the value of her work as best he could. He tells the reader that the work is written in Hebrew because the language makes possible “closer and more concise expression,” adding that it is intended not

to offer learned precepts and detailed documentation but rather to exhibit general sentiments of sympathy and philanthropy to enlarge and harmonize the imagination, and by that means dispose the minds of readers to a similar taste and habit of thinking in true religion and genuine morals, as the best supports in the adverse scenes of human life; in which it appears from the general tenor of her Epistle, that she has sometimes had occasion to exercise, in a high degree, the virtues of fortitude and forbearance.<sup>5</sup>

He further extols her words as reflections of the infinite wisdom and benevolence of the Creator, pointing throughout to the instructions of the Holy Bible. He defends her apparently hidden allusions to Virgil and other “eminent writers” who may perhaps not appear germane to her main subject. He hopes his readers can appreciate “the warmth, the graces, the strength, the dignity of the composition” in the translation that Bolaffey has rendered into English.<sup>6</sup> How well, it seemed, had this translator successfully compensated for a lack of substance of the work, by elevating sentiments over clear ideas, apologizing for extraneous authors unconnected with the message of the work, and, most importantly, linking her unexceptional reflections to her own fortitude in withstanding the pressures of her life!

Lee addresses her epistle to “the general assembly of the Israelites,” by which she meant the community of Ashkenazic Jews living in London. She announces that her trusted messenger Isaac Lyon (Aryeh) the son of Solomon would deliver the epistle directly into their hands.<sup>7</sup> She calls for her friends to arise to seek re-

---

<sup>5</sup> Bolaffey, preface to Lee, *The Hebrew Epistle*, 4–5. Professor Iris Idelson-Shein points out to me that Bolaffey’s description of Lee’s composition, as “not meant to offer learned precepts and detailed documentation but rather to exhibit general sentiments of sympathy and philanthropy,” participates, in her words, in the gendered binaries of rational men and sentimental women. It does seem that he describes her effort in a stereotypical language. On the other hand, her stringing together Hebrew phrases with little rhyme or reason must have presented a challenge to Bolaffey as he tried to translate the work meaningfully. His argument that her words were meant to convey a mood more than an actual message appears to me as his way of enhancing her effort rather than deprecating it.

<sup>6</sup> Bolaffey, preface to Lee, *The Hebrew Epistle*, vi–vii.

<sup>7</sup> Isaac Lyon (1787–1850) was the third Jew employed by the baroness, acting as a kind of personal messenger or secretary for her, and he was often mentioned in her numerous papers. Lyon’s father was Solomon Lyon, the distinguished teacher of Hebrew at Cambridge, Oxford, and Eton. On him see Naomi Cream, “Reverend Solomon Lyon of Cambridge (1755–1820),” *Jewish His-*

demption and prosperity for the entire human race. She mentions her other Hebrew writings, her commentaries based on her own understanding, unconcerned with “the trifling minutiae of Grammar, nor the arbitrary rules. [. . .] I wrote them under the Supreme influence rapidly, as if the Divine light was shining on my mind and the Hurim and Thummim Illuminating the depths of my intellect.” She was perhaps aware of her own deficiencies in Hebrew composition, which could apparently be overcome by divine intervention. She adds that she has spoken words of peace and not reproof and presented her *Essay on Government* to the chief rabbi of the German (Ashkenazic) Congregation along with this epistle.<sup>8</sup>

She mentions ambiguously a redemptive and invigorating moment soon to come. And she refers more explicitly to her own personal tragedies and challenges, her arduous struggle against her enemies and even her friends who failed her. But she finds a way to heal: “The Supreme Healer alone infinite in power afforded the invigorating remedy to my wounds and gloriously exalted me!” She calls again and again for the coming of a judgment day, one with “an end to the groanings from oppression among our friends” and “a new order of things.” This epistle constitutes “a seal of peace, a reference to future years.”<sup>9</sup>

At the end, she returns to the legitimating Jewish testimony regarding her sacred mission: “My Messenger, Isaac Lyon [Aryeh], saw me write, and read nearly the whole, and I also shewed to him many fragments which were additions, to this Epistle. He has attested those facts, and many others can vouch for the truth of this assertion[.]” She closes with her name and self-designated title: “Antonina Despenser, the only Daughter of Francis Baron Despenser.”<sup>10</sup>

A close comparison of Bolaffey’s English translation with Lee’s Hebrew text reveals a faithful rendering of the original, smoothing out the many rough edges of the sometimes awkward and unnatural Hebrew phrasing and syntax, and yielding quite impressively a felicitous and most readable English essay. It is as if Bolaffey had discussed the Hebrew work with its author and well understood the precise meaning of her Hebrew constructions—well enough to transform them

---

*toral Studies* 36 (1999–2001): 31–69. Isaac was the first Jewish man to travel voluntarily to Australia, where for a few years he taught children of convicts in the newly founded penal colony of New South Wales. On his return to England, he published several minor Hebrew works and taught children in various institutions. He was clearly not as erudite as his well-known father but certainly had received a decent Jewish education. On Isaac, see Naomi Cream, “Isaac Leo Lyon: The First Free Jewish Migrant to Australia?” *Journal of the Australian Jewish Historical Society* 12 (1993): 3–16.

<sup>8</sup> Lee, *The Hebrew Epistle*, 4–10 (*Iggeret*, 4–7).

<sup>9</sup> Lee, *The Hebrew Epistle*, 12–20 (*Iggeret*, 9–14).

<sup>10</sup> Lee, *The Hebrew Epistle*, 23–24 (*Iggeret*, 17). She was not in fact the only daughter of Francis, Baron Despenser.

into elegant English. How ironic to consider how an imperfect Hebrew epistle composed by a Christian baroness could be translated into a polished English composition by a Sephardic Hebrew scholar from Italy, a relative newcomer to England!<sup>11</sup>

The seemingly successful joint venture between a Christian woman and her Jewish translator did not end well, however, much to the consternation of both individuals. Two years after the publication of the *Epistle*, Lee published two separate accounts of her highly incriminating accusations against Bolaffey of theft and dishonesty. In the first, *A Declaration*, written in January 1824, she laid out in meticulous detail the charges against her Jewish employee. Bolaffey had initially revealed his financial distress to her and she had offered him a five-pound gift to alleviate his misery. He had acknowledged her gift and indicated it would be helpful to him. Apparently the banknote she promised him was folded with other banknotes and he mistakenly took twenty pounds from her to which he was not entitled and spent it on his rent. He subsequently had the temerity to send her a bill for two years of his “literary labor, and instruction in Hebrew, Italian and French” for two hundred pounds, subtracting the twenty pounds he had already taken. According to Lee, he had never worked for her except in translating the *Epistle* and this fictional bill simply added insult to injury. She proceeded to discuss her previous conversations and engagements with him, his work as her translator, his dissatisfaction as “the Hebrew master of a Charity school,” and his desire to work for her as a full-time secretary, although she had never agreed to such an arrangement.<sup>12</sup>

She also alluded to her present distressed psychological state, which Bolaffey by his dishonest act had rendered even more troubled. Nevertheless, she fully acknowledged that for a time the two had harmoniously worked well together. While he had not actually taught her Hebrew, or French and Italian, he had reviewed her other biblical commentaries and he had been “deserving of esteem and confidence; he always expressed a fervent wish to be taken under my protection; and frequently confirmed in the most decisive manner his professions of attachment to my person and his determination to adhere under all or any circumstances to my Cause, and to any Cause which I might support.”<sup>13</sup> Before closing

---

11 On the larger theme of translation as a meeting ground for Jewish–Christian relations, see Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

12 Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee, *A Declaration (Relating to the Conduct of H. V. Bolaffey)* (London: F. Kiernan, 1824); this four-page “declaration” is “relating to the conduct of H. V. Bolaffey towards Mrs. Lee.”

13 Lee, *A Declaration*, [3].

her declaration, she referred explicitly to Bolaffey's problems with his health and finances, and even to a lawsuit for which she had previously offered him some assistance.

Lee's declaration against Bolaffey followed her bizarre practice of publishing other litigious works against her perceived enemies, especially Lady Anne Dashwood, her sister-in-law, whom she accused of coveting her valuable possessions. In what she called a "final addenda" to her investigation of Dashwood and her alleged collaborator, Mr. Delmar, Lee continued her obsessive retelling of the Bolaffey incident with new intensity and conviction.<sup>14</sup> She now divulged that Bolaffey had voluntarily returned the twenty-pound note, and she then gave it to him as a gift as "he raised his hands and his eyes to heaven and uttered a Hebrew thanksgiving."<sup>15</sup> He next asked for her blessing, but she continually reproached him and departed from the room. Yet she added: "Notwithstanding the proceedings specified in the Declaration, the Baroness does not regret having chosen H. V. Bolaffey to be the Translator of her Circular[.]" Moreover, she testified that Bolaffey had always spoken about her "in the highest terms of commendation. [. . .] He seemed to be overjoyed when he was with the Baroness," and he was always ready to prove his allegiance to her.<sup>16</sup>

It is at this point that Solomon Bennett finally makes his appearance in Lee's narrative. She had shown her Hebrew commentaries not only to Bolaffey but to Bennett as well: "The Baroness had shewed some pages of the *perushim* to Solomon Bennett, a well-known engraver among the Jews who approved generally speaking of the characters, and also, with few exceptions, of the phrases. The asperity of the person above mentioned is well known; with reference to which the following fact must be satisfactory, to all impartial persons."<sup>17</sup> Lee obviously knew Bennett's reputation well as one accused, especially by his Jewish enemies, of being a contentious and harsh critic of intellectual superficiality and boorishness. His modest praise of her Hebrew work, in comparison to the effusiveness of Bolaffey, was not to be taken for granted.

She continues to describe Bennett and their relationship:

When the Baroness some years ago wrote a Hebrew inscription for a cedar box, she sent it to Solomon Bennett and gave him authority to write the same inscription in those characters which he might deem most accurate; he did not make any alteration in the characters

---

<sup>14</sup> Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee, *Final Addenda to an Investigation into the Conduct of Lady Anne Dashwood and Mr. Delmar with Respect to Antonina the Baroness Despensier, Author of the Essay on Government*, etc. (London: F. Kiernan, 1824).

<sup>15</sup> Lee, *Final Addenda*, 81.

<sup>16</sup> Lee, *Final Addenda*, 82, 85.

<sup>17</sup> Lee, *Final Addenda*, 86.

which the Baroness sent to him. It is further necessary to declare that the Baroness, at first sent to Solomon Bennett, merely with reference to the inscription about mentioned; she however afterwards spoke to him, and shewed him other Hebrew characters of which he equally approved; she also translated some passages, read remarks which she had written, etc. He subsequently engraved several seals for her; and she had communications with him, with reference to Books, etc. Justice however requires the further asseveration that he never in the slightest degree assisted the Baroness in any of her Hebrew writings; conscience has several times induced him to corroborate the fact above mentioned; there were several urgent, and perhaps, to many, obvious reasons, for the degree of tenacity which the Baroness evinced with reference to the points in question; among others the senseless malignity, and the gross ignorance of a few, who, at the period when she first spoke to Solomon Bennett, i.e. about nine years ago, were instruments of the worst of purposes, may be adduced; with reference to which, and to her own situation, she was equally scrupulous with respect to various circumstances of little comparative consequence, which need not here be detailed. Solomon Bennett has always admitted the facts in question; and must also recollect that the Baroness for the reason above declared, carried her tenacity so far that she refused to let him write even a Hebrew character in case of a trivial mistake, or omission, in any writings which she might show to him; though he several times wrote attestations, addressed to her, with reference to transactions in which he might have been concerned, etc.<sup>18</sup>

The passage is interesting for several reasons. Lee and Bennett had met some nine years earlier, in 1815. This seems to have predated her first encounter with Bolaffey. She had initially engaged him as an engraver but her particular interest in Hebrew was apparent from the start. Although not mentioned here, they had a mutual friend, William Frend, the Unitarian clergyman and social reformer, who had been one of Bennett's major supporters.<sup>19</sup> She sought legitimation from Bennett, the Hebrew scholar, as she had done with Bolaffey, and she underscored this need especially because she had endured a tarnished public image for most of her adult life. While she solicited Solomon's help, she insisted on the quality of her own work and demanded credit for it. Their relationship was transactional but based on a considerable amount of mutual trust and respect.

In the thousands of documents in the Baroness's extensive archive, one would not expect to discover a letter from Solomon Bennett written in his own hand specifically about the Bolaffey affair. But such a letter exists, dated February 1, 1824, only a few weeks after the *Declaration* was published. It offers a deeper understanding of the relationship between the Baroness and Bennett and between Bennett and Bolaffey, and it deserves to be cited in full:

---

<sup>18</sup> Lee, *Final Addenda*, 86–87.

<sup>19</sup> On Lee's close relation with Frend, see Powers, *The Female Infidel*, index, s.v. "Frend, William." On Frend, see the previous chapter.

Baroness!

I have read your declaration attentively and am sorry on both sides, viz. of your sustaining losses, and that a member of my nation, particularly a man who claims a portion of erudition, yet should be guilty of that heinous crime of theft—for surely the theft was committed previous to charging you with the fraudulent bill of 200 pounds; it is fabricated to cover the crime of his theft with another heinous crime of a fraudulent bill. The baroness has to recollect that I always have warned you for hypocrites and imposters but now you have experienced it. I am therefore to admonish you of the past and to advise you for the future: viz. to pardon a capital crime is a crime for itself. I am on that account fully convinced if you do not prosecute the offender [viz. Bolaffey] for his criminal conduct, he will infallibly prosecute his designe with respect to his fraudulent bill; depend upon it, he will neither spare your character nor your money nor your generous disposition which you have shown to that villain. He will neither spare to ridicule your Hebrew knowledge all with the views to make himself innocent and master over you. I have also to remind you the good the Baroness may be able to do with the sum of 200 pounds. How many indigent and needy persons the baroness may be able to assist with that sum rather than to indulge felony in its carrier? I conclude it with my sole opinion to prosecute the offender according to law, and to save your pecuniary subsistence but above all your character! As mentioned before.

Your sincere obedient servant, SBennett 14 Panton St., Haymarket

PS. Please not to acquaint anyone of my making such communications to you.<sup>20</sup>

Bennett apparently knew Bolaffey outside their possible meetings in the home of Lee. David Meldola was a friend of Bennett and he was also Bolaffey's brother-in-law, as already mentioned.<sup>21</sup> What is so striking is Bennett's unhesitating conclusion that Bolaffey was guilty of the crimes Lee had delineated, and he strongly encouraged her to prosecute her translator according to the letter of the law, even though he had not bothered to examine how Bolaffey understood the incident, and even though Bolaffey was a fellow Jew. Had not Bolaffey acquired some legitimate credentials by authoring two Hebrew grammars as well as teaching three languages at Oxford and Eton? What motivated Bennett to throw him under the bus, so to speak, to take the side of his Christian patron, while asking her to keep his surprising view a secret? Was it merely competition between the two Jewish teachers to gain the loyalty of their common employer that led him to

<sup>20</sup> The National Archives, Richmond, United Kingdom, TS11/276/999/4 RC3554475.

<sup>21</sup> See Richard Barnett, "Haham Meldola and Hazan de Sola," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 21 (1962–1967): 1–38; including the translation of the letter from Bennett to Meldola quoted in chapter 1 (see n. 34). See also the letter of Isaac Leeser to David Meldola of March 14, 1851, where Bennett is mentioned, p. 2: Isaac Leeser Collection, Box 1, FF8, item 23, Library at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania (LSDCBx1FF8 23); available in the Gershwind-Bennett Isaac Leeser Digital Repository at the University of Pennsylvania, <https://colenda.library.upenn.edu/catalog/81431-p3sb3xj7f>. My thanks to Dr. Arthur Kiron for the reference.

include Bolaffey among the “hypocrites and imposters,” or did he know something else about this man and his character? Bennett had good reason to keep his letter private; that Lee chose to preserve it provides an awkward glimpse behind the scenes of her relationship with the two Jewish scholars.

One other letter from Bennett—dated July 4, 1824, some seven months after the letter above—was saved by the Baroness in her archive. The pretext for writing this time was to inform her of the publication of his commentary on the Temple of Ezekiel, but he quickly added the following lines, meant to confirm his endorsement of her Hebraic skills against any potential doubters of her accomplishments: “I beg to repeat my opinion, frequently given, during eight or nine years, that I have had at various periods, personal communication with you. I consider your Hebrew characters, generally speaking, correct, and I also approve (generally speaking) of the composition of your *perushim*, and of some other of your Hebrew writings which I have seen.”<sup>22</sup>

Bennett signed the letter with his full Hebrew and English name, as if to indicate that he was sending Lee a kind of *haskamah*, authenticating and legitimating her Hebrew competence (with some qualification) as a defense against any possible detractors such as Bolaffey. It appears to be not only a formal gesture to an employer but an act of genuine kindness on the part of an associate who had known her for almost a decade and appreciated her efforts.<sup>23</sup>

---

22 The National Archives, Richmond, United Kingdom, TS11/276/999/4, RC3554475.

There is still one more bit of evidence revealing the ties between Lee and Bennett. In her own personal archive, she deposited a pamphlet written and published by Bennett that is otherwise unknown (see the National Archives, Richmond, United Kingdom, TS11/276/999/4, RC3554475). This work, *An Appeal to the Judicious and Candid Class of the Hebrew Congregation*, signed by him and three others in 1816, justifies his co-officiating at a wedding between a Kohen (a Jew of priestly lineage) and a convert's daughter in the face of the opposition of London's two chief rabbis. On the incident, see chapter 3, above. Bennett had shared this publication with the baroness, who apparently read it, since there are two annotations in her own handwriting on the first page. The first was in response to Bennett's statement that the chief rabbis' stance against the marriage was in contradiction to Numbers 31:18. Elaborating on this idea a few lines below, she writes: “And which of the modern Rabbinical (or barbarous) laws do our learned rabbi preferre [*sic*], to those of the Written, or the Oral laws? But if such be admitted, we may as well change the whole, and there is then an end with the Sanctity attributed to Scripture!” How remarkable that this interesting text exists thanks to its preservation by a Christian woman! And more importantly, it suggests that she and Bennett engaged in interreligious dialogue and that she was interested in rabbinic law, though she disapproved of it when it seemed to contradict the sanctity of Scripture.

23 There is a fourth Jew who was supported by Lee and may have worked for her when he was in London. His name is Hart Simonds of Lesly, in Prussia, as he writes (or Zvi Hirsch ben Shimon)

## 5.2 Mrs. Catherine Housman of Bath

In sharp contrast to the well-publicized and well-documented Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee, Catherine Housman has remained in the shadows of the historical past. Despite my best efforts, I have yet to find any serious discussion of her life or publications in scholarly literature. Notwithstanding this relative anonymity, during her lifetime she did publish six books, which are easily located in major libraries and readily accessible on the internet. Given her strong biblical interests and her animated discussions of the relationship between modern science and Christian faith, she seems to have found a following even among contemporary readers. It is therefore puzzling to try to explain her obscurity among women writers of nineteenth-century England. What is clear, however, is the significant role she played in Solomon Bennett's career in London both as his generous patron and even possibly as his intellectual partner, as we shall soon see.

---

on the title pages of his one known and unusual publication in English and Hebrew: *The Arguments of Faith or Incontrovertible Answers to Sophists and Epicureans* (London: printed for the author by Francis Kiernan, 1822). He writes: "With tears in my eyes and a sad heart. I implored my Creator and exclaimed. O Almighty! Abandon me not, look upon my affliction and my pain! Thy never-ceasing mercy heard me from Thy throne. And before I had finished my humble supplication, I espied a deliverer approaching me, the Baroness Antonina Despenser, only daughter of the much beloved Baron Despenser whose name as well as that of her father 'as he sitteth among the elect of the land' is renowned. I became elevated by her condescension, and then I spoke within myself—I will give her the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.' O Almighty God! Let this deed be remembered in Thy eternal mind, and let her glory brighten forever. Amen" (75–76). He adds in a note: "She assisted me, a stranger, without any previous knowledge of me, to her own detriment, for which may her Almighty deliverer assist her in all her difficulties and enable her to complete all her works. (75n). Anne Powers, who first noticed this passage, observes in *The Female Infidel* (330–331) that Lee certainly must have had her hand in the project, as he echoes her (false) claim that she was the only daughter of the Baron Despenser. Powers indicates that Simonds petitioned Lee two years later for ten pounds for the fifty copies of the book he had delivered to her, even threatening to sue her. Kiernan was paid the ten pounds in 1825, and Simonds apologized to the baroness. Powers does not provide the source for this information, which I could not verify.

Simonds's work, written for a Jewish readership but also an English one, is a rather conventional Jewish refutation of selected biblical passages alleged by Christian exegetes to allude to Jesus. That Lee was willing to support the publication of this book, given her issues with Christianity, is highly interesting. My thanks to Professor Marcin Wodziński, whose educated guess is that Simonds's place of origin, Lesly, was Loslau, or Wodzisław Śląski, in Upper Silesia, which already had some Jewish population at the end of the eighteenth century (see "Wodzisław Śląski: Demography," *Polin: Virtual Shtetl*, 2017, <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/node/453/100-demography/22139-demography>).

Catherine Housman was born in Liverpool in 1776 and died in 1855 at the age of eighty-five, as recorded in the Bath Archives. *The Bath Chronicle* (Thursday, February 22, 1855, p. 3) mentions that she died on February 19 at her residence in 14 Sydney Place, at a very advanced age: “Mrs. Housman, was an old and respected inhabitant of this city, whose loss will be sincerely regretted by the neighbouring poor.” The *Chronicle* of Thursday, March 22, 1855 (p. 2), contains an advertisement for the sale by auction of her effects. These included a “select library,” a grand piano-forte, china, glass, and plate.<sup>24</sup> As to other details of her life, there are only passing references in her writing: she was enrolled in a “seminary”; she attended various lectures; she corresponded with a Boston clergyman (Isaac Boyle) who was a relative; she read widely on biblical, archeological, theological, and scientific subjects; and she was a woman of means who supported local charity, subsidized her own publications, and, at least in the case of Bennett, underwrote those of others. She seemed to know various prominent public figures, especially in Bath, several of whom are mentioned in her writings, and was respected as an accomplished author. She learned biblical Hebrew and had also studied postbiblical Hebrew writings, including poetry. She read considerably in ancient history and archaeology and was fascinated by antique art and symbolism. She was also familiar with contemporary writings on science, especially works challenging scientific theories as threatening to Christian faith. She was apparently a widow, since her name in her books and in the archives appears as Mrs. Housman or Mrs. Catherine Housman.

Between 1821 and 1849, Housman published six books—all focused on the same theme of defending the inerrancy of biblical truths against the regnant scientific theories of her day regarding creation, heliocentricity, atomism, multiple worlds, gravitation, and more. The books seemed to be responses to specific texts that aroused her anger, and in some cases they apparently originated as private letters to friends, which she later collected and prepared for publication.

Housman’s first book was titled in Hebrew and English: *Michtav o-Aḥvah mi-Sefer Torah Limḥot et ha-Aglah / A Writing or Declaration from the Law Book, to Obliterate the House of the Revolver, or Solar System* (1821). Written initially as an amusement, she tells us, it was eventually recast as a book to counter the famous

---

<sup>24</sup> This information is gleaned from *Bath Chronicle*, February 22, 1855, 3; March 22, 1855, 2. See also P. J. Bendall, *Newton St Loe, Bath: Memorial Inscriptions* (2016), <https://www.batharchives.co.uk/sites/www.bathvenues.co.uk/files/2022-07/NSL%2520Memorials%2520Issue%25202.pdf>. Catherine Housman’s will is located at the National Archives, Richmond, United Kingdom, PROB 11/2208/200. The will, which has two codicils, mentions the distribution of her assets to individuals and institutions located primarily in Bath and Liverpool. Among the beneficiaries is her Boston relative mentioned in her books, Rev. Isaac Boyle; and see below.

sentiment of Alexander Pope: “Nature and Nature’s Laws Lay Hid in Night—God said, ‘Let Newton be!’ and all was Light.” She adds, “In regard to Pope’s epitaph, I unite with many who deem those lines profane. And in respect to Sir Isaac Newton, although he might have been one of the very best of men, nevertheless, if we permit the word of God to bias, and form our judgment on that base, it compels us to allow, that when Sir Isaac demonstrated those laws of Kepler, he must have been under the influence of some deception.”<sup>25</sup> What follows is her concerted attempt to show that the origin of this deception, the Newtonian solar system, was to be located in ancient heathen notions of the gods. As they were condemned by the biblical prophets, they deserve the same repudiation in the author’s day. Referring to of the worship of the idol Rimmon by the ancient king of Syria’s house, she writes: “Although the present age may be deemed highly enlightened with respect to the arts and sciences, yet there must be an exception of one branch (for the science of the system of creation must be excluded) as that remains in the same dark state as it was full eight-hundred and ninety years before the birth of our Saviour, our present Orrery or solar system being the very same as that which the Syrian king adopted.”<sup>26</sup>

She proceeds to offer familiar and oft-repeated arguments against the credibility of the solar system and astronomy in general, which is “based on conjecture though dressed up with all the parade of mathematical demonstration.” She is particularly offended by the teaching of Newton’s works in the seminaries, where “a pupil is invited to walk the solar path, as if he was going to be led into the light of God’s path, to cull the flowers of sublimity, or to set his feet on some precious stone of sure foundation.” But the theory of Newton is equivalent to the theory of Baal against the truth of the Lord, and “what our God reveals we ought to know; what he conceals, we never can.”<sup>27</sup> The Epicureans, the Peripatetics, the Gassendists, and the Cartesians, she adds, have examined and discussed under the terms of vacuum and infinity all those parts of physics which remain full of doubts, questions, and uncertainties that can never be resolved. As it is impossible for them to know the finite bounds of matter or its infinity, the divisibility of that

---

25 Catherine Housman, *Michtav o-Aḥvah mi-Sefer Torah Limḥot et ha-Aglah / A Writing or Declaration from the Law Book, to Obliterate the House of the Revolver, or Solar System* (London: A. J. Valpy, 1821), v–vi.

26 Housman, *Michtav o-Aḥvah mi-Sefer Torah / A Writing or Declaration from the Law Book*, 102.

27 Housman, *Michtav o-Aḥvah mi-Sefer Torah / A Writing or Declaration from the Law Book*, 121, 133, 240, 260. On the general context of Housman’s anti-Newtonianism in the first half of the nineteenth century, see John Gascoigne, “From Bentley to the Victorians: The Rise and Fall of British Newtonian Natural Theology,” *Science in Context* 2 (1988): 219–256, and Francis Reid, “Isaac Frost’s *Two Systems of Astronomy* (1846): Plebeian Resistance and Scriptural Astronomy,” *British Journal of the History of Science* 38 (2005): 161–177.

same matter is another secret of which they will be eternally ignorant. But she makes clear that there remains a positive place for scientific inquiry: “You are not, my dear sir [she is writing to a relative], to conclude, although I am against Newtonian theory, that I am against any branch of useful science. I hold the talents of mankind in high esteem as anyone. It is merely a dissenting voice against astronomy’s unfathomables, seemingly so devoid of truth, that even its adopters outlive their faith, and where to cultivate is time ill-spent.”<sup>28</sup>

Interspersed among her acute anti-Newtonian comments are several equally impressive displays of Hebraic knowledge. She cites and explains Akiva’s midrash on man, woman, and fire in the Babylonian Talmud tractate *Sotah* 17a. She offers her own Hebrew translation of the first Psalm, deviating from the standard version. She waxes eloquent on the beauty of the Hebrew language:

The Hebrew language, under those who dip into its treasurable depository merely for amusement, may find much entertainment, from the great degree of system and analogy it contains. There is a lambent spirit that plays about the word which reason has the faculty to collect, examine, and diffuse again each part into its own letter or into a kindred one. Although order be diversified, still do we find unanimity preserved, and trace also in each ancient page an affection of the same spirit, breathing throughout the whole tradition, enticing each individual (whose final expectations are to stand in his proportionate lot in Zion’s Heavenly Temple) to depart from the serpent *dever*, wilderness of suppositions and errors into the *davar* of light and truth.<sup>29</sup>

After citing a passage from the Aramaic Targum, she admits: “I am under obligation to a learned friend for the above note, not having any knowledge myself of the Syriac or nothing of the Chaldee except for its resemblance to Hebrew.”<sup>30</sup> Was her learned friend Solomon Bennett? We shall examine her indebtedness to him below. But her Hebraic literacy is beyond question, as she then proceeds to quote from “a beautiful Hebrew poem composed by Solomon ibn Gabirol in the 4th century [sic]” that is among the “ancient compositions” in her possession. She translates the poem, which begins with the words *Ashrei Ayin Ra’atah shoshanat ha-Sharon* [Happy is the eye which beholds the rose of Sharon].<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Housman, *Michtav o-Aḥvah mi-Sefer Torah / A Writing or Declaration from the Law Book*, 121, 275.

<sup>29</sup> Housman, *Michtav o-Aḥvah mi-Sefer Torah / A Writing or Declaration from the Law Book*, 257, 279, 282–283. *Dever* [plague] and *davar* [word] have the same root.

<sup>30</sup> Housman, *Michtav o-Aḥvah mi-Sefer Torah / A Writing or Declaration from the Law Book*, 318.

<sup>31</sup> Housman, *Michtav o-Aḥvah mi-Sefer Torah / A Writing or Declaration from the Law Book*, 324–325. On the poem itself and a listing of its variants, see Israel Davidson, *Oẓar ha-shira ve-hapyyut* [Thesaurus of medieval Hebrew poetry], vol. 1 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary 1924), 381 aleph, no. 8434.

Housman's second book was published twelve years later; *Three Letters to a Friend* (1833) was written as a response to two popular books by the Reverend Alexander Keith (1792–1880): *The Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion from the Fulfilment of Prophecy* (1823) and *Signs of the Times* (1832). Keith was a Free Church of Scotland minister who won acclaim for his refutation of David Hume, especially in his early work. Known as “Prophecy Keith,” he traveled to Palestine as part of Scotland's mission of inquiry to the Jews.<sup>32</sup>

Writing to Mrs. Cuming, her trusted friend, Housman objected to Keith's assumption that the progress of science had ultimately become equivalent to the cause of truth because of geological discoveries or Newton's theories. While referring to some of the key Newtonians of her day, such as Halley and Herschel, she also mentions and cites approvingly several of the critics of Newton, such as Robert Woodhouse, Thomas Baker, and John Scott, whose works she had consulted. Keith may be an able writer, she concludes, “but he passed over the sins of the science of Baal.”<sup>33</sup> The opinions of the critics helped convince her that the Newtonian system was on the decline.

In her next letter she takes on the geological theories of Georges Cuvier, particularly his notion of catastrophism, a succession of deluges plaguing the earth, relying on one Captain George Forman, who challenged his theory in a book of essays published in 1832. She argues that Forman's demolition of Cuvier is useful as long as he avoids deviating from Scripture:

The young students in geology, upon the authority of their great master, imbibe notions which they believe to be founded on physical laws, and when they find that these notions, even with the utmost latitude of interpretation, cannot be made to accord with the facts recorded in Scripture, they are too apt to give up the revelation of God for the wild fancies of a philosopher. [ . . . ] Forman's idea of a single deluge countering the forty is a precious gem, a defender of the faith of the Holy Writ. But one must weed out the few Baalish trees which mingle in his otherwise excellent reasonings.<sup>34</sup>

---

32 On Rev. Alexander Keith, see Lionel Alexander Ritchie, “Keith, Alexander (1792–1880), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15262>.

33 Catherine Housman, *Three Letters to a Friend* (London: A. J. Valpey, 1833), 27. She had read Robert Woodhouse, *Treatise on Astronomy Theoretical and Practical* (Cambridge: J. Smith for J. Deighton & Sons, 1821); Thomas Baker, *Reflections Upon Learning, Wherein Is Shewn the Insufficiency Thereof, in Its Several Particulars, in Order to Evince the Usefulness and Necessity of Revelation* (London: A. Bosvile, 1699); and John Scott, *The Holy Scriptural Doctrine of the Divine Trinity in Essential Unity* (London: printed by the author and others, 1754).

34 Housman, *Three Letters to a Friend*, 49–52. See Captain Walter Forman, *Treatises on Several Very Important Subjects on Natural Philosophy* (London: Wason and Foxwell, 1832), appendix f, “Cuvier's Theory of a Succession of Deluges.”

She also dismisses the Reverend Thomas Chalmers's *Discourses on the Christian Revelation viewed in Connexion with the Modern Astronomy* (1817), his well-known and highly influential arguments for a meaningful synthesis between Newton and Christian faith: "Newton's hypothesis retards our belief in the certainty of Jesus's view of creation. [. . .] You should pause before surrendering your faith to Dr. Thomas Chalmers' *Discourses*. [. . .] Believing in Newton is anti-Christian, apostacy, and idolatry."<sup>35</sup>

Six years later, Housman published a letter to Dr. Joseph Hume Spry of Bath, her friend and neighbor, and made sure to send a copy to her relative in Boston, Rev. Isaac Boyle. As in her other works, she again reveals her considerable erudition in Hebraic studies and in the Christian polemical attacks against Newton in her day. Of considerable interest are her reflections on the history of the Hebrew language. She disagrees with Humphrey Prideaux that the returning exiles learned Hebrew in Aramaic after their exile in Babylon, arguing to the contrary that they did not lose their native language so quickly. She cites approvingly Benjamin Kennicott's opinions on the Judean Hebrew of the exiles as well as Gerald Fitzgerald's *An Essay on the Originality and Permanency of the Biblical History* (Dublin, 1796). She concludes that the Hebrew letters were never changed during Ezra's time, that Hebrew was the first and original language of mankind and was preserved with the most vigilant care from Moses to Malachi, that Saadia composed the first Hebrew grammar in the tenth century, and that the vowel points were neither original nor essential to the Hebrew language, which itself was pure from its inception.<sup>36</sup>

Housman continues her assault on the Newtonian solar system with an additional set of recent authorities she had consulted, especially Thomas Wirgman's *Opinions of the Divarication of the New Testament* (1835), Charles Babbage's *The Decline of Science in England and on Some of Its Causes* (1830), and John Murray's *Proof of Revelation Based on an Appeal to Existing Monuments, Sculptures, Gems, Coins, and Medals* (1831). Her primary concern, as before, is to argue for the primacy of faith: "[W]e see how, at every turn, it is the study of those who devote themselves to science to *ridicule* the *idea* of standing in awe of God, or in attributing to HIM the immediate superintendence over his works!"<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Housman, *Three Letters to a Friend*, 55–95; quotation, 95. On Chalmers, see now Jonathan R. Topham, *Reading the Book of Nature: How Eight Best Sellers Reconnected Christianity and the Sciences on the Eve of the Victorian Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

<sup>36</sup> Catherine Housman, *Letter to Dr. Spry in Vindication of the Word of God against Every Species of Scientific Opposition* (London: W. Hughes, 1839), 8–50.

<sup>37</sup> Housman, *Letter to Dr. Spry*, 61–81, 97–130, 185–193; quotation, 63.

Catherine Housman wrote three other books, but I conclude this brief overview of her writing by focusing only on the volume she published in 1849 titled *Meditations on the Scriptural Interpretations Contained in Sir William Drummond's "Oedipus Judaicus,"* a work particularly relevant to Bennett, since (as we have seen in the previous chapter) he corresponded with Drummond.<sup>38</sup> Sir William Drummond of Logiealmond printed his *Oedipus Judaicus* in 1811 for private circulation; in it, he attempted to prove that the Old Testament was an extended astrological allegory. The book immediately incurred the wrath of several critics.<sup>39</sup> Housman discovered the volume relatively late, but given her previous defenses of the literal truth of Scripture, she could not restrain herself from offering her own personal assault on his speculations. She relied especially on the Reverend George Townsend's *Oedipus Romanus* (1819), an attempt to extend Drummond's thesis to the twelve Caesars of Rome, to satirize and belittle Drummond's fallacious reading. Using his vast knowledge of ancient pagan religious and archeology, Sir William, Housman claimed, had discovered a new way of eliciting truth, "commanding us to desert the alter of Revelation to kneel at that of reason and liberality, pointing to the Persian sphere, the Indian zodiac, and the Egyptian hieroglyphic, as the sacred substitute of the Christian scriptures."<sup>40</sup> Drummond insisted that the Hebrews had invented the zodiac, that the zodiacal structure found at Palmyra was built by Solomon, and that multiple biblical passages could be reduced to an astrological explanation, especially those describing the Temple and Tabernacle, all hypotheses that Housman found strained and unconvincing. She ultimately concludes that "Drummond most unaccountably resolves all things into zodiacal signs and constellations; and I am decidedly of the opinion that he never would have indulged in the hallucinations contained in his *Oedipus Judaicus* which robs the Scriptures of all reasonable claims to truth, had he not fully adopted the tenets of the solar system[.]"<sup>41</sup> To refute Drummond, she even cites an English translation of Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Maddah* on Abraham's confrontation with the idolatry of his day. She closes with a long quotation from George Townsend on the danger of Drummond's learning, ingenuity, and talent being not in the service of Christianity, with which she totally concurs. Revelation must be literally interpreted or it ceases to be history: "The narratives of scripture, before

---

38 The other two works Housman published are *Letter to Charles Empson, Esq.* (London: Hughes and Robinson, 1848), and *Observations on a Volume Recently Published Entitled "Perfect Peace" or Letters Memorial of the Late John Warren Howell, Esq. of Bath, M.R.C.S.* (London: W. Hughes, 1844).

39 On Drummond, see chapter 4 above.

40 Housman, *Meditations on the Scriptural Interpretations*, 10.

41 Housman, *Meditations on the Scriptural Interpretations*, 33–61; quotation, 61.

Sir Drummond's interpretation, melt away like the rainbow in the heavens. The doctrines of Christianity cease to exist; morality becomes a matter of convenience, principle a dream, the laws of God chimerical, the laws of man expedient."<sup>42</sup>

At first glance, it is hard to fathom how Solomon Bennett was attracted to Catherine Housman other than as a major source for subsidizing his publications. She certainly appears to be his most enthusiastic patron, a factor that undoubtedly had much to do with the bond the two developed over time. But their mutually positive feelings toward each other rested on more than her financial support. In the first place, she appreciated his engravings and purchased them for her highly illustrated books. Already in her first book of 1821, *A Writing or Declaration from the Law Book*, she uses four: one based on Exodus 25:9 (the form of the Tabernacle), one based on 1 Kings 11:7 (Solomon's altar for Chemosh [Chemosh]), and one based on Daniel 13:18 (Daniel discovers the deceit of Bel's priests). Bennett's original engraving of the Molten Sea based on 1 Kings 7 is also included, drawing on his book describing Solomon's circulating water system of the Temple, which Housman generously cites.<sup>43</sup> The first three engravings (but not the Molten Sea) are used again in *Three Letters to a Friend* and in *Letter to Charles Empson*. Two of them appear in *Meditations on the Scriptural Interpretations*; one appears in her *Letter to Dr. Spry*. In other words, she circulated and recirculated Bennett's engravings among others that fit the subject matter of her books.<sup>44</sup>

Housman also seemed to have read Bennett carefully. He had sent her multiple copies of his Ezekiel commentary, which he dedicated to her. She not only appreciated his commentary on King Solomon's Molten Sea, reproducing his accompanying plate and carefully summarizing his thoughts; she also read his *Theological and Critical Treatise on the Primogeniture and Integrity of the Hebrew Language* (1835). She discusses the integrity and continuity of the Hebrew language in her *Letter to Dr. Spry* in a manner almost identical to that of Bennett, and then she adds (in a discussion of derivatives of Hebrew in other languages):

---

<sup>42</sup> Housman, *Meditations on the Scriptural Interpretations*, 63–79, 101–109; quotation, 105. She uses the English translation of Maimonides by Hermann Hedwig Bernard: *The Main Principles of the Creed and Ethics of the Jews, Exhibited in Selections from the Yad Hachazakah of Maimonides* (Cambridge: J. Smith, printer to the University, 1832).

<sup>43</sup> Housman, *Michtav o-Ahvah mi-Sefer Torah / A Letter or Declaration from the Law Book*, 8, 44, 242, 326–40. Bennett published *The Molten Sea* in 1821.

<sup>44</sup> Housman, *Three Letters to a Friend*, 66–68; *Letter to Charles Empson*, 32, 106, and end of volume; *Meditations on the Scriptural Interpretations*, 52, 72; and *Letter to Dr. Spry*, 204. See also appendix II, below.

“The above specimens testify to the truth of the late Solomon Bennett’s remarks that the Hebrew language ‘lendeth to all and borroweth of none.’”<sup>45</sup> Her book to Spry appeared only a year after Bennett’s death in 1838. In addition, she may have used several illustrations from a Passover Haggadah in his possession.<sup>46</sup>

Bennett, for his part, was indebted to her for her financial contributions to several of his publications, especially his work on the Hebrew language, *Specimen of a New Translation of the Hebrew Bible* (1836), and, of course, his Ezekiel commentary. Here is his dedication to Mrs. Housman at the beginning of the elegant edition of the latter work:

Madam,

Our sacred writings assure us, among other encouragements to the pursuit of wisdom and learning that “*Ez Hāyīm Hi* [ . . . ]”: “She is the tree of life to those who fortify her, and they that support her are happy” (Prov. iii. 18): of which passage the Rabbinical exposition is, that The text does not say “*le-lomdeha*,” to those that *study and learn* her, but “*le-mahzikim ba*,” to those who *fortify and support* her; implying, that both those who study and those who support her, shall equally reap the fruit of the tree of life.

Impressed with the feelings and truth of the mentioned Rabbinical laudable theme, and grateful for the assistance I have received from you, who, out of pure zeal for ancient literature and the sacred writings, spontaneously patronised this work, and enabled me to bring it before the public, I have requested permission to dedicate it to you; and assure you, that a sense of your kindness and encouragement will remain indelibly fixed in the heart of,

Madam,

your much obliged, and very humble servant, S. Bennett.<sup>47</sup>

Bennett’s dedication appears more than perfunctory; rather, it is warmly felt and expressed. No doubt their genuine connection, at least over the last seventeen years of his life from the time of her first publication in 1821, was based on their mutual “pure zeal for ancient literature and the sacred writings.” Bennett’s intel-

<sup>45</sup> Housman, *Letter to Dr. Spry*, 50.

<sup>46</sup> Housman, *Michtav o-Aḥvah mi-Sefer Torah / A Letter or Declaration from the Law Book*, 33, 283; *Three Letters to a Friend*, 78: “Image in colors of the molten calf of transgression in the wilderness illustrating their change of glory by evolutions around the sun. Copied by a friend from a very ancient Hebrew book concerning the Passover, in the private collection of a gentleman who obligingly permitted the above.”

<sup>47</sup> Solomon Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel: viz. An Elucidation of the 40th, 41st, 42nd, &c. Chapters of Ezekiel, Consistently with the Hebrew Original; and a Minute Description of the Edifice, on Scientific Principles, Illustrated by a Ground-Plan and Bird’s-Eye View* (London: published by the author, R. Hunter, and M. Solomon, 1824), v–vi, “Dedication to Mrs. Housman of Sidney Place, Bath; and formerly of Springfield, near Liverpool.” See the next chapter for an extended discussion of this work, as well as appendix 1 on *The Molten Sea*.

lectual tie to Housman may rest on even more than their mutual zeal for ancient literature, as I propose below.

Solomon Bennett worked tirelessly until the day of his death in 1838 on his revised English translation of the standard edition of the Old Testament, which included his short introductions to some of the biblical books and his comments related to his translations throughout. His handwritten copy of this almost completed work is extant. It opens with his translation of Genesis and an original introduction. The translation was published posthumously in 1841 by his Christian friend Francis Foster Barham without the introduction, which apparently was not to the liking of the editor, who wrote his own preface to Bennett's translation. Here is a part of Bennett's introduction relevant to the views of Housman:

Modern critics, the gropers after the ruins of Egypt and Asia tell us of civilizations that preceded the one depicted in our sacred scripture. [ . . . ] [T]hese whims are mere undigested suppositions invented from the hieroglyphical figures of fragments of ancient Egypt, the mode of the characters being mere cyphers, dull and insignificant. Some philosophers designate an antiquity to the world from the zodiacs of Egypt, Persia and the ruins of the East and some grope among the constellations of the celestial hosts which they consider far and beyond our computations in Scripture. How can these undigested suppositions challenge the plain authority of the truth of scripture, written in plain and explicit language? [ . . . ] They settled in their mind to change places between the sun and earth so that the latter revolves around the former. They found it no difficult task to transmigrate all the visibly lucid stars into material and opaque bodies, namely many habitable globes like our inhabitable earth. They defy the first chapter of Genesis entirely with the doctrine of plurality of worlds ad infinitum.<sup>48</sup>

The philosophers' doctrine of plurality, Bennett claims, is invalid; so too their proposed measurement of the diameter of the earth's orbit, and other whimsical and unproven hypotheses. Their only object is to reject the position of sacred Scripture, its authority with respect to creation, to annul revealed religion and the chronology laid out in Scripture, and miracles. This has been acknowledged by all nations to be a code and record to preserve the commonweal of mankind, and nothing is more important than to testify to its eternal truth.

Bennett mentions several authors who supported his vigorous critique of modern science but not Housman, even though his argument, which extends for several pages, appears to mirror hers in several of her publications, especially

---

<sup>48</sup> MS Jews College 105, vols. 1–2, corrections and annotations by Solomon Bennett of the Oxford standard edition of the Old Testament, 1824. The citation and summary is from 1:16–19, part of his introduction to the book of Genesis. His translation of Genesis is found in *The Hebrew and English Holy Bible* (London: printed for the family of the late Solomon Bennet, 1841). I consider this work more extensively in chapter 8, below.

her refutation of William Drummond. Was it merely a coincidence that their positions were so close? Had he read her writings as she had read his, and did they at least discuss these issues with each other? One is hard-pressed to answer these questions or even to imagine how an enlightened Jew, considered radical by some of his own co-religionists, shared identical views regarding biblical authority and contemporary science with a pious female fundamentalist of the Christian faith.<sup>49</sup>

### 5.3 On the interactions between Bennett, Lee, and Housman

Would it be fair to describe the relationships Bennett had with Lee and Housman as friendships, or were their acquaintances simply built primarily on the artistic and literary services that Bennett provided both women? While I have hesitated to speak about “friendships” between the Jew and the two Christian women, their exchanges were certainly more than transactional. Bennett had long-term relationships with both of them, and they appeared to value his knowledge and his counsel. Of course, the case of each woman was different. While both displayed a deep attraction to biblical and Jewish studies, and especially the Hebrew language, Housman was more inquisitive and erudite, at least regarding the Bible and ancient history. Lee, of course, was capable of writing a serious book on political thought, although her personal meditation in Hebrew was less impressive. What both women had in common was their attraction to Bennett because he was a learned Jew willing to share his knowledge with Christians. This was in

---

<sup>49</sup> I should at least mention that although Bennett was probably familiar with Housman’s works and might have been affected by her views, he did not quote her directly. However, as we have seen, he had no hesitation in praising her publicly as a patron of his works.

One final question about the two women: How typical were their Hebraic and biblical pursuits? No doubt many Anglican and especially evangelical women in nineteenth-century Great Britain and elsewhere in Europe were fascinated by and engaged in Bible study and exegesis. The scholarship on Christian women students of the Bible is quite extensive. See, for example, Marion Ann Taylor, “Anglican Women and the Bible in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 75 (2006): 527–552; Marion Ann Taylor, “Women and Biblical Criticism in Nineteenth-Century England,” in *Faith and Feminism in Nineteenth-Century Religious Communities*, ed. Ruth Albrecht and Michaela Sohn-Kronthaler (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019), 29–62; and Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi, *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: An Historical and Biographical Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2012). But Lee was hardly typical, given her life experiences and her singular Hebrew composition. And Housman’s knowledge of science, ancient history, archaeology, and art, as well as Hebraic studies, appears far more advanced than that of most other female biblical exegetes of her day.

sharp contrast, as I have argued, to the lack of appreciation, the indifference, even the hostility, that Bennett experienced from his fellow Jews.<sup>50</sup> Whether there was a close friendship between the Jew and the two Christians or not, their interactions were hardly superficial or casual. In their interfaith encounters, there was indeed a meeting of minds, if not hearts.

Finally, I pose the obvious question of whether the sex of these two exceptional women had any special impact on Bennett's relationship with each of them.<sup>51</sup> Bennett, as I have mentioned, fashioned strong ties with a conspicuous number of Christian men of varied persuasions and denominations. For example, he corresponded with William Drummond, who was Housman's nemesis. Drummond even wrote him a flattering letter, publicly acknowledging his learned Jewish interlocutor.<sup>52</sup> Bennett cherished these Christian social and intellectual connections with learned Christians because they were financially efficacious as well as intellectually invigorating. He genuinely believed, as we have seen, that the special Christians he encountered were admirable because of both their liberal Christian faith and their tolerance of minorities such as the Jews. Their religiosity was quite different from that of their counterparts in Poland and Germany, so he believed. It was genuinely exciting to live in a country where a Jewish intellectual had relative freedom and privilege far beyond the limited opportunities of the Continent.

Was Bennett's contact with these Christian women substantially different from those he nurtured with Christian men? The intensely felt needs of Lee and Housman to study Hebrew and Judaism with a Jew in order to deepen their own religious identities do appear, at first glance, to be like those of Bennett's male patrons. But perhaps one might argue that as women with more limited professional and intellectual opportunities than those of men, their encounter with Bennett and his accessible Jewish knowledge offered them unique paths both to elevate their own intellectual profile and to enhance their own spiritual lives. This dynamic seems more evident in the case of Lee, whose life and feelings are more accessible through her writings. As we have seen, her traumatic kidnapping and apparent rape, followed by the ridicule and notoriety that accompanied her all her life, left her a kind of tragic figure who had been victimized by men. Her need to compensate for her own feelings of illegitimacy and inferiority might

---

<sup>50</sup> See chapter 3, above.

<sup>51</sup> My thoughts in the next few paragraphs are stimulated by the perceptive remarks of Professor Iris Idelson-Shein, who read and commented on an earlier version of this chapter. I am grateful to her although the mistakes that might follow are my own.

<sup>52</sup> See chapter 4, above.

have motivated her to employ Jewish men, marginalized as she was her and seeking their own legitimacy in a Christian world.

Lee's relationship with Bolaffey seems to offer clearer evidence of a gendered interaction than her relationship with Bennett. Lee demanded loyalty from her entourage of Jewish men; they were there to testify and assure her how gifted she was as a scholar of the Hebrew language. When Bolaffey apparently tried to cheat her, she was deeply offended and felt compelled to punish him by publicly humiliating him while reminding him and others of her generous support for him. Did their odd arrangement, as she composed a Hebrew epistle while he translated her work into perfect English, not serve bizarrely to bolster both their images? He was elevating her as a scholar and author of prophetic passages in the holy language, while she was promoting him, a foreign Jew, to the status of a kind of British don with full command of the English language. That this relationship of mutual support was suddenly shattered by his apparent greed or desperate need to gain more advantage over her seems tragic. Lee learned once again the dire consequences of relying on untrustworthy men, a lesson reinforced by Bennett's testimony about his fellow Jew in his private letter to her.

In returning finally to Bennett and his attraction to these two women, I wish to underscore that the more he inhabited Christian spaces and engaged with English intellectuals, both male and female, the more Jewish he became in his own eyes and in those of his Christian associates. Rather than view this apparent paradox as the inevitable consequence of the Jew who wishes to assimilate into non-Jewish society but cannot, I would argue that in Bennett's case, we see someone consciously choosing to navigate an entrance into elite Christian society while remaining proudly and defiantly a Jew. Becoming a Jewish expert in those aspects of Judaism especially attractive to Christians—Hebrew language and biblical exegesis—was not only a strategy for earning a livelihood and gaining social acceptance. It became ultimately the way he could define his own cultural identity, express his devotion to the language and moral legacy of the Jews, and contribute meaningfully to English civilization.

## 6 The Artist as Exegete: Bennett's *Temple of Ezekiel (Torat Ha-Bayit) (1824)*

In 1824, Bennett's *Temple of Ezekiel: viz. An Elucidation of the 40th, 41st, 42nd, &c. Chapters of Ezekiel, Consistently with the Hebrew Original and a Minute Description of the Edifice, on Scientific Principles, Illustrated by a Ground-Plan and Bird's-Eye View* was published in London (see Figure 6.1). It was perhaps his best-known work, and certainly the one most elegantly printed and most well-supported by Christians and Jews alike. The English translation and commentary were accompanied by an engraved portrait of the author and two detailed engravings of the Temple, by a list of highly significant patrons, and by a heartfelt dedication to the person who had contributed most to this project. Bennett had obviously worked on this book for a long time. He mentions that he had already prepared the plates when he was a young man still living in Belarus.<sup>1</sup> He had finished the English work apparently as early as 1811 (the date with which he closes the preface both in English and Hebrew) and had struggled to find a publisher and the means to publish the book. But in 1824, his effort was crowned with success as he acquired the needed financial support and found publishers willing to produce this attractive work. The book was printed by the well-known A. J. Valpy of Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, and published by the author, 14 Panton St., Haymarket, along with R. Hunter of 72 St. Paul's Church Yard, and M. Solomon of 119 Pall Mall.<sup>2</sup>

M. Solomon was none other than Myer Solomon, one of the most prominent Jews of London—cantor, ritual slaughterer, preacher, and circumciser—as well as philanthropist and proprietor of a popular bric-à-brac store on 119 Pall Mall that drew many visitors, Jewish as well as Christian. Solomon had founded the Western Synagogue, a synagogue where Bennett was at least a nominal member

---

1 See Solomon Bennett, *Nezah Yisra'el: The Constancy of Israel: An Unprejudiced Illustration of Some of the Most Important Texts of the Bible: or, A Polemical, Critical, and Theological Reply to a Public Letter, by Lord Crawford, Addressed to the Hebrew Nation* (London: W. H. Wyatt, 1809), 156–157: “I have in my possession two different plans of the Temple described by Ezekiel, which I performed in the earlier part of my life for the Bible Society when in my native Country, according to different Commentators, executed in a proper manner, with all dimensions, geometrically represented, and fully described, agreeable to the text of the Bible, (which at a more successful period, I intend to engrave and publish).” For discussion of this statement, see chapter 1, above.

2 On Valpy, see W. P. Courtney, revised by Richard Jenkyns, “Valpy, Abraham John (*hap.* 2786, *d.* 1854),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 17, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28054>. On Hunter's publishing history, see the Open Library webpage at Internet Archive, [https://openlibrary.org/publishers/R.\\_Hunter](https://openlibrary.org/publishers/R._Hunter), and Philip A. H. Brown, *London Publishers and Printers, c. 1800– 1870* (London: British Library, 1982), index. On Solomon, see the next footnote.

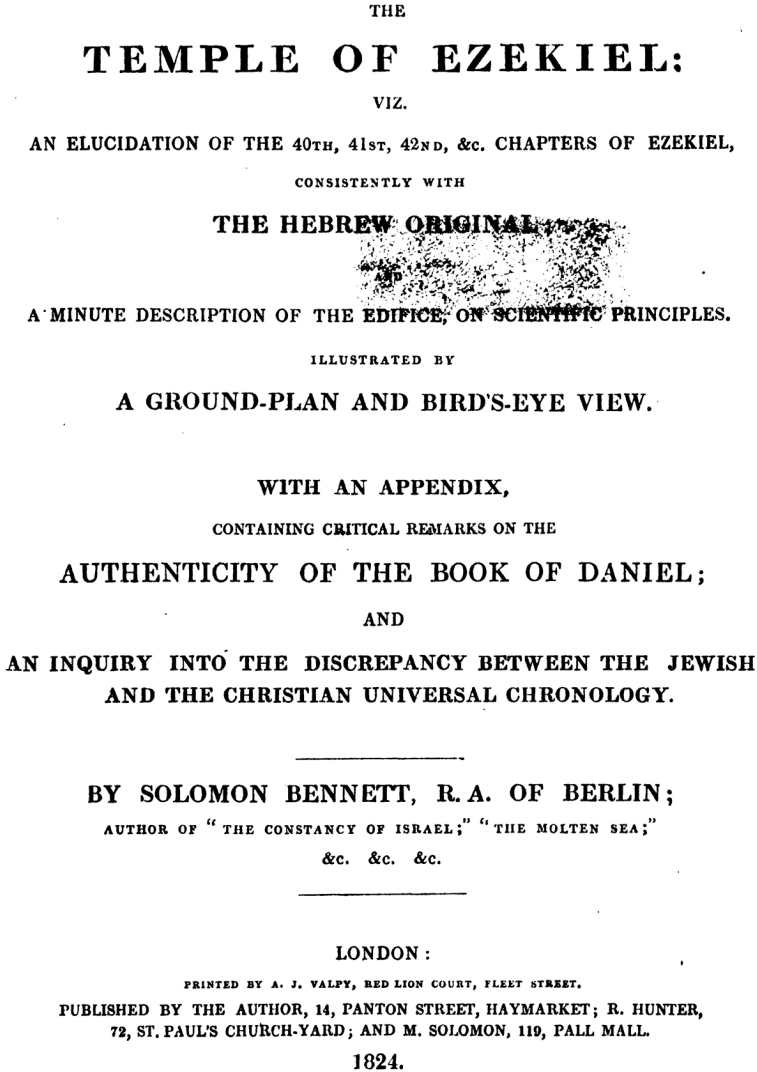


Figure 6.1: Title page of Bennett's *The Temple of Ezekiel* (London, 1824).

along with several of his sons.<sup>3</sup> Myer Solomon was listed as a patron of the book as well as publisher.

---

<sup>3</sup> On Myer Solomon, see Arthur Barnett, *The Western Synagogue through Two Centuries (1761–1961)* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1961), 151–155. See also “The Circumcision Register of Myer Solomon of

Upon completing the English edition, Bennett prepared a Hebrew version intended for his co-religionists on the Continent and especially in Belarus. The manuscript is still extant but was never published. Though the Hebrew manuscript generally follows the English, it clearly adds comments not found in the printed version, designed for a readership that was Jewish and literate in Hebrew.<sup>4</sup>

While Bennett had benefited from sponsors who supported several of his other books, his success in gaining patrons for this book on Ezekiel was especially impressive, beginning with the chief sponsor, Mrs. Catherine Housman, discussed in the preceding chapter. As we have seen, Bennett had previously been commissioned by her to create engravings on biblical themes for her various publications; she had read several of his books both prior to and following the publication of the Ezekiel volume; and in the case of two of his works, she also contributed to their printing. He most likely had read her own works on the conflict between biblical truth and modern science. Bennett obviously valued her supportive relationship, as he indicates in his warm dedication to her quoted above.<sup>5</sup>

Besides Mrs. Housman, Bennett's list of patrons includes several eminent clergymen, barristers, and literary figures, mostly Christians but some influential Jews as well. A number were long-term friends and supporters such as the Unitarian leader William Frend, the distinguished and controversial scholar of the ancient world William Drummond, and a Jewish merchant originally from Amsterdam named Morris Solomon. Bennett dedicated other books to Frend and Solomon and published his correspondence with Drummond on the book of Daniel as an appendix to this book.<sup>6</sup> The Christian clergymen included the Lord Bish-

---

the Western Synagogue, 1782–1839," *JCR-UK: The Susser Archive*, August 18, 2014, <https://www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/susser/myersolomoncircreg.htm>.

4 Solomon Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, MS Jews College 4 (now London School of Jewish Studies MS 4); digital copy in National Library of Israel, NLI Film no. F 5376.

5 Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 5. See chapter 5, above.

6 I deal with Frend's and Drummond's relationship with Bennett more extensively in chapter 4, above. On Morris Solomon, I am grateful for the following information supplied by Professor Bart Wallet. Morris Solomon was the son of Isaac Morris and Sarah Solomon. He married Sarah Lehren, the daughter of Moses Lehren and Judith Dusnetz, on April 24, 1816, in The Hague. The Lehren family hailed from Mainz, where they had their own Klaus synagogue, and in The Hague they became the foremost Orthodox family in town, with very close ties to the local Ashkenazi chief rabbi. Moreover, Judith Dusnetz was related to the chief rabbis of Nijmegen and Leeuwarden. Sarah's brothers were the famous bankers Zvi Hirsch(el), Abika and Jacob Moses Lehren, who served for years as the *Pekidim* and *Amarcalim* [charity officials] for the holy cities in the land of Israel. They mobilized Orthodox rabbis across Europe against the rise of the Reform movement. So, through his wife Sarah—who in non-Jewish circles called herself Suzette—Morris Solomon was related to one of the wealthiest, most pious, and most controversial families of the

ops of Durham (Shute Barrington), Lichfield and Coventry (Henry Ryder), and St. Davids (Thomas Burgess), as well as Rev. Samuel Bennett, the Duke of Sussex's chaplain and close friend. John Borthwick Gilchrist, the learned Scottish linguist who studied Hindustani, was another subscriber, as were G. W. Marriott, Esq., chancellor of the Diocese of St. David's; John Charles Spenser, the third Earl of Spenser, who would later become chancellor of the exchequer; and Nicholas Vansittart, the first Baron Bexley and a former chancellor of the exchequer.

Not unexpectedly, several subscribers were probably recruited by Mrs. Housman, especially several clergymen from Bath.<sup>7</sup> Most conspicuous were several prominent Jewish rabbis and communal leaders who supported Bennett's publication despite their previous hostility or at least past indifference to the author. Bennett's main nemesis, Rabbi Solomon Hirschell, the chief Ashkenazic rabbi, along with his Sephardic colleague, Rabbi Raphael Meldola, surprisingly subscribed to Bennett's publication. Besides Morris Solomon, I. L. Goldsmid of the well-known Goldsmid family was listed, along with several other Jews. It seems likely that the persuasive efforts of Myer Solomon played a role in this new and unexpected show of support, especially from the two rabbis.<sup>8</sup>

## 6.1 The English preface

Bennett opens his commentary with a long preface explaining his objective in choosing the subject of Ezekiel's Temple and composing his own commentary on the relevant chapters of the biblical book: to correct the misleading and false understanding of the Hebrew Bible promoted by Christian commentators. Bennett asserts that "Christians see it as a mere emblematical representation of the Temple of Christ." But this contradicts, Bennett claims, the sheer logic of Ezekiel's purpose in all his prophecies, to encourage Jews in captivity to rebuild their commonwealth. If so, why would he speak of a third temple; what consolation would they derive from an imaginary one? This notion of modern Christian scholarship is "a little less absurd than the fictions of romance," he adds. In contrast to their fantasies, the biblical text describes in detail a real temple plan, not a mystery. There-

---

Netherlands. Ironic indeed that he would prove to be such a faithful supporter of the non-Orthodox Jew Solomon Bennett.

<sup>7</sup> Doctor Spry (recipient of a letter from Mrs. Housman that was published in 1839), Rev. Mr. Broadhurst, Rev. William Hunt, Rev. Mr. Mapletoft, and Mr. Salome, all from Bath.

<sup>8</sup> I deal more extensively with the relationship between Bennett and the two rabbis in chapter 3, above. Besides Goldsmid, the other Jews mentioned as subscribers are Abraham Hertz, Lyon Moses, Asher Samson, and Mr. L. Samson.

fore, he directly asks his reader, “[S]hall the Christian better understand the Hebrew literature, and know its history from its primitive to its present state, than the Hebrews themselves?”<sup>9</sup>

As was true of his other writings, this polemic against Christian biblical exegesis was hardly a matter of scholarly disagreement alone but also highly personal. In a series of revealing anecdotes in the opening pages of his commentary, Bennett describes his frustrating efforts to publish his commentary, disclosing the challenges of a solitary Jewish intellectual, not a clergyman, living among a Christian majority. He first complains about the prejudice he felt as a Jew without an honorific title “when the author is, not only, an untitled layman, but one who lives by the produce of his industry, and above all, bears the name of a Jew! Of this I may speak confidently, have experimentally suffered from it.” He relates how he was refused by one bookseller, who claimed, “It is our duty to suppress everything related to Hebrew literature,” and added that he should publish his work anonymously. Another told Bennett he paid no regard to any work that was not of a religious nature (“according to his own religious notions”). And someone from the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews held forth about his project: “Is it not vanity and presumption in a mortal being, to imagine that he can explain visions, which were the revelation of God himself?”<sup>10</sup>

On another occasion, Bennett encountered the same person in the council chamber of the London Society, who sarcastically asked him, in the presence of others,

Well, Mr. Bennett, how do you get on with the temple of Ezekiel? have you already raised its walls, or do you dream of it? &c.” I replied, in his own tone, “*Imaginary* temples are certainly more expeditiously reared than real ones; and when there are so many Christian builders of *temples in the air*, why may not the Israelite be permitted to dream of a material one? He, whose liberality has provided us with *three real* temples, can surely not object to our *imagining* a fourth?”<sup>11</sup>

The last retort elicits one final recitation of a pertinent encounter about religious and literary prejudices, as he puts it:

Some years ago, when I was about to publish my work on the Molten Sea [1821], I happened to be at the house of a literary friend who put a prospectus of the work into the hand of one of the company, with the view of inducing him to become a subscriber. But the gentleman, with a *philosophical* spirit, returned it, *vomiting* with a sneer—“Of what concern to us is king Solomon’s washing-tub for the temple?” [a reference to the irrigation system of the

---

<sup>9</sup> Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 2–4.

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 6.

Temple of Solomon, described in 1 Kings 7] I could not hear such an unhallowed sentiment with indifference, but replied,—“I see whole societies bestow their labor on subjects of an importance far inferior to this; sending dilettanti to distant countries, and at great expense, to dig in the ruins of Greece, of Egypt, &c. to search for relics which they esteem as fit subjects for antiquarian research; and when sundry broken earthen pots, mutilated bas-reliefs, fragments of images, &c. &c. are happily discovered, they are carefully sent home. Then begin the literati to deliberate on these inestimable relics; and the results of these *interesting* deliberations are forthwith given to the world, with all the aid of typography and embellishment, and are devoured with literary eagerness. Yet I never heard anyone exclaim in this philosophical language – ‘What is it to us, whether these broken pots of ancient superstition were chamber-pots, washing-pots, or vessels of drunkards? If those fragments once represented kings, or tyrants, or idols?’” But I *may* ask if it becomes us thus to revive the superstitions of the ancients, and the absurdities and obscenities of heathen fable, and yet reject investigations which, independently of their claims on our regard in a religious point of view, embrace objects of a purer character, and a higher antiquity. Yet such are the fruits of malignant prejudice, when Judaism is its object.<sup>12</sup>

Having justified the need for his project, Bennett next lists the previous commentators on Ezekiel whom he had consulted, both Christian and Jewish, and whom he found wanting. Despite the abundant scholarship written on the Temple in general and Ezekiel’s Temple in particular, Bennett appears unaware of most of the well-known and influential Christian commentators. He seems totally oblivious to the classic work of the Spanish Jesuit Juan Bautista Villalpando, who, with Hieronimo Prado, published an exhaustive three-volume commentary on the book of Ezekiel, and specifically a separate volume on the Temple written by Villalpando himself (vol. 2, 1604). He also makes no mention of Johannes Coccejus’s 1669 work on the Ezekiel Temple, a critical revision of the Villalpando commentary. Nor was he aware of Isaac Newton’s writing on the subject.<sup>13</sup>

Bennett did apparently consult the commentary of Augustin Calmet (1672–1757), which offered a Temple reconstruction relying more closely on the biblical text and less on Renaissance and Baroque styles of architecture, though it focused primarily on the Temple of Solomon. He also consulted two English commentators. The first, Thomas Stackhouse (1677–1752), discussed the Ezekiel Temple in his *A New History of*

<sup>12</sup> Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 6–7n.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Michael Rabens, “Baroque Visions of the Temple of Jerusalem,” *Oz* 17 (1995): article 8, <https://doi.org/10.4148/2378-5853.1274>, and Jeroen Goudeau, “Ezekiel for Solomon: The Temple of Jerusalem in Seventeenth-Century Leiden and the Case of Coccejus,” in *The Imagined and Real Jerusalem in Art and Architecture*, ed. Jeroen Goudeau, Mariette Verhoeven, and Wouter Weijers (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 88–113. On Newton and the Temple, see Tessa Morrison, “Isaac Newton and the Architectural Models of Solomon’s Temple,” *Avello Publishing Journal* 1 (2013): 1–18, and Matt Goldish, *Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998).

*the Holy Bible* (London, 1742–1744). It is hard to understand why Bennett singled out this popular but hardly distinguished work. But Bennett was considerably more impressed by the exegesis of John Gill (1697–1771), the Baptist theologian who produced “expositions” of the Old and New Testaments. The six folio volumes of the Old Testament commentary, completed in 1766, were based on extensive study of Jewish commentators, among others. In Bennett’s estimation, the commentaries of Calmet and Stackhouse are unsupported by the text; in contrast, “Dr. Gill, in his exposition of the Bible, has taken more pains than any subsequent critic.”<sup>14</sup>

More useful by far for Bennett’s work are the Jewish commentators, especially two: the standard medieval commentator Rashi and Yom Tov Lipmann Heller (1579–1654), author of *Zurat Ha-Bayit* (Prague, 1602). He also regularly consulted the Mishnaic tractate *Middot* in seeking to clarify the specific measurements of the Temple described by Ezekiel.

Bennett’s understanding of the origin of Ezekiel’s Temple plan is quite simple. It is a blueprint not of a third temple, one to emerge in the future, but rather of the Second Temple, the one constructed by Zerubbabel and fulfilled at the restoration from Babylonian captivity. Ezekiel’s colleagues, the later prophets and men of the so-called great assembly, who rebuilt the Temple probably had known Ezekiel personally and had received verbal instructions relating to their future political state.

The only remaining question for Bennett is why the Judeans did not execute the plan of the Temple of Ezekiel completely rather than only partially. Although they were treated as free men by the Persians, they incurred the jealousy of their neighbors and were forced to delay the rebuilding of the Temple by eighteen years. Despite the liberal treatment of the restored community under Cyrus and then Darius, the leaders resolved to deviate in part from the original grandeur of the plan proposed and described by Ezekiel. Their congregation was small and relatively poor, so they adopted a design that included only the principal parts of Ezekiel’s plan – that is, the actual Temple and sanctuary; its adjoining buildings

---

14 Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 8. For Calmet, see *Calmet’s Great Dictionary of the Holy Bible*, trans. and ed. Charles Taylor (London: printed for C. Taylor, 1797); Arnold Ages, “Calmet and the Rabbis,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 55 (1965): 340–349; and Rabens, “Baroque Visions of the Temple of Jerusalem.” On Stackhouse, see Scott Mandelbrote, “Stackhouse, Thomas (1681/2–1752),” September 23, 2004, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26197>. On Gill, see Michael A. G. Haykin, “Gill, John (1697–1771),” September 23, 2004, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10731>, and Gill’s *An Exposition of the New Testament* (3 vols. [London: printed for the author, 1746–1748]) and *An Exposition of the Old Testament* (6 vols. [London: printed for the author, 1748–1766]), available online as “John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible,” at <https://web.archive.org/web/20001010153543/http://www.freegrace.net/gill/>.

were deferred until a more favorable opportunity would present itself. With neither the financial means nor any time of relative peace available to them, the Temple was never completed as Ezekiel had conceived, but the Judeans were content with a smaller and simpler sanctuary.<sup>15</sup>

## 6.2 The Hebrew preface

That Bennett prepared a Hebrew version of his Ezekiel commentary (see figure 6.2) offers the modern reader a clearer and more profound understanding of the author's intentions and his self-reflection on the entire project. The Hebrew text certainly deviates from the English; one would expect Bennett to express himself differently to his respective audiences. But in essence, his message is the same in both versions, though he is less careful and less polite in voicing his grievances against Christian exegesis when writing in Hebrew to Jews alone. Moreover, the Hebrew version offers a more personalized sense of his inner convictions in relation to the Christian other. It also enables the reader to understand how Bennett understood himself, his own skills, and his contribution to Hebrew learning in relation to other Jewish scholars, past and present.

Bennett opens his Hebrew text by addressing his brethren, especially in Poland, lovers of Torah and wisdom. There the legacy of his forefathers was implanted within him; there he was nurtured and drank from its waters. But his spirit changed and “the sparks of light of my learning passed over my counte-

---

<sup>15</sup> Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 9–20. For the assessment of recent scholarship on Ezekiel's Temple, see Tova Ganzel, “Between the Prophet and His Prophecy: Ezekiel's Visionary Temple in Its Historical Context,” in *The Believer and the Modern Study of the Bible*, ed. Tova Ganzel, Yehudah Brandes, and Chayuta Deutsch (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019), 463–497. See also Tova Ganzel and Shalom E. Holtz, “Ezekiel's Temple in Babylonian Context,” *Vetus Testamentum* 64 (2014): 225–226: “The prophet describes a temple whose architecture and organization resemble those of temples contemporary with and geographically most proximate to the prophet's stated time and place. The very description in the Book of Ezekiel, with its emphasis on gates, walls and courtyards, shows a perception of the temple quite similar to that observed in Babylonian topographical texts. Still more significant than the surface similarities, however, are the demonstrable ideological commonalities, reflected in the arrangement of space and the deployment of personnel within that space. Ezekiel explicitly expresses a concern with erecting barriers between humans and deities in order to preserve sanctity. Studies of the full range of available records show that Neo-Babylonian temples shared this concern. We cannot say with any certainty that Ezekiel borrowed these features from his environment. We may say, however, that Ezekiel and his audience might have understood the plan for the rebuilt temple by looking to their surroundings. They had, in short, a working model not too far from their homes in exile.”

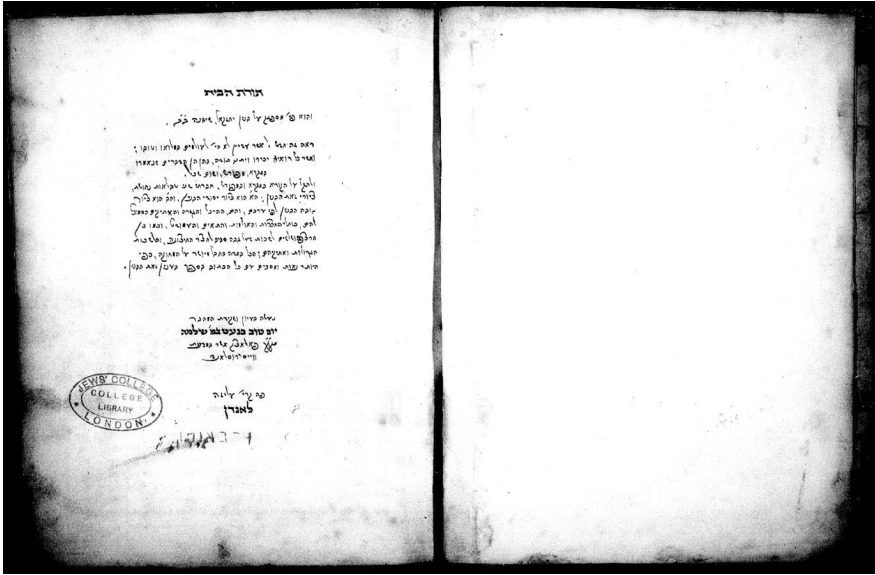


Figure 6.2: The first page of *Torat Ha-Bayit*.

nance.” Searching near and far for the source of this light, he ultimately realized that this spirit came from the West, which had reached the pinnacle of culture in the world. He left to wander to these Western lands to learn from their scholars, to gain from *Yaldei zarim* – literally, “the children of foreigners,” as he calls them. He was able to actualize his ambitions to become an engraver in the Western academies and in those places where the Jews were treated well. Nevertheless, he was burdened by the economic challenges of earning a living, having limited time and energy. But he felt the obligation to engage in Torah study. In London, he published a book in English called *Nezah Yisrael (The Constancy of Israel)*, arguing with the Christians on their misrepresentations of religion. He pointed out their mistakes and misunderstandings in their translations of the Bible, both those that were intentional, bringing the text into agreement with their theological principles, and those based on inadequate knowledge of Hebrew: “I proved from our rabbis and from the scholars of the nations that their teachings were false; the diffusion of their religion among the nations was based on lies and inferior views and based on nothingness.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 3.

Having contextualized this present composition against the background of his previous experiences with Christian culture, he turns to explain his particular interest in the Temple of Ezekiel:

When I read their commentaries, I saw how many mistakes they made in translating the text [. . .] missing the simple and obvious meaning of the original text. They saw in them mysteries, explaining the text as wondrous and hidden beyond all human comprehension, interpreting the hidden with more hiddenness, with a figurative meaning. They interpreted the Temple as referring to Jesus their messiah because he himself is the sanctuary; he is the high priest; and he is the pascal offering that atones for them. [. . .] And this is the great Temple which the nations seek.<sup>17</sup>

Bennett concludes that this Christian view was ultimately based on a Jewish understanding of the Second Temple period, a period of warfare and destruction – especially the destruction of the Temple by the Romans and the dispersion of the Jews, which the Jews understood as a punishment for their sins. The Christians thus concluded that the prophecy of Ezekiel and the building of his Temple were meant for a future time. Following these standard Jewish interpretations, Christians concluded that Ezekiel’s vision of the Temple was a secret and spiritual one, neither material nor actual. Given this false understanding, Bennett had no other alternative but to explain the true meaning of the text:

Who could imagine such a teaching? The goyim have transformed the words of the living God into nonsense and vanities and inferior teachings, defining clear light with counterfeit and meaningless views, irrational and unnatural. I then decided to gird my loins to destroy the mistakes of the young lions who wrest the text of its simple meaning. I composed and published my own work on the Temple of Ezekiel in English with two engravings to straighten the crooked heart, to show a straight path of the truthful religion from the time Israel was one people on the land. After I published the text in English, I was approached by acquaintances from my own people who asked me to compose the book with the copper engravings in Hebrew for the benefit of my people in other lands who do not know English and especially for Jews living in Poland for whom the word of God is precious in their eyes and who will appreciate this publication.<sup>18</sup>

But at first thought, Bennett was quite intimidated by the idea of composing a commentary, given the prior works by great sages such as Rashi and Tosephot Yom Tov (Yom Tov Lipmann Heller) and his work *Zurat Ha-Bayit*, which he considered truly superior to his own:

---

<sup>17</sup> Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 3–4.

Who am I to wear a *tallit* [prayer shawl] that is not mine and to intrude myself among holy commentators? Who am I, a person who is preoccupied with material pursuits and intellectual crafts, burdened with the encumbrances of time to earn a living, to assume to make use of the crown of the Torah? The sages tell us that our fathers left us a place to distinguish ourselves and we have a part and an inheritance in God's Torah, to show wisdom and to explicate the hidden. This is particularly true for a subject like this not particularly based on reasons and speculations or on ancient traditions, but rather on pictorial, figurative insight [*hasagah ziyurit*] in this building craft so that it can be correlated with all that is written in the text. One who lacks knowledge of the science of building [architecture] or one lacking a picture or a plan of the building drawn with all its specifications with the correct measurements in miniature, the literal meaning of the text will be hidden from him.<sup>19</sup>

In examining the commentaries of others, he discovered that all who wrote on the Temple of Ezekiel lacked this specific understanding: the more they wrote, the more the truth eluded them, since

it depends not on multiple references or good prose but a *habatah ziyurit* [a pictorial observation, gaze] across its length and width. It is in the nature of the perception of the senses that they easily and carefully convey the perceptible [*hamuhash*], which make an impression as an idea and permanently recalls what it saw as if it were before one's eyes, built magnificently. [. . .] So even though Rashi and Tosephot Yom Tov had a theoretical understanding regarding the Temple, they lacked a practical understanding; they could not present an appropriate image through the strength of their research to make it easier for the reader to understand the text. So, the reader could not make a precise impression of what he was reading. Rashi also confused more by bringing new and old versions whose reliability was impossible to discern. He even admitted in places that he did not fully understand.<sup>20</sup>

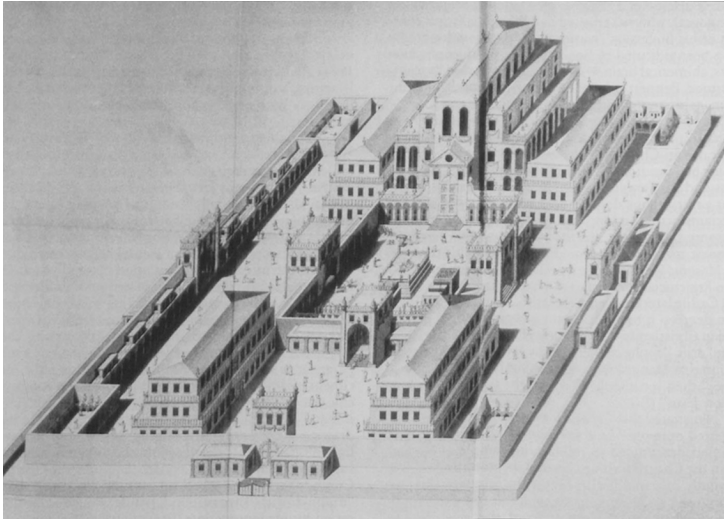
Bennett's qualifications for this specific task were now obvious: "Since I acquired my reputation in the craft of art and copper engraving with a partial knowledge of architecture, I declared accordingly that it was the time to do God's work to provide support for the Torah, especially regarding the appearance of Ezekiel's Temple. I soon discovered that all of Ezekiel's revelation is based on the foundations of the science of architecture completely with respect to all its details." He thus felt commanded to pick up a pen to make the observations that align with the text through his commentary and the two engravings he had prepared. The first is a basic illustration – a ground-view: that is, a picture of all the foundations of the building, the sanctuary, the beams, the walls of the courtyards, the halls, offices, gates, floor of the surrounding courtyard, its length and width and its appropriate measurements according to the meaning of the biblical text. He identifies the various parts with the designations A, B, C, etc. The second engraving is a

---

<sup>19</sup> Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 4.

bird's-eye view, looking down at all the details of the building, the floors and galleries and so on, which would not be visible to one standing on the ground rather than in the sky (see figure 6.3).<sup>21</sup> Through this image, the reader gains a perspective regarding the text unavailable to Rashi.



**Figure 6.3:** A bird's-eye view of the Temple of Ezekiel, engraved by Bennett.

Bennett, in this Hebrew version, expands his remarks on the real purpose of Ezekiel's Temple plan. Ezekiel's vision was the same as the actual Second Temple. The sanctuary, its sequestered space, and its magnificent walls were created in the image of Ezekiel's plan, as explained by the rabbis in Tractate *Middot*. The scholars of the Mishnah described what they learned from the men of the great assembly who testified to what they saw authentically, testimony upon which Rashi and Tosephot Yom Tov relied in writing their commentaries. Similarly, Bennett adds: "I follow them when they are right based on the same information. If their interpretations are forced or incorrect, I will interpret according to my own opinion to conform with the text."<sup>22</sup>

However, it is evident that the Second Temple was not fully completed according to Ezekiel's plan. The men of the great assembly who built the Temple were in touch with the last prophets – Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zachariah, and

<sup>21</sup> Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 4–5.

<sup>22</sup> Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 5.

Malachi – and knew and spoke with Ezekiel about the redemption and the return to the land of Israel, the rebuilding of the Temple, and matters of state. It was because of the generosity of Cyrus the king of Persia that forty-two thousand exiles returned. They were not wealthy enough to carry out elaborate plans of temple building; the affluent remained in Persia. So, the men of the great assembly decided to use the resources they had from Cyrus sparingly, not creating a temple exactly according to Ezekiel’s plan but focusing only on its essentials. They decided to defer the rest for a later time, when their borders were extended and they were economically able to enlarge and enhance the building to follow Ezekiel’s specifications.

Over time the Palestinian community grew and flourished, building fortresses and towers and acquiring instruments of war, such as bows and shields and armor, helmets, and artillery. Wars broke out more frequently between the children of Israel and the kings to the east and west, north and south, and for this reason, the community was in no position to improve the original building they had erected. “But there is no doubt,” Bennett concludes, “that God will ultimately redeem his people, as he has done in the past, at the end of days, rebuilding the complete Temple and the original borders of the Holy Land.”<sup>23</sup>

Bennett adds one additional note to clarify his approach in composing his commentary: “The reader might ask how this author decided to provide measurements with respect to all the walls, compartments, and buildings even when they are not stipulated in the biblical text itself. At first glance, the reader might conclude that this is only a *ziyur ra’ayoni* [an idealized projection] but not truly and essentially reflecting the reality of the text. Since these numbers are not offered in the text, he might assume they are merely the projections of sophists having no basis.”<sup>24</sup>

He makes two cogent responses to these doubts. First, he explains that all we know for sure is what is described in Tractate *Middot*, which was only a modest version of Ezekiel’s larger vision:

These measurements can be ascertained for the parts they describe; for the rest, we are entitled to interpret as much as possible, following the biblical text and relying on our opinion rather than that of others. This is the major mistake of previous exegetes who tried to equate what they read in Ezekiel with the descriptions in the Mishnah, or added their speculations based on their own imaginations. [ . . . ] Second, even if the biblical text does not give us precise measurements of the walls and chambers of the Temple, we follow two principles. The first, that since we notice that the measurements Ezekiel gives of the Temple foundations are accurate and proportional to that accepted by the art of architecture, it appears justified to

---

<sup>23</sup> Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 5–6.

<sup>24</sup> Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 7.

offer a proportional measuring for the offices and chambers following those offered for the areas of the buildings, big when appropriate or small, even when it is not mentioned explicitly. And second, since we are given certain measurements in the text such as the height of entrances, the halls, the four large offices, and the wings of the buildings, we are entitled to infer the hidden from the explicit. We are permitted to offer measurements of the parts of the Temple not mentioned in the text so the entire building and its area will be perceived accurately as a whole, symmetrical and proportional.<sup>25</sup>

Thus ends the Hebrew version of the preface, a remarkable elaboration of the English meant to justify his innovations before his learned Hebrew readers steeped in previous Jewish exegesis on the Temple. In spelling out his approach to the text, he vigorously defends the English version of his commentary as a much-needed corrective to the misconceptions and distortions of the biblical text offered by ignorant and theologically biased Christian commentators. But in writing in Hebrew to his co-religionists, he makes a supreme effort to justify his standing as a layperson, not a rabbi, and to bolster his credentials in understanding a text well commented upon by Hebraic scholars seemingly more learned than he is. In London, he faced a somewhat lesser challenge to present himself as a legitimate scholar before Christian Hebraists with limited linguistic skills or before a community of uneducated Jews he did not appreciate nor respect. In choosing to make the same arguments in Hebrew, he understood that the bar was higher to demonstrate his profundity and originality.

Ironically, it is in this Hebrew text never published and probably never examined by more than a handful of readers that Bennett articulates his most significant reflection on being simultaneously an artist and a Hebraic scholar and on how the two identities can engage each other in meaningful collaboration and dialogue. Bennett admits he cannot surpass the erudition of his exegetical predecessors, but he can offer a unique perspective on the Temple because of his *hasagah ziyurit* or figurative insight, his architectural background, his sense of proportion and measurement, and his practical ability to visualize a text as one conceives a picture, drawing, or engraving. This artistic sense can already be appreciated in his previous work on Solomon's plumbing system of the Temple, *The Molten Sea*, which I describe briefly in appendix I of this book. His commentary on Ezekiel's Temple is surely a direct continuation of this modest work published three years earlier, demonstrating his intense interest in visualizing the architectural and the mechanical details of the Hebrew Bible. Together with his deep obsession with reading the text literally and accurately, free of grammatical mistakes and theological distortions, Bennett locates in these pages precisely how his

---

<sup>25</sup> Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 7–8.

professional and personal pursuits of a Jewish intellectual living in virtual isolation from his homeland could creatively merge, and how the visual could profoundly reveal the literal biblical truth.

### 6.3 The commentary and its legacy

Bennett's actual commentary on chapters 40–43, in both its English and Hebrew versions, is less noteworthy than are the prefaces. He reiterates a theme also found in his other works on the splendor of the culture of the Second Temple in contrast to that of the First. He again makes his general claim, in reference to Ezekiel 40:27, that “even though the text doesn't stipulate the measurement of the walls of the courtyard and the chambers, we can calculate them based on the proportion and the symmetry of the sides.” He carefully correlates the information in the text with that provided in the Mishnaic Tractate *Middot*, as, for example, on Ezekiel 40:46: “As we are told in Mishnah (Midot) that the second Temple was to a certain degree an imitation of that of Ezekiel, particularly in its principal parts, such as the porch before the Temple, the holy of holies, and the adjoining cells, which exactly resemble those before us.” He openly challenges the interpretations of Rashi and Lipmann Heller on several passages, and refutes Gill, Calmet, and Stackhouse, as well.<sup>26</sup>

Bennett waxes eloquent (in both English and Hebrew) on the two faces, the human and the lion, of the cherubim in Ezekiel 41:19, which represent a union of ferocity and mildness:

the wonderful combination of the two *extreme* qualities of the human essence, viz. the extreme ferocity of the *animal* quality, or *nature*, and the mildness of its divine intellect, which, from being naturally in opposition to each other, and scarcely compatible, evince the more forcibly in their union the *divine and supernatural power or essence* by which they are combined; as well as that nature itself is also *sacred*, when preserved in its bounds; and both are thought worthy the attention of their creator.<sup>27</sup>

In his extensive notes on chapter 43, he reviews the entire history of the First and Second Temple periods, bemoaning the corruption of the Israelite monarchs in the former and extolling the return to a spiritual renaissance in the latter. In the later period, the government of people of Israel became a pure commonwealth while “Hebrew literature began to flourish and to illumine the less enlightened generations of the world, in matters of religion and morality, as well as science.”

<sup>26</sup> Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 23, 27, 46, 47, 49, 68; Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 12, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 62; Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 24.

He is also emphatic in disagreeing with Maimonides, indeed all rabbis, who claim that appointing a king over Israel was a divine commandment: “[. . .] I will boldly assert, in contradiction to any Rabbinical commentary whatever on that point,” that their enactments “were not a *kabbalah me-avoteinu* [a tradition of our ancestors],” not from Sinai nor from the first prophets nor the later ones; “royalty was inconsistent with the essential government of the house of Israel.” And once again: “I must again repeat, that the opinions of the former Rabbies and commentators are of no weight with me, *when regarding* the kings of Israel, and in particular those of the house of David[; . . .] for to me, one word of biblical and historical truth is more acceptable than volumes of sophistry and cavil.”<sup>28</sup>

In the Hebrew version, Bennett repeats his abhorrence of the Israelite monarchy, while adding a final “English” touch that might have surprised his Hebrew readers had they ever had the opportunity to study his words: “during the Second Temple period there was no absolute monarchy but rather a mixed monarchy [*murkhevet*] like the monarchy of England that exists today[; . . .] the king cannot do anything without permission of Parliament. [. . .] Thus, during the Hasmonean era, the country was ruled by the Sanhedrin. Accordingly, the Second Temple is equivalent to the English system.”<sup>29</sup>

Before concluding his commentary with some brief remarks on the two engravings of the Temple he had created, Bennett inserts the following sentence, meant perhaps to be conciliatory but appearing, nevertheless, to be provocative: “Although the explanation of the visionary Temple of Ezekiel upon scientific principles may be objectionable to some orthodox Jews or Christians, who prefer the mystical to the rational, especially in scriptural matters; yet, I think myself warranted in maintaining, that, as the prophets (independently of their divine inspiration) were able politicians and men of science, we are not required to lay reason aside, more especially since the text itself is simple, clear, and obvious.”<sup>30</sup>

A new Jewish commentary based “upon scientific principles” and crafted by an author capable of offending pious Jews and Christians alike was not to go unnoticed; but neither would it cause a sensation within either the Jewish or the Christian communities. Most Jews hardly knew of the work, since the Hebrew version was never published. Bennett never really found the opportunity to make his case to his own co-religionists that his commentary was a real contribution to Hebrew exegesis and literature, written from the perspective of an artist/engraver. He also never had the chance to demonstrate the value of his hybrid

---

28 Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 84, 88, 89–90.

29 Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 32.

30 Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 110.

literary creation that was written in a fluent and rich Hebrew style and that drew from traditional exegesis while marked by a scientific approach to architectural and aesthetic principles. Moreover, he could not claim to other learned Jews that he had put his knowledge of history and linguistics to good use to vanquish his Christian opponents.

On the other hand, Bennett's work was "seen" in the Christian literary world of London. Either Bennett himself or his publishers had inserted multiple notices of the book's imminent appearance in a wide range of literary journals. It also appeared conspicuously in various dictionaries and encyclopedia dealing with biblical and religious subjects throughout the nineteenth century. The book found its way to prominent libraries, such as those of the Royal Asiatic Society, the famous architect Sir John Soane, and the Duke of Sussex.<sup>31</sup> I have yet to locate a serious review of the book in English journals, such as appeared when Bennett's first book, *The Constancy of Israel*, was published. This must have been disappointing to the author, as the book had initially enjoyed moral and financial support from both Christians and Jews, and because Bennett had written an original and thought-provoking tome. Bennett certainly knew that this was a work that deserved a wider readership beyond the British Isles. Alas, his completed Hebrew manuscript did not see the light of day as a published book, despite his obvious efforts to have it included on the Jewish bookshelf. Only the modern reader can now marvel at his bold attempt to write as a foreigner in the English language to a Protestant readership and then translate his biblical scholarship into the literary language of Polish Jewry.

---

<sup>31</sup> A sampling of notices on the publication of *The Temple of Ezekiel* includes *The Gentleman's Magazine or Monthly Intelligence* 135 (1824): 165; *The London Christian Instructor or Congregational Magazine* VII (1824): 168; *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 15 (1824): 478; *The Repository of Arts, Literature, Fashions, Manufactures* 3 (1824): 185; *The Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature* 19 (1824): 187; *Critica Biblica*, 4 vols. (London: William Booth, 1827), 2:142; *The Eclectic Review*, n.s., 21 (1824): 287; *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 4 (January 1837): x; *Catalogue of the Library: Sir John Soane's Museum* (London: Wyman and Sons, 1878), 35; *Biblioteca Sussexiana*, part 1, *Theology* (London: Evans, 1844), 132; *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, ed. Thomas Hartwell Horne, Samuel Davidson, and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, 10th edn., vol. 2 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, and Roberts, 1856), 902; and John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of Ezekiel*, trans. Thomas Myers, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1850), 352.

## 7 On the Singularity and Sanctity of the Hebrew Language

Several years after the publication of his work on the Temple of Ezekiel, Bennett took up a theme of great importance to him and of direct relevance to his forthcoming project of biblical translation: the special place of the Hebrew language in Jewish tradition, its divine character, and its remarkable continuity. In 1829, he heard about an inaugural lecture given by his Jewish contemporary Hyman Hurwitz on his appointment to the first chair in Hebraic Studies at University College, London. Some of Bennett's acquaintances asked him to respond to the lecture, a request that provided him a platform to articulate his views on the origins of Hebrew in sharp contrast to those of Hurwitz. Six years later, only three years before his death and during the period when he was nearing the completion of his translation, he published a more expansive excursus on the Hebrew language based on the polemical views he had voiced earlier regarding Hurwitz's talk. The two works together demonstrate that at the very core of Bennett's belief in Judaism's significance to the world was the sanctity of its holy tongue, the language of sacred Scripture. I shall discuss both works in what follows.

### **7.1 A Critical Investigation into the Merits of the Lecture [. . .] by Hyman Hurwitz (1829)**

Hyman Hurwitz (1770–1844; see Figure 7.1) was Bennett's contemporary in every sense; like Bennett, he was born and raised in Poland—in his case, in the city of Posen—and he reached London at about the same time as Bennett. They were dissimilar, however, in the professional paths they pursued. While Bennett had established himself as an engraver with a university degree and with membership in the Royal Academy of the Arts in Berlin, Hurwitz founded a *yeshivah* for boys in Highgate, in North London, and distinguished himself as an educator in the Jewish community, albeit without any direct exposure to university study. Unlike Bennett, he had positive relations with the organized Jewish community and he was an observant Jew. Though both men fostered close contacts with Christian intellectuals, Hurwitz built his career primarily through his friendship with one individual: his neighbor from Highgate, the celebrated English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Fourteen letters penned by Coleridge to Hurwitz between 1818 and 1830 are extant, revealing much about their personal relations and professional collaboration. The correspondence includes a recommendation from Coleridge to Leonard Horner, the warden of London University, dated November 27, 1827, re-

garding Hurwitz's qualifications for a new position as Hebrew professor at what would be called University College, London. Clearly boosted by this recommendation, Hurwitz was appointed the first professor of Hebrew language and literature at the new institution famed for welcoming, among others, Jews, atheists, dissenters, and women. His credentials for the position rested on the publication of several Hebrew grammars, his refutation of Bellamy's biblical translations and exegesis, and especially *Hebrew Tales*, his well-known anthology of rabbinic narratives translated into English; it was published in 1826, just before his university appointment, and included several translations by Coleridge himself.<sup>1</sup>

No doubt Hurwitz's appointment to be the University chair in January 1828 was the pinnacle of his academic and pedagogic career. Hurwitz also had the distinction of receiving an additional testimonial from Coleridge read aloud at the University Council meeting of February 1827, as well as the solid support of the University's chief Jewish donor, Isaac Lyon Goldsmid. Along with the other professors of modern languages, Hurwitz was paid a very small amount, with the expectation that he could earn sufficient fees from private pupils, and that, in due course, he would be paid a decent salary. Although this did not happen, since Hurwitz's classes remained small, he nevertheless continued to serve the university until his death in 1844.

On November 11, 1828, Hurwitz delivered his inaugural lecture as Professor of the Hebrew Language and Literature before a distinguished audience of academics and members of the Jewish community. It was subsequently published in the same year by John Taylor on behalf of the University of London. From his opening lines, Hurwitz openly conveyed the ultimate meaning of this moment in the history of England and its Jewish minority, and in his own personal life experience:

---

1 On Hyman Hurwitz, see David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 261–268; Leonard Hyman, “Hyman Hurwitz: The First Anglo-Jewish Professor,” *Jewish Historical Society of England Transactions* 21 (1962–1967): 232–242; Chris Rubinstein, “Coleridge and Jews,” *Coleridge Bulletin*, n.s., 24 (Winter 2004): 91–96, available online at *The Friends of Coleridge*, <https://www.friendsofcoleridge.com/membersonly/cb24/12%20CB%2024%20Rubinstein.pdf>; “Hyman Hurwitz (1770–1844),” *UCL Bloomsbury Project*, April 11, 2011, [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/articles/individuals/hurwitz\\_hyman.htm](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/articles/individuals/hurwitz_hyman.htm); and Adam Yamey, “A Jewish Academy in North London,” *Yamey*, December 3, 2020, <https://adam-yamey-writes.com/2020/12/03/a-jewish-academy-in-north-london/>. See his inaugural address, *An Introductory Lecture Delivered in the University of London, on Tuesday, November 11, 1828* (London: John Taylor, 1828), available at [https://www.google.com/books/edition/An\\_Introductory\\_Lecture\\_Delivered\\_in\\_the/Y-TfAAAAMAAJ?hl=en](https://www.google.com/books/edition/An_Introductory_Lecture_Delivered_in_the/Y-TfAAAAMAAJ?hl=en); Samuel Taylor Coleridge's letters to Hyman Hurwitz (1818–1830) are in the University of Pennsylvania Van Pelt Library, Kislak Center for Special Collections, MS Coll. 868. On Hurwitz's poetry, see Karen A. Weisman, *Singing in a Foreign Land: Anglo-Jewish Poetry, 1812–1847* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), chap. 2.



Figure 7.1: Hyman Hurwitz, University College, London, Professor of Judaic Studies.

The impressive character of all that surrounds me, where the best hopes, wishes, and meditations of my life, seem at once represented and realized—and where, beyond hope, my labours and aspirations have found a sphere and an object—the importance of the charge consigned to me—the novelty of the situation in which I now for the first time stand before those whose favourable opinion and kind anticipations have placed me in it—my unusedness to public speaking, and even the strangeness of my own voice to my own ears in the silence and *felt* attention of such an audience[.] [. . .] But there are other thoughts[.] [. . .] For can I forget, dare I suffer a false delicacy to prevent me from expressing the reflection—that, novel as the situation is to *me*, I myself, viewed in connection with the name and characteristic distinction of my Race, am no less a novelty in this situation! Was it possible that I should not hail the hour, in which I heard my name among the Professors of the London University, as the commencement of a gracious revolution?—as a dawn of a moral sun that rises with blessings on its wings?—that rises for all, but with especial and more enlivening influence for those who have most suffered from the preceding darkness;—a darkness which divided man from man, and made him cling to every distinction, to every accidental difference of birth and opinion, rather than to what alone should distinguish rational creatures—their intellectual powers, and the moral uses which they make of them!<sup>2</sup>

In conveying his own emotions at this very precious moment, he was undoubtedly speaking as well for those who had come to express their utmost respect and admiration to him and to the university that had boldly appointed him.

There is no evidence of a personal relationship between Hurwitz and Bennett, although they most likely knew of each other and each other's scholarly endeavors. When Hurwitz's lecture was published, Bennett was apparently solicited by one of his Christian associates to address the substance of the Jewish professor's elegant words. Some months later, he published, at his own expense, a pamphlet titled *A Critical Investigation into the Merits of the Lecture Delivered in the University of London, November 11, 1828 by Hyman Hurwitz, Professor of the Hebrew Language and Literature* (1829).

No doubt Bennett fully appreciated the deep significance of the first appointment of a Jew to teach Hebrew at a public university in London. Nevertheless, he sincerely felt there was something lacking, and despite the accolades the lecture had received, he felt compelled to raise his objections to the words of his esteemed colleague and co-religionist. Thus, he opens:

The great eulogiums poured out in the public periodical papers, as well as praises which filled the mouths of the numerous individuals, in behalf of the lecture in question, could not fail to reach my ears as well. [. . .] My mind equally became flattered when hearing that advocates had started up, to stimulate the propagation of that language and its literature, which was for many centuries, or even ages, kept in the background, and observed it as imperfect, corrupted, and lost. I expected from the present lecturer, that he would have ap-

---

<sup>2</sup> Hurwitz, *An Introductory Lecture*, 3–4.

peared as a zealous defender of the language he professes, and to rescue the same from its numerous assailants. [ . . . ] The pamphlet of the before-mentioned lecture, was handed to me by one of my Christian literary friends, who wished to have my opinion on the particular points contained in it, as they felt something in it which militates against the integrity of the sacred language; I call it sacred because it is confessed, on all hands, that its origin is lost in the chaos of the universal creation; it is then of a Divine origin, and could not be otherwise but sublime and perfect. The elegance of the language and eloquent style of that lecture, made me even great promises in behalf of what I expected to countenance. But how greatly I find myself disappointed in my expectation; literally to say,—it is rather fostering the vulgar opinions of degrading the Hebrew language, than to rescue it from its assailants.<sup>3</sup>

What provoked Bennett's disappointment in his Jewish colleague, and why did he expend so much energy and money to publish his hostile pamphlet? As he continues, he explains:

We have a right to ask, was it the office of a Hebrew professor, to lend his hand to support the vulgar doubts with respect to the sacred primogenity, the perfectiousness, and stability of that language? Could he not rather let the doubts remain as they stand in the vulgar opinions, for or against it, without adding fuel to fire? And if such be corroborated by a Hebrew professor, who professes Judaism, what authority will then remain for the integrity of Scripture at large? Nay, if such be his real assertion, I will pass my opinion, that the London University might save themselves the trouble and the expenses of establishing a class for the study of the language, which is avowed by its professor to be imperfect, to have undergone changes, and to have been lost.<sup>4</sup>

Bennett fully understood that his attack on his fellow Jew would be received poorly, especially considering his already tense relationships with Rabbi Hirschell and the lay leadership who supported him. He was likewise conscious of his own lack of formal credentials to challenge the vaunted authority of this newly appointed university professor:

I am aware of the vulgar prejudices, with respect to my attempt, in raising my hand against that sanctioned grand Tiro [Tyro] particularly as I am a mere layman, who lives in obscurity, and only known in the circle of his own family, and among a few tradesmen from whom I reap a humble profit for the support of my family; it will infallibly appear to many as a daringness, to dabble my hands in points so essential, and so critical, like the inquiries which regard the Hebrew language, and its literature. [ . . . ] However, prejudices never obstructed the road of inquiries before me; nor did vulgar fear check me from entering the gates of literary criticisms. But, in the present case, it was to gratify the request of my Chris-

---

<sup>3</sup> Solomon Bennett, *A Critical Investigation into the Merits of the Lecture* [ . . . ] by Hyman Hurwitz (London: printed by the author by Samuel Pinder, 1829), 3–4.

<sup>4</sup> Bennett, *A Critical Investigation*, 4.

tian literary friends, whose friendship will never be removed from my mind; and to them alone are my following inquiries directed.<sup>5</sup>

The issue that irked Bennett the most, that provoked him to lash out at the novice professor—the “sanctioned grand Tiro,” as he called him—was Hurwitz’s doubts about the sacred origins, the perfection, and the stability of Hebrew over the centuries, notions that Bennett deemed to be incontrovertible truth. We shall examine some of his detailed arguments immediately below. What is most salient at first glance is the unseemliness of a Jew writing to Christians to disparage another Jew. Bennett apparently was jealous of Hurwitz, whom he clearly considered inferior to him in his Hebraic learning. At one point, in a passage quoted below, he recalls perusing one of Hurwitz’s works on Hebrew grammar and dismissing it as being the mere product of a boarding-school master and teacher to Jewish boys.<sup>6</sup> His arguments could easily be construed as petty and ugly, displaying his bitterness and own insecurity because he was not taken more seriously as a candidate for the position now held by Hurwitz. His tone was sarcastic and cynical throughout, recalling some of the worst of his nasty vituperations against the chief rabbi of London, and reinforcing his reputation as a contentious and prickly individual among friends and foes alike.

Beyond Bennett’s sheer temerity and bad behavior in spoiling Hurwitz’s party, so to speak, was a serious message, one at the heart of his profound understanding of the history of the Hebrew language and his ultimate faith in his own Jewish identity. A closer examination of his critique of Hurwitz’s lecture is in order. He begins his criticisms of Hurwitz with a savage attack on the latter’s claim that “[i]t is highly probable that the Hebrew, in its infant state consisted entirely, or at least mostly of words of one syllable and that it only assumed its artificial state in the process of time.” Bennett exclaims alarmingly: “We never yet heard of such a foul sentiment passing the mouth of any of the most ancient, most celebrated, and most learned of the Hebrew Rabbies, and grammarians, from time immemorial.” He continues:

This whimsical opinion, I have read (twelve years since) in a book written by our present lecturer; who to my knowledge, picked it up from among some rubbish of a modern German sophist, one Mordechai Gumpel;<sup>7</sup> but, being then a boarding-school master, and teacher to Jewish boys. I passed it by with a sneer, as not worth my notice; but now seeing it

---

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, *A Critical Investigation*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Bennett, *A Critical Investigation*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Mordechai Gumpel Schnaber Levison (1741–1797), who composed a Hebrew grammar called *Derekh ha-Kodesh ha-Ḥadashah*; on him, see David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), chap. 12.

repeated and sounded from the pulpit of the London University, and considering as well, the taste of modern critics, the admirers of novelties, such a profane doctrine might become in time permanent; it became then my imperative duty to expose its absurdity, and to place a guard to prevent not to be deluded by false doctrines, and base instructions like the point in question.<sup>8</sup>

Bennett similarly challenges Hurwitz's claims regarding the poverty and decline of biblical Hebrew, especially in the prophetic writings of Jeremiah. Bennett strongly disagrees with Hurwitz's comparison between Isaiah and Jeremiah: "On the other hand I am of the opinion, that our Hebrew professor went rather by hear-say than to have entered perspicuously in the nature of the books of these two prophets. For granting that the book of Isaiah possesses the majestic style and eloquence; yet, in some instances the purity of diction is wanting, as the language thereof is much abrogated; the metaphors, figures, and types, in some instances exaggerated, even obscure." And with respect to Jeremiah, "his orations are fiery, emphatic and energetic. [. . .] There is no more beautiful book than Lamentations, drawing tears from the eyes of the reader. [. . .] So much for the want of Jeremiah's knowledge of the Hebrew language, and the deficiency of his style and elegance." The Hebrew parts of Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah were also not inferior, in Bennett's estimation, nor was there any deviation from "Hebrew's primitive integrity." After the destruction of the First Temple, Hebrew ceased to be a vernacular but it preserved its virtue and stability, its purity and elegance, during the Second Temple period, even after 70 C.E.: "In short, to my humble opinion, the Hebrew language did not alter, nothing was lost, nor did it deviate from its primitive state from time immemorial till the present day."<sup>9</sup>

Bennett sums up his case against Hurwitz by referring to present realities:

True it is, that we are lost to the language, as there exists a great neglect (in this country in particular) even among my own brethren, who have no knowledge at all of the extensive field of the Hebrew literature and its language; all whose knowledge consist of a Hebrew Bible and the annual prayer-book. [. . .] But the language is never lost from those who have a desire to enter its extensive and salubrious Eden! And I am further of the opinion, that Mr. Hurwitz, as professor, may contribute his humble literary mite to the propagation of the Hebrew language but there is nothing left for him to improve on.<sup>10</sup>

He points to other examples of Hurwitz's linguistic deficiencies but finally closes with the following lines: "There are many other assertions in his lecture, which are even on base ground, though covered with that ornament of eloquence, as to

---

<sup>8</sup> Bennett, *A Critical Investigation*, 5–7.

<sup>9</sup> Bennett, *A Critical Investigation*, 11, 12, 13, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, *A Critical Investigation*, 14–15.

stifle the audibility, and the conception of his audience; yet my funds do not allow me to be prolix, so as to extend my pamphlet; and accordingly, I must satisfy myself, and my literary friends, with this small portion of my humble abilities.” His avoidance of prolixity did not stop him from promoting his newly completed manuscript, “The Preeminence and Stability of the Hebrew Language,” and searching for a patron to support its publication: “Reference may be obtained by my venerable friend the Rt. Rev., the Lord Bishop of Salisbury [Thomas Burgess], who is well acquainted with the contents of the work.”<sup>11</sup>

Not surprisingly, Bennett’s diatribe was denounced by the few reviewers who chose to comment on its publication. The reviewer in *The Christian Recorder* best summed up his contempt for Hurwitz’s Jewish critic:

Most of our readers have no doubt either seen or heard of the eloquent lecture on Hebrew literature, which was delivered by Mr. Hyman Hurwitz at the London University, on the opening of his classes at that institution. The enlightened views which were put forth in that composition, have, as was to be expected, excited the indignation of some of the professor’s Jewish brethren; and Mr. Solomon Bennett, whom we have long known as a well-meaning, but somewhat shallow man, has published a “Critical Investigation” on the subject, which requires an Oedipus for its interpretation. So far as we can gather the author’s meaning, he maintains, that the Hebrew language has undergone no changes from the time of Adam, to whom it was given, and that, by maintaining the contrary, Mr. Hurwitz has uttered “a foul sentiment,” we will only say, *Credat Judaeus*.<sup>12</sup> The pamphlet concludes thus: “There are many other assertions in his lecture [ . . . ] yet my funds do not allow me to be prolix, so as to extend my pamphlet; and accordingly, I must satisfy [?] myself and my literary friends, with this small portion of my humble abilities.” Truly, if we might ever rejoice in a man’s poverty, it would be on an occasion like this.<sup>13</sup>

It is no coincidence that Bennett ultimately used his attack on Hurwitz to promote his own forthcoming book on the subject. His rudeness and transparent self-promotion could not have been lost on his readers. But there remains a more serious point to underscore here. Bennett’s criticism of Hurwitz was not merely based on personal jealousy, although such jealousy is hard to ignore. He firmly

---

11 Bennett, *A Critical Investigation*, 18–19. On Bennett’s relationship with Thomas Burgess, see above, chap. 4.

12 “Credat Iudaeus Apella, / non ego” [The Jew Apella may believe it, not I]; Horace, *Satires* 1.5.100–101.

13 “A *Critical Investigation into the Merits of the Lecture [of Hyman Hurwitz]*,” *The Christian Recorder: A Religious and Literary Journal* 2 (Thursday, February 5, 1829): 30. See also the review of the same title in *The Athenaeum and Literary Chronicle* 65 (January 21, 1829): 40: “We are sorry, for Mr. Hurwitz’s sake, that he is not met by some worthier antagonist than this miserable and ignorant blockhead. There is no footman in London who does not know more of the English vocabulary, and the laws of grammar, than Mr. Solomon Bennett.”

believed in the sanctity and continuity of the divine language. Indeed, the anonymous reviewer was correct in calling this his belief. There is a certain irony in noting that notwithstanding his reputation as a non-observant Jew at odds with rabbinic leadership, he remained a man of great faith, a faith primarily linked to the Hebrew tongue and its endurance over the ages. Despite the obvious fact that Hurwitz remained in good standing in the London Jewish community as a founder of a traditional Jewish school, it was the allegedly secular Bennett who demonstrated his true belief in the immutability of Judaism as expressed through its sacred language and literature. Bennett's book on the Hebrew language, discussed in the next section, was the continuation and ultimate outcome of his disagreement with Hyman Hurwitz.

## ***7.2 A Theological and Critical Treatise on the Primogeniture and Integrity of the Holy Language (1835)***

While Bennett had long planned to write a specific book on the Hebrew language, he did not complete the task until 1835. Despite the passage of six years, and despite his awareness that the pamphlet criticizing Hurwitz had not been well received, he remained emphatic in his excoriation of Hurwitz's position and steadfast in his belief in the divine origin and the immutability of the Hebrew language. By 1835, Hurwitz's project of translating and revising the standard edition of the Old Testament was in its final stages. It too found a place in this slim volume, since the two primary objectives of clarifying the singularly divine status of Hebrew and providing a new and accurate English translation of the Hebrew Bible were clearly intertwined in the mind of this sixty-eight-year-old Jewish scholar.

In the opening of this work dedicated to the Sephardic Hebrew scholar Moses Mocatta (1768–1857), his long-standing supporter and friend, Bennett continues to pursue the same issue that had preoccupied him in his critique of Hurwitz: "The treatise I now lay before the public has been produced in consequence of my having noticed the many works recently published on the Holy Language by modern literati and critics, the tendency of which is rather to disparage than to do honour, to that eminent and sacred language, losing sight of its antiquity and endeavouring to bring it down to a level with the modern languages." Bennett's goal, accordingly, is to refute these false theories of modern critics in as unprejudiced a manner as possible, citing from both Christian and Jewish scholars: "Authorities and titles do not affect my mind, nor do they hin-

der me in the career of my investigations,” nor apparently did the religious affiliation of his wide-ranging sources.<sup>14</sup>

The close connection between a recognition of the divine status of Hebrew and biblical translation is emphasized from the start: “We Hebrews maintain that the language bestowed on our common parent was that in which the sacred volumes of the Hebrew Bible were written, as we behold them at the present day.” The assertions of critics who claim that the original language was lost over time

have, indeed, been made by some mere pretenders to a knowledge of Hebrew literature; for, as far as I am acquainted with critical authors on the subject, in the present day, I have not yet found any one who is capable of translating extemporaneously any portion of Hebrew, and still less have I found among them a full and thorough knowledge of Hebrew literature at large; and yet they are prone to enter into the labyrinth of Hebrew criticism,—and with no other views on the part of some, than to reject the steadfastness of the Hebrew Scriptures and the immutability of the Hebrew language; but on the part of others, to throw a black veil over Revelation and religion at large. [ . . . ] Such has been the assertions even of many who have styled themselves professors of the Hebrew language and its literature.<sup>15</sup>

No doubt, in the above passage Bennett referred directly to Hyman Hurwitz, as he immediately mentions Hurwitz’s hypothesis, presented in his lecture, on the derivation of Hebrew [*Ivrit*] from the patriarchs, referred to as *Ivrim*, which he quickly dismisses. And once again, he directly challenges Hurwitz by maintaining that the grammatical system of Hebrew was coeval with the language itself, requiring no improvement or alteration. Where Hurwitz had argued that one can assume that the language had undergone many and considerable changes, his object, Bennett opines, was to flatter the whims of modern critics, the adversaries of Scripture’s authority: “For if the language has really undergone alterations in various times from its primitive institution, the authority of the Scripture records of events from the Creation must infallibly become dubious, as no *positive* and standing accounts were in existence! [ . . . ] So long as there are no sufficient grounds to corroborate the [ . . . ] *antithesis*, [ . . . ] the universal opinion regarding

---

<sup>14</sup> Solomon Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise on the Primogeniture and Integrity of the Holy Language: Showing Its Origin, in Unison with the Copiousness of Its Grammatical and Etymological System to Have Been from Time Immemorial Retroceding to That of the Creation* (London: printed for the author by Richard Taylor, 1835), v. The Hebrew title of the book is *Derush Torani u-Meḥkari al kadmut u-shelemut lashon ha-kodesh*. Besides Mocatta, Bennett’s subscribers included the Duke of Sussex (the president of the Royal Society), the Lord Viscount Kingsborough, the Lord Bishop of Chichester, the Lord Bishop of Salisbury, Thomas Pettigrew, William Frend, Asher Samson, Lynn Moses, Morris Emanuel, Aaron Goldsmid, Mrs. Housman, Samuel Hart (an artist), Myer Solomon, and Morris Solomon of Amsterdam.

<sup>15</sup> Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 2, 3.

the immutability of the Holy Language remains valid and free from doubt.” Why then conjecture, “as suggested by the before-mentioned lecturer [Hurwitz]”?<sup>16</sup>

Bennett had previously mocked Hurwitz’s notion of the initial appearance of two-syllable roots in the biblical text in his critical response to the professor’s introductory lecture. In the first instance, he had attributed Hurwitz’s foolish error to the fallacious arguments of Mordechai Gumpel Schnaber Levison, whom he then apparently considered to be the source of Hurwitz’s error. In the present book, Bennett returns to the same issue with a vengeance! But this time, the guilty culprit is not Levison but another European Jewish scholar, Salomon Ben Seligman Pappenheim of Breslau (1740–1814), the well-known Hebrew grammarian and lexicographer:

Unfortunately, our modern Jewish literati follow in many instances the steps of modern Christian critics, in searching after *novelties* in order to introduce innovations into the Holy Language, though derogatory to the sacred code and to the language itself. [ . . . ] The hypothesis of the before-mentioned Professor [Hurwitz] was chewed over (though undigested) from a modern German Hebrew scholar, the fore-runner of, and runner after, novelties; viz. one Rabbi Solomon Popenhaim [*sic*], who in his work, *Heshek Shlomo* [The delight of Solomon], declares himself to be the original inventor of that hypothesis; but more particularly in his work entitled *Yeriot Shlomo* [The curtains of Solomon], [ . . . ] in which he strenuously asserts that all the roots of the Holy Language consisted originally of two letters only.<sup>17</sup>

Bennett will countenance neither the ludicrous theory of this otherwise learned rabbi nor the foolish mistake of Hurwitz’s reliance on him. He writes: “The delusion of this hypothesis is sufficiently glaring: for we find throughout Scripture the generally sanctioned standard of three letters for each verb. [ . . . ] The same ingenious author, indeed, tries to show that even *one* letter constitutes a root,” but he concedes in his preface that one has to add some letters to the binary roots. “When a literary character has once established his fame, he becomes arbitrary, and assumes an infallible authority to advance to the world any favourite opinion or hypothesis, though not weighed by reason or supported by authorities. [ . . . ]

---

<sup>16</sup> Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 3, 5; quotation, 11, 12. Bennett discussed the term *ivri* again on 31–33.

<sup>17</sup> Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 26. On Pappenheim, see James Strong and John McClintock, “Pappenheim, Salomon Ben-seligmann,” in *The Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1880), at <https://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/P/pappenheim-salomon-ben-seligmann.html>, and Natalie Naimark Goldberg, “Salomon Pappenheim and His Writings: Rabbi, Maskil, Aufklaerer,” in *The Maskil in Our Time: Studies in Honor of Moshe Pelli*, ed. Zev Garber, Lev Ḥakak, and Shmuel Katz (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me’uḥad, 2017), 34–57.

Such appears to me to have been the confidence of the author now under our notice.” Bennett desires not to be offensive but only to “expos[e] the mistakes of the votaries of error,” to “preven[t] the student being deluded by any of these crude notions of modern critics with regard to the Holy Language,” including “the undigested and dull hypotheses as that proposed by the before-mentioned Rabbi, and in the Lecture of the Professor of the London University.”<sup>18</sup>

It is not Hurwitz alone who emerges as a target in Bennett’s later work; even Adam Clarke, the so-called preeminent scholar of the Hebrew Bible, is reintroduced, this time in a discussion on the challenge of deciphering ancient names in the biblical text and the absurd derivations offered by some contemporary scholars. He refers the reader, for example, to Dr. Adam Clarke’s Bible commentary on Numbers 27:1–11, relating to the names of Zelophad (Zelophehad) and his five daughters considered as types relating to the advent of the Messiah. Bennett snipes: “If Zelophad had had a dozen daughters, the Doctor would, doubtless, have typified them all!”<sup>19</sup>

There are also new and varied sources of which Bennett makes use, illustrating his wide erudition and his commitment to referring to books of both Jewish and Christian origin. In the same discussion of the derivation of ancient Hebrew names, he cites Ethan Smith, the pastor of a church in Poultney, Vermont, who composed a book titled *A View of the Hebrews* (1823), based on tourist accounts “of aborigines of that hemisphere”—remnants of the ten lost tribes who possess “religious principles, sentiments, customs and manners” and use words derived from ancient Hebrew.<sup>20</sup>

In discussing the vowel points in Hebrew, Bennett demonstrates his knowledge of the heated debates among ancient and modern critics regarding their origins: “Some modern critics, enemies of the *teaching dots* (as they style the Hebrew vowel-points), are of the opinion that the letters [ . . . ] served primitively (as they pretend, in an old Hebrew language which is lost,) as vowel letters, as in all modern languages and these they pretend to reinstate.” His source for this view was *Racines Hebraique sans Points royelles* (1732), a book by Charles François Houbigant (1686–1783), a French Christian Hebraist. Bennett dismisses this position and those who embrace it: “This unhallowed and unauthorized hypothesis is also chewed over by some English Hebrew grammarians, who, in many instances, copy the whims of the French novelists.” But the letters never serve as vowels. Bennett again cites from the preface to this book on the Hebrew origins of words

---

<sup>18</sup> Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 28, 29.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 11n. Clarke published his Bible commentary in 6 vols. (1810–1826).

<sup>20</sup> Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 9–10.

in Greek and Latin and other languages, mentioning that he had created his own list of such derivations.<sup>21</sup>

He is also familiar with and discusses *Lectures on the Elements of Hieroglyphics and Egyptian Antiquities* (1829), a book by Marquis Spineto (ca. 1774–1849), an Italian nobleman residing in Cambridge. Here is Bennett’s description:

The object of the Marquis’s work is to raise Egypt to a high antiquity of *myriads* of years, far beyond the chronology we obtain from our sacred Scriptures. It was Manetho, the vague Egyptian historian, and (like all the heathens of that period) the inveterate enemy of Scripture authority, who described to his master, Ptolemæos Philadelphus, the history of (his supposed) Old Egypt—namely, that it was of a high antiquity, and in the utmost splendour, and that it possessed all advantages peculiar to human civilization.<sup>22</sup>

To refute Spineto, Bennett solicits the opinion of none other than his close associate Sir William Drummond, “whose authority as a historian and linguist is not to be doubted.” For Drummond, the hieroglyphics of Manetho were inauthentic fabrications and should not be trusted by modern scholars. Spineto also asserted that the invention of letters in an alphabetical order is attributable to the Egyptians, as letters emerged out of their modified hieroglyphics. This too is a false hypothesis, an attempt to undermine the primacy of the Hebrew language over all other languages.<sup>23</sup>

Besides these new sources, Bennett also cites himself or, more precisely, his unpublished manuscript nearing completion. In this context, it is sufficient to note his interesting self-reference: “In one of the critical notes of my New Version of the Bible (Genesis v. 3.) I have proved the integrity of the chronology of the *ante-* and *post-*diluvian periods as laid down in our Hebrew text, and the gross corruptions of the Samaritan text and Septuagint”.<sup>24</sup> By 1835, at least, Bennett seems to have completed not only his revised translation of the Hebrew Bible but the critical notes as well, to the extent that he could cite from them.

At the close of the book, Bennett reiterates his deep concerns about the Hebrew language while offering some hope for the future of its perpetuation. It is in this context, too, that he describes the genesis of his project to keep the Hebrew

---

21 Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 14, 24 and note. On Houbigant, see Joseph Jacobs and M. Seligsohn, “Houbigant, Charles François,” in *Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, managing ed. Isidore Singer, 12 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901–1906), 6:484, available at <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7910-houbigant-charles-francois>.

22 Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 38.

23 Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 39n (quotation), 39–42. On Drummond and his relationship to Bennett, see chapter 4, above.

24 Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 22n.

Bible at the forefront of Western civilization. The fate of the Holy Language in his time is directly connected to a larger dilemma. As Hebrew is “reduced to a level with the modern languages,” its decline might be viewed as a way “of reducing revealed religion to an institution of mere human invention.” He also notes with sadness the concomitant neglect of Hebrew literature, in particular the volumes of the Talmud: “These volumes, which are the great treasure of all fundamental laws, both in their minutiae and in their details; comprising also the extent of all jurisprudence; the laws of inheritances and entailments; criminal and penal, matrimonial and divorce laws; divine and ritual laws, ethics, and moral precepts,—all underwent one fate, that of consignment to *the flames*[.]”<sup>25</sup>

Hebrew books, he notes, are no longer abused in recent centuries; many precious tomes are preserved in public and private library collections; and an elite group of Christian scholars such as the Buxtorfs, Surenhusius, and Bartolucci and their successors cultivate Hebraic studies with great devotion. “But alas!,” he adds,

the same prejudices which prevailed against the Jewish nation in the barbarous times of Europe are still continued against them, against the Holy Language, against Rabbinical literature in general, and even against their fundamental knowledge of the true Unity of God! I must not, however, be too censorious towards the literati of our Christian brethren, considering that most of my Israelitish brethren in this kingdom are also indifferent towards the Holy Language and the extensive literature of the Rabbies. [. . .] [I]t is the province of the Rabbies of the different synagogues to endeavour to excite attention to the subject[.]<sup>26</sup>

It is at this juncture in the narrative that Bennett introduces his own work and shifts finally from the plight of Hebrew in general to that of the legacy of the Hebrew Bible in particular:

Although the far greater portion of my life has been devoted to different branches of the Arts, for the support of my family, yet literature was never wholly neglected by me. Biblical criticism has been the chief object of my attention, more particularly the authorized version of the Old Testament. In the course of my studies, instances of corrupt and erroneous translation continually presented themselves; the Hagiographical Books and the twelve minor Prophets particularly, overwhelmed me with surprise; in them I found that the instances of correct translation were far outnumbered by those of corrupt and erroneous interpretation: the authorized version of these books, indeed, may be said, in general terms, to be inconsistent with the originals and with the grammar and etiology of the Holy Language, (instances of which I have given in a pamphlet entitled “Critical Remarks on the Authorized Version” [1834].) Of these errors I made memoranda, which I preserved, some in the margin of a

---

<sup>25</sup> Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 43.

<sup>26</sup> Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 47–48.

copy of the English Bible, but the greater portion separately in a book which I kept for that purpose.<sup>27</sup>

The details of that project will constitute the subject of the next chapter. Bennett concludes this notice with the hope that his ultimate efforts will bear fruit and that others will appreciate his achievement and support its ultimate publication:

But how to introduce into the world the result of my holy labour I am utterly at a loss: for it is vain to expect that the Church will patronize it; and consequently the Government will refuse its sanction, and I regret that my circumstances will not justify me in publishing the Work on my own responsibility.

My hopes, however, are flattered with the idea that in this great Metropolis of the world, where literature and all branches of human perfection are so extensively cultivated and patronized, my sacred labours may find both admirers and advocates divested of religious and political prejudices; and to such liberal-minded lovers of truth my appeal for assistance in this sacred undertaking is fervently directed.<sup>28</sup>

Just like his pamphlet against Hyman Hurwitz, this essay on the Hebrew language ends with an advertisement for his ultimate literary and religious effort to come. His hopes were dashed by his premature death in 1838 and by the lack of support for so ambitious a project. But he came close to realizing his lifetime goal, as we shall soon explore.

---

27 Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, “Notice,” following 49. Compare this reference—to memoranda in the margin of a copy of the English book as well as a separate book—with the detailed discussion of this project in the next chapter. In the extant two volumes I have studied, there are marginal notes as well as added original pages inserted into the binding, not a separate book.

28 Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, “Notice,” following 49.

## 8 A Jewish Gift to British Civilization: A New Translation of the English Bible

### 8.1 Earlier Jewish translations of the Hebrew Bible in England

To any English person living in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reading the Bible as the authentic rendering of divine revelation meant always the English Authorized Version. Given the long history of the King James translation and the ubiquitous role it played in the religious, cultural, and civil life of English society for centuries, its familiar phraseology and cadences were understandably conceived as identical with the way God spoke. For the vast majority of English Jews increasingly incapable of reading the Bible in Hebrew, the English translation gradually began to function for them as well as the major entry point into the biblical narrative. It is difficult to chart the process precisely except to observe its results, confirmed by the candid observations of rabbis and educators (including Bennett himself) that Hebraic literacy, beyond a small elite, was hardly the norm by the late eighteenth century, among either Sephardic or Ashkenazic Jews. Hyman Hurwitz, writing in 1807 in his *Sefer Rishon Le-Mikra'ei Kodesh, or, Elements of the Hebrew Language*, offered as dependable an estimate as any in claiming that only a fifth of the young students graduating Jewish schools could read Hebrew with any accuracy and even fewer could read the Bible without consulting an English translation.<sup>1</sup>

David Levi, the dominant figure of Anglo-Jewry at the end of the eighteenth century, had long criticized the English translation for its inaccuracies, but neither he nor any of his colleagues could dislodge its usage for Christians and Jews alike. When the prominent Christian cleric Anselm Bayley, a self-proclaimed friend of the Jewish people, published a bilingual edition of the entire Old Testament in 1774, with the Hebrew text on the left side of the page and the authorized English version on the right, he intended that it be used by Jews with little or no Hebraic background, as the Hebrew title makes clear: “On one side Hebrew [*Yehudit*] and the other side English [*Britanit*] to assist the Jews who speak English to understand the Bible and its secrets from their own tongue that was in the past.”<sup>2</sup>

---

1 This section relies significantly on my *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 219–228, with some shifts of emphasis; see Hyman Hurwitz, preface to *Sefer Rishon Le-Mikra'ei Kodesh, or, Elements of the Hebrew Language* (London: L. Alexander, 1807), ii.

2 See David Daiches, “The Beginnings of Anglo-Jewish Biblical Exegesis and Bible Translation,” *Miscellanies* (Jewish Historical Society of England) 4 (1942): 25.

Even the long-awaited “Jewish” version of the Torah and *Haftarot*, published in Hebrew and English by Alexander Alexander in 1785, was hardly an improvement over the Bayly edition. The five-volume set was obviously intended for synagogue use, but it too contained only the English authorized edition. The work did provide some supplementary notes, especially on the book of Genesis, but they are hardly a serious encounter with the English translation as an essentially Protestant rewriting of the Pentateuch. Even the notes, as David Daiches perceptively pointed out many years ago, display a distinctly English Protestant flavor. Such rubrics as “explanatory, historical, critical, and practical,” or Alexander’s use of “the argument” at the conclusion of each book, betray the formidable influence of the English Bible tradition.<sup>3</sup>

When Lion Soesmans offered his own rival edition of the Pentateuch for Jewish usage in 1787, he had apparently outdone his rival by securing the services of David Levi himself. The title page reads ambiguously: “Corrected and translated by David Levi.” What this meant is that Soesmans again used the Authorized Version but added the more extensive scholarly notes of Levi. Even Alexander Alexander’s son, Levi, eventually realized that this edition was superior to that of his father and republished it again in 1821. This later version was still unchanged from the original, despite its somewhat exaggerated claims that the “practical, critical, and grammatical” notes of Levi had been “carefully corrected and revised, with various improvements and additions distinguishing also from the six hundred and thirteen precepts [ . . . ] as observed by the Jews.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, over the course of some fifty years, English Jews inevitably assumed that the Authorized Version was in fact identical to the traditional text. While Jews might have heard the original Hebrew text chanted in the synagogue, most of them understood it solely through its English Protestant translation. In this respect, their aesthetic experience with the Bible increasingly mirrored that of their Christian contemporaries in churches throughout England.<sup>5</sup>

David Levi surely regretted this sad twist of fate that no alternative English translation, one more faithful to the original Hebrew version, was available in his

---

3 Daiches, “The Beginnings of Anglo-Jewish Biblical Exegesis,” 26–27, 29; Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 220–221. On David Levi, see the book’s index, especially passages in chap. 2.

4 Title page of *The Holy Bible, in Hebrew, Conformable to the Accurate Text of Everardo van der Hooght, V.D.M., Printed at Amsterdam, in 1705, and the Musical Accents after the Manner of Pramselo, with the English Translation on the Opposite Page; To which is added, the Notes, Explanatory, Practical, Critical, and Grammatical of the Late David Levi, Carefully Corrected and Revised*, vol. 1 (London: L. Alexander, A.M. 5582 [1821–1822]).

5 Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 221–226, including the illustrations of the various books discussed.

time. He had announced his aspiration to produce “a new translation of the Bible, with a copious commentary, on a plan never before attempted; and in which the errors of the present translation will be clearly pointed out, the difficult passages explained, and the seeming contradictions reconciled,”<sup>6</sup> but he failed to fulfill this desire. In 1789, one of Levi’s contemporaries, an otherwise unknown Sephardic Jew named Isaac Delgado, published *A New English Translation of the Pentateuch, Being a Thorough Correction of the Present Translation, Wherever It Deviates from the Genuine Sense of the Hebrew Expressions, or Where It Renders Obscure the Meaning of the Text; or, Lastly, When It Occasions a Seeming Contradiction: Proving the Validity of Such Emendations by Critical Remarks and Illustrations, Grounded on Other Instances in Scripture Where the Like Words and Phrases Occur*. Delgado, who on the title page called himself “a teacher of the Hebrew Language,”<sup>7</sup> accomplished considerably less than his pretentious title seems to indicate. The new English translation was in fact “a specimen of the whole”: that is, a list of corrected translations in one column facing the standard English translation, along with extensive notes that justified the suggested emendations. What was unusual about Delgado’s effort was neither the significance of his changes nor his erudition but the dedication “To the Honourable and Right Reverend Dr. Shute Barrington, Lord Bishop of Salisbury.” The publication constituted a kind of ecumenical project since, in the words of Delgado, “we both, my Lord, worship the ONE TRUE GOD.” And he continues in his preface:

It is greatly to be lamented, that, in a Christian country, which abounds with men eminent for their abilities and learning, a correction of the present translation of the Bible, and a literal explanation of it, so much wanted, [ . . . ] hath been hitherto neglected; for the want of which, people, meeting with several obscure passages, which cannot be properly understood, are apt to throw it aside, and seldom view it again. What most surprises me is, that none of all the publishers of Family Bibles, that have come to my knowledge, ever undertook such a task.<sup>8</sup>

Delgado, accordingly, pursued his work as a service to English society in general. Since the English Bible was the common possession of Jews and Christians alike, it followed that if it was deficient, a Jew knowledgeable in the Hebrew text could

<sup>6</sup> David Levi, *Lingua Sacra*, 3 vols. (London: W. Justins, 1785–1787), 3:epilogue, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Isaac Delgado, *A New English Translation of the Pentateuch* (London: printed for the author by W. Richardson, 1789).

<sup>8</sup> Delgado, *A New English Translation of the Pentateuch*, [iii], [iv], v. On Bishop Shute Barrington, see Sir Thomas Lawrence, “Barrington, Shute (1734–1826),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1011940?rskey=mPZSxt&result=2>. Barrington is included on the list of subscribers to Bennett’s commentary on Ezekiel; see chapter 6, above.

volunteer, for the common good, to improve the translation. The issue was not to preserve a Jewish version exclusively for Jewish usage, as was the case in the previous biblical editions, but to refine a text to be shared by all religions. To be sure, Delgado could not withhold his stinging barbs regarding the highly publicized project of Benjamin Kennicott. He strongly insists that he will never avail himself “of that pernicious method of supposing an error in Scripture, committed by transcribers after the compilation of the Bible by Ezra and his synod, who faithfully handed it down to us as they found it, without venturing to alter a single letter, and was since preserved by the Massorites as pure as they received it.” He notes that Jews all over the world preserve the same text and “to pretend to correct the original Hebrew by the different readings found in manuscripts” is a profane act “as it would give us a spurious copy, instead of a divine narrative.”<sup>9</sup>

Delgado’s effort, apparently supported by the Bishop of Salisbury himself, was indeed a modest success. No more convincing testimony of active Jewish collaboration with Christian clergy in improving the English translation of their common Bible could be found than the remarkable ecumenical list of subscribers to this volume, including several well-known Christian clerics and Jewish leaders of both the Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities.<sup>10</sup> In his outreach to the well-known bishop and other Christians who supported the publication, Delgado was also breaking new ground. He was not exclusively concerned with producing a Torah translation for Jewish usage. He was committed to producing an accurate translation for Christians, though one undoubtedly to be consulted by Jews as well. But as a Hebrew expert of the Jewish faith, he was explicitly performing a service for all members of the British nation, and in so doing, he was engaged in a sacred task that transcended his own faith community. Solomon Bennett was following in his footsteps on a much grander scale.

## 8.2 Bennett’s first announcement: critical remarks on the Authorized Version

Some forty-five years passed before another Jewish scholar advanced the idea of a new English translation, this time of the entire Old Testament rather than the Pentateuch alone. That scholar was, of course, Solomon Bennett, who in 1834 published his *Critical Remarks on the Authorised Version of the Old Testament Containing Some Examples of Its Errors, with Specimens of an Amended Translation*.

---

<sup>9</sup> Delgado, *A New English Translation of the Pentateuch*, vii.

<sup>10</sup> Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 226–228.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Bennett's infatuation with Hebrew was also connected intimately to a second passion that preoccupied him virtually to the day of his death in 1838: his ardent desire to offer a corrected English translation of the entire Old Testament, a vital need for the English Christian nation, so he believed, to be carried out by a learned Jew. In fact, his *Critical Remarks* were published only a year before his essay on the Hebrew language. Not only were the two projects related – a correct version of the Bible was critical in demonstrating the continuity and perfection of the Hebrew language – but Bennett worked on both simultaneously in the last years of his life. He opens the *Critical Remarks* by addressing his Christian readers:

During my sojourn in this kingdom, I have always endeavored to enter merely into the spirit of the vernacular language of the country; chiefly with the view of understanding its literary productions. I have read various authors of flourishing and fine language, yet at the same time void of good sense and information. I have read books replete with hypotheses and sentiments, yet void of truths, and even perplexing to the minds of readers. Different is the character of my address to the public; my labours are of a sacred nature and relate to the integrity of Scripture; and their object is to promote a pure, correct, and perfect version of the Bible, critically and etymologically demonstrated, which has never yet been attempted by anyone; and to ascertain if it meets the original or not, which has remained for near 1899 years in a state of great indecision. I am proposing a perfect version of the Hebrew Bible, but not orations of eloquence – a version of the standing truths of Scripture, so as to please Biblical Scholars, but not a display of decayed vain ornaments, so as to please idle thoughts.<sup>11</sup>

He later relates a specific incident that triggered his ambitious project:

It would never have entered my mind to examine the versions of the Bible, which have stood the test for 1800 years, and which have passed the hands of thousands of divines and learned men as a correct version (to doubt their labours would be a reflection on their learning), had not one occurrence so forcibly struck my mind, that I could no longer remain indifferent to it. [ . . . ] In the year 1812, one Daniel Isaac Eaton published various tracts of Tom Paine, and he presented me with a copy of his writings; in which pamphlet, among his satirical allusions, I noticed that Paine greatly derided Scripture, charging it with foolish and blasphemous language.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Solomon Bennett, *Critical Remarks on the Authorised Version of the Old Testament: Containing Some Examples of Its Errors, with Specimens of an Amended Translation* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1834), iii.

<sup>12</sup> Bennett, *Critical Remarks*, 3–4. On Daniel Isaac Eaton, the controversial editor of Paine's books, see his *Trial of Mr. Daniel Isaac Eaton, for Publishing the Third and Last Part of Paine's Age of Reason: Before Lord Ellenborough, Court of King's Bench, Guildhall, March 6, 1812* (London: Daniel Isaac Eaton, 1812; reprint, n.p.: Forgotten Books, 2018); Daniel Lawrence McCue Jr., "Eaton, Daniel Isaac (*bap.* 1753, *d.* 1814)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, October 4, 2007, <https://>

At about the same time, Bennett was sent another document, titled *Report from Select Committee on King's Printers' Patents*, ordered by the House of Commons to be printed on August 8, 1832. "From the whole of its contents," he writes, "I could not find anything to my satisfaction, in regard to my inquiry respecting the 1800 years' standing version of the Bible, for, notwithstanding the innumerable corruptions, and erroneous translations, of single words, whole phrases, and even of whole verses, like those with which the versions are filled, and which gave no sense whatever, not the least mention was made of taking the same into consideration."<sup>13</sup>

The problem of erroneous translation was also obvious with respect to the most recent editions of the Bible: "But what surprised me more was, I had before me the famous Bible (4 octavo volumes) entitled 'The Old Testament, English and Hebrew, with Remarks, Critical and Grammatical, on the Hebrew,' by Anselm Bayley, LLD, in 1774; and notwithstanding his great promises, yet his English version is replete with all the gross errors and corruptions which we meet with in the most common editions of the Bible, without exceptions." Similarly, the editions of Adam Clarke, John Hewlett, and John Bellamy were all found wanting, filled with mistakes and corruptions that they neither noticed nor corrected. He is especially unsparing in his comments on Bellamy, whom we encountered earlier and about whom Bennett had shared his impressions: "I cannot forbear noticing an edition (published by Longman and Co., Paternoster Row, in 1818) of an imposter and plagiarist [John Bellamy], a mere pretender to the knowledge of the Hebrew language, entitled 'The Holy Bible, newly translated from the original, etc.,' whose name and abilities are hardly worth my notice."<sup>14</sup>

Bennett is aware that plagiarists will use his own emendations for their own purposes. "However, I must go with the stream; particularly as I was persuaded

---

doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/8421; and Michael T. Davis, "That Odious Class of Men Called Democrats: Daniel Isaac Eaton and the Romantics 1794–1795," *History* 84, no. 273 (January 1999): 74–92. Note that both the radical Eaton and the conservative Lord Ellenborough, his adversary, were on good terms with Bennett.

<sup>13</sup> Bennett, *Critical Remarks*, 5. See "The Bible-Printing Monopoly," *Eclectic Review*, 3rd ser., 9 (June 1833): art. 4, 509–533, a review of four books on the inadequacies of standard translations, including a reprint of the committee's report, published in 1833 (available at <https://books.google.com/books?id=suAEAAAQAAJ&newbks=0&printsec=frontcover&>).

<sup>14</sup> Bennett, *Critical Remarks*, 6. On Anselm Bayley, see Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 40–44, 180–83, and J. M. Rigg, revised by Emma Major, "Bayly [Baily], Anselm (1718/19–1794)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, November 10, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1763>. On Hewlett, see G. C. Boase, revised by H. C. G. Matthew, "Hewlett, John (1756/7–1844)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, November 12, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13154>.

by some literary gentlemen to do so. Accordingly, I shall present some examples out of different books composing the Bible; viz. quotations from the authorized version; as well as the corrections of the same." He thus hopes to present the reader with "a perfect idea of my labour in sacred research." He first considers the Pentateuch, admitting that the standard version is good except for some poetical sections. He notes some glaring mistakes in Joshua and 2 Samuel, as well as errors in the hagiographical and less prophetic books, notably Psalms and Proverbs; and as of 1834, he acknowledges that he "has not [yet] examined the remaining parts of the hagiographical books nor yet the latter prophetic books."<sup>15</sup>

There are at least three reasons for the sorry state of the English translation, according to Bennett. Jews were never consulted, given "the prevalent prejudices against the Hebrew nation, which have descended from the barbarous times of Europe down to the present day." Second, the rabbis were satisfied with the original Hebrew and had no reason to examine translations, while the Christians adhered uncritically to their Authorized Version. And third, no authority could challenge the present version, although it was authorized in a period when Hebrew was not well understood. This impediment functioned as "an iron bar before the gate not allowing anyone to enter the garden so as to clear away the weeds and poisonous herbs." Bennett openly acknowledges that some Christian translations could be trustworthy: "I have before me the Oxford Bible of 1824, in the marginal notes of which, I perceive versions which are much better than the authorized versions; even some of them are exact versions of the original Hebrew, and yet the erroneous and false translations remain in the body of the Bible, whilst these correct ones are scattered indifferently in the margin as if of little or no value at all."<sup>16</sup>

Despite these partial accomplishments of Christian scholars, the prevailing prejudice of ignoring the vast Hebraic skills of Jewish exegetes has led to the present condition, an unsatisfactory and inaccurate biblical translation authorized by Protestant authority. The obvious question to be asked is the following:

Who then ought to be the best judges of the integrity of any version of the Bible, if not that people with whom the original language was vernacular; viz. from the creation until the destruction of the second temple, a period of about 4000 years, and with whom it has never ceased to be their zealous and sacred study, in all the particulars relative to the Hebrew literature at large, even in their oppressed and persecuted state, until now? Nor can any critic or historian prove, that there ever was a period of time in which the Holy Language was neglected or changed, as pretended by some shallow modern critics!<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Bennett, *Critical Remarks*, 8, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Bennett, *Critical Remarks*, 22–23.

<sup>17</sup> Bennett, *Critical Remarks*, 22.

Bennett was nominating himself for the immense task at hand. As we have seen, there had already been several attempts by Jews to offer an English version of the Pentateuch, generally adaptations of the King James Version for Jewish usage, and in one case, that of Delgado, an “ecumenical” version; but no one had seriously attempted to revise the entire English translation of the Hebrew Bible. Bennett now offered, in the first of two small volumes, specimens of his translation along with a clear plan of action that would guide his ambitious project to its conclusion:

The method I proceed in is this: – First, I have for my work a copy of an English Bible, viz. the Oxford Bible, an edition of 1824, and a copy of the great Hebrew Bible (printed in Basel) enriched with the Massorah Magna and Parva, and with the important commentaries of the Targums of Rabbi Solomon Iarchi, Rabbi David Kimchi, R. Levi Ben Gershom, and Aben Ezra. [ . . . ] I do not adhere closely to literal translation, as such is inconsistent even with living languages; and how much more so must it be the case with that Holy Language, whose system, grammar, etymology, cannot be compared with any of the modern languages. In cases like this, the Translator has only to notice, with the utmost perspicuity, the scope of the subject, and to render it with all the simplicity of the language into which he is about to translate. [ . . . ] Secondly, I do not trouble myself about the idiom of the standing version at large, as it is immaterial to my views whether it be of the ancient or modern idiom, so long as it preserves the sentiments of the original words, except in those instances in which the version is inconsistent with the original meaning of the Hebrew text, as demonstrated all along. [ . . . ] Thirdly, I have enriched it with numerous critical notes, free from hypotheses, types, and private opinions, which are common with commentators.<sup>18</sup>

He closes this first volume with a plea for support from Christians for his noble project. Having entered an enlightened age in Europe in a unique country with its grand repository of literature of every description and its treasury of arts and sciences, Bennett believes his dream can be realized: “In a nation like this, I hope that my labours, my sincere and upright views, will also find their zealous advocates, who will cordially patronize and support me in my proposed sacred labour.”<sup>19</sup>

### 8.3 The publication of a specimen of Bennett’s new translation

Two years later, in 1836, Bennett published his *Likūṭim me-ha’ataḳah ḥadashah ‘al Torah, Nevi’im u Ketuvim = Specimen of a New Version of the Hebrew Bible Translated from the Original Text*. This time it included a list of subscribers, among

<sup>18</sup> Bennett, *Critical Remarks*, 24–25.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett, *Critical Remarks*, 26.

them several names familiar as supporters of earlier works as well as others: for example, the Duke of Sussex, the Lord Viscount Kingsborough, Dr. Lee, Moses Montefiore, Mrs. Housman, William Frend, Dr. Stephen Lushington (a well-known anti-slavery advocate), George Birkbeck (a famous doctor and professor of natural philosophy), James Blundell (a London obstetrician), Moses Mocatta, Myer Solomon, and Asher Solomon.<sup>20</sup>

In his preface, Bennett again recalls his profession as engraver, from which he was forced to retire eight years earlier (in 1828) following a partial loss of his sight, after which he devoted himself to a close examination of the Authorized Version. He now writes explicitly to potential donors to fund his ambitious project, and specifically to non-clerics: "I do not address myself to all the members of that class of the erudite whose emoluments depend on their religious pursuits, but to the well-educated, noble, wealthy, and independent class of the community, on whom the salvation and well-being of the commonwealth mainly depend, and who have no pecuniary or sinister interest in religious and literary pursuits."<sup>21</sup>

He relates the long history of Hebraic learning among the Jews on the Continent and the calamitous history of the Jews under Catholic rule, leading to the destruction of Jewish communities and of their precious books and libraries. Since no Jews were permitted to live in England until the mid-seventeenth century, the Bible in Hebrew was a sealed book prior to the sixteenth century. He gleaned the history of the Authorized Version from the classic history of John Lewis, *A Complete History of the Several Translations of the Holy Bible, and New Testament, into English* (1818), from which he learned that the King James Version was not a genuine translation from the original Hebrew but was partly translated from the Saxon, the Dutch, the Latin, and other European languages. He thus concludes: "Truly, the version as it stands at the present day by no means proves the authors thereof to have possessed a grammatical and etymological knowledge

---

<sup>20</sup> We have encountered most of these faithful subscribers before. On Stephen Lushington, see Martin Spychal, "A strenuous and able Reformer": Dr Stephen Lushington (1782–1873), *The Victorian Commons*, September 17, 2020, <https://victoriancommons.wordpress.com/2020/09/17/a-strenuous-and-able-reformer-dr-stephen-lushington-1782-1873>. On George Birkbeck, see Matthew Lee, "Birbeck, George (1776–1841)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, May 26, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/2454>. On James Blundell, see [Anon.], revised by Anne Digby, "Blundell, James (1790–1878)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, April 8, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/2713>.

<sup>21</sup> Solomon Bennett, *Likutim me-ha'atakah hadashah 'al Torah, Nevi'im u Ketuvim = Specimen of a New Version of the Hebrew Bible Translated from the Original Text, and Comprising Selected Chapters [ . . . ] Arranged in Three Columns, viz. the Authorized Version, the Updated Version, and the Original Hebrew Text* (London: printed for the author by Richard Taylor, 1837), ii.

equal to the comprehension of the sublimity of the holy language.”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, it has not improved up to the present day. He reiterates how he carefully examined the most popular editions – those of Bayly, Hewlett, Clarke, and Bellamy – “and although I found them to be very free in commenting, metaphorizing, and typifying Scripture, yet being shallow Hebrew scholars, they followed verbatim the authorized version with all its corruptions.”<sup>23</sup>

As we have previously noticed, Bennett had little respect for Bellamy’s scholarship, but here he is particularly outspoken in his utter contempt for the man:

But what surprises me, and has doubtless surprised the reader, is, “The Holy Bible [. . .] by John Bellamy, 1818.” This insignificant Hebraist and plagiarist, whom I assisted in many instances, greatly surprised me, in the preface of his Bible, by the use he made of my instructions, presenting them as specimens of his improved version. This inspection induced me to enter the examination of his version of the Book of Genesis, and his learned critical notes, in consideration of which, I found him to be mostly ignorant even in the lowest degree of the knowledge of the Hebrew language; the corruptions and insignificance of his version, and the critical notes relative to his taste are beyond endurance. Such has been the progressive condition of the holy language among the professors of the Church and in the classics at large. The student having taken half a dozen, or perhaps as many as a dozen lessons in that language and assisting himself with a Hebrew dictionary and a lexicon, he deems himself to be a perfect Hebrew scholar, so as even to become a critic in Hebraism!

Bennett then quotes from the beginning of Bellamy’s preface on Genesis (“which in my humble opinion is the best part of his criticisms”), where he offered an extensive list of Christian authorities who believed that the Authorized Version was not consistent with the original Hebrew.<sup>24</sup> Bellamy’s emphasis on the continuity of the Hebrew language from its inception to the present certainly mirrors Bennett’s strong position.

Bennett’s charges that Bellamy studied with him and then plagiarized him should also be seen in a wider context. When Bellamy’s *The Holy Bible Newly Translated from the Original Hebrew with Notes Critical and Explanatory* was published in London in 1818, it was met with an avalanche of criticism from many Christian clerics, which he tried to answer in part. They challenged the notion of replacing the standard edition with a new translation and assailed the many mistakes and mistranslations he had subsequently introduced. Most interesting is a volume attacking Bellamy written in 1820 by the aforementioned Hyman Hurwitz,

---

<sup>22</sup> Bennett, *Specimen*, i–vii; quotation, vii. See also David Daiches, *The King James Version: An Account of the Development and Sources of the English Bible of 1611 with Special Reference to the Hebrew Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941).

<sup>23</sup> Bennett, *Specimen*, viii.

<sup>24</sup> Bennett, *Specimen*, xviii–ix.

a detailed criticism disputing the need for an entirely new translation and a defense of previous translations, Jewish and Christian. In an appendix, Hurwitz republishes his various letters against Bellamy beginning in 1814, four years before his Bible translation was published. The bulk of the book is a serious critique of the many absurd mistranslations; it even levels a charge of plagiarism regarding a much earlier book by one Walter Cross containing biblical points that Bellamy seemed to have copied. Since Bennett accused Bellamy of ignorance, mistranslation, and plagiarism, he may have known about and consulted Hurwitz's detailed book, even though he makes no reference to it. Bennett of course admits to having met with Bellamy and having shared his enthusiasm for a new translation while offering him some of his own emendations of the text. Perhaps after Bennett encouraged Bellamy to go ahead with his project, as he acknowledges, Bellamy then proceeded to "borrow" some of Bennett's arguments in favor of a new translation, an appropriation that Bennett later regretted. When Bennett saw what a miserable job Bellamy did in the end, using Bennett's insights without acknowledgment, he disassociated himself from Bellamy and his work. When Hurwitz was appointed to the University College London position eight years later, Bennett disparaged him publicly, as discussed in the previous chapter, referring to him as a mere primary school principal, but failed to acknowledge their shared criticisms of the notorious John Bellamy and Hurwitz's serious publication on this self-proclaimed biblical scholar.<sup>25</sup>

Before offering his three-column sample collation of the original Hebrew, the standard translation, and his own translations, along with significant comments on various verses, Bennett presents a final apology and justification of his entire endeavor. Although his work has been reviewed by several classical Hebrew

---

<sup>25</sup> The number of works critical of Bellamy's Bible is startling. See, for example, Henry John Todd, *A Vindication of Our Authorized Translation and Translators of the Bible; and of Preceding English Versions Authoritatively Commended to the Notice of Those Translators; Occasioned by Certain Objections Made by Mr. John Bellamy in His Late Translation of the Book of Genesis, and by Sir J. B. Burges, in His Reasons in Favour of a New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (London: F. C. & J. Rivington, 1819); John William Whittaker, *An Historical and Critical Enquiry into the Interpretation of the Hebrew Scripture with Remarks on Mr. Bellamy's New Translation* (Cambridge: J. Smith, 1819); Samuel Lee, *A Letter to Mr. John Bellamy on His New Translation of the Bible* (Cambridge: J. Smith, 1821); and *New Version of the First Three Chapters of Genesis; [ . . . ] To Which Are Annexed Strictures on Mr. Bellamy's Translation by Essenus* (London: Rowland Hunter, 1819)—"Essenus" was John Jones, a Unitarian minister. See particularly Hyman Hurwitz, *Vindiciae Hebraicae: or, A Defence of the Hebrew Scriptures as a Vehicle of Revealed Religion as Occasioned by the Recent Strictures and Innovations of J. Bellamy; and in Confutation of His Attacks on All Preceding Translations and on the Established Version in Particular* (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1820).

scholars, he is aware that all his emendations might not be universally accepted, and that some chapters

will prejudice orthodox readers against it; nor will some of my critical notes meet the approbation of every modern critic, being inconsistent with some of the doctrines and opinions now entertained by philosophers. [ . . . ] But my earnest object is to introduce to the world a true and correct version of the Hebrew Bible, which stood the test, and was well understood for a period of near 1400 years previous to the Christian era; but has been most superficially and roughly treated for the last eighteen centuries by translators of all European nations; by some from motives of religious prejudice, by others from supineness and indifference; but more so when we consider that the Rabbies of the synagogue, from the Primate to the petty rabbi, use the original Hebrew text, the authorized version being entirely unnoticed by them. On the other hand, the Clergy of the Church, from their Primates down to the most petty curate, are well satisfied with the authorized version. As for the original Hebrew, it is generally wholly unknown to them. Accordingly, between these two negatives the truth and the integrity of the Hebrew Bible is at stake. All of which I have taken into consideration and devoted my time and labour to the sacred object of introducing to the world a new and corrected version of the Bible, with essential critical illustrations.<sup>26</sup>

What follows is a discussion of ten different chapters of the Hebrew Bible from Genesis to Malachi and Ecclesiastes, offering fresh translations, notes, and longer discussions of the critical issues these chapters raise for Bennett. He apologizes for the work's length: "The reader, I trust, will give me credit for sincerity in my labour; considering that I have exceeded the usual limits of a specimen, it being rather a small theological work than a mere specimen."<sup>27</sup> From these various excursions, I mention a few examples.

He opens the body of the work with a discussion of Genesis 5:24–29, citing the standard translation without any alteration. He makes clear from the start that his object in highlighting a part of the chapter was not to take issue with the translation but rather to defend the integrity of the chronology of the ante- and postdiluvian periods as presented in the Hebrew Bible – dating that has perplexed modern critics, including some who have tried to amend it, especially regarding the postdiluvian period. He singles out the orientalist Thomas Yeates, whose scholarship is "not warranted by Scripture, which is an undigested performance, and contains little more than mere unsupported assertions, intended to favour the fabulous history of the antient Eastern nations." He also dismisses those scholars who offer alternate misleading readings of Scripture from either the Septuagint or the Samaritan version of the biblical text, specifically mentioning Adam Clarke's discussion and the table he had reproduced in his commentary

---

<sup>26</sup> Bennett, *Specimen*, v, xii.

<sup>27</sup> Bennett, *Specimen*, xi.

on Genesis. For Bennett, it is “unreasonable to suppose that these Samaritans should have preserved, in their idolatrous country, a correct copy of the original Pentateuch, more perfect than any copy preserved in Jerusalem under the care of the priests and levites of the Temple[.]” It is also unreasonable to assume that the Septuagint, prepared twelve hundred years after Moses, is more authentic than the original. He refers finally to his extended discussion of this very topic in his still-uncompleted biblical translation and commentary: “In the critical notes of my New Version of the Scriptures (now in Manuscript), I have demonstrated at large the delusive nature of the opinions of these assertors, as well as the unwarrantable character of the authorities upon which their hypotheses are established.”<sup>28</sup>

For Job 38, Bennett again presents his three columns: the original, the standard version, and his own. There are small deviations from the standard version in most of the verses Bennett translates, seemingly rendering them closer to the Hebrew, although it is not always clear (at least to me) why some of these slight changes are introduced. On the other hand, the famous vision beginning with the words “Out of the Whirlwind” elicits a lengthy commentary on his part. On verse 7 he writes:

The Rabbies are unanimously of the opinion that all the celestial hosts are *hayyim maskilim*, i.e. animated intellectual essences, and with passive obedience praise and fulfill the dictates of their divine Author. I know that this opinion (“the celestial bodies being animate essences,”) will not be acceptable to the followers of Newton and Laplace, who are immersed in the waves of mystery concerning solar sediment worlds, even as opaque inhabitable globes formed by the concussion of atomical sediments. Nevertheless, I would observe to the reader that I am far from possessing a disregard for those illustrious philosophers. I confess I do not pretend to be a professional astronomer, nor a naturalist; but considering that the authors of the sacred Scriptures did not dream of modern philosophers and theorists, so I, as translator of sacred learning, am bound to confine my version and its illustrations to the spirit of the authors of these ancient volumes, without twisting and perverting Scripture to the opinions of modern theorists.<sup>29</sup>

On occasion Bennett in his earlier writings had juxtaposed the theories of modern astronomers to biblical truth, but never so forcefully. Here he confesses that he is not a professional astronomer but nevertheless feels justified in challenging as-

---

<sup>28</sup> Bennett, *Specimen*, 14, 15, 18; Thomas Yeates, *Remarks on the Bible Chronology: Being an Essay towards Reconciling the Same with the Histories of the Eastern Nations* (London: Richard Watts, 1830). On Yeates, see D. S. Margoliouth, revised by J. B. Katz, “Yeates, Thomas (1768–1839),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, May 24, 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30208>.

<sup>29</sup> Bennett, *Specimen*, 19.

tronomers' mechanical understanding of the universe when it appears to contradict the clear intent of Scripture. He continues:

All opaque massy bodies, which possess even the most inert motion, we declare to be animate bodies. Why then shall we deprive the visible celestial hosts, whose substances are subtle, transparent, luminous, most essential to our habitable globe, and possess motion and order for their perpetual courses, – why shall we deny them the gift of animation? – and why should this planetary animation be more dubious than the vague and virulent hypothesis of the solar system, which teaches the doctrine of a plurality of worlds, forming themselves from the concussion of the sediments or atoms [ . . . ]? The volumes of the Philosophical Transactions abound with papers on the subject of the plurality of worlds; it is therefore unnecessary for me to be prolix.<sup>30</sup>

To underscore his point, for those he calls the adherents of biblical truth Bennett cites a Hebrew prayer on the occasion of the new moon: “Blessed be thou our God, king of the universe, who with his word created the heavens and with the breath of his mouth all the hosts, order and time He appointed to them, not to deviate from their appointments; even [ . . . ] they rejoice and are glad to fulfill the dictates of their Master, who is the true worker, and his works are perfect, etc.” And thus, he concludes:

This in my humble opinion is more cogent with human understanding and feelings, than the supposition that the whole of the celestial bodies were created [ . . . ] by concussion and traverse the spheres on their own accord – or in other words, making the sun the chief ruler, and the omnipotential power, who directs the whole of the visible system by a power of gravitation; as such must be the drift of their doctrine of a plurality of worlds.<sup>31</sup>

He similarly interprets others verses in the chapter to challenge modern scientific theories; for example, he retranslates verse 38 to address the issue of gravitation. The Authorized Version reads: “When the dust groweth into hardness, and the clods cleave fast together?” And here is Bennett’s translation: “Who can account for the pressure of the earth to the centre, and cement its lumps together?” And the following comment appears:

[This is] a twofold reference to the law of gravitation, the gravitation of the earth to the centre of the system and the tendency of all matter to gravitate to the centre of the earth itself, which are inherent laws of the supreme and intelligent divine Power, but not of that law of gravitation, laid down in the delusive and unwarranted solar system of Copernicus, Laplace, Newton, and their followers; who invest the sun with the power of gravitation; and to that power of the sun’s gravitation they ascribe all the planetary revolutions, and all the

---

<sup>30</sup> Bennett, *Specimen*, 19.

<sup>31</sup> He is quoting from the traditional prayer for the new moon, *birkhat ha-levanah*, based on BT *Sanhedrin* 42a.

phenomena that appear between the lunar sphere and the earth, as well as all the physical phenomenon of the earth itself. In short, they ascribe to the sun (literally speaking) an omnipotent power of antient heathenism, and the term God, is but a byword with them.<sup>32</sup>

As we shall see, Bennett's assault on modern science is just a prelude to his even more intense discussion opening his translation of and commentary on the book of Genesis, still in manuscript at his death. It comes as a bit of a surprise, given that he had not gone out of his way to highlight the issue previously. In light of the image he had cut among some of his contemporaries as a critic of the rabbinate, a Jew professionally and socially attached to the Christian literary world, and generally an independent and contentious spirit regarding Jewish belief and practice, this seeming orthodoxy and biblical literalism regarding Scripture and his skepticism toward scientific icons such as Newton and Laplace seem somewhat out of character as a mature statement of his beliefs in the final years of his life. His views on science and Scripture surprisingly appear to mirror those of one of his closest Christian associates. We shall examine this matter again later in this chapter.

One final example from Bennett's specimens illustrates his passion and his expertise, here in explicating a text from Isaiah 21:1. The standard version translates the beginning of the line as "The burden of the desert of the sea. As whirlwinds in the south pass through," which Bennett replaces with "The burden of the desert, situated south of the Caspian sea." In his long note to this emendation, Bennett elaborates on the geographical location of the Caspian Sea, adding that "Babylon, Persia, and Media were all situated at the south of the Caspian Sea and extended towards the Southern Ocean. However, on the entire downfall of Babylon [. . .] Persia extended her dominion westward towards the Euphrates, even unto Egypt; it has even changed the names of those countries until the present day. Such is the geographical position of those countries to which the text refers." He then apologizes for the mistaken references to this region by the medieval Jewish commentators who wrote long before the area was visited by European explorers: "Most of them wrote in the 12th and 13th centuries, in which the geographical knowledge of that climate was mostly unknown. [. . .] But it is beyond doubt that the kings and the court of Judea, such as Isaiah himself [. . .] having had commerce at large with the Eastern kingdoms, [. . .] they infallibly must have been well acquainted with the geographical positions of their neighboring kingdoms."<sup>33</sup> Bennett's fascination with geographical details and his historical

---

<sup>32</sup> Bennett, *Specimen*, 23–24.

<sup>33</sup> Bennett, *Specimen*, 38–39.



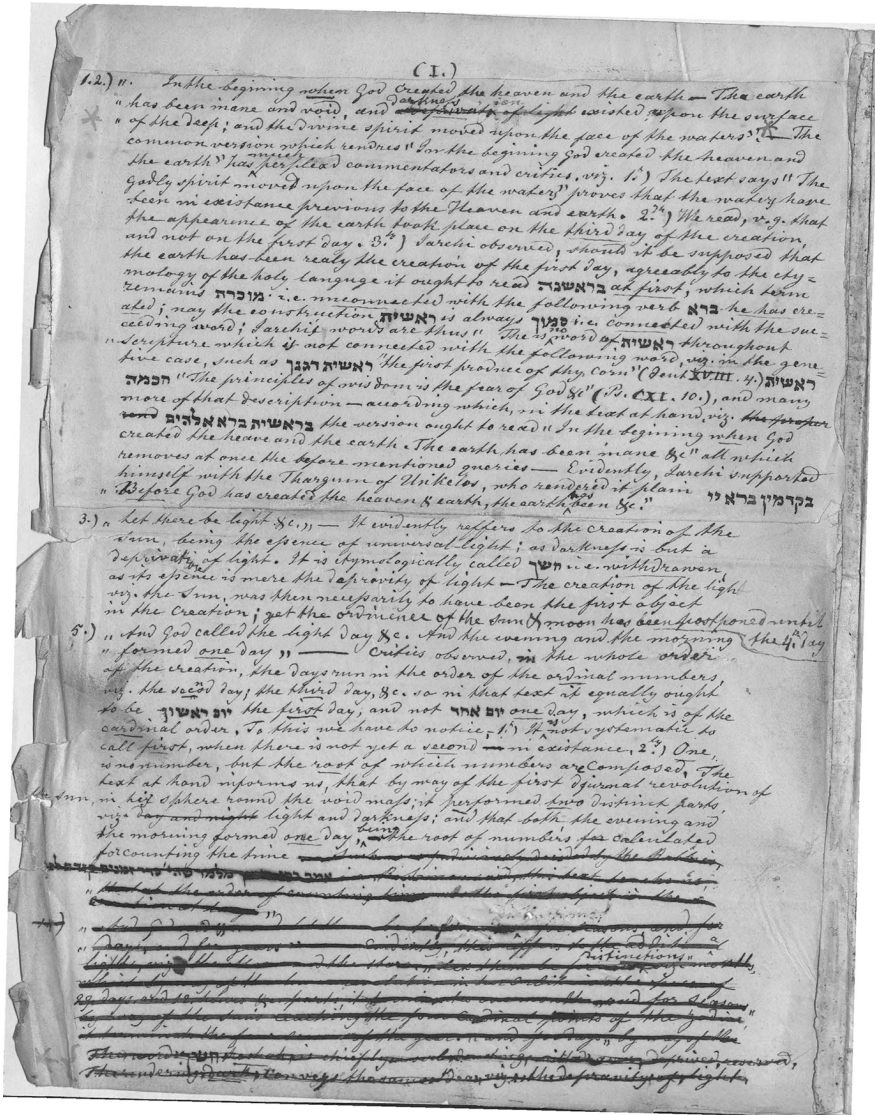


Figure 8.2: Another page of Bennett's working copy of his revisions of the standard English Bible, from his Introduction to Genesis.

Bennett includes the following note at the beginning of each volume:

Notice: The reader of that effect, viz., the version of the Hebrew Bible, will no doubt find himself confused seeing the M.S. in so disorderly a state, viz., that many of its verses and

notes are out of their respective places, particularly in the Hagiographical volumes and the poetical texts of scripture. To apologize for the same, I am to inform the reader that the effort at hand went through four successive perusals and a careful reexamination in such notice of what has been done in the formers, added what as well has been oversighted in the foregoing readings, which the magnitude of a work so general and so sacred as this requires. Accordingly, it was not the order I had to attend to but that of the completion perfection [*sic*] and to give due place in each page to the additions and alterations relative to each chapter and page.<sup>35</sup>

The notice offers a clue to resolving some of the questions posed above. This was apparently Bennett's working copy, as it includes the printed text of the Oxford Bible with Bennett's handwritten annotations on each page containing side comments and cross outs. They flow over the margins of each page and are continued on supplementary blank pages inserted by Bennett. These latter pages too are sometimes orderly and sometimes have cross outs and later additions, making for a messy mix. It might have been more efficient to recopy this entire work to prepare it for the press, and perhaps a cleaner copy exists. On the other hand, as the note indicates, Bennett addresses the reader directly, apologizing for the disorderly presentation and explaining that it was not for the lack of effort in proof-reading and improving the manuscript. So, this extant copy was meant to be read, either as the penultimate version before printing or simply in its present form. As we shall see, part of Genesis was later published after Bennett's death, but his long introduction was omitted.

What seems likely is that Bennett had reached the last stages of his vast work close to the time of his death. He may not have been able anymore to correct or to improve the manuscript or to prepare it for publication, even if he had found the financial means to initiate this undertaking. Thus, he penned the apologetic note to his readers, acknowledging the sloppy nature of his completed work but also admitting that he was incapable of proceeding further. The manuscript remained in the possession of the family; it was obviously known to Francis Barham, his friend, who tried to print it, but the effort was aborted after the publication in 1841 of one volume with the original Hebrew printed alongside Bennett's translation.

A thorough examination of the manuscript is clearly beyond the scope of this chapter; but since it does constitute Bennett's final work and represents a kind of culmination of his entire scholarly career, it deserves our attention as a reflection of the author's most mature thoughts on the Bible and his self-understanding as a Jewish translator and commentator. I begin by considering a sampling of the prefaces that Bennett provided to each chapter of the Bible, which are accessible in-

---

35 MS Jews College 105, 1:4 (appearing upside down), 2:2.

troductions intended for the general reader and meant to highlight what he considered the essence of each unit of the text.

The most interesting and lengthy of all the prefaces is Bennett's introduction to the book of Genesis, in which he denigrates the theories of modern science: heliocentricity, the solar system, gravitation, and multiple worlds. The purpose of the peripatetic system and ancient philosophy in general as well as of modern philosophers and scientists such as Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton, as he saw it, was the derision of scriptural authority with respect to creation. We have already seen an adumbration of this position in his commentary on Job 38; here the argument is developed even more expansively.

Bennett begins his preface with a conventional treatment of the long-discussed subject of creation out of nothing [*hiddush*] versus the eternity of the world [*kadmut*], citing first Aristotle and then Maimonides' well-known discussion of the problem in his *Guide for the Perplexed*. One cannot assert from experience what is beyond experience, Maimonides carefully formulates. Accordingly, neither position – creation or eternity – can be proven, and it is therefore plausible to accept the former, as it possesses prophetic authority if not philosophical certainty.

Prophetic testimony, of course, is subjective, dependent on each nation's notion of revelation. Bennett thus prefers to justify the notion of creation out of nothing by appealing to an argument based on historical truth derived not just from one credible witness but from an entire nation and the recounting of its sacred history. The historical truths of sacred Scripture corroborate faith in a universal creator. The Bible's perfect chronologies and histories of patriarchs are similarly indisputable. He is therefore entitled to claim a priori that the account of creation is also historical and factual.

The truth of creation can also be ascertained a posteriori from the more recent history of European nations who immigrated to the West from the East. Even accounts by travelers to North and South America of indigenous peoples who apparently trace their ancestry to the ten lost tribes testify to scriptural truth, including that of creation. The history of modern civilized people obliges us, Bennett claims, to assume that all creation emerged from nonexistence and divine intervention.

Aristotle struggled to demonstrate eternity while simultaneously claiming that the earth was a changeable body. Aristotle's ideas gave rise to notions of modern philosophers regarding fossils, shells, minerals, and animal skeletons discovered in places to which they are not native. This later history accordingly provides a basis for establishing the earlier creation. Since Aristotle acknowledged a

gradual and imperceptible change of the earth's surface, the concept of eternity is not reasonable, and the biblical notion of creation remains intact.<sup>36</sup>

It is at this point that Bennett's narrative sharply turns in a polemical direction. He begins by attacking the claims of some scholars of the ancient world:

Modern critics, the gropers after the ruins of Egypt and Asia, tell us of civilizations that preceded the one depicted in our sacred scripture. [ . . . ] These whims are mere undigested suppositions invented from the hieroglyphical figures of fragments of ancient Egypt, the mode of the characters being mere cyphers, dull and insignificant. Some philosophers designate an antiquity to the world from the zodiacs of Egypt, Persia, and the ruins of the East and some grope among the constellations of the celestial hosts which they consider far and beyond our computations in Scripture. How can these undigested suppositions challenge the absolute authority of the truth of scripture, written in plain and explicit language?<sup>37</sup>

Although he admits he is not a scientist, he still cannot countenance “the nefarious doctrines that undermine scripture which lead to abject atheism, encumbered with ellipticals, eccentrics, epicycles, diagrams, ratios, and enumerations. [ . . . ] Some philosophers contradict our senses by seeing the earth flattest at its poles, like that of a turnip, others like an orange, others oblong like an egg. In the future, other suggestions may suit their convenience.” There is no agreement among philosophers on the measurement and dimensions of the planetary system:

They settled in their mind to change places between the sun and earth so that the latter revolves around the former. They found it no difficult task to transmigrate all the visibly lucid stars into material and opaque bodies, namely many habitable globes like our inhabitable earth. They defy the first chapter of Genesis entirely with the doctrine of plurality of the worlds ad infinitum moving in a vacuum, infinities of space, time, and atoms. Atoms floating in a vast vacuum, like the Epicureans, they ascribe them a power of blind agency of gravitation which they attribute to the sun-attraction, repulsion, collision, and separation. By the power of gravitation worlds are created from the various floating atoms conglomerated into a solid body even setting it into motion in various directions like our globe. They frequently discover stars that left their places. New stars, old stars disappear, a creation based on gravitation, necessity, and self-formation.<sup>38</sup>

These modern theories are repulsive to Bennett since “their only object is to reject the position of sacred scripture, its authority with respect to creation, to annul revealed religion and the chronology laid out in scripture, and miracles. [ . . . ] Nothing is more significant than corroborating scriptural authority [ . . . ] the

---

<sup>36</sup> MS Jews College 105, 1:9–16 (some of the pages are out of order).

<sup>37</sup> MS Jews College 105, 1:16.

<sup>38</sup> MS Jews College 105, 1:17–18.

source of universal religion and history and a code peculiarly adapted to preserve the commonweal of mankind.” Bennett offers several examples of contemporary scholars who defend Scripture while challenging the overreach of philosophy and science, such as Lord Francis Bacon, Bartholomew Prescott, and Captain William Woodley. Finally, Bennett objects to the Copernican system and its followers, including several clerics among them – followers of Kepler, Laplace, Buffon, Mirabeau, Newton, and Herschel, as well as “the eminent divines” Cardinal Cusanus, Bishop Wilkins, and Bishop Horsley: “Shall we from mechanical experiments confined to a workshop obtain a knowledge of the rolling order of the spheres? Can blind agency produce that wisdom and intellect which made the universe? O, philosophical insanities! The delusion of atomical, chaotic, and infinite creations forming themselves blindly into infinite worlds. The biography of the solar system commences with heathenism and ends with atheism.”<sup>39</sup>

This lengthy discussion seems surprisingly out of place at the beginning of Bennett’s translation and commentary. Its aggressive argument against the Copernican system and modern science in general and its linkage to ancient heathen philosophies do not seem appropriate as an introduction to the first book of the Bible. That is perhaps why Francis Barham, in his printed version of Bennett’s translation, omitted it altogether and substituted the first pages of Bennett’s earlier work of 1834. It is also surprising, as noted above, because Bennett was never so outspoken on modern science in his other writings, apart from the passages on Job 38 discussed earlier in this chapter. Was this a later development in his thinking, a fuller expansion of a theme latent in earlier writing but presented so explicitly and so explosively only in his final work? It does challenge the profile of Bennett as a kind of radical Jew, comfortable among non-Jewish elites, and a critic of the rabbis and the Jewish community, as mentioned earlier. In this case, his views on religion and science, on faith and Scripture, are quite conservative, retrograde, even fundamentalist. It surely underscores the complexity of Bennett’s intellectual profile and the difficulty of categorizing his thinking.

One possible source of this turn of thinking deserves mention. In chapter 5 I discussed Bennett’s close relationship to his patron Mrs. Catherine Housman, her interest in his writings and engravings, his dedication to her in one of his books, and her remarkable production of six books about Scripture, ancient philosophy,

---

<sup>39</sup> MS Jews College 105, 1:18, 23 Bennett gives special attention to two critics of modern science: Bartholomew Prescott, author of *A Defence of The Divine System of the World* (Liverpool: J. Lang, 1823), whom he calls “an acquaintance of mine,” and Captain William Woodley, R.N., author of *A Treatise on the Divine System of the Universe* (London: W. A. Wright, 1834): “This gentleman was a royal navigator, accustomed to measure the longitude and latitude of his sea journeys. [ . . . ] The earth is always at rest, the sun moves around it.” MS Jews College 105 1:19, 20.

and modern science. Was it mere coincidence that Bennett sounded so much like his talented associate? Without repeating my summaries of her work, it is obvious that the two had much in common, that their relationship was built on more than financial considerations. Bennett never cites her books, nor are the sources he uses to substantiate his position cited by her. Thus, there is no tangible evidence of her influence on his thinking. Yet the resemblance is striking and suggests that he might have read her books or conversed with her on a subject so central to her Christian and to his Jewish faith. That Bennett's reflection emerged at the very end of his life and long relationship with her is also worthy of note.

The other prefaces Bennett composed to books of the Bible are shorter, less explosive, and less revealing about his ultimate concerns. Nevertheless, several shed interesting light on his priorities in understanding the biblical text. In his preface to the book of Esther, he accepts the view of critics that it was written in Persian and later translated by the Great Synagogue because of its importance in tracing the beginning of the restoration of the Second Temple period. He relates how he inspected an ancient Bible in the library of the Duke of Sussex, written in Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian all in Hebrew characters, printed in Constantinople: "In this Bible I observed that the Book of Esther is intitled the Book of Ahasuerus; this Bible obviously bears its name from the East from ancient times. It was written, most probably, in Persian as part of the court chronicle relative to the reign of Ahasuerus. The Great Synagogue saw it essential to its history since Ahasuerus was the successor to Cyrus." The Massorites placed a Hebrew version in the Bible and changed its name, but the "Eastern Hebrews" retained its original title.<sup>40</sup>

Bennett writes in his preface to Job that the book is undoubtedly of early antiquity and unique in the Bible. While some critics suppose it to be factual, most, including the rabbis, consider it a poetical and critical composition that includes a sacred dialogue. The rabbis assert that Moses was the author, and their claim is not without foundation. Such metaphysical discussions of providence are not found prior to Moses, who was eminently qualified in "Arabic" [sic] intellectual culture and learned in all wisdom. Accordingly, Bennett concludes that Moses was the author and that this discussion served as an introduction to his code of Jewish law, constructed as a controversy between Job and his three friends over Job's afflictions, his apparent innocence, reward and punishment, fatality, and predestination. God intervenes and Job ultimately accepts his fate as mere dust and ashes, and his felicity is restored. In Bennett's estimation, the prose parts of

---

<sup>40</sup> MS Jews College 105, 2:131–132. The Bible printed in Constantinople is apparently *Torat Adonai*, copied by Eliezer ben Gershom Soncino in Constantinople. The right column contains Jacob Tavusi's Judeo-Persian ("Farsi" in Hebrew) translation; now in the British Library, London, Or. 70.

the book were written in a perfect parabolic and emblematic style equal to that of Moses, mostly condensed in its use of pronouns, adverbs, tenses, and syntax. The discussants use harsh language even against each other, vigorously defending their positions. When the Lord answers Job out of the storm, the language is more emphatic and more sublime.

Bennett scrupulously consulted Targum Yonatan, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Levi ben Gershon, and he finds them strongly differing from each other and offering hypotheses on several passages that in his humble opinion could not be attributed to the author. The object of the book is an abstract discussion regarding the omnipotent power of God and his providential influence in the universe at large. It was meant to be a composition of a general nature for all human beings and not for any sectarian group. Given that it is even more ancient than the Pentateuch, Bennett feels duty bound to bring it to the common reader in a plain and correct language. It would thus appear that Job is the Bible's quintessential book that contains neither a Jewish nor a Christian message, but a universal one.<sup>41</sup>

Bennett's preface to the book of Psalms focuses on the question of authorship and its historical context. He acknowledges that David wrote many psalms, but some were undoubtedly written by contemporary Levite poets on behalf of their king. Many psalms refer to the desolation of the House of Israel at the end of the First Temple period and during the Babylonian captivity, while others, such as Psalm 119, were written in Babylon by the sons of Korach. There are those who, like Ibn Ezra, insist that all were written by David through prophecy and vision, but Bennett discounts this view as lacking evidence and proceeds with the first hypothesis of multiple authorship. He insists on recognizing the talented poets of the period beyond David himself. Overall, the style of the book of Psalms "is plain and intelligible, poetic, laconic, free from hypothetical sentiments[,] [ . . . ] not prophetic, speaking of future things [in contrast to the Christian way of interpreting them]; they speak of one or multiple subjects, sometimes not fully comprehensible given their antiquity and our inability to understand their contexts." Bennett explains the various categories of Psalms with their Hebrew names as well as the musical terms of the Temple musicians.<sup>42</sup>

His preface to the book of Proverbs is straightforward. The moral proverbs are presented in the form of a thesis and antithesis; sometimes several verses connect to one subject. The language is laconic and hard to translate. Translators of the standard version rummaged through rabbinic commentaries but were not successful in translating and understanding certain Hebrew words. These sacred

---

41 Bennett, *MS Jews College 105*, 2:148–152.

42 Bennett, *MS Jews College 105*, 2:221–224; quotation, 222.

proverbs were preserved and passed down for generations in perfect Hebrew. To convey the best sense of their meaning, one must introduce certain ellipses and transpose certain words in accordance with the vernacular of English. He concludes, “This is my approach for the other poetical works and my approach for Proverbs.”<sup>43</sup>

His preface to Ecclesiastes is similarly conventional. He sees the work as a multitude of judicious sentiments about the vanity of human speculation and idle thoughts, emphasizing that there is nothing positive or decisive in a person’s endeavors and in objects that he seldom attains, and that the present good should not necessarily be considered an absolute good. All human affairs depend on time, place, and circumstance. The drift of the book can be summarized in one sentence comprehending two principal points – man’s efforts and achievements all are vanity and no special advantage is bestowed on him, yet individually human beings are part of a whole system; though the purpose of the universal creator is hidden and not for mortal men or women to understand, their assistance may be indispensable to the whole. The conclusion of the entire work is to fear God and to do his commandments.<sup>44</sup>

In sharp contrast to the books already considered, Bennett is at a loss for words when introducing the Song of Songs: “I am not ashamed to own that the Book comprehending the songs of Solomon is above my comprehension to meddle with. I shall therefore not put my hand to it in either view but shall leave it to the unlimited field of hypothesis to the typical commentators to play with them to their own pleasure.” However, he does attempt to remove any allusions to Christianity from its translation.<sup>45</sup>

Isaiah, in Bennett’s preface to the prophet’s book, appears as a royal poet of the kings of Judah, a visionary and talented orator. His is the first great poetic book of antiquity, lyrical but clear, plain, and energetic, although a few of the orations are obscure and open to the possibility of conjecture. His language is overburdened with figures and characters, even too “high colored.” Like Psalms, the book of Isaiah had more than one author; Isaiah 40–66 was composed by several anonymous writers of the Babylonian captivity, then edited and included in the Bible by Ezra and the men of the great assembly.<sup>46</sup> Bennett does not disparage Isaiah, the father of poetic biblical writing, but elevates other prophets over him,

---

<sup>43</sup> Bennett, MS Jews College 105, 2:379–382; quotation, 379. Israel ben Yom Tov Bennett, Solomon’s son, signed 378, suggesting that he had something to do with the editing or ownership of this manuscript.

<sup>44</sup> Bennett, MS Jews College 105, 2:432–433.

<sup>45</sup> Bennett, MS Jews College 105, 2:452.

<sup>46</sup> Bennett, MS Jews College 105, 2:457.

especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In his view Jeremiah's language is far superior to that of the other prophets, specifically in his depictions of destruction and reconstruction in the Second Temple period. Jeremiah was the author of Lamentations, according to Bennett. It is an emotional narrative whose poetry surpasses that of all the other prophets and exemplifies the ancients' powerful writing on tragedy. Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah, prophesizing in Babylonia while Jeremiah was in Jerusalem, offering both castigation and comfort for a return and rebuilding of the Temple, and exhibiting a style different from that of the other prophets, which was clearly forged in Babylonia.<sup>47</sup>

Beyond these compact summaries of the biblical books, Bennett of course offers his comprehensive revisions of each book with annotations explaining and justifying his emendations as well as offering various observations on subjects he deemed important. It is impossible to review meaningfully in such a short space the multiple results of his laborious effort. All I can offer here are a few more samples illustrating the style and substance of the translation and commentary.

One way to begin this brief consideration is by citing three contemporaries who read all or part of the work and commented on its significance. We have already encountered Francis Barham, who tried but failed to publish Bennett's entire translation posthumously. In the preface to his edition of Bennett's translation to Genesis, Barham wrote:

To translate the Hebrew Bible for himself, and to satisfy the critical aspiration of his own soul, was his favorite design for many a studious year. He knew that to please himself was the best way to please the world, and he never deserted a text till he conceived that he had perfectly understood and expressed its latent power in definite terms. [ . . . ] He translated the Bible as if no translation had been made before, as if he alone were High Priest of the Holy of Holies, and the first to reveal its mysterious and ceremonial sanctities to the eyes of an uninitiated world.

He then adds that Bennett

appears to have been perfectly satisfied with the larger portion of our vulgate English version, and he has left a great number of texts standing in perfect accordance to it, knowing that no alteration could be made with advantage. To the Christian English reader, this fact will appear most satisfactory, since it proves that a learned Jew, by no means prejudiced for Christianity, but rather the reverse, has, in the majority of instances, confirmed the ordinary Anglican translation as sound and unobjectionable. On other occasions, however, Mr Bennett, as might have been expected a priori, has differed widely from King James's trans-

---

<sup>47</sup> Bennett, *MS Jews College* 105, 2:573, 673, 685.

lators in rendering important texts. He has not unfrequently rendered a biblical phrase by words that present the most striking antagonism to the versions generally received.<sup>48</sup>

The second Christian to remark on Bennett's work did so in a review of his earlier specimens of 1836, published in *The Times* on October 24, 1840:

From what we have seen, it appears that the learned labours of Solomon Bennett are calculated to throw a great deal of light on numerous texts, to assist very greatly the study of the sacred volume, and convey generally, to all readers of the Bible, a vast deal of important instruction. [ . . . ] From what we have examined, we can, however, testify to the very able manner in which the translation is done, to the recondite learning of the translator, and to the extraordinary industry displayed. There are many of the corrections which, though at first appearance of little moment, and merely shades of verbal alteration, will, on reflection, be entitled to praise.<sup>49</sup>

Here are some of the comments of the third reviewer, writing for *The Spectator* soon after the publication of Farham's edition of Genesis:

The general character of the translator's mind seems to have been one of great primitive simplicity – English words with an old Hebrew tone of thinking. This quaintness, which is not pleasantly perceptible in his common prose, well adapted him for a translator of the Scriptures; especially since he seems never to have altered for the sake of altering, but preserved the authorized version wherever he deemed that it conveyed the meaning. As an example of the errors of the authorized version, the First Part is hardly a fair specimen; great care having been taken in the rendering of Genesis, as indeed is the case with all the books of Moses. What changes there are are chiefly verbal. For instance, the second verse in the first chapter in the authorized translation runs – “the earth was without form and void”; Bennett has it: “The earth was waste and void”; which conveys a more striking picture of desolation, but one less chaotic. Again, in the same version, the authorized version says – “The Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters”: Bennett – “The Divine Spirit hovered above the face of the waters”; which is more characteristic of the winged presence under which the Spirit is generally painted.<sup>50</sup>

These positive evaluations of Bennett's achievement share much in common. They all comment on his industry and his commitment to this project, translating

---

48 Francis Barham, “Editor's Preface,” in *The Hebrew and English Holy Bible: The Hebrew Reprinted from the Text of Heidenheim*, revised by Solomon Bennett, edited by Francis Barham (London: printed for the Family of the late Solomon Bennett, 1841), 2–3.

49 “Specimen of a New Translation of the Hebrew Bible,” *The Times*, October 24, 1840.

50 “Solomon Bennett's Bible,” *The Spectator*, April 10, 1841, 355. Note, however, the slightly different translation of the verse in Bennett's Bible manuscript, MS Jews College 105, 1:1, for Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning when God created the heaven and the earth, the earth has been inane and void, and darkness existed upon the surface of the deep.” Did Bennett change his mind after writing his manuscript, or was the change the work of Francis Barham? We shall never know.

the Bible “as if no translation had been made before.” They point out how much of the authorized translation was left intact, acknowledging for the Christian reader that while the standard Bible required revision, its Hebraic scholarship still had considerable merit in the eyes of an unprejudiced observer. The second reader notes that many of Bennett’s alterations are minor, “merely shades of verbal alteration,” as he calls them, but still worthy of praise. The final reader, who had seen only the volume on Genesis, notes that this specimen exhibits relatively few emendations, since Bennett agreed more often than not with the standard version.<sup>51</sup> He does characterize Bennett’s English translation as primitively simple and quaint, in contrast to the English of his previous writings, and even illustrates Bennett’s improvements by quoting his translation of a memorable verse from the beginning of Genesis, probably known by heart by most Christian readers. Such a commendation is particularly significant in light of the abuse Bennett endured at the hands of reviewers of his early publications who singled out his English skills as unacceptable.

To these comments on Bennett’s achievement we might add the following. Bennett’s primary focus in translating and revising the standard version is grammatical and philological. He considers the Bible sacred and strives for as accurate a translation as possible, but one rendered into a readable and aesthetically pleasing English style. He is aware of the powerful weight of the traditional English text of the King James Version and recognizes the huge challenge of seeking to dislodge it from its traditional place in English culture. Nevertheless, he appreciates the urgency of the hour and of his critical task to make the translation align with the original so as to genuinely replicate the divine words. He works especially hard on retranslating biblical poetry and considers the English translation of the Hagiographa [*Ketuvim*] as in particular need of revision.

His devotion to philology is accompanied by a commitment to historical context, particularly an abhorrence of extraneous theological notions that corrode the actual meaning of the text. He cannot countenance Christian eisegesis and its historical misreadings of the text and removes all such Christian accretions silently and without fanfare. He carefully identifies the biblical actors, accounting for their lives and literary habits, as well as the political and economic conditions of the societies from which they emerge. Given his professional background, he is especially sensitive to material objects, to measurement and thick description both of objects of nature and of artificial creations of human beings such as the Temple edifice and its accoutrements. While he is incensed by the pretentious claims of modern science and philosophy to undermine biblical truths, he is nev-

---

51 “Solomon Bennett’s Bible,” 355.

ertheless aware and appreciative of the works of nature and scientific discoveries as long as they do not violate the inerrancy of the biblical narrative. Finally, though Bennett regularly consults medieval Jewish commentaries, his translation does not rely on previous modern renderings into English such as that of Adam Clarke, which indeed he scornfully rejects. As Barham had put so well: “He translated the Bible as if no translation had been made before.”

My short description hardly does justice to this massive undertaking, scarcely scratching the surface of Bennett’s prodigious adaptation of the Hebrew Bible into English. Before concluding this summary, I offer several rich examples of his exegesis. In his comment on Genesis 22:17, Bennett questions the notion of blessing the seed of Abraham when his descendants lived in war and strife during the first monarchy. He clarifies that the object of God’s blessing was neither temporal nor worldly. The monarchy offered no benefit in its despotic or aristocratic character. Instead the reference is to the spiritual existence of Abraham’s offspring, proclaiming the existence of the universal creator. All civilizations benefited from Israel, since “history has decreed that everywhere the Israelites were dispersed they carried with them their religious precepts, holy scriptures, and holy language.”<sup>52</sup>

Commenting on Exodus 22:18, Bennett offers a reflection on witches, who have preoccupied numerous critics of the church:

The Rev. Doc. A. Clarke in his notes claims the law proves the existence of witches, and the actual performances of supernatural things such as spells, incantations, and charms. This is the theory behind the miracles performed by Jesus himself and by the apostles. It becomes an absolute creed and a faith in the existence of demons which is held not to deny the truth of the Gospels. I have no need to expiate on the truth of the Gospels in general but can comment on the text of reason as described in the Old Testament which is contrary to the Christian understanding of miracles.

Bennett cites various rabbinic sources to argue that witches and spirits don’t exist: those who claim to be witches are mere imposters who prey on credulous individuals and even derange their minds.<sup>53</sup>

Bennett’s comment on Leviticus 11:2 regarding the laws of *kashrut* [dietary laws] focuses on issues of health and sanitary practice: “Moses was divinely inspired like a skilled physician ordering his patients. He distinguished between animals to be eaten and not to be eaten[;] [ . . . ] shellfish are a combination of petrifi-

---

52 Bennett, MS Jews College 105, 1:63–64.

53 Bennett, MS Jews College 105, 1:158.

cation and putrefaction, for we know nothing of their nature when submarine and we do not know their effect on human blood and the body.”<sup>54</sup>

Regarding the laws of adultery and the sanctity of marriage in Leviticus 20, Bennett declares: “Marriage is not a mere civil contract nor a mercantile engagement but a sacred divine institution for the propagation of the world [ . . . ] to cultivate duties from parents towards their legal and pure offspring, to promote the welfare of a commonwealth, not to propagate libertine men, looseness of character, void of principles, living instinctively like the ferocious beasts of the fields and forests. Therefore, the adulterer should justly be put to death.”<sup>55</sup>

Could this comment be relevant to Bennett’s own personal life and the public accusation that he had abandoned his first wife and family? Was this reflection on the laws of divorce in Deuteronomy 24 drawn from personal experience? He writes: “This legislation is relevant today where in Christendom it is assumed when God ordains, marriage should not be severed [Matt. 19:3–12]. [ . . . ] Marriages now are more commercial articles than divine unions; they depend more on the two physical brokers – the eye and the heart. The mind and judgment are hardly consulted in these engagements.” He adds that bodily and character defects are often disguised before partners marry, a circumstance that makes the marriage susceptible to perpetual discord.<sup>56</sup>

On the sun standing still in Joshua 10:12–14, Bennett acknowledges that

I chose the theory of the famous philosopher and theologian R. Levi ben Gershon. He could not accept the notion that the sun stopped for twelve hours nor that there was no miracle at all. All miracles were sublunary and local, performed for a small group of people, namely Israel, but the miracle of Joshua occurred in the spherical region. [ . . . ] He is not convinced the miracle was felt throughout Canaan or the opposition would have immediately surrendered to Israel. This would have disorganized the entire sublunary world, the Palestinian hemisphere, established by divine mandate. This miracle would make Joshua more important than Moses.

Instead, Levi ben Gershon concluded that the sun was not absent entirely but moved slowly, with eighteen hours rather than twelve of daylight, so that the result was not noticed by the world at large. This forced interpretation confirms for Bennett that the sun neither stopped its course entirely nor did it move at its usual speed.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Bennett, MS Jews College 105, 1:191.

<sup>55</sup> Bennett, MS Jews College 105, 1:225.

<sup>56</sup> Bennett, MS Jews College 105, 1:223–225, 356–357.

<sup>57</sup> Bennett, MS Jews College 105, 1:401–402.

In his reflections on 1 Kings, Bennett once again displays his utter disdain for the monarchy, including the vaunted Solomon:

To my humble and unprejudiced opinion, Solomon's reign began with innocent bloodshed and has terminated with the introduction of idolatry into the holy city of Jerusalem, by the indulgence of the numerous illegal wives and concubines of the various idolatrous nation altogether quite contrary to the command of a king of Israel as fully laid down in the commandments [Deut. 17:14–20]. [ . . . ] I have no need to screen my considering that scripture justifies the cause of all these points.

He finds the honest testimony of Scripture regarding Solomon's political and private conduct more acceptable "than any of the divines that sophistically palliate all the faults of Solomon."<sup>58</sup>

In his comments on Isaiah 11–12, Bennett expands on the divergent emphases on messianism among Jews and Christians. Here his negative view of messianism in general is consistent with his other writings:

The Fathers of the present European Church also established their notion of a spiritual messiah but with the rabbis it remained a doubtful dogma; some even denied his existence such as Hillel in Sanhedrin who claimed he was devoured in the time of Hezekiah. The messianic issue remained undecided, but Maimonides strenuously defended the messianic doctrine and included it in his thirteen principles. But Ḥasdai Crescas in *Or Adonai* and Joseph Albo in his *Ikkarim* both claimed it was traditional but not based in scripture. Albo even claimed that the Nazarean [Jesus] adopted the creed to disparage Jewish law for the Gospel dispensation cannot exist without that creed of the messiah. The mosaic code was meant to preserve the commonwealth of mankind at large; it stands on its own ground and its own defense. Accordingly, the messiah is out of the question; the preservation of its laws and statutes are the only guide to them who faithfully adhere to it. [ . . . ] I treated on that subject more than the text requires, for which I apologize.

If any orthodox persons upbraid him for deviating from traditional Jewish sources, he declares that he relies on the citation of Hillel in the Talmud, on Crescas, and on Albo.<sup>59</sup>

## 8.5 German and English Bible translations

There remains only the final sequel to the narrative of Bennett's life and literary legacy. In 1841, three years after his death, Francis Foster Barham edited and published *The Hebrew and English Holy Bible* on behalf of his family. This first vol-

<sup>58</sup> Bennett, MS Jews College 105, 1:579–583; quotations, 579, 582.

<sup>59</sup> Bennett, MS Jews College 105, 2:477–479; quotation, 478–79.

ume was apparently meant to be the beginning of a multivolume work including the original Hebrew with Bennett's English translation and notes. Alas, only one volume was published, which contained only his translation of Genesis 1–41:30 without his notes but with an appreciative introduction by Barham (quoted in part in chapter 4). We might surmise that Barham valued Bennett's accomplishments as a translator more than his harsh remarks on modern science as well as on other subjects.<sup>60</sup>

We have already noted that while Bennett had examined several contemporary English translations and commentaries of the Old Testament, he disparaged them and never consulted them for his own use. He of course based his own translation on the Authorized Version and was fully conversant with the medieval Jewish commentators. During Bennett's lifetime, German Jews produced a surprisingly large number of biblical translations, the best-known being those of Moses Mendelssohn and Leopold Zunz. It seems hard to imagine that Bennett had never encountered at least the famous Mendelssohn translation, since he knew German well, had lived in Berlin, and was aware of Jewish literary developments on the Continent. However, I have no record of his reading or consulting it or of seeing it as a kind of model for his own work. In fact, as I have already argued in chapter 1, Bennett mentioned Mendelssohn's name only once, and he (as well as his colleagues) appears to have made no impression on Bennett during his stay in Berlin, which was long after Mendelssohn's death and at a time when the German Haskalah had lost much of its élan. In 1838, the same year that Bennett died after nearly completing his work, Zunz edited and published his own popular translation, an edition Bennett could not have known. How might we understand Bennett's Bible in the context of these two monuments of German Jewish culture?

In recent years both Abigail Gillman and Michah Gottlieb have published impressive studies of the history of German biblical translation in this period, which easily enable us to compare the aspirations and results of the German works with those of Bennett. Without recounting the rich details presented by both scholars, and the variety of approaches taken by individual German Jewish translators, one might conclude that their common goal was to create a Bible accessible to and resonant with middle-class German Jews, so that they would appreciate more meaningfully the values and aesthetics of the biblical roots of their religious identity. In Gottlieb's view, the translation explosion among German Jews was primarily a Jewish reformation, diminishing the importance of Talmud study and elevat-

---

<sup>60</sup> For more on Barham, see chapter 4, above.

ing the Bible in a language meant to enhance Jewish identity while furthering the integration of Jews into German society.<sup>61</sup>

How strikingly different were the goals of Bennett and his Bible project! Bennett initiated his revision of the Authorized Version for the betterment of Christian society, to save it from the scourge of Thomas Paine and his bitter disparagement of Scripture. His goal was to dedicate his Hebraic expertise on behalf of his adopted Protestant homeland, to salvage its religious values and its soul, and to effectuate a Christian reformation shielded from the ravages of the secular atheists and other enemies of the Anglican Church. In so doing, he hoped to bring Judaism and Christianity in its Protestant form closer to each other, on the basis of a shared sacred scriptural foundation.

There were of course similarities between the efforts of Bennett, Mendelssohn, and Zunz. All three were prioritizing the Hebrew Bible over the Talmud through their translations, and all three anticipated in one way or another that their projects would enhance Jewish culture and their own co-religionists. Bennett certainly hoped that by reforming Christianity, Judaism might be recentered within Christian civilization and the position of the Jews could be improved. Nevertheless, the difference between the German Jewish translators and this Anglo-Jewish one was profound. In England, Bennett was less afflicted by the social and political disabilities of Jewish life than were his counterparts in Germany. Indeed, he had left Berlin precisely because he desired more freedom as a Jew and as an artist and writer, and he found it. No doubt assimilated English Jewish readers would benefit from his English translation as much as Christians, but they were not his primary target audience.

While German Jewish translators felt less compulsion to follow the revered translation of Martin Luther and could work more independently in forging fresh translations of their own, the sacred tradition of the King James Bible still weighed heavily on English society and on Bennett in particular. His starting point was not a new translation but one intimately linked to the Authorized Version. He was oblivious to what was transpiring in Germany with respect to translation, and he created, or almost created, a new English Bible addressing primarily the needs of Christians – his unfinished gift to British civilization.

---

<sup>61</sup> Abigail Gillman, *A History of German Jewish Bible Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), and Michah Gottlieb, *The Jewish Reformation: Bible Translation and Middle-Class German Judaism as Spiritual Enterprise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). See also Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Gottlieb's useful analysis would have been strengthened by a more serious engagement with the arguments of his predecessors.

# Afterword

## A.1 The aftermath of Solomon's death

Solomon Bennett died on December 18, 1838, of unknown causes and was buried at the Brompton (Fulham Road) Jewish Cemetery of the Western Synagogue of which he was a member, in the presence of his widow Elizabeth and family. At his death, the couple had eight children, six boys and two girls. The youngest, Eve, was born in 1837.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, little evidence exists regarding Elizabeth, other than her birthplace in Middlesex in 1801, her marriage date in 1818, and the date of her death in 1864. She was indeed Solomon's silent partner until his death. That changed, however, months after Solomon's burial. Among the letters in the archives of the Royal Literary Fund about and from Solomon, which I have utilized above to reconstruct his social networks, are several penned by Elizabeth Bennett herself, sent in early 1839.

Mrs. Bennett first wrote to the Reverend W. H. Landon, secretary of the committee, on January 5, 1839, informing him of the death of her husband and applying for financial support for her and her eight living children. Two days later, in another letter to the committee, she specifies that of her eight children, only two were over fifteen years of age and able to support themselves; the others were fully dependent on her, including a baby of six months. She mentions that in the previous month her late husband had requested a stipend on which the committee took no action. She was writing to confirm his untimely death and to point out her added distress and critical needs:

My late husband, gentleman, as many of you may be aware had to seek his living in the pursuit of literature and was the author of many scriptural works but was most unfortunately unsuccessful of which I feel the distress at present with my very large family. I have therefore for the last time to petition your benevolent institution, from which he received during his life much valuable assistance, for any bounty your benevolence may bestow which will be gratefully received both by myself and family.<sup>2</sup>

---

1 Arthur Barnett, *The Western Synagogue through Two Centuries (1781–1961)* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1961), 54. He adds that the Hebrew inscription on Bennett's tombstone declares him to be "a man full of wisdom in Mikra, Mishnah, and Gemara; the Law of Truth was in his mouth and in it he laboured all his days; he was the author of scholarly works." See also the useful entry in Cemetery Scribes, last updated in 2013: <http://www.cemeteryscribes.com/getperson.php?personID=12941&tree=Cemeteries>.

2 Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, British Library, London, Western Manuscripts: Loan 96 RLF 1/526, letters 33 and 34.

She signs her request “B [Beth] Bennett.” On February 14, 1839, she received twenty pounds from the committee (signing the receipt), and she acknowledged with gratitude their generous support in a letter written on February 20.<sup>3</sup> Almost a year later, on February 4, 1840, she wrote her final letter to the committee:

Gentlemen, I again take the liberty of applying to you for any assistance your benevolence may afford me towards the assistance of my family. My late husband Mr. Solomon Bennett was well known both personally and by his works for many years to many gentlemen of your society and received several favors from your excellent institution during his life. My case is unfortunately well known, gentlemen, to you. I was left by the death of my husband thirteen months ago with eight children, six of whom are not capable of supporting themselves. I then applied and received from your goodness real and timely assistance. I, therefore, again being in need, take the liberty of applying to you. I have not forwarded to you any recommendations from gentlemen because I have kept my distress known only to myself and have struggled also twice[?] without applying to strangers. I can only, gentlemen, in that respect [refer] to the numerous recommendations which I made last year and my late husband then alive laid before you from other academics[?]. Any assistance which your kindness may think to bestow will confer a lasting obligation and a great assistance, gentlemen, to your most humble servant, Elizabeth Bennett.<sup>4</sup>

This last plea was rejected by the committee, after she had previously received a subvention as a widow.<sup>5</sup> It is not clear how Mrs. Bennett managed to cope with the severe economic challenges she then faced. What is obvious is that at the age of thirty-eight, she took on the heavy burden of raising a large family, which she managed with considerable success until her death in 1864. Her letter, while not elegantly written, reveals an educated and determined woman courageously appealing for support for her husband’s progeny and for herself. She recognizes her husband’s intellectual accomplishments, and although she acknowledges his lack of economic success, she is proud of his legacy. She was not only Solomon’s silent partner but his heroic partner, fully assuming the awesome responsibilities of the household, raising a large family, and worrying about the necessities of life that her husband could not fully provide, especially after he had retired from engraving and was working exclusively on his scholarly books.

As late as 1897, it was reported that the Brompton cemetery had a mulberry tree, still yielding fruit. It was there that Elizabeth Bennett had been buried thirty-three years earlier at the age of sixty-four.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526, letters 35 and 36.

<sup>4</sup> Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526, letter 37.

<sup>5</sup> The letter of February 4, 1840, was marked “inadmissible” on the top left-hand corner.

<sup>6</sup> Barnett, *The Western Synagogue*, 83.

## A.2 The value of Solomon Bennett's biography

I imagined what it might have been like to sit in a room with Solomon Bennett, perhaps together with several other interlocutors, and converse with him. It could not have been easy to break the ice with him. He seemed grumpy, arrogant or at least self-assured (perhaps masking his own insecurities), even abrasive, competitive, and contentious. He had high intellectual standards and he could not countenance pomposity in men of power and influence, especially clerics and theologians. These impressions are confirmed by the degree of animosity displayed toward him by some Jews, by the reports of Christians who testified on his behalf, and by the angry polemical style of some of his writings. Given his less than pleasing personality and his frequent verbal skirmishes with those with whom he disagreed, what were his redeeming qualities, and why is there value in reconstructing his life and thought, and recalling the faded memory of his own personal impact on the communities, both Christian and Jewish, in which he lived?

I begin with the obvious: his writings. These were not the work of a university-educated academic; they emerged at a later stage of Bennett's life and primarily in a language foreign to him until his adult years. As described above, Bennett wrote his first book in English, a language he had only recently mastered as an immigrant to England, at the age of forty-two. He trained to be a copper engraver after he exhibited a penchant to study the arts at a young age. This was his only formal education and it lasted for only a year, as his certificate indicates (although he remained in Copenhagen for several more years). Even his high level of competency in Hebraic studies and Bible was attained not through any formal training but within the confines of his synagogue and his own study. He was an autodidact, and his mastery of the Hebrew Bible, its grammar and literary style, its history and ethical message, seems to have emerged from his own reading and acquisition of knowledge, and from an innate ability to learn languages, especially Hebrew. Since he had never written a word before coming to London, we need to look for stimuli in his new surroundings that generated this new passion and this hidden and previously untapped talent. Ultimately, he turned to full-time scholarly writing after experiencing a deterioration of his eyesight and an inability to continue the intense and demanding work of an engraver. But in 1809, the year of the publication of *The Constancy of Israel*, he was still healthy and still preoccupied with his chosen profession.

The spur to write the first book and those that followed did not come from a Jewish community either indifferent or hostile to Bennett and to his literary and artistic bent. Rather it emerged from meetings with literate and affluent Christians fascinated with Bible study and eager to exploit his knowledge of Scripture for their advantage. It is no coincidence that the early sections of his first book

dealt directly with Jewish–Christian polemics—addressing, disputing, and correcting standard Christian readings of the Old Testament in the cause of an authentic, grammatically correct, and historically valid understanding of the Hebrew Bible. In pursuing this mission, Bennett needed to draw on more than his traditional Jewish background, relying also on a knowledge of biblical scholarship of early modern and contemporary Christian savants across the Continent, especially in England; he required an essential grounding in the history and cultures of the ancient Near East; and he had to discover and invent a way of communicating effectively in a style of discourse familiar and pleasing to Christian readers, especially clerical ones. Note as well how his conventional polemics led ultimately to a more expansive field of self-discovery: a reflection on the origins and continuity of Jewish existence among the nations, an articulation of the essence of the Jewish contribution to Western civilization, and even an open disclosure of his personal life, a kind of short autobiography, reminiscent of a new genre emerging in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

With the modest success of this book, Bennett found a calling in writing on biblical subjects (such as the Molten Sea or the Temple of Ezekiel), where he could combine his mastery of the text with the visual image he created through his artistic and architectural abilities. This naturally led to his excursus on the origin and continuity of the Hebrew language and then to a deep commitment to undertaking his life work: revising the King James translation of the Hebrew Bible in the service of serving those Christian associates who had bolstered his own self-image and had given his life purpose and ultimate meaning.

The trajectory of his academic studies is directly linked to his social relations with Jews and Christians alike. He was never a traditional Jewish scholar, either by training or inclination. He displayed a fundamental mastery of rabbinic literature and praxis, but his real expertise was biblical language and literature. He was too impious, too intolerant of rabbinic “reptiles” who could do little more than become proficient in Jewish law in the narrowest sense and lacked a larger vision and insight into the texts they were studying. It was inevitable that he would fail to respect most rabbis, whom he perceived as hungry for power and prestige while lacking intellectual rigor and creativity. His ego would not allow him to feel inferior to such clergy; he in fact had been credentialed by a leading art school and by an academy of art that granted him more prestige than any rabbinic ordination, so he thought; and he therefore felt entitled to usurp their prerogatives if need be, as in the case of his performing a wedding deemed illicit by the local rabbis. It was also inevitable that he would find fault with spiritual leaders such as Rabbi Hirschell, because of what he perceived as both their meager intellectual achievements and their moral impoverishment. He always considered himself a Jew devoted to the legacy and mission of his people; but his background

and vision of Judaism left him an outsider, alienated by the mores and values of some rabbis and their affluent supporters.

At the same time, this peculiar orientation toward Judaism and the contemporary Jewish community made him particularly attractive to Christians. They respected his mastery of the text that they aspired to know more intimately; they tolerated and even enjoyed his forensic skill in defending the literal meaning of the Bible and preserving it from pretentious theological eisegesis, which often led to religious distortion and confusion; and they appreciated his deep commitment to furthering their understanding of their heritage and their own self-awareness of their common bonds with Judaism. Bennett's attraction as a Jewish exegete certainly had its limits, however. No self-respecting Protestant could ultimately accept Bennett's theological stance. The missionaries continued to manipulate the Jewish faith to demonstrate what they saw as the ultimate authenticity of the Christian message. And some Christians could never countenance the sheer self-righteousness of a Jew claiming that he understood their own Scripture better than they ever could. Nevertheless, it is quite remarkable, as we have seen, to chart the engagement of Bennett across a wide spectrum of well-known Christian literary, legal, and theological figures, several of whom explicitly demonstrated their appreciation for him and intimately conversed with and learned from him.

As I have argued already, these Christians helped shape Bennett's own Jewish identity. His integration into the upper echelons of the Christian literary establishment—dukes, jurists, theologians, and other scholars—did not diminish his loyalty to his faith. His intimacy with wealthy patrons and Christian intellectuals of all political and religious stripes did not engender on his part radical assimilation, any diminution of his self-awareness as a Jew, or any desire to enter the Christian fold, even its Unitarian strain. On the contrary, Bennett's Christian friends made him more Jewish, more convinced of Judaism's moral force, and more secure in his own skin as a member of a proud minority among Christian elites supposedly liberated, so he hoped, from the dark hostility of the Christian past. His supreme act of translating the Bible, as we have seen, constituted the ultimate payback he could offer the altruistic Christians he had met, open to tolerating him in their midst, indeed welcoming him not despite his Jewishness but because of it.

I would contend that as we try to grasp the significance of Solomon Bennett's life and thought for Jewish history, it is that apparent coalescence of unresolved contradictions and inconsistencies that makes him so interesting and worthy of notice. He loved books and textual study although his primary preoccupation was engraving and the arts, for which he trained and which enabled him to earn a living. He was first and foremost a student of the language of the Bible but chose to write in English for non-Jews. The first of his only two exceptions to this prac-

tice was a polemical work written primarily for Jewish readers on the Continent to justify himself before his detractors. Unhappy with the limited readership it found, he rewrote and expanded the work, airing the dirty laundry to readers of English. The second exception was his attempt to rewrite and translate his commentary on the Temple of Ezekiel in Hebrew, gearing it to the needs of traditional Jews in his homeland in Belarus. He failed to publish the work and it remained in manuscript. His book was read only by English speakers.

Perhaps because Bennett had grown up in countries with monarchical governments, such as Russia and Germany, he was infatuated with the democracy and limited monarchy of England. This passionate admiration eventually led him to find fault with the kings of Israel and Judea, even David and Solomon, and to regard the monarchical age of biblical history as a black mark on the pristine origins of ancient Jewish history. He not only hated monarchy; he displayed no special love for the land of Israel and the aspiration of Jews to live within their own borders and enjoy the sovereignty common to all other nations. Instead, he extolled the diaspora and saw it as neither a punishment nor the attenuation of divine grace but as a special opportunity bestowed on the chosen people to infuse their values and to inculcate their moral instruction into Western civilization—or, as he put it, he thought it preferable to be a stranger in a foreign land than a ruler of one's own. Despite the hostilities and persecutions inflicted by Christian societies on their Jewish minorities, the epoch in which Bennett was living was most opportune for Jews, so he believed, to instruct the world in their virtue.

Bennett could preach Jewish morality to his Christian associates while at the same time obfuscate his own moral failures—his apparent desertion of his first wife and children and his inability or unwillingness to reconnect with them as he built a new life and family in London, and perhaps his lack of transparency to the officials of the Russian government in leaving his homeland under false pretenses with little intention to return. He could also wax eloquent about the sagacity and moral vision of Jews while demonstrating a propensity for rather ill-tempered behavior, such as his protracted struggle with his adversary Rabbi Solomon Hirschell and even his public ridicule of his Jewish colleague Hyman Hurwitz.

Here is one more example of Bennett's seeming self-contradictions. Bennett, in his critique of the rabbis and traditional Jewish education, would appear to many as a liberal-minded *maskil*, a person of the Enlightenment eager to break out from the hermetically sealed walls of Jewish traditional life. In some respects, the label *maskil* might encapsulate his outward-looking stance to engage in a world beyond Judaism, to master all kinds of learning, and to enrich his life through the arts. At the same time, Bennett was a man of profound faith in the eternity of the Hebrew language and in the inerrancy of the Hebrew Bible. It is hard to reconcile his sharp critique of modern science, of heliocentricity and the

Newtonian solar system, with the image of a *maskil*. He was very conservative in some respects, an enlightened literalist,<sup>7</sup> so to speak, despite the heretical image projected by his rabbinic detractors. I am at a loss to explain how Bennett could offer a sharp critique of Newtonianism and still name one of his sons Isaac Newton Bennett! Does this utter inconsistency reveal as well the ambiguity and imprecision of his self-understanding?

Further complicating this negative stance toward Newtonianism for its challenge to biblical truth is that Bennett apparently adopted it as a result of his exposure to Mrs. Housman and her like-minded Christian fundamentalists. It did not emerge, as best as I can ascertain, from traditionalist Jewish sources. On the contrary, many traditional Jews by Bennett's day had made their peace with Newton, heliocentricity, and the solar system.<sup>8</sup>

Once again, such discrepancies should caution the historian from neatly sorting Jewish intellectuals into clear-cut categories such as orthodox, reform, secular, *maskil*, moderate, radical, or whatever. Bennett, a self-made scholar and artist, cannot be defined so arbitrarily and neatly. His complexity is what makes him so fascinating a historical figure and provides much color and variety to the Jewish and interdenominational intellectual landscape of his day.

### A.3 The biography of Solomon Bennett and its connection to my previous works

In bringing this study to a close, I consider this moment somewhat of a milestone in my professional life as a historian. I beg the indulgence of the reader in offering a short explanation of this feeling and in reflecting on the relationship between this present work and my earlier writings.

I completed my doctoral dissertation at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1974, exactly fifty years ago as I write these words. Like my study of Solomon Bennett, it was also a biography of a Jewish intellectual: Abraham Farissol, a polemicist, scribe, and cantor in Ferrara, Italy, at the end of the fifteenth and the early sixteenth century. The dissertation, originally written in Hebrew, was published in English in 1981. Eight monographs have followed and this present volume is the tenth, completed in my eightieth year.

---

<sup>7</sup> My thanks to Arthur Kiron for the designation.

<sup>8</sup> See generally David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

My preoccupation with Bennett's life surely constitutes a conscious return to biography, a genre to which I have been intensely drawn through much of my career. In addition to Farissol, I became fascinated with the life and thought of another Italian Jewish savant of the sixteenth century named Abraham Yagel and devoted two books to him. I wrote another work on the eighteenth-century Polish kabbalist, scientific writer, and bookseller Pinḥas Hurwitz, and still another on his contemporary Moses Marcus, the Anglo-Jewish convert. And even my more synthetic books on scientific discovery and Jewish thought, on the Jewish Enlightenment in England, and on missionaries, converts, and rabbis of the nineteenth century all constituted collections of biographical portraits of Jewish and some non-Jewish thinkers and their writings. The study of an epoch through the lens of one individual life or several lives has provided me with an anchor, a specific trajectory, a degree of depth to my subject, and a human connection with the past that has been profound.

It is not only historical biography that has appealed to me but biography coupled with intellectual and cultural history, with thinkers as well as doers. I also am fascinated by minor figures, at least those relatively ignored by earlier historians and usually viewed as outside the typical canon of Jewish thinkers of the early modern and modern eras. These individuals, in the main, stood at the interstices of Jewish and Christian civilizations, mediators between the two cultures, articulating a need to draw simultaneously from both in constructing an individual self whether they remained Jewish or not. My passion, from Farissol to Bennett, has always been consistent: to give voice to those who were relatively unnoticed, silent, and invisible from the perspective of past scholarship. Such individuals also demand their *go'el*, their redeemer, recoverer, or excavator of the past. I admire those scholars who have created fields of study around one outstanding figure such as Maimonides, Spinoza, or Mendelssohn, who can interpret and reinterpret every dimension of their lives and every line of their writings. But I have chosen a different path of discovery—to explore an intellectual life selected not only by the criterion of originality and brilliance but also for what it teaches about the cultural setting the thinker encountered, the social interactions in which they engaged, and the stimuli that motivated them to articulate their reflections about the world they inhabited. This kind of history is not specifically concerned with epigones or imitators of others; the thinkers I have considered did have fresh and unique observations about their worlds, about what they read and observed. But for whatever reason, historians have not given them serious enough attention. To discover interesting figures previously underresearched by previous scholars has therefore been my quest. The late Natalie Zemon Davis described her role as a historian and biographer with the metaphor of giving birth. I might describe my own as a kind of reviver of the dead [*meḥayeh matim*], a process usually reserved for the Almighty in Jewish tradition. But

perhaps the historian participates in some modest way in a sacred task of remembering, of restoring the dead to life, at least partially and with many gaps. On the few occasions when a younger colleague or student mentions in passing figures I have previously researched as if they belong to a well-acknowledged list of luminaries usually mentioned in survey courses, I am surprised and most grateful for having had some limited role in generating such notice.

Solomon Bennett now joins the company of my previous subjects of history—Farissol, Yagel, Hurwitz, Marcus, along with Alexander McCaul, the missionary, or Moses Margoliouth, the convert, or David Nieto, the Sephardic rabbi of London, or Tobias Cohen, the doctor and medical graduate of Padua, and so many more. Some were mediators between Jewish and Christian cultures, others between their ancestral faith and the natural world, and still others between mysticism and rationalism. They lived transient lives as emigrants and immigrants, were familiar and identified with multiple cultures and languages, and found a profound and personal link with Judaism, even if they converted or were simply transformed to appreciate Judaism through their textual study alone. Bennett is far removed from my earliest biographical subjects in time and place but they might have been recognizable to each other, or at the very least a contemporary student of history might recognize the resemblance among them. Solomon Bennett's memory, like the memory of the others I have studied over this half century, have truly been a blessing to me.

Merion, Pennsylvania, May 29, 2024



# Appendix I: Two Early Treatises of Solomon Bennett

## I.1 *A Discourse on Sacrifices* (1815)

In the wake of the modest success of his first book, Bennett published another polemical work against Christian exegesis of the Hebrew Bible, focusing exclusively on the place of sacrifices in Judaism and Christianity. Dedicated to his long-term friend and supporter Morris Solomon of Amsterdam, it opens with an apologetic clarification as to why the author had devoted an entire treatise to this one issue:

The Discourse I am now laying before you may appear at the first sight paradoxical, or as a sophistry designed to disparage a system generally and universally adopted and promulgated. Yet, as I do not advance in it anything but that which is sanctioned by Scripture; and in addition by the authority of those Rabbies of the Mishnah who existed during the period of the second Temple, anterior to the Christian era, and who accordingly cannot be charged with religious prejudices; so I hope that you will not be too hasty in your judgement and conclusion, until you shall have thoroughly perused the same, and well digested it.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding his confession of innocence in following Scripture alone without promoting any ideological agenda, Bennett was in fact boldly addressing a centerpiece of Christian theology, one that rested on a particular understanding of the sacrificial system of Judaism that he wished to refute. He thus continues:

Numberless volumes are written by the doctors of the Christian church, to prove that the order of the sacrifices were absolute commandments, and that no remission of sins can be obtained by the Divine mercy alone, unless by the additional gift, viz. the shedding of animal blood, and the whole process of the sacrifice as described in the Bible. The church carried this point still further [ . . . ] that to obtain a general and an universal salvation, either for the past, or future generations, and forgiveness of their general (like those of Adam and Eve) or individual transgressions, the Divine wisdom thought proper to send into this mortal world, in a space of about 3700 years after the Creation, a Son of his own, and in a peculiar mode, which was Jesus the messiah, to shed his innocent blood, so as to make an universal atonement for all his adherents.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Solomon Bennett, "To the Reader," in *A Discourse on Sacrifices* (London: published and sold by the author, 1815), opening page. On Morris Solomon of Amsterdam, see above, chapter 6, note 6.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 1–2.

In other words, Christian theologians demanded a literal and binding commitment to animal sacrifice as described in Scripture to make sense of Jesus's ultimate sacrifice and his atonement for humanity's sins.

To make his point more relevant to the ambience of English Protestantism of his day, Bennett chose to mention the well-known biblical commentary of the Methodist scholar Adam Clarke (1762–1832), a figure he had already singled out for ridicule in *The Constancy of Israel* for Clarke's English translation of a small work on ancient Israel by Claude Fleury (see chapter 2, above). It is obvious Bennett could not countenance the constant typological exegesis that this clergyman was fond of using, without regard to the actual literal meaning of the biblical text:

That miraculous divine the Rev. Dr. A. Clarke in his bombastic comment on the Pentateuch has not been sparing in asserting this doctrine [regarding the sacrifices]. Thus I observe this master of types, in his comment on Genesis, typifying all the Angels, the Patriarchs, the matrons, showing all to have been types of Jesus the Messiah; and in Leviticus I saw him with the same eagerness and facility of argument, make the Tabernacle with all its utensils, but in particular all the Sacrifices, either of the animal species, or cookeries, pan-cakes, and libations, all to have been equally types of the great sacrifice, viz. the Messiah. In short, this divine deprived the Israelites of everything peculiar to their own history and national establishment, so as to make the whole of it but as a mere cypher, an allusion to something else, beyond it.<sup>3</sup>

The last sentence is particularly telling, laying bare the essential object of a Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible: to deprive Jews of their own history and culture by superimposing on them a theological meaning alien to their original intention.

In the same category as Clarke, Bennett contended, was his Christian contemporary John Bellamy (1755–1842), another well-known translator of and commentator on the Hebrew Bible for whom Bennett had nothing but contempt. There is

---

<sup>3</sup> Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 2–3. On Fleury and Clarke, see Solomon Bennett, *Nezah Yisra'el: The Constancy of Israel: An Unprejudiced Illustration of Some of the Most Important Texts of the Bible: or, A Polemical, Critical, and Theological Reply to a Public Letter, by Lord Crawford, Addressed to the Hebrew Nation* (London: W. H. Wyatt, 1809), 209–211n, and above, chapter 2, note 34. See also Stephen B. Dawes, *Adam Clarke: Methodism's First Old Testament Scholar*, Cornish Methodist Historical Association Occasional Publication 26 (Truro, England: Cornish Methodist Historical Association, 1994); Papers of Dr Adam Clarke, University of Manchester Library, Manchester, UK, catalogued at <http://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb133-plp>; Simon Mayers, "Representations of 'the Jews' in Methodist Discourses: Report Based on a Brief Visit to the Methodist Archives and Research Centre," August 25, 2014, available at <https://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/784513/27385906/1482318882317/background-mayers.pdf?token=8H90dl5abkmSoGCYjsbSFsX90bM%3D>; and Ian Sellers, "Clarke, Adam (1762–1832)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, October 10, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5483>.

a certain irony that he cited Bellamy together with Clarke, since Bellamy had proclaimed himself a great scholar of the Hebrew language, a critic of the standard translation of the Hebrew Bible, and the author of his own allegedly superior translation. He had also mocked Clarke's scholarship in bolstering his own. In Bennett's estimation, Bellamy was not only ignorant of the Hebrew language but was even more fraudulent than Clarke in his scholarly claims. As we have seen in chapter 8 above, Bennett knew him personally, had conversed and instructed him on several occasions, and ultimately discovered that Bellamy had plagiarized him. Moreover, Bennett's Jewish contemporary, Hyman Hurwitz, whose entanglement with Bennett was discussed above in chapter 7, would devote an entire publication to exposing Bellamy's faulty biblical scholarship as well.<sup>4</sup>

Bennett cites from an advertisement of a work by Bellamy titled *The History of All Religions* (1812), which was supposedly a new work:

It is indeed new, and strange too. He presents us further with a sample of his work, (like corn-dealers) evidently meaning to show the best part of the production [. . .] and concludes thus [on Cain and Abel]: "Now, as Sacrifices as well as offering were commanded [. . .] and as nothing was acceptable without the Sacrifice, had Cain obeyed the divine command, had he brought his sacrifice [. . .] and had he believed in the promise of God to redeem men by the coming of the Messiah, who was to be the great Sacrifice, as all sacrifices were to be terminated in him; his offering would have been accepted. But Abel's offer was accepted since he believed in the promise of Christ.

Bennett concludes that he will "leave it to the judgment of literary gentlemen far superior to mine, and who may judge for themselves, upon a prepossessed, preposterous jargon (to my understanding) like this." What is clear from the examples of Clarke's and Bellamy's exegesis is that sacrifice is a fundamental doctrine of the Trinitarian creed, and since "Jews now don't have sacrifices, nor the Great Sacrifice, the lamb of God, [they] must then remain without any salvation whatever."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Bellamy's work against Clarke is called *The Ophion: or, The Theology of the Serpent* (London: sold by Hatchard, Williams, and Arch, 1811). Hyman Hurwitz wrote a work defending Hebrew Scriptures against John Bellamy called *Vindiciae Hebraicae: or, A Defence of the Hebrew Scriptures as a Vehicle of Revealed Religion as Occasioned by the Recent Strictures and Innovations of J. Bellamy; and in Confutation of His Attacks on all preceding Translations, and on the Established Version in Particular* (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1829). On Bellamy, see Sue Young, "John Bellamy 1755–1842," *Sue Young Histories*, August 16, 2012, <https://www.sueyounghistories.com/2012-08-16-john-bellamy-1755-1842>; and see chapter 8, above.

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 4–6.

It is at this juncture that Bennett offers his own hypothesis, drawn from his unpublished manuscript titled *Amot Mikrei Kodesh*, or “The Validity of the Hebrew Text,” containing

48 examinations, presenting the most glaring errors and pedantisms of Drs. [Benjamin] Kennicott, [Giovanni Bernardo] de Rossi, etc.,<sup>6</sup> and our present eminent divine Ad. Clarke on the Pentateuch only; who, with their usual arrogance, and the prejudices peculiar to Christian divines, charged the long standing and sanctioned validity of the same with omissions, interpolations, transpositions, and changeabilities; I say again, error, which an Israelite schoolboy would not be guilty of.<sup>7</sup>

In his twenty-fifth examination, Bennett offers the following theses: that the primitive institution of sacrifices was not invented for remission of sins; that the shedding of animal blood was not essential for remission of sin; and that the commandments of sacrifices were not absolute or essential for human salvation. They were ceremonial, local, and temporal. The patriarchs, Bennett contended, saw sacrifices as voluntary gifts, tokens of gratitude and obedience toward the universal benefactor and never as intended for remission of sins. The priests later corrupted the practice whereby “sacrifices became a system subject to the whims and caprices of priests, and a very productive income to them; but to intelligent minds, it appeared in a most degrading state.” Although the general practice of sacrifices was not abolished, it was “reduced to free will gifts, thanks and peace offerings, and duty offerings, sin and guilt offerings”—that is, made only to God and limited to Palestine and Jerusalem and to the tribe of Levi. Furthermore, contended Bennett, the book of Leviticus never required sacrifices for the remission of sin. And this notion was reinforced by the prophets, who declared that the whole system of sacrifices was neither essential to salvation nor an absolute commandment. The rabbis of the Mishnah also insisted that sacrifices were local and temporal, applicable only to commandments connected to the land of Israel. All this evidence strongly suggests to Bennett that sacrifices were limited to a specific class, to a specific place, and to a specific time.<sup>8</sup>

In closing his modest work, Bennett takes one more jab at Adam Clarke, this time linking him directly to the Christian missionaries of the London Society he so detested:

---

<sup>6</sup> On Kennicott, see David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), chap. 1; on de Rossi, see F. F. Parente, “De Rossi, Giovanni Bernardo,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 39, ed. Vincenzo Cappelletti (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1999), at [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/de-rossi-giovanni-bernardo\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/de-rossi-giovanni-bernardo_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/).

<sup>7</sup> Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 7–18; quotations, 9, 11.

As I was informed of the candour of the eminent divine Dr. Adam Clarke, who conceitedly and arrogantly expressed himself at a meeting of the ci-devant nefarious and infatuated London Society for the universal conversion of the Jews, by saying that there is not one Jew who knows the Hebrew language, and the literature thereof; and likewise the arrogance, the absurdities and sarcasms with which to my knowledge his bombastic comment on the Pentateuch is filled; I therefore loudly call upon him, as the guide and light of his time, to take into consideration, and refute if he be able, the objections I have made in this my Discourse; and I shall be obliged to him for a reconciliation of the texts, and better information respecting the doctrine of Sacrifices.<sup>9</sup>

Bennett was, of course, aware that his claim that the sacrifices were not an essential part of biblical religion or of ancient rabbinic civilization but were necessary for Christians to perpetuate their doctrine of the shedding of the blood of Lamb of God would be unconvincing to many Jews and Christians alike. As he observes, “Many Hebrew Rabbies as well as the Rabbies of the Christian church, being amateurs of hypotheses (which they call by the name of mysteries) will not so easily give ear to my dissertation”; nevertheless, he appeals “to the sacred text itself and to the purity of sacred reason.”<sup>10</sup>

One unnamed Christian reader, writing in *The Jewish Expositor and the Friend of Israel*, a periodical of the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews, responded to Bennett in a lengthy and learned essay, offering a full refutation of Bennett’s three theses, which he based on passages from Scripture (especially from the book of Leviticus), the Targumim, and even the Jewish exegete David Kimḥi. This was indeed a tour de force, punching holes in the hypothesis that sacrifices were unessential to the practice of biblical religion. How ironic that a textual scholar such as Bennett, committed to the literal meaning of Scripture, would dare take such liberties with the plain meaning of the Bible to marginalize the sacrificial system of the Temple and the priests and see their emphasis as a distortion of ancient Judaism. Even the prophets and the psalmist, with all their emphasis on moral intention over external ritual, never imagined abolishing the observance of sacrifices altogether. So, for example, this author comments on Psalm 51:16 (“Thou desirest not sacrifice [ . . . ] Thou delightest not in burnt offerings”): “But if we regard David an inspired person, we ought to interpret his language by his own conduct, and we shall see, that when he says, God desirest not sacrifices nor takes delight in burnt offerings, he means those

---

<sup>9</sup> Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 21. A proposal for publishing by subscription “the Work long since advertised by me intitled *Amot Mikrei Kodesh* The Validity of the Hebrew Text” immediately follows. The work was never published with this title but might have served as the foundation for Bennett’s discourse on the Hebrew language discussed in chapter 7, above.

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 19.

sacrifices which the carnal Israelites vainly and impiously imagined would be accepted [ . . . ] and he thus shews, that sacrifices are of no avail, unless accompanied with a contrite and broken heart.” But sacrifice with proper conviction and moral conduct remained unambiguously intact.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, Bennett was audaciously attempting to decouple the doctrine of sacrifice as expiation for sin from the myth of Jesus’s ultimate sacrifice for humanity, a task like that of his older Jewish contemporaries David Levi and Joseph Crool, both mentioned by his critic. If correct, Bennett could argue that the Christian dogma rested on weak and untenable foundations. But this reader would have none of it: and using an abundance of proof passages to argue for the validity of the Christian reading of Scripture on this point, he certainly pushed back on Bennett’s daring hypothesis. Clarke and Bellamy might have been easy targets to demolish, but not the author of this review, favorably reprinted in a later collection of essays from *The Jewish Expositor*.<sup>12</sup> In two other reviews of Bennett’s work, one allegedly written by a Jew or a former Jew, Bennett faced similar criticism of his reading of the Hebrew notion of sacrifices and even an apparently irrelevant accusation about his personal observance of Jewish ritual—a charge, as we have seen, made against him on several occasions.<sup>13</sup> In his own typically bombastic manner, he vigorously defended his own position, surely in line with the views of previous generations of diasporic Jews. The doctrine of actual animal sacrifice, so he claimed, has always been more critical to Christians than to Jews, owing to Jesus’s central sacrificial role in bearing the sins of humanity. In this claim, Bennett was conveying a significant historical truth by delineating carefully the two faiths of his day.<sup>14</sup>

---

11 “Opinions of Modern Jews on Sacrifices,” *The Jewish Expositor and Friend of Israel* 1 (December 1816): 401–414; quotation, 411.

12 On David Levi, see Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, index, s.v. “Levi, David.” On Joseph Crool, see David S. Katz, *The Jews in the History of England, 1484–1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 377–379. The review was reprinted in William Cuninghame, ed., *Letters and Essays Controversial and Critical on Subjects Connected with Conversion and National Restoration of Israel* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1822), 145–168.

13 “A Discourse on Sacrifices,” *Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature* 12 (March 2, 1817): 219–223; “A Discourse on Sacrifices,” *New Evangelical Magazine and Review* 3 (April 1817): 123–124.

14 Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 20–21, ending with a further assault on Adam Clarke.

## I.2 On *The Molten Sea* [Yam shel Shlomo] (1821)

Three years before publishing his commentary on the Temple of Ezekiel, Bennett put out a similar work of detailed mechanical and architectural description called *The Molten Sea*, a commentary, following 1 Kings 7, on the system of collecting and distributing water throughout the Temple. The text was preceded by another elaborate engraving prepared by the author depicting the unusual system conceived by Solomon (see Figure I.1).<sup>15</sup> This earlier work is undoubtedly related in style and content to the Ezekiel publication and might be deemed a precursor to it.

Bennett presents himself on the title page as Solomon Bennett, a member of the Royal Academy of Berlin, a title he obviously cherished and held on to even after two decades in London. The volume is dedicated to his good friend the Unitarian minister and political leader William Frend, who came to his financial aid at a time of crisis and demonstrated his appreciation of Bennett's Jewish learning: "you are not only a zealous advocate for literary pursuits, but an excellent judge of them; it is before your face, therefore, that I am to lay my little dissertation entitled, 'The Molten Sea,' which you will please to accept as an *Kurban todah*, offer of confession, from your devoted and sincere friend, the author."<sup>16</sup>

Bennett had consulted several Christian commentators on the chapter, especially Johann Jakob Scheuchzer's *Physica Sacra* (1731–1735), as well as *Calmet's Dictionary of the Holy Bible*, first edited and published in 1797 by Charles Taylor. Bennett finds these works lacking:

I give them credit for their endeavours but little is due to their comments on scripture. They paid attention to the twelve oxen [holding up the water reservoir], but overlooked the vessel itself, which is the chief object in this structure, as the essential part for the service of the Temple; I mean to say, that they did not pay any attention whatsoever to the dimensions given in the text of that colossal vessel; they did not examine whether the vacuums of their supposed forms would be competent for the reception of that quantity of water allotted to it in the text, or not; they did not observe the impropriety in the standing version of that subject, which [ . . . ] should have been the chief point of their researches.<sup>17</sup>

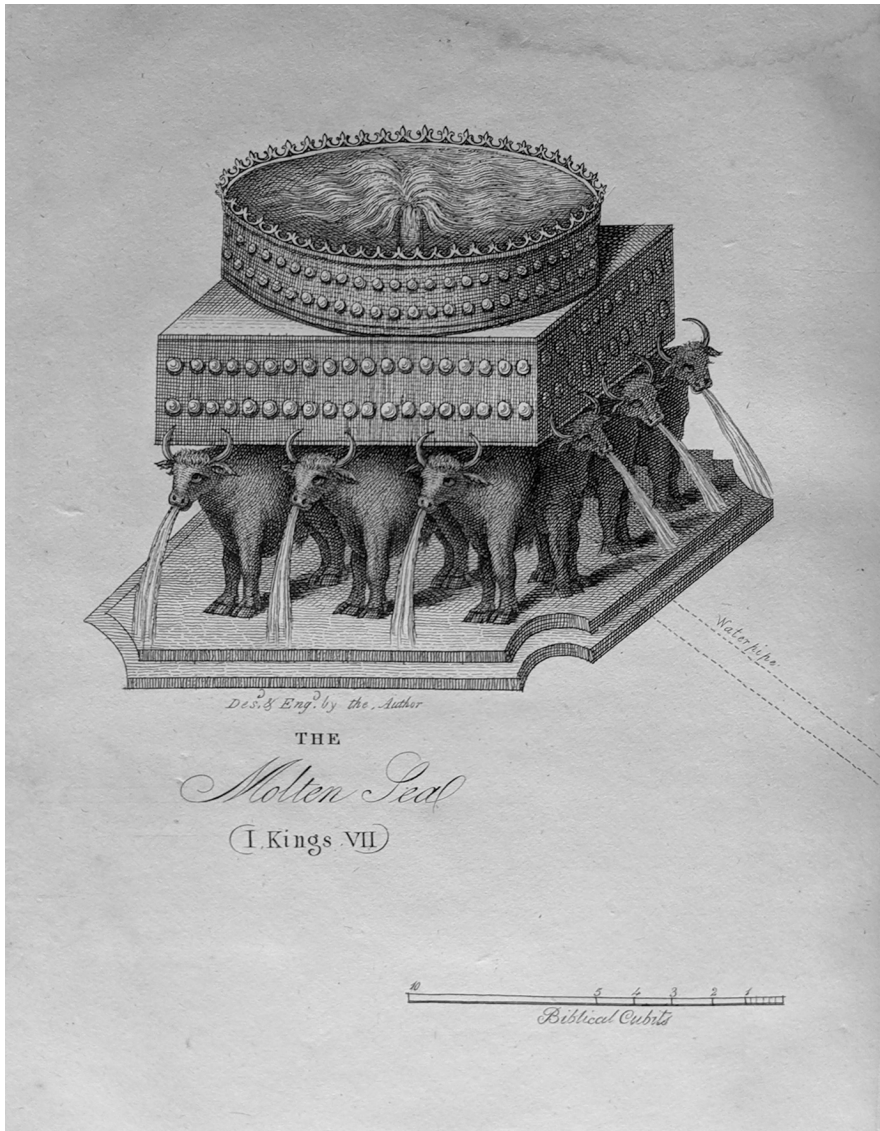
As in his work on Ezekiel's Temple, the focus is on the mechanical details and how the structure was conceived. And much as in the later book, he first points to

---

<sup>15</sup> Solomon Bennett, *The Molten Sea* (London: published by the author and sold by J. Hatchard and Son, 1821). On the Hatchard publishing house, see "J. Hatchard and Son," *Open Library*, [https://openlibrary.org/publishers/J.\\_Hatchard\\_and\\_Son](https://openlibrary.org/publishers/J._Hatchard_and_Son).

<sup>16</sup> Bennett, *The Molten Sea*, 6, dedication page.

<sup>17</sup> Bennett, *The Molten Sea*, 7.



**Figure I.1:** Bennett's engraving of the Molten Sea, published in his book *The Molten Sea* (London, 1821).

the engraving that he designed to illustrate the proper form of the Molten Sea, and to prove that the knowledge he acquired came from the rabbis, not from recent scholars:

because the author is not dubbed with the titles of Reverend, Esq., the initials D.D., etc.; but above all, because the author is a Jew!!! Which prejudices I experienced daily, though prevalent now a-day. To which I answer, as, to the first opinion, *Mikrah ani doresh*, I appeal to the text! Which is in behalf of my assertion; that the rabbies were nearer to that sacred period than modern bibliographers; and as one astronomical gentleman [i.e., William Frennd] conscientiously testified in a work of his, entitled *Evening Amusements for the Year 1817* (page 162) saying, “This nation (alluding to the Hebrews) was well acquainted with the motion of the sun and moon long before the Greeks had emerged from their barbarous state,” etc. So, I am to add, that the rabbies were as well acquainted with mathematics, long before the Christian world had a knowledge of it; and as all is treated in it, scientific and problematical, no man can dispute its authority [ . . . ] because its waters issue from the sanctuary [Ezek. 47:2].<sup>18</sup>

Bennett later responds to the charge that Solomon had no knowledge of geometry and could not properly calculate the measurements of this huge vessel: “If he was deficient in geometry, he was not deficient in ocular demonstrations, particularly when he had the mass-staff and line in his hand, with which he measured the building of the Temple and all the utensils of the same. [ . . . ] [One has] no right to attribute to Solomon a gross deficiency of mathematical knowledge—especially since he possessed the art of building, including Baalbek and Palmira.” The real deficiency lies in the limited knowledge of Christian exegetes who lack sufficient literacy in Hebrew as well as rabbinics, “without which, many obscurities in scripture must infallibly remain unanswered.”<sup>19</sup>

Bennett reiterates his main point at the conclusion of his short excursus:

Having brought the above subject to a concise termination as well as a reconciliation of the text, does it remain any doubt that the king Solomon had a sufficient knowledge of geometry as well as of measuring solids; viz. by that premeditating order of the different dimensions given to its form, as to enable the vacuum for a reception of the determined quantity of two thousand baths of water allotted to it? Besides, the great knowledge of mechanism and the art of foundry, of casting such a colossal vessel, with its twelve supporters?<sup>20</sup>

Having demonstrated the wisdom of Solomon in inventing such an elaborate irrigation system based on scientific principles, and having ably displayed his own fascination and competence in interpreting the biblical text, Bennett devotes the last page of his book to announce his forthcoming publication: *The Temple of Ezekiel!*

---

<sup>18</sup> Bennett, *The Molten Sea*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett, *The Molten Sea*, 11, 14.

<sup>20</sup> Bennett, *The Molten Sea*, 20.



## Appendix II: The Engravings of Solomon Bennett

I have referred to and reprinted many of Bennett's copper engravings throughout this book. While hardly an expert in this highly specialized art, I have come to appreciate the significant role it played in Bennett's life and how it expanded his intellectual and social contacts both on the Continent and in England. The skill required to engrave a plate was not easily attained. Engravers such as Bennett needed artistic ability, excellent judgment, and attention to detail. They also needed good eyesight and patience.<sup>1</sup> Bennett may have completed his formal study in Copenhagen in one year, but he practiced and improved his craft for many additional years. How he came to devote himself to this challenging profession, to leave home and family, and to travel to foreign countries previously unknown to him remain questions not fully answered by the sources that illuminate his life and thought.

By Bennett's time, engraved portraits depicted not only famous men but also authors, common politicians, and civic figures of various kinds. Bennett seems to have taken on varied assignments ranging from biblical scenes to famous men such as Frederick II, Shakespeare, and Napoleon to military leaders. In the case of Frederick II or his wife, Bennett's choice of subjects appears to be no more than standard for Berlin during the time he was beginning his career. Nevertheless, that he was rewarded for his engravings does suggest his work showed some distinction. The Shakespeare and Napoleon engravings, in contrast, seem less original and less noteworthy. His military paintings such as those of George III and IV do seem difficult to reconcile with the anti-monarchical posture found in his writings.

Professional engravers replicated prior images—usually paintings, as we have seen. Some made original images or even contemporary political cartoons for editorial pages. But Bennett's productions generally were more conventional. When he depicts biblical scenes, especially in his engravings of the Temple, the Molten Sea, and the Tabernacle, his work seems more interesting and connected more closely to his exegetical writings on the Bible; for the most part, however, he appears to have kept his engravings separate from his literary work. While I have tried to demonstrate how his biblical interests could converge with his artis-

---

<sup>1</sup> On the history of engraving and the mechanics of the engraving process, see, for example, Susanne Anderson-Riedel, *Creativity and Reproduction: Nineteenth Century Engraving and the Academy* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), and Arthur Hind, *A History of Engraving and Etching from the Fifteenth Century to the Year 1914* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1923).

tic ones, especially in the case of the Temple of Ezekiel, this was not always the case.<sup>2</sup>

Arthur Barnett has suggested that Bennett's best work was in his early years in Berlin,<sup>3</sup> and this seems to be generally confirmed by the extant engravings that can still be located. But some of the later engravings from the London period are quite impressive: see, for example, the hand-colored military images from the Brown University collection (nos. 15 and 16 below). Bennett's production in England seems concentrated mostly during the first decade of his career there, before his eyesight deteriorated and the his artistic work was gradually reduced.

I list below all the engravings attributed to Solomon Bennett known to me, their present location, the painting on which the engraving is based, and the date (when known). When the image is available on the internet, I also offer the appropriate link.

## II.1 The list of engravings

1. Lorens Weiskopf (Lorenz Werskoss), Danish alchemist of seventeenth century. Perhaps Bennett's earliest extant work, based on an original painting by Henrich Dittmers (ca. 1625–1677). See figure 1.3, above. The painting is still located in Copenhagen in the National Gallery of Denmark. Available online: [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Heinrich\\_Dittmers\\_-\\_The\\_Alchemist\\_Lorens\\_Weiskopf\\_-\\_KMSsp818\\_-\\_Statens\\_Museum\\_for\\_Kunst.jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Heinrich_Dittmers_-_The_Alchemist_Lorens_Weiskopf_-_KMSsp818_-_Statens_Museum_for_Kunst.jpg). The engraving is located at the Kupferstichkabinett [Museum of Prints, Drawings, and Fine Manuscripts], Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, no. 213–130. It was probably completed ca. 1795. This engraving, together with several others by Bennett, is reproduced in Salli Kirschstein, *Juedische graphiker aus der zeit von 1625– 1825* (Berlin: Der Zirkel Architektur-Verlag, 1918) [hereafter Kirschstein], engraving no. vii.
2. King Frederick the Great [II]. Located in the Kupferstichkabinett, 776–93 (additional copies, 109–101, 775–95). See figure 1.4, above. Kirschstein, engraving no. viii.
3. Queen Louisa Augusta. Located in the Kupferstichkabinett, 686–121 (additional copies, 727–96, 110–101), based on a painting by Nikolaus Lauer (1753–1824). See figure 1.5, above. Kirschstein, engraving no. ix.

---

<sup>2</sup> I have benefited from the thoughtful comments of Professor Larry Silver in writing the last few paragraphs.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Barnett, "Solomon Bennett 1761–1838: Artist, Hebraist, and Controversialist," *Jewish Historical Society of England Transactions* 17 (1951–1952): 92.

4. King Frederick William III. Located in the Kupferstichkabinett, 97–1883, based on a painting by Nikolaus Lauer.
5. Field-Marshal Richard Heinrich Moellendorf, governor of Berlin. Located in the Kupferstichkabinett, 212–130 (additional copy, 211–130), based on a painting by Jean Marc Pascal (active 1784). Kirschstein, engraving no. xi.
6. Ewald Friedrich von Hertzberg, Prussian statesman. Located in the Kupferstichkabinett, 210–130, based on a painting by Johann Heinrich Schröder (1757–1812).
7. Daniel Chodowiecki, artist and president of the Royal Academy. Located in the Kupferstichkabinett, 209–130, based on a painting by Johann Christoph Frisch (1738–1815). See figure 1.6, above. Kirschstein, engraving no. x.
8. William Shakespeare. Looking toward the viewer, wearing a point ruff and a doublet decorated with darts. After George Vertue's print of the Harleian miniature. See figure 2.3, above. Frontispiece to an edition of *The Dramatic Works of Shakespeare* (J. Stockdale, 1807). British Museum, London, 1980, U.693; K,64.37; K,64.38; and K,64.39 (4 copies).
9. Danae in the Golden Shower. Lying naked on a bed, raising her hands toward a shower of coins at left, as her servant tries to cover her in a sheet. After Adriaen van der Werff. Plate 19 from an unidentified series. 1803. British Museum, 1861,1109.397.
10. Hannah presenting Samuel to Eli. Eli, seated at left, extends his arm to touch Hannah, who is facing him, bending forward with her arms around her son, both in profile to left, the boy with his hands together in prayer; two bulls behind at right. See figure 2.2, above. After Benjamin West (Staley 272), no date. British Museum, 1838,0714.89.
11. George IV. Standing three-quarter length to front, head turned in three-quarter profile to left, wearing elaborate uniform with star and, his right arm extended and leaning on the hilt of his sword, holding a plumed hat in his left hand; field of leeks in background at left. After Sir William Beechey, 1805. British Museum, 1870,1008.2586.
12. Napoléon I, Emperor of the French. Bust-length, in profile to left, wearing lavish imperial costume and laurel wreath. 1808. British Museum, 1850,0211.116.
13. The Dutch Courtship. The merry hostess; a man leaning over a barrel and serving wine to a drunken woman; a child holding a spoon at left. After Richard Brakenburgh, 1807. British Museum, 1861,1109.43.  
Note: nos. 8–13 are available online at <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/AUTH231244>.
14. King George IV. After Sir William Beechey, 1805. National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG D10982 (same as no. 11 above). Available online: <https://www>.

- npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp19855/salomon-jomtob-bennett?role=art.
15. Frederick Augustus, Duke of York and Albany. Hand-colored line and stipple engraving: full-length portrait in uniform on horse rearing toward left, baton in upraised hand. See figure 2.5, above. “H.R.H.F. Duke of York & Albany, Prince Bishop of Osnabruck &c. &c. Field Marshal and Commander in Chief of the Army of Great Britain.” *Prints, Drawings and Watercolors from the Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection*. Brown Digital Repository. Brown University Library. <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:227462/>.
  16. George Prince of Wales: Hand-colored line and stipple engraving: full-length portrait, mounted, in uniform, sword upraised in right hand, facing left. Published October 1801. “His Royal Highness George Prince of Wales &c: Colonel of the 10th Light Dragoons.” *Prints, Drawings and Watercolors from the Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection*. Brown Digital Repository. Brown University Library, Providence, RI. <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:227455/>.
  17. Solomon Hirschell: Hirschell is standing in a library holding a book in his left hand. After a painting by Frederick Benjamin Barlin. Photograph of an engraving belonged to the Josef Moses Levy Collection and the Israel Solomons Collection, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, PST 295. See figure 3.2, above. The original engraving was once located in the Mocatta Library (now merged with the collections of University College London).
  18. The Form of the Tabernacle, based on Exodus 25:9. See figure 2.1, above. Printed in five books by Catherine Housman: *A Writing or Declaration from the Law Book, to Obliterate the House of the Revolver, or Solar System* (London: A. J. Valpy, 1821), 8; *Three Letters to a Friend* (London: A. J. Valpy, 1833), following 66; *Letter to Charles Empson, Esq.* (London: Hughes and Robinson, 1848), 32; *Meditations on the Scriptural Interpretations Contained in Sir William Drummond’s “Oedipus Judaicus”* (London: Hughes and Robinson, 1849), 52; and *Letter to Dr. Spry in Vindication of the Word of God Against Every Species of Scientific Opposition* (London: W. Hughes, 1839), 204.
  19. Solomon’s Altar for Chemoth, based on 1 Kings 11:7. Printed in four books by Catherine Housman: *A Writing or Declaration from the Law Book*, 44; *Three Letters to a Friend*, following 66, after engraving 18 listed above; *Letter to Charles Empson*, 106; and *Meditations on the Scriptural Interpretations*, 72.
  20. Daniel Discovers the Deceit of Bel’s Priests, based on Daniel 13:18. Printed in three books by Catherine Housman: *A Writing or Declaration from the Law Book*, 242; *Three Letters to a Friend*, following 68; and *Letter to Charles Empson*, end of the volume.

21. The Molten Sea, based on 1 Kings 7. See figure I.1, above. Printed in Solomon Bennett, *The Molten Sea* (London: Jay Hatchard and Sons, 1821), frontispiece, and in Housman, *A Writing or Declaration from the Law Book*, 326.
22. The Ground Plan of the Temple of Ezekiel. Printed in Solomon Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel* (London: published by the author, R. Hunter, and M. Solomon, 1824), 1824, end of book.
23. A bird's-eye view of the Temple of Ezekiel. See figure 6.3, above. Printed in Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, end of book.
24. Solomon Bennett, self-portrait. After a painting by G. Fraser. See figure 0.1, above. Printed in Solomon Bennett, *Nezah Yisra'el: The Constancy of Israel* (London: W. H. Wyatt, 1809), 1809, frontispiece, and in later books by Bennett.
25. Solomon Bennett, possibly a self-portrait. After a painting in the possession of Hubert Meredith, his great-great-grandson, painter unknown. See figure 0.2, above. Printed in Arthur Barnett, *The Western Synagogue through Two Centuries (1781–1961)* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1961), 50. The location of the original is presently unknown.



## Appendix III: A Note on the German Translation of *The Constancy of Israel*

Twenty-six years after Bennett's first book was published, Friedrich Ludwig Wilhelm Wagner translated it into German as *Israel's Beständigkeit: Eine unbefangene Beleuchtung mehrerer wichtiger Bibelstellen* (Darmstadt: Johann Philipp Diehl, 1835). Wagner, a popular theologian and schoolmaster living in Darmstadt, died that same year. Besides his pedagogic and pastoral activities, he was chiefly known as the author of a widely read religious book titled *Lehren der Weisheit und Tugend in Fabeln, Erzählungen und Liedern* (1792), which had already appeared in sixteen editions by the time of his death and was distributed in hospitals by charitable organizations. He published many other popular works, including a biography of Buffon translated from the French.<sup>1</sup>

What motivated Wagner to translate Bennett's work? He tells us that he had read an essay on Bennett and his works by the distinguished theologian and biblical scholar Anton Theodor Hartmann (1774–1838), professor of Old Testament theology at Rostock,<sup>2</sup> which appeared in December 1833 in the *Leipziger Literatur Zeitung*. It was the featured essay of the issue, and Hartmann devoted it to the Jewish author's writings, accurately summarizing the content of all his writings up to 1833. Wagner was duly impressed and felt the need to expose the German reader to *The Constancy of Israel*.

For Wagner, the translation was justified because it offered valuable information in the context of the possible emancipation of the Jews of Germany. It also provided a clear sense of the kind of arguments Jews could make in response to the missionaries, who were required to engage with those arguments to succeed in transforming the Jewish heart: "If one considers how in our days the emancipation of the Jews is taking place both in and out of the German fatherland and

---

1 On Wagner, see Philippe Sander, "Wagner, Friedrich Ludwig," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 40 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1896), 494–495, online at <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz84220.html#adbcontent>, and the background information in the German Wikipedia entry "Friedrich Ludwig Wagner (Theologe)," January 18, 2023, [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich\\_Ludwig\\_Wagner\\_\(Theologe\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Ludwig_Wagner_(Theologe)).

2 On Hartmann, see Gustav Moritz Redslob, "Hartmann, Anton Theodor," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 10 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1879), 680–681, online at <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz26227.html#adbcontent>. A complete list of his scholarly works is found in the German Wikipedia entry "Anton Theodor Hartmann," April 13, 2023, [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton\\_Theodor\\_Hartmann](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton_Theodor_Hartmann).

in other countries [ . . . ] this little work by Bennett should rightly demand the attention of governments as well as the estates, theologians as well as laity.” And earlier: “Our industrious proselyte makers receive here much rich material for reflection and learn the direction in which they must direct their attacks in order to overcome the stubborn Jewish heart.”<sup>3</sup> In the latter statement he paraphrases Hartmann himself:

A detailed acquaintance with the Jewish controversial theology, with the Jewish method of interpretation and the religious way of thinking of the Jews, brought about by deeply rooted ideas faithfully propagated in education and teaching are necessary weapons if the fight is to succeed better than it has hitherto. In general, it is a very important regret that our tirelessly busy missionaries hardly ever report the doubts and objections that both pagans and Jews raise against the historical and dogmatic part of Christianity, or only do so in a cursory and abbreviated manner. If this were to be done in detail, the pitfalls on which the well-intentioned and so eagerly pursued efforts of our converts usually fail would be more happily avoided [ . . . ] with a deeper influence on the heart and mind.<sup>4</sup>

What is interesting is that Wagner’s reference to the debate regarding Jewish emancipation has no parallel in Hartmann. On the contrary, before his death Hartmann wrote several pamphlets against the emancipation of the Jews, to which the well-known Reform rabbi Gotthold Salomon replied in 1835.<sup>5</sup> According to Hartmann, learning about Jews and Judaism from Bennett was justified only to arm the missionary so he might succeed in his holy task. His admirer Wagner obviously felt otherwise.

---

3 Wagner, introduction to Salomon Bennett, *Israel's Beständigkeit: Eine unbefangene Beleuchtung mehrerer wichtiger Bibelstellen*, trans. Friedrich Ludwig Wilhelm Wagner (Darmstadt: Johann Philipp Diehl, 1835), 10, 6.

4 Wagner, introduction to Bennett, *Israel's Beständigkeit*, 6–7. See Hartmann’s essay, “Nachricht für alttestamentliche Philologen,” *Leipziger Literatur Zeitung* 2, no. 57 (December 1833): 473–476, at 473: “Es ist überhaupt sehr zu bedauern, dass unsere unermüdet geschäftigen Missionarien die Zweifel und Einwürfe, die sowohl Heiden als Juden gegen den geschichtlichen und dogmatischen Theil des Christenthums vorbringen, in ihren Berichten fast nie der nur mit abkürzender Flüchtigkeit mittheilen. Geschähe dieses in ausführlicher Darlegung, so würden die Klippen, an welchen die gut gemeinten und so eifrig verfolgten Bemühungen unserer Bekehrer gewöhnlich scheitern, glücklicher vermieden, und die Punkte leichter aufgefunden werden, au Zweyter Band.” The essay by Hartmann is online at <https://archive.org/details/s2id13403950/page/n761/mode/2up>.

5 For Gotthold Salomon’s debate with Hartmann over his opposition to emancipation, see Gotthold Salomon, *Briefe an Herrn Anton Theodor Hartmann [ . . . ]: Über die von demselben aufgeworfene Frage: Darf eine völlige Gleichstellung in staatsbürgerlichen Rechten sämtlichen Juden schon jetzt bewilligt werden?* (Altona: Johann Friedrich Hammerich, 1835).

In any case, Hartmann's relatively long essay on Bennett, at least in this one instance, publicized his written work in German lands and must have gratified him when it appeared in a reputable journal written by a serious theologian of Christianity. The German translation of his work, finished a year before his death, must have pleased him even more.



# List of Figures

- Figure 0.1** Engraving of Solomon Bennett, self-portrait, after a portrait by G. Fraser. First published in 1809. Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York — **11**
- Figure 0.2** Engraving of Solomon Bennett, possible self-portrait, from a painting in the possession of Hubert Meredith, his great-great grandson. From Arthur Barnett, *The Western Synagogue through Two Centuries (1781–1961)* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1961), 51 — **12**
- Figure 1.1** Historical boundaries in the Lithuanian–Belarusian lands, eighteenth–twentieth centuries. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons — **15**
- Figure 1.2** The certificate translated into French authorizing Solomon’s Bennett’s completion of his Studies at the Royal Academy of Copenhagen. MS Jewish College 116, London — **25**
- Figure 1.3** Bennett’s engraving of Lorens Weiskopf (Lorenz Werskoss), Danish alchemist of seventeenth century, based on an original painting by Henrich Dittmers (ca. 1625–1677). This may be Bennett’s earliest extant engraving. Courtesy of the Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin — **27**
- Figure 1.4** Bennett’s engraving of Frederick II dedicated to the Russian Tsar Paul I. Courtesy of the Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin — **28**
- Figure 1.5** Bennett’s engraving of Queen Louisa Augusta. Courtesy of the Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin — **29**
- Figure 1.6** Bennett’s engraving of the artist Daniel Chodowiecki, president of the Royal Academy. Courtesy of the Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin — **30**
- Figure 2.1** Bennett’s engraving of the Tabernacle, reproduced in several of Catherine Housman’s books — **36**
- Figure 2.2** Bennett’s engraving of Hannah Presenting Samuel to Eli, after Benjamin West. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum — **37**
- Figure 2.3** Bennett’s engraving of William Shakespeare, after George Vertue’s print. Frontispiece to an edition of *The Dramatic Works of Shakespeare* (London: J. Stockdale, 1807). Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum — **38**
- Figure 2.4** Title page of Bennett’s *The Constancy of Israel* (London, 1809). Courtesy of the Library of the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia — **40**
- Figure 3.1** Rabbi Solomon Hirschell, painting by Frederick Benjamin Barlin. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London — **59**
- Figure 3.2** Photograph of Bennett’s engraving of Barlin’s painting. Barlin’s suit over this engraving forced Bennett into debtor’s prison. Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York — **60**
- Figure 3.3** Title page of Bennett’s *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke’s Place* (London, 1818) — **64**
- Figure 4.1** William Frend, Unitarian clergyman. Engraving (1793) by Andrew Birrell, after Silvester (Sylvester) Harding. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London — **81**
- Figure 4.2** Thomas Joseph Pettigrew, librarian of the Duke of Sussex. Watercolor by Ann Williams Skelton (after 1839), after Henry Room. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London — **85**

- Figure 4.3** Augustus Frederick, the Duke of Sussex. By Charles Turner, published by John Miller after Chester Harding. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London — **92**
- Figure 4.4** Sir William Drummond of Logiealmond. Hand-colored stipple engraving, after Arminius Mayer. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London — **94**
- Figure 5.1** Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee, the Baroness Le Despenser, ruminating on her extraordinary dream. Anonymous. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum, London — **100**
- Figure 5.2** The abduction of Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee by Loudon and Lockhart Gordon. Anonymous. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum, London — **101**
- Figure 6.1** Title page of Bennett's *The Temple of Ezekiel* (London, 1824) — **124**
- Figure 6.2** The first page of *Torat Ha-Bayit*. MS Jews College 4. Courtesy of the Library of the London School of Jewish Studies, London — **131**
- Figure 6.3** A bird's-eye view of the Temple of Ezekiel, one of the two plates engraved by Bennett included in his *The Temple of Ezekiel*. Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York — **134**
- Figure 7.1** Hyman Hurwitz, UCL Professor of Judaic Studies. Hebrew and English titles, with Hebrew couplet. Anonymous. Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York — **142**
- Figure 8.1** A sample page of Bennett's working copy of his revisions of the standard English Bible. MS Jews College 105. Courtesy of the Library of the London School of Jewish Studies, London — **170**
- Figure 8.2** Another page of Bennett's working copy of his revisions of the standard English Bible, from his Introduction to the Book of Genesis. MS Jews College 105. Courtesy of the Library of the London School of Jewish Studies, London — **171**
- Figure I.1** Bennett's engraving of the Molten Sea [*Yam shel Shlomo*], from his book *The Molten Sea* (London, 1821) — **204**

# Bibliography

## Primary Sources

### Works by Solomon Bennett

- An Appeal to the Judicious and Candid Class of the Hebrew Congregation*. 1816. National Archives, Richmond, United Kingdom. TS 11/276/999/4, RC3554475.
- A Critical Investigation into the Merits of the Lecture Delivered in the University of London, November 11, 1828 by Hyman Hurwitz, Professor of the Hebrew Language and Literature*. London: printed for the author by Samuel Pinder, 1829.
- Critical Remarks on the Authorised Version of the Old Testament: Containing Some Examples of Its Errors, with Specimens of an Amended Translation*. London: Effingham Wilson, 1834.
- “Defence of Mr. S. Bennett against the Monthly Review.” *New Review: Or Monthly Analysis of General Literature* 1, no. 2 (February 1813): 246–249.
- A Discourse on Sacrifices*. London: the author, 1815.
- English Summary of Hebrew translation of Averröes (Ibn Rushd) on Aristotle titled *Ha-Shamayim ve-ha-Olam*. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich. MS München 37.
- The Hebrew and English Holy Bible: The Hebrew Reprinted from the Text of Heidenheim*. Revised by Solomon Bennett. Edited by Francis Barham. London: printed for the Family of the late Solomon Bennett, 1841.
- “Holy Bible.” [A (re)translation of and commentary on the Hebrew Bible based on the Oxford standard edition of the Old Testament expanded to include Bennett’s emendations and commentaries.] London, MS Jews College 105, vols. 1–2. Library of the London School of Jewish Studies, London.
- Israel’s Beständigkeit: Eine unbefangene Beleuchtung mehrerer wichtiger Bibelstellen*. Trans. Friedrich Ludwig Wilhelm Wagner. Darmstadt: Johann Philipp Diehl, 1835.
- Likūṭim me-ha’ataḥah ḥadashah ‘al Torah, Nevi’im u-Ketuvim = Specimen of a New Version of the Hebrew Bible Translated from the Original Text, and Comprising Selected Chapters [ . . . ] Arranged in Three Columns, viz. the Authorized Version, the New Version, and the Original Hebrew Text*. London: printed for the author by Richard Taylor, 1836.
- The Molten Sea*. London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1821.
- Nezah Yisra’el: The Constancy of Israel: An Unprejudiced Illustration of Some of the Most Important Texts of the Bible: or, A Polemical, Critical, and Theological Reply to a Public Letter, by Lord Crawford, Addressed to the Hebrew Nation*. London: W. H. Wyatt, 1809.
- The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke’s Place Displayed, in a Series of Critical, Theological, and Rabbinical Discussions, on a Hebrew Pamphlet, Entitled, “Minhat Kena’ot” (Avenge Offer)*. London: the author, 1818. [Author given as “Salomon Bennett.”]
- The Temple of Ezekiel*. London: A. J. Valpy, printed by the author, R. Hunter, and M. Solomon, 1824.
- Tene Bikkurim*. London: L. Alexander, 1817.

*A Theological and Critical Treatise on the Primogeniture and Integrity of the Holy Language: Showing Its Origin, in Unison with the Copiousness of Its Grammatical and Etymological System, to Have Been from Time Immemorial Retroceding to That of the Creation.* London: printed for the author by Richard Taylor, 1835.

*Torat ha-Bayit.* MS Jews College 4 (now London School of Jewish Studies MS 4). Digital copy in National Library of Israel, NLI Film no. F 5376.

### Archival Sources Related to Solomon Bennett

Archives of the Royal Literary Fund. British Library, London, Western Manuscripts: Loan 96 RLF 1/526.

[Applications to the Royal Literary Fund by Mr. Solomon Bennett and Mrs. Elizabeth Bennett, his widow, and letters of support from Bennett's Christian friends and his responses.]

Historisches Archiv. Preussischen Akademie der Künste, Berlin. PrAdk 0137. [Evidence of Bennett's membership in the Royal Academy of Art in Berlin.]

Library of the London School of Jewish Studies, London. MS Jews College 116. [A collection of personal documents Bennett apparently carried with him during his travels from Polotsk to London, including his official documents in Russian permitting his exit from Polotsk, a French translation of his graduation certificate from the Royal Academy in Copenhagen, German and Danish documents related to his membership in the Royal Academy of Art in Berlin and the honors he received, and several letters.]

National Archives. Richmond, United Kingdom. [Letters from Bennett to Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee.]

### Reviews of Bennett's Works

"A Critical Investigation into the Merits of the Lecture [of Hyman Hurwitz]." *The Athenaeum and Literary Chronicle* 65 (January 21, 1829): 40.

"A Critical Investigation into the Merits of the Lecture [of Hyman Hurwitz]." *The Christian Recorder: A Religious and Literary Journal* 2 (Thursday, February 5, 1829): 30.

"Mr. Bennett's Constancy of Israel." *The Literary Panorama* 7 (December 1, 1809): 460–469.

"The Constancy of Israel." *The Jewish Expositor and the Friend of Israel* 1 (1816): 272–276.

"The Constancy of Israel," *The Monthly Review or the Literary Journal Enlarged* 68 (August 1812): 396–401 (article 8).

"A Discourse on Sacrifices." *Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature* 12 (March 2, 1817): 219–23.

"A Discourse on Sacrifices." *New Evangelical Magazine and Review* 3 (April 1817): 123–124.

"Opinions of Modern Jews on Sacrifices." *The Jewish Expositor and Friend of Israel* 1 (December 1816): 401–414. Reprinted in *Letters and Essays Controversial and Critical on Subjects Connected with Conversion and National Restoration of Israel First Published in the Jewish Expositor*, ed. William Cuninghame, 145–168. London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1822.

"Solomon Bennett's Bible." *The Spectator*, April 10, 1841, 355.

"Specimen of a New Translation of the Hebrew Bible." *The Times*, October 24, 1840.

## Works by Others

- Asarfati, Joseph Illuminator, Josué Ben Abraham Ibn Gaon, David Kimhi, and Samuel Ben Abraham Ibn Nathan. *Cervera Bible*. [N.p.: n.p., 12th–13th century.] PDF. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021668000/>.
- Baker, Thomas. *Reflections upon Learning, Wherein Is Shewn the Insufficiency Thereof, in Its Several Particulars, in Order to Evince the Usefulness and Necessity of Revelation by a Gentleman*. London: A. Bosvile, 1699.
- Barham, Francis. “Editor’s Preface.” In *The Hebrew and English Holy Bible: The Hebrew Reprinted from the Text of Heidenheim*. Revised by Solomon Bennett, edited by Francis Barham. London: printed for the Family of the late Solomon Bennett and sold by William Straker, 1841.
- Belais, Abraham. *Elegy on the Death of His Royal Highness Augustus Frederick Duke of Sussex: Also a Prayer for Her Majesty the Queen and All the Royal Family*. Heb. & Eng. London: the author, 5603 [1843].
- Bellamy, John. *The Ophion: or, The Theology of the Serpent*. London: sold by Hatchard, Williams, and Arch, 1811.
- Bernard, Hermann Hedwig, trans. *The Main Principles of the Creed and Ethics of the Jews, Exhibited in Selections from the Yad Hachazakah of Maimonides*. Cambridge: J. Smith, printer to the University, 1832.
- “The Bible-Printing Monopoly.” *Eclectic Review*, 3rd ser., 9 (June 1833): 509–533.
- Bolaffey, Hayim Vita. *The Aleph-Beth: or The First Step to the Hebrew Language*. London: Galabin and Marchand, 1811.
- Bolaffey, Hayim Vita. *An Easy Grammar of the Primæval Language, Commonly Called Hebrew, Entitled “Orah meshor” or, The “Straight Path” To Real Knowledge, Fully Exemplified by Instructive and Elegant Extracts*. London: Hatchard and G. & W. B. Whittaker, 1820.
- [Calmet, Augustin.] *Calmet’s Great Dictionary of the Holy Bible*. Trans. and ed. Charles Taylor. London: printed for Charles Taylor, 1797.
- “The Circumcision Register of Myer Solomon of the Western Synagogue, 1782–1839.” *JCR-UK: The Susser Archive*. August 18, 2014. <https://www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/susser/myersolomoncirqreg.htm>.
- Cohen, S. I. *Elements of the Jewish Faith*. Richmond, VA: William W. Gray, 5577 [1817].
- Crawford, Charles. *A Letter to the Hebrew Nation*. London: T. Becket, 1805.
- Crawford, Charles. *Three Letters to the Hebrew Nation by the Author of “The Christian,” a Poem*. London: W. Whittemore, 1817.
- De Morgan, Sophia Elizabeth. *Threescore Years and Ten: Reminiscences of the Late Sophia Elizabeth De Morgan*. Ed. Mary A. De Morgan. London: R. Bentley, 1895.
- Delgado, Isaac. *A New English Translation of the Pentateuch, Being a Thorough Correction of the Present Translation, Wherever It Deviates from the Genuine Sense of the Hebrew Expressions, or Where It Renders Obscure the Meaning of the Text; or, Lastly, When It Occasions a Seeming Contradiction: Proving the Validity of Such Emendations by Critical Remarks and Illustrations, Grounded on Other Instances in Scripture Where the Like Words and Phrases Occur*. London: printed for the author by W. Richardson, 1789.
- Eaton, Daniel Isaac. *Trial of Mr. Daniel Isaac Eaton, for Publishing the Third and Last Part of Paine’s Age of Reason: Before Lord Ellenborough, Court of King’s Bench, Guildhall, March 6, 1812*. London: Daniel Isaac Eaton, 1812. Reprint, N.p.: Forgotten Books, 2018.

- Essenus [John Jones]. *A New Version of the First Three Chapters of Genesis; Accompanied with Dissertations Illustrative of the Creation, the Fall of Man, the Principle of Evil, and the Plagues of Egypt: To Which Are Annexed, Strictures on Mr. Bellamy's Translation*. London: Rowland Hunter, 1819.
- Fleury, Claude, *The Manners of the Ancient Israelites*. Trans. A. Clarke. 2nd edn. Manchester: S. Russell for W. Baynes, 1805.
- Forman, Walter. *Treatises on Several Very Important Subjects on Natural Philosophy*. London: Wason and Foxwell, 1832.
- Gill, John. *An Exposition of the New Testament*. 3 vols. London: printed for the author, 1746–1748.
- Gill, John. *An Exposition of the Old Testament*. 6 vols. London: printed for the author, 1748–1766.  
[An edition of both works is available online as “John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible.”  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20001010153543/http://www.freegrace.net/gill/.](https://web.archive.org/web/20001010153543/http://www.freegrace.net/gill/)]
- Hahn, Meir. *Shot Lashon*. Hamburg/Altona: Samuel and Judah Bun Segal, 1817.
- Hartmann, Anton Theodor. “Nachrichte für alttestamentlich Philologen.” *Leipziger Literatur Zeitung* 2, no. 57 (December 1833): 473–476.
- Housman, Catherine. *Letter to Charles Empson, Esq.* London: Hughes and Robinson, 1848.
- Housman, Catherine. *Letter to Dr. Spry in Vindication of the Word of God against Every Species of Scientific Opposition*. London: W. Hughes, 1839.
- Housman, Catherine. *Meditations on the Scriptural Interpretations Contained in Sir William Drummond’s “Oedipus Judaicus.”* London: Hughes and Robinson, 1849.
- Housman, Catherine. *Michtav o-Ahvah mi-Sefer Torah Limhot et ha-Aglah / A Writing or Declaration from the Law Book, to Obliterate the House of the Revolver, or Solar System*. London: A. J. Valpy, 1821.
- Housman, Catherine. *Observations on a Volume Recently Published Entitled “Perfect Peace” or Letters Memorial of the Late John Warren Howell, Esq. of Bath, M.R.C.S.* London: W. Hughes, 1844.
- Housman, Catherine. *Three Letters to a Friend*. London: A. J. Valpy, 1833.
- Hurwitz, Hyman. *An Introductory Lecture Delivered in the University of London, on Tuesday, November 11, 1828*. London: John Taylor, 1828.
- Hurwitz, Hyman. *Sefer Rishon Le-Mikra’ei Kodesh, or, Elements of the Hebrew Language*. London: L. Alexander, 1807.
- Hurwitz, Hyman. *Vindiciae Hebraicae: or, A Defence of the Hebrew Scriptures as a Vehicle of Revealed Religion as Occasioned by the Recent Strictures and Innovations of J. Bellamy; and in Confutation of His Attacks on All Preceding Translations, and on the Established Version in Particular*. London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1820.
- Lee, Rachel Fanny Antonina. *A Declaration (Relating to the Conduct of H. V. Bolaffey)*. London: F. Kiernan, 1824.
- Lee, Rachel Fanny Antonina. *Final Addenda to an Investigation into the Conduct of Lady Anne Dashwood and Mr. Delmar with Respect to Antonina the Baroness Despenser, Author of the Essay on Government, etc.* London: F. Kiernan, 1824.
- Lee, Rachel Fanny Antonina. *The Hebrew Epistle of Antonina Despenser etc. Entitled “Iggeret Ha-Kolel El Ha-Ivrin” or A Circular Epistle to the Hebrews*. London: H. N. and M. Solomon, 1822.
- Lee, Samuel. *A Letter to Mr. John Bellamy on His New Translation of the Bible*. Cambridge: J. Smith, 1821.
- Levi, David, trans. *The Form of Prayers, for the New Year: According to the Custom of the German and Polish Jews*. Rev. Isaac Levi. London: E. Justins, 5567 [1807].
- Levi, David. *Lingua Sacra*. 3 vols. London: W. Justins, 1785–1787.
- Loewe, Louis. *A Discourse [on Ps. cxix. 55] Delivered [ . . . ] on the Day of the Funeral of H.R.H. Prince Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex*. London: J. Wertheimer, 1843.

- Maimon, Solomon. *The Autobiography of Solomon Maimon: The Complete Translation*. Ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Abraham Socher. Trans. Paul Reitter. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.
- Moritz, John Christian. "Extracts from Letters of the Rev. L. Way." *The Jewish Expositor and the Friend of Israel* 4 (1818): 116-17.
- Newton, S. "Remarks on Mr. S. Bennett's Translation of 110th Psalm." *The Jewish Repository on Monthly Communications Respecting the Jews and the Proceedings of the London Society* 1 (1813): 132-137.
- Prescott, Bartholomew. *A Defence of The Divine System of the World*. Liverpool: J. Lang, 1823.
- The Queen v. Palmer: Verbatim Report of the Trial of William Palmer[.]* Transcribed from the Short-Hand Notes of Mr. Angelo Bennett. London: J. Allen, 1856.
- Report from Select Committee on the King's Printer's Patent*. Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, 8th of August 1832. London, 1833.
- Rintel, Meir. *Minḥat Kena'ot*. London: Jechiel Hanau, 1816-1817.
- Salomon, Gotthold. *Briefe an Herrn Anton Theodor Hartmann [ . . . ]: Über die von demselben aufgeworfene Frage: Darf eine völlige Gleichstellung in staatsbürgerlichen Rechten sämmtlichen Juden schon jetzt bewilligt werden?* Altona: Johann Friebrich Hammerich, 1835.
- Scott, John. *The Holy Scriptural Doctrine of the Divine Trinity in Essential Unity*. London: printed by the author and others, 1754.
- Sharpe, Charles. *Catalogue of the Rare and Valuable Library of the Late Rt. Hon. Edward Lord Viscount Kingsborough*. Dublin: Webb and Chapman, 1842.
- Simonds, Hart. *The Arguments of Faith or Incontrovertible Answers to Sophists and Epicureans*. London: printed for the author by F. Kiernan, 1822.
- Spineto, Marquis. *Lectures on the Elements of Hieroglyphics and Egyptian Antiquities*. London: printed for J. G. & F. Rivington, 1829.
- Tefilah ve-taḥanunim: [ . . . ] be-vate kenesiyot ha-Ashkenazim be-London uve-khol malkhut Britanya be-yom ḳevurat ha-ṣar*. London: Wertheimer, 1843. [Memorial prayers at the death of Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex.]
- Todd, Henry John. *A Vindication of Our Authorized Translation and Translators of the Bible; and of Preceding English Versions Authoritatively Commended to the Notice of Those Translators; Occasioned by Certain Objections Made by Mr. John Bellamy in His Late Translation of the Book of Genesis, and by Sir J. B. Burges, in His Reasons in Favour of a New Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. London: F. C. & J. Rivington, 1819.
- Whittaker, John William. *An Historical and Critical Enquiry into the Interpretation of the Hebrew Scripture with Remarks on Mr. Bellamy's New Translation*. Cambridge: J. Smith, 1819.
- Woodhouse, Robert. *Treatise on Astronomy Theoretical and Practical*. Cambridge: J. Smith for J. Deighton & Sons, 1821.
- Woodley, Captain William, R.N. *A Treatise on the Divine System of the Universe*. London: W. A. Wright, 1834.
- Yeates, Thomas. *Remarks on the Bible Chronology: Being an Essay towards Reconciling the Same with the Histories of the Eastern Nations*. London: Richard Watts, 1830.
- Xeres, John. *An Address to the Jews, by John Xeres: Containing His Reasons for Leaving the Jewish, and Embracing the Christian Religion*. London: J. Heptinstall, for Anthony Barker, 1710.

## Secondary Sources

- Ages, Arnold. "Calmet and the Rabbis." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 55 (1965): 340–349.
- Anderson-Riedel, Suzanne. *Creativity and Reproduction: Nineteenth Century Engraving and the Academy*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010.
- [Anonymous], revised by Anne Digby. "Blundell, James (1790–1878)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. April 8, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/2713>.
- Apple, Raymond. "Solomon Hirschel – 'High Priest of the Jews.'" 2006 Rabbi LA Falk Memorial Lecture, Delivered at the Great Synagogue, Sydney. *OzTorah*. <https://oztorah.com/2010/06/solomon-hirschel-high-priest-of-the-jews/>.
- Barnett, Arthur. "Solomon Bennett 1761–1838: Artist, Hebraist, and Controversialist." *Jewish Historical Society of England Transactions* 17 (1951–1952): 91–111.
- Barnett, Arthur. *The Western Synagogue through Two Centuries (1781–1961)*. London: Valentine Mitchell, 1961.
- Barnett, Richard. "Haham Meldola and Hazan de Sola." *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 21 (1962–1967): 15–17.
- "Bennett Solomon [Yom Tov b. Solomon]." *Cemetery Scribes*. 2013. <http://www.cemeteryscribes.com/getperson.php?personID=12941&tree=Cemeteries>.
- Boase, G. C., revised by H. C. G. Matthew. "Hewlett, John (1756/7–1844)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. November 12, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13154>.
- Brown, Philip A. H. *London Publishers and Printers, c. 1800–1870*. London: British Library, 1982.
- Chamberlain, Muriel E. "Drummond, Sir William, of Logiealmond (1770?–1828)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. January 5, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/8088>.
- Colbert, Benjamin. "Christopher Lake Moody." *British Travel Writing*, University of Wolverhampton. 2017. <https://btw.wlv.ac.uk/authors/1004>.
- Courtney, W. P., revised by Richard Jenkyns. "Valpy, Abraham John (*bap.* 2786, *d.* 1854)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 17, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28054>.
- Cream, Naomi. "Isaac Leo Lyon: The First Free Jewish Migrant to Australia?" *Journal of the Australian Jewish Historical Society* 12 (1993): 3–16.
- Cream, Naomi. "Reverend Solomon Lyon of Cambridge (1755–1820)." *Jewish Historical Studies* 36 (1999–2001): 31–69.
- Daiches, David. "The Beginnings of Anglo-Jewish Biblical Exegesis and Bible Translation." *Miscellanies (Jewish Historical Society of England)* 4 (1942): 20–32.
- Daiches, David. *The King James Version: An Account of the Development and Sources of the English Bible of 1611 with Special Reference to the Hebrew Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941.
- Davidson, Israel. *Ozár ha-shira ve-ha-piyyut* [Thesaurus of medieval Hebrew poetry]. Vol. 1. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1924.
- Davis, Michael T. "'That Odious Class of Men Called Democrats': Daniel Isaac Eaton and the Romantics 1794–1795." *History* 84 (January 1999): 74–92.
- Dawes, Stephen B. *Adam Clarke: Methodism's First Old Testament Scholar*. Methodist Historical Association Occasional Publication 2. Truro, England: Cornish Methodist Historical Association, 1994.
- de Quincey, Thomas. "The Female Infidel." Chap. 4 of *Autobiographic Sketches, 1790–1803*, 128–144. De Quincey's Works 14. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1862.
- Ditchfield, G. M. "Stanhope, Charles, third Earl Stanhope" (1753–1816). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. November 11, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26241>.

- Dubnov, Simon M. *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland: From the Earliest Times Until the Present Day*. Trans. I. Friedlaender. 3 vols. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1916–1920.
- Endelman, Todd M. *The Jews of Britain, 1656–2000*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Endelman, Todd M. *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714–1830*. 1979. Reprint, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999.
- Feiner, Shmuel. *The Jewish Enlightenment*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.
- Fizman, Samuel. *Constitution and Reform in Eighteenth-Century Poland: The Constitution of 3 May 1791*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Ganzel, Tova. “Between the Prophet and His Prophecy: Ezekiel’s Visionary Temple in Its Historical Context.” In *The Believer and the Modern Study of the Bible*, ed. Tova Ganzel, Yehudah Brandes, and Chayuta Deutsch, 463–497. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019.
- Ganzel, Tova, and Shalom E. Holtz. “Ezekiel’s Temple in Babylonian Context.” *Vetus Testamentum* 64 (2014): 211–226.
- Garnett, Richard, revised by J. Gilliland. “Lee [née Dashwood], Rachel Fanny Antonina (1773?–1829).” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. May 11, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16302>.
- Gascoigne, John. “From Bentley to the Victorians: The Rise and Fall of British Newtonian Natural Theology.” *Science in Context* 2 (1988): 219–256.
- Gillman, Abigail. *A History of German Jewish Bible Translation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- Goldberg, Natalie Naimark. “Salomon Pappenheim and His Writings: Rabbi, Maskil, Aufklaerer.” In *The Maskil in Our Time: Studies in Honor of Moshe Pelli*, ed. Zev Garber, Lev Hakak, and Shmuel Katz, 34–57. Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me’uhad, 2017.
- Goldish, Matt. “The Battle for ‘True’ Jewish Christianity: Peter Allix’s Polemics Against the Unitarians and Millenarians.” In *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin*, ed. James Force and David Katz, 143–162. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- Goldish, Matt. “A Convert among the London Conversos: New Light on the Oral Law Debate.” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Jewish Studies, Panel: “Conversos and Conversions in Early Modern Europe.” Boston, MA, December 22, 2003.
- Goldish, Matt. *Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998.
- Goodwin, Gordon, revised by Alan Bell. “King, Edward, Viscount Kingsborough (1795–1837).” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15560>.
- Gottlieb, Michah. *The Jewish Reformation: Bible Translation and Middle-Class German Judaism as Spiritual Enterprise*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.
- Goudeau, Jeroen. “Ezekiel for Solomon: The Temple of Jerusalem in Seventeenth-Century Leiden and the Case of Cocceius.” In *The Imagined and Real Jerusalem in Art and Architecture*, ed. Jeroen Goudeau, Mariette Verhoeven, and Wouter Weijers, 88–113. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- Hamilton, Thomas, revised by John D. Haigh. “Lee, Samuel (1793–1852).” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16309>.
- Haykin, Michael A. G. “Gill, John (1697–1771).” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10731>.
- Henderson, T. F., revised by John Van der Kiste. “Augustus Frederick, Prince, duke of Sussex (1883–1843).” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. January 3, 2008. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/900>.
- Hermann, Frank. “Christie, James (1730–1803).” *Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5362>.
- Hind, Arthur. *A History of Engraving and Etching from the Fifteenth Century to the Year 1914*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1923.

- Hundert, Gershon David. *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Hyman, Leonard. "Hyman Hurwitz: The First Anglo-Jewish Professor." *Jewish Historical Society of England Transactions* 21 (1962–1967): 232–242.
- "Hyman Hurwitz (1770–1844)." *UCL Bloomsbury Project*. April 11, 2011. [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/articles/individuals/hurwitz\\_hyman.htm](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/articles/individuals/hurwitz_hyman.htm).
- Jacobs, Joseph, and M. Seligsohn. "Houbigant, Charles François." In *Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, managing ed. Isidore Singer, 6:484. 12 vols. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901–1906.
- Kaplan, Yosef. "'Karaites' in Early Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam." In *Sceptics, Millenarians, and Jews*, ed. David Katz and Jonathan Israel, 221–229. Leiden: Brill, 1990.
- Katz, David S. *The Jews in the History of England, 1484–1850*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002.
- Keren, Naomi. "From Berlin and Amsterdam to Copenhagen: Maskilic Networks and Their Influence on the Formation of Modern Jewish Schools in Copenhagen" [Hebrew]. Paper delivered at Bar Ilan University, March 3, 2022. Ramat Gan, Israel.
- Keren, Naomi. "Modern Jewish Identities in Denmark as Reflected in Ego-Documents (1770–1870)" [in Hebrew]. Ph.D. diss., Bar Ilan University, forthcoming.
- Kirschstein, Salli. *Juedische graphiker aus der zeit von 1625–1825*. Berlin: Der Zirkel Architektur-Verlag, 1918.
- Klier, John. *Russia Gathers Her Jews: The Origins of the Jewish Question in Russia, 1772–1825*. De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986.
- Knight, Frida. *University Rebel: The Life of William Frend (1757–1841)*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1971.
- Larson, Timothy. *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Lawrence, Sir Thomas. "Barrington, Shute (1734–1826)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1011940?rskey=mPZSxt&result=2>.
- Le Foll, Claire. *La Biélorussie dans l'histoire et l'imaginaire des Juifs de l'Empire russe (1772–1905)*. Collection Etudes juives. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2017.
- Leary, Louis. "Charles Crawford: A Forgotten Poet of Early Philadelphia." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 83 (1959): 293–306.
- Lee, Matthew. "Birkbeck, George (1776–1841)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. May 26, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/2454>.
- Lister, Andrew. "The Duke of Sussex and T. J. Pettigrew's *Bibliotheca Sussexiana*." *Antiquarian Book Monthly Review* 14 (1987): 58–65.
- Lobban, Michael. "Law, Edward, first Baron Ellenborough (1750–1818)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. October 3, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16142>.
- Lowenstein, Steven. *The Berlin Jewish Community: Enlightenment, Family, and Crisis, 1770–1830*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Lukowski, Jerzy. *The Partitions of Poland: 1772, 1793, 1795*. London: Longman, 1999.
- Mandelbrote, Scott. "Stackhouse, Thomas (1681/2–1752)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26197>.
- Mandelbrote, Scott, and Michael Ledger-Lomas, eds. *Dissent and the Bible, c. 1650–1950*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Margoliouth, D. S., revised by J. B. Katz. "Yeates, Thomas (1768–1839)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. May 24, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30208>.

- Massil, Stephen. "Two Hebrew Grammars and the Enlightenment." *Jewish Historical Studies* 41 (2007): 99–143.
- Mayers, Simon. "Monuments to the Truth of Christianity: Anti-Judaism in the Works of Adam Clarke." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 93 (2017): 45–66.
- Mayers, Simon. "Representations of 'the Jews' in Methodist Discourses: Report Based on a Brief Visit to the Methodist Archives and Research Centre." August 25, 2014. Available at <https://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/784513/27385906/1482318882317/background-mayers.pdf?token=8H90dl5abkmSoGCYjsbSFsX90bM%3D>.
- McCue, Daniel Lawrence, Jr. "Eaton, Daniel Isaac (bap. 1753, d. 1814)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. October 4, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/8421>.
- Meirovich, Harvey. "Ashkenazic Reactions to the Conversionists, 1800–1850." *Transactions and Miscellanies, Jewish Historical Society of England* 26 (1974–1978): 6–25.
- Morrison, Tessa. "Isaac Newton and the Architectural Models of Solomon's Temple." *Avello Publishing Journal* 1 (2013): 1–18.
- Moshenska, Gabriel. "'The Finest Theological Library in the World': The Rise and Fall of the Bibliotheca Sussexiana." In *Book Collecting in Ireland and Britain 1650–1850*, ed. Elizabethanne Boren, 168–187. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2018.
- Moshenska, Gabriel. "Selected Correspondence from the Papers of Thomas Pettigrew (1791–1865), Surgeon and Antiquary." *Journal of Open Archaeology Data* 1 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.5334/4f913ca0cbb89>.
- Moshenska, Gabriel. "Thomas 'Mummy' Pettigrew and the Study of Egypt in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain." In *History of Egyptology: Interdisciplinary Measures*, ed. William Carruthers, 201–214. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015.
- Nangle, Benjamin C. *The Monthly Review Second Series, 1790–1815*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955.
- Norman, Jeremy. "Samuel Taylor Develops the First System of Shorthand Used Throughout the English Speaking World." *Jeremy Norman's HistoryofInformation.com*. December 9, 2024. <https://historyofinformation.com/detail.php?id=3234>.
- Ohana, Michal Aziza. "A Moroccan Jew's Journey into Anglican Christianity." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 75, no. 2 (Autumn 2024): 337–360.
- Opie, John. "Stanhope, Charles, third Earl Stanhope (1753–1816)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1001276>.
- Owen, William. "Burgess, Thomas (1756–1857)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1009447>.
- Parente, F. F. "De Rossi, Giovanni Bernardo." In *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*. Vol. 39, ed. Vincenzo Cappelletti. Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1991. [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/de-rossi-giovanni-bernardo\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/de-rossi-giovanni-bernardo_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/).
- Petuchowski, Jacob J. "The Mumar: A Study in Rabbinic Psychology." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 30 (1959): 179–190.
- Pfeffer, Jeremy I. *"From One End of the Earth to the Other": The London Bet Din, 1805–1855, and the Jewish Convicts Transported to Australia*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2008.
- Powers, Anne M. *The Female Infidel: The Vindication of Fanny Dashwood*. [Author.] 2018.
- Price, D. T. W. "Thomas Burgess (1756–1837)." *Dictionary of National Biography*. October 8, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/3985>.
- Rabens, Michael. "Baroque Visions of the Temple of Jerusalem." *Oz* 17 (1995), article 8. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2378-5853.1274>.

- Redslob, Gustav Moritz. "Hartmann, Anton Theodor." In *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 10:680–681. Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1879.
- Reid, Francis. "Isaac Frost's *Two Systems of Astronomy* (1846): Plebeian Resistance and Scriptural Astronomy." *British Journal of the History of Science* 38 (2005): 161–177.
- Rigg, J. M., revised by Emma Major. "Bayly [Baily], Anselm (1718/19–1794)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. November 10, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1763>.
- Ritchie, Lionel Alexander. "Keith, Alexander (1792–1880)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15262>.
- Roberts, Daniel S. "Wordsworth's Reading of Rachel Lee: de Quincy's Evidence." *Notes and Queries* 49 (2002): 465–467.
- Roe, Nicholas. "Freund, William (1757–1841)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. June 8, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10169>.
- Rohdewald, Stefan. "Durch Mikroskop und Fernglas: Belarussische gesamt-europäische und andere Geschichte(n)." In *Belarus-Reisen: Empfehlungen aus der deutschen Wissenschaft*, ed. Thomas Bohn and Marion Rutz, 181–195. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020.
- Rohdewald, Stefan. "Eine Mischung von Menschen und Sprachen wie beim Turmbau zu Babel: Die russländische Vielvölkerstadt Polock im Kaleidoskop von Augenzeugenberichten." In *Ein weißer Fleck in Europa . . . : Die Imagination der Belarus als Kontaktzone zwischen Ost und West*, ed. Thomas M. Bohn and Victor Shadurski, 127–138. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2011.
- Rohdewald, Stefan. "Schwache unter Schwachen: Zur Aushandlung jüdische Raumes in Städten des Grossfürstentums Litauen im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert am Beispiel von Polock." In *Machträume der frühneuzeitlichen Stadt*, ed. Christian Hochmuth and Susanne Rau, 259–281. Konstanz: UVK Verlag, 2006.
- Rohdewald, Stefan. *Vom Polocker Venedig: Kollektives Handeln sozialer Gruppen einer Stadt zwischen Ost- und Mitteleuropa (Mittelalter, frühe Neuzeit, 19. Jh. bis 1914)*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005.
- Rosenthal, Herman, A. S. Waldstein, and Peter Wiernik. "Polotsk (Polotzk)." In *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901–1906). <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12257-polotsk-polotzk>.
- Rosman, Moshe. "Poland before 1795." *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. <https://encyclopedia.yivo.org/article/17>.
- Roth, Cecil. "Eccentric Englishwomen: III. 'Baroness Despensers.'" *The Spectator*, August 30, 1937, 792–793.
- Roth, Cecil. "Rabbi Solomon Hirschell and His Contemporaries." Chap. 13 of *The History of the Great Synagogue* (1950). Available at JCR-UK, <https://www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/susser/roth/chthirteen.htm>.
- Roth, Cecil. "Two Livornese Jews in England: Michael Bolaffi, Musician, and Hayim Vita Bolaffey, Linguist." *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 16 (1945–1951): 223–225.
- Rubens, Alfred. "Early Anglo-Jewish Artists." *Jewish Historical Society of England Transactions* 14 (1935–1939): 112–117.
- Rubens, Alfred. *A Jewish Iconography*. Rev. edn. London: Jewish Museum, 1981.
- Rubinstein, Chris. "Coleridge and Jews." *Coleridge Bulletin*, n.s., 24 (Winter 2004): 91–96.
- Rubinstein, Hilary L. "Hirschell [Hirschel, Herschell], Solomon (1762–1842)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. October 8, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13363>.
- Rubinstein, Hilary L. "Lyon, Hart [Hirsch Lewin or Loebel]." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 28, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17275>.
- Ruderman, David B. *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

- Ruderman, David B. *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Ruderman, David B. *Missionaries, Converts, and Rabbis: The Evangelical Alexander McCaul and Jewish-Christian Debate in the Nineteenth Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020.
- Ruderman, David B. "A Native of Poland Professing the Arts in London": The Unconventional Jewish Life and Thought of Solomon Yom Tov Bennett (1767–1838)." *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 17 (2023): 176–203.
- Sander, Philippe. "Wagner, Friedrich Ludwig." In *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, 40:494–495. Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1896.
- Seidman, Naomi. *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Sellers, Ian. "Adam Clarke (1762–1832)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. October 10, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5483>.
- Shear, Adam. "Footprints and the Duke of Sussex (Augustus, 1773–1843)." *Footprints: Jewish Books Through Time and Place*. April 24, 2020. <https://edblogs.columbia.edu/footprints/2020/04/24/footprints-and-the-duke-of-sussex-augustus>.
- Sheehan, Jonathan. *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Spychal, Martin. "A strenuous and able Reformer": Dr Stephen Lushington (1782–1873)." *The Victorian Commons*. September 17, 2020. <https://victoriancommons.wordpress.com/2020/09/17/a-strenuous-and-able-reformer-dr-stephen-lushington-1782-1873>.
- Strong, James, and John McClintock. "Pappenheim, Salomon Ben-Seligmann." In *The Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1880. Available at <https://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/P/pappenheim-salomon-ben-seligmann.html>.
- Svanholm, Lise. "Danish-Jewish Painting." In *Danish Jewish Art*, ed. Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen, 481–513. Copenhagen: Rhodos, 1999.
- Symons, John. "Pettigrew, Thomas Joseph (1791–1865)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 24, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22063>.
- Taylor, Anne. "Barham, Francis Foster [known as Alist Francis Barham] (1808–1871)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. October 10, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1373>.
- Taylor, Marion Ann. "Anglican Women and the Bible in Nineteenth-Century Britain." *Anglican and Episcopal History* 75 (2006): 527–552.
- Taylor, Marion Ann. "Women and Biblical Criticism in Nineteenth-Century England." In *Faith and Feminism in Nineteenth-Century Religious Communities*, ed. Ruth Albrecht and Michaela Sohn-Kronthaler, 29–62. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019.
- Taylor, Marion Ann, and Agnes Choi, eds. *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: An Historical and Biographical Guide*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2012.
- Tedder, H. R., revised by Francis Russell. "Christie, James (1773–1831)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5363>.
- Thompson, Wendy. "The Printed Image in the West: Engraving." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. October 2003. [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/engr/hd\\_engr.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/engr/hd_engr.htm).
- Topham, Jonathan R. *Reading the Book of Nature: How Eight Best Sellers Reconnected Christianity and the Sciences on the Eve of the Victorian Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022.
- Varley, E. A. "Barrington, Shute (1734–1826)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. October 8, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1534>.

- Webb, Alfred. "Edward King, Viscount Kingsborough." In *A Compendium of Irish Biography: Comprising Sketches of Distinguished Irishmen, and of Eminent Persons Connected with Ireland by Office or by Their Writings*, 275. Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son, 1878.
- Weisman, Karen A. *Singing in a Foreign Land: Anglo-Jewish Poetry, 1812–1847*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.
- "Wodzisław Śląski: Demography." *Polin: Virtual Shtetl*. 2017. <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/node/453/100-demography/22139-demography>.
- Yamey, Adam. "A Jewish Academy in North London." *Yamey*. December 3, 2020. <https://adam-yamey-writes.com/2020/12/03/a-jewish-academy-in-north-london/>.
- Yates, Nigel, ed. *Bishop Burgess and His World: Culture, Religion, and Society in Britain, Europe, and North America in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007.
- Young, Sue. "John Bellamy 1755–1842." *Sue Young Histories*. August 16, 2012. <https://www.sueyounghistories.com/2012-08-16-john-bellamy-1755-1842>.

# Index

- Albo, Joseph 184  
Alexander, Alexander 156  
Alexander, Levi 156  
Allix, Pierre 46  
*Almagest* of Ptolemy 90  
*Appeal to the Judicious and Candid Class of the Hebrew Congregation*. See Lee, Rachel Fanny Antonina  
Aristotle 173  
Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex 84, 87, 90–93, 96, 139, 163  
Averroës (Ibn Rushd) 87
- Babbage, Charles 115  
Bacon, Francis 175  
Baker, Thomas 114  
Barlin, Frederick Benjamin 58, 59, 60, 210  
Barham, Francis Foster 87, 95–96, 119, 172, 175, 179–180, 182, 184  
Barnett, Arthur 2, 31, 62, 170, 208  
Barrington, Shute 88, 126, 157  
Bartolucci, Giulio 153  
Bath. See Housman, Catherine  
Bayley, Anselm 155, 156, 160, 164  
Bellamy, John 141, 160, 164–65, 198–99, 202  
Ben Oven, Joshua 59  
Bennett, Angelo 35, 36, 37  
Bennett, Charles 35, 37  
Bennett, Elizabeth 35, 187–88  
Bennett, Eve 35  
Bennett, Isaac [Newton] 35, 37, 193  
Bennett, Israel 35  
Bennett, Moses 35, 37  
Bennett, Nathaniel 35  
Bennett, Samuel 126  
Bennett, Sarah 35  
Bennett, Solomon 35  
Bennett, Solomon Yom Tov  
– his affection for the English nation 41  
– his commentary on the Temple of Ezekiel 9, 22, 34, 72, 80, 93, 109, 118, 123–39, 140, 190, 192, 205  
– his *Constancy of Israel* 9, 14, 22, 35–56, 78, 84, 132, 139, 189, 198  
– his *Constancy of Israel* in German 213–15  
– his *Critical Remarks on the Authorized Version* 158–62  
– his *Discourse on Sacrifices* 58–59, 197–202  
– his early life in Polotsk 13–24  
– as engraver 9, 22, 31, 208–12  
– his family in London 35–37  
– known as Benet Shlomovich 23  
– his *The Molten Sea* 82, 117, 127, 136, 190, 203–05  
– his *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place* 62, 69–72  
– his *Specimen of a New Version of the Hebrew Bible* 91, 118, 162–170  
– his *Tene Bikkurim* 62, 67, 70, 72  
– as translator of Old Testament 9, 152, 155–86  
– his view of Berlin Jews 32–34  
– his view of modern science 119–20, 167–69, 173–75  
Berlin 1, 10, 13, 26–34, 35, 37, 43, 52, 57, 58, 140, 186, 208  
– its Royal Academy of Fine Arts and Mechanical Sciences 10, 31, 203  
Berlin, Zevi Hirsch (Hirschell Lewin) 33, 57–58  
Birkbeck, George 163  
Blackstone, William 99  
Bloch, Marcus 32, 33  
Blundell, James 163  
Bolaffey, Haim Vita 102–109  
Boyle, Isaac 115  
Brill, Joel 32, 33  
Buffon, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Count of 175  
Burgess, Thomas 87, 88–89, 97, 126, 147  
Buxtorf, Johannes, elder and younger 153
- Calmet, Augustin 128, 129, 137, 203  
Catechism. See Cohen, S. I.  
Catherine II 19  
Chalmers, Thomas 115  
Chodowiecki, Daniel 26, 30, 209  
Christie, James (the Younger) 79, 83–84  
Clarke, Adam 51–52, 151, 160, 164, 166–67, 182, 198, 199, 200–01, 202  
Coccejus, Johannes 128

- Cohen, S. I. 59, 61–66  
 Cohen, Tobias 195  
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor 80, 140–41  
*Constancy of Israel*. See Bennett, Solomon Yom Tov, his *Constancy of Israel*  
 Copenhagen 1, 10, 13, 20, 21, 24–26, 34, 37, 43, 52, 189, 207  
 – its Royal Danish Academy of Arts, 21, 22, 24–26  
 Copernicus, Nicolas 116, 173, 175  
 Copper engraving 1, 98, 207–08  
 Crawford, Charles 39, 42–46  
 Crescas, Hasdai 184  
 Cross, Walter 165  
 Cusanus, Nicolas de 175  
 Cuvier, Georges 114
- Daiches, David 156  
 Dashwood, Anne 99, 106  
 Dashwood, Francis 99, 104  
 Delgado, Isaac 157–58, 162  
 De Morgan, Sophia Elizabeth 82  
 De Rossi, Giovanni Bernardo 200  
 Diaspora 2, 47–53, 55, 192  
 Drummond, William 87, 93–95, 96–7, 116–17, 120, 121, 125, 152, 210  
 Dubnov, Simon 19  
 Duke's Place. See the Rabbinate and rabbis; Solomon Hirschell
- Eaton, Daniel Isaac 159  
 Eiger, Akiva 67  
 Elijah Gaon of Vilna 14  
 England. See London  
 Englishing of Anglo-Jewish culture 5–6  
 Endelman, Todd 4–5
- Farissol, Abraham 193, 194, 195  
 Fleury, Claude 51, 198  
 Fitzgerald, Gerald 115  
 Forman, George 114  
 Fraser, G. 10, 211  
 Frederick II, King of Prussia 26, 28, 31, 207, 208  
 Frensdorff, William 79–83, 88, 96, 97, 107, 125, 163, 203, 205  
 Frey, Joseph 7
- Galileo, Galilei 173  
 Gilchrist, John Borthwick 126  
 Gill, John 129, 136  
 Gillman, Abigail 185  
 Goldish, Matt 46  
 Goldsmid, Isaac Lyon 126, 141  
 Gordon, Loudon and Lockhart 99, 101  
 Gottlieb, Michah 185  
 Gravitation. See Newton and Newtonianism  
 Great Britain. See London
- Hahn, Meir 62, 65, 66  
 Halle-Wolfssohn, Aaron 32, 33  
 Halley, Edmond 114  
 Hartmann, Anton Theodor 213, 214  
*Hasidim* 14  
*Haskalah*. See *maskil*, *maskilim*  
 Hebrew language 3, 140–154  
 Heller, Yom Tov Lipmann 129, 132, 136  
 Herschel, William 114, 175  
 Hertz, Marcus 32, 33  
 Hewlett, John 160, 164  
 Higgins, Godfrey 91  
 Hirschell, Solomon 9, 21, 32–33, 57–77, 78, 83, 126, 144, 190, 192, 210  
 Horsley, Samuel 175  
 Houbigant, Charles François 151  
 Housman Catherine 93, 97, 98, 110–120, 121, 125, 126, 163, 175–76, 193, 210, 211  
 Hunter, R. 123, 211  
 Hurwitz, Hyman 3, 140–48, 155, 164–65, 192, 199  
 Hurwitz, Pinḥas 194, 195
- Ibn Ezra, Abraham 162, 177
- Kaplan, Yosef 66  
 Karaites 65, 66–67  
 Katz, Jacob 5  
 Keith, Alexander 114  
 Kennicott, Benjamin 6, 88–89, 115, 158, 200  
 Kepler, Johannes 175  
 Kimḥi, David 89, 162, 201  
 King, Edward, Viscount Kingsborough 87, 89–90, 97, 163  
 Kirschstein, Salli 2, 10

- Laplace, Pierre-Simon 167, 168, 169, 175  
 Law, Edward, Lord Ellenborough 69  
 Lee, Rachel Fanny Antonina 74, 97, 98, 99–109, 120, 121, 122  
 Lee, Samuel 93, 163  
*Letter Addressed to the Hebrew Nation*. See Crawford, Charles  
 Levi ben Gershon [Gersonides] 87, 162, 177, 183  
 Levi, David 5, 155, 156, 157  
 Levison, Mordechai Gumpel Schnaber 145, 150  
 Lewis, John 163  
 Lindsey, Theophilus 80  
 Locke, John 7, 8  
 London 1, 5, 13, 20, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 42, 43, 52, 58, 62, 67, 68, 69, 70, 75, 78, 79, 99, 110, 132, 136, 139, 140, 141, 143, 145, 146, 147, 148, 189, 192, 203, 208  
 London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews 7, 40, 127, 201. See also Missionaries  
 Louisa Augusta, Queen of Prussia 26, 29, 208  
 Lushington, Stephen 163  
 Luther, Martin 186  
 Lyon, Isaac 103, 104  
 Lyon, Solomon 76, 103
- Maimon, Solomon 15  
 Maimonides, Moses 51, 62, 73, 74, 87, 116, 138, 173, 184, 194  
 Manetho 152  
 Marcus, Moses 194, 195  
 Margoliouth, Moses 195  
 Marriott, G. W. 126  
*Maskil, maskilim* 1, 26, 34, 192, 193  
 McCaul, Alexander 4, 195  
 Meirovich, Harvey 55  
 Meldola, David 57, 102, 108  
 Meldola, Raphael 58–59, 62, 72, 73, 76, 102, 126  
 Mendelssohn, Moses 5, 32, 33, 34, 185, 186, 194  
 Michalki, Jacob 73, 75  
*Minḥat Kena'ot*. See Rintel, Meir  
 Mirabeau, Gabriel Riquetti, Count of 175  
 Missionaries 7, 40, 43, 50–61  
 Mocatta, Moses 148, 163  
 Monarchy 1–2, 137–138, 184, 192  
 Montefiore, Moses 163  
 Moody, Christopher Lake 53–55
- Lissa, Jacob ben Jacob Moses of 67  
 Murray, John 115
- Napoléon I 207  
 Newton, Isaac, and Newtonianism 7, 8, 112–120, 128, 167, 168, 169, 173–76, 193  
*Nezah Yisra'el*. See Bennett Solomon Yom Tov, his *Constancy of Israel*  
 Nieto, David 47, 195
- Oedipus Judaicus*. See Drummond, William
- Paine, Thomas 159, 186  
 Pappenheim, Salomon Ben Seligman 150  
 Partition of Poland (1772) 13, 17–18, 52  
 Passicoff (Passek), Pieter Bogdanowitch 19, 20, 52  
 Paul I, Emperor of Russia 31  
 Pettigrew, Thomas 79, 83, 84–87, 90, 96  
 Polack, Mannes 67–68  
 Poland. See Polotsk  
 Polish Jews 2  
 Polotsk 1, 9, 13–24, 34, 35, 98  
 – its Jesuit College 22  
 Pope, Alexander 112  
 Prado, Hieronimo 128  
 Prescott, Bartholomew 175  
*Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place*. See Bennett, Solomon Yom Tov, his *Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place*  
 Prideaux, Humphrey 115  
 Priestly, Joseph 79, 90
- Rabbinate and rabbis 1, 3, 49, 72, 190  
 Rashi [Solomon Iarchi] 129, 132, 136, 162, 177  
 Reform Judaism 55  
 Reval 23  
 Riga 20, 21, 23–4  
 Rintel, Meir 62, 63, 65  
 Ryder, Henry 126
- Saadia Gaon 115  
 Salomon, Gotthold 214  
 Samaritan 166–67  
 Satanov, Yitzchak 33, 34  
 Scheuchzer, Jakob 203  
 Scott, John 114  
 Shakespeare, William 38, 207, 209

- Shorshei Emunah*. See Cohen, S. I.  
*Shot Lashon*. See Hahn, Meir  
 Simonds, Hart 109–10, n23  
 Slotover, Moses 33  
 Smith, Ethan 151  
 Snow, Joseph 80, 83  
 Soane, John 139  
 Soesmans, Lion 156  
 Solomon, Asher 163  
 Solomon, Morris 125, 126, 197  
 Solomon, Myer 123–24, 126, 163, 211  
 Spenser, John Charles 126  
 Spineto, Marquis 152  
 Spinoza, Benedict 194  
 Spry, Joseph Hume 115, 117, 118, 219  
 Stackhouse, Thomas 128–29, 136  
 Stanhope, Charles 83  
 Surenhusius, William 153
- Tallinn. See Reval  
 Tang, Abraham 5  
 Targum Yonatan, Targumim 177, 201  
 Taylor, Charles 203  
 Taylor, Samuel 37  
 Temple, First and Second 1, 137, 138, 146, 176, 179  
*Tene Bikkurim*. See Bennett, Solomon Yom Tov, his *Tene Bikkurim*
- Townsend, George 116  
 Translation of Old Testament into English 3, 9, 153–54, 155–186  
 – Comparison with German Jewish Translations 184–86
- Valpy, A. J. 123, 210  
 Vansittart, Nicholas 126  
 Villalpando, Juan Bautista 128
- Wagner, Friedrich Ludwig Wilhelm 213–15  
 Weiskopf, Lorens 26, 17, 208  
 Wilkins, John 175  
 Wirgman, Thomas 115  
 Woodhouse, Robert 114  
 Woodley, William 175  
 Wordsworth, William 100
- Xeres, John 43, 46–47
- Yagel, Abraham 194, 195  
 Yeates, Thomas 166
- Zemon Davis, Natalie 194  
 Zunz, Leopold 185, 186