

8. THE STUDY OF THE *MISHNAH* AND THE QUEST FOR CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN EARLY EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND: COMPLETING A NARRATIVE INITIATED BY RICHARD POPKIN

David B. Ruderman

Richard Popkin left an enormous impact on my life and my career as a Jewish historian. I first met Dick soon after I had assumed my first academic position as an assistant professor of history at the University of Maryland, sometime after 1974. He was visiting his friend Leonora Cohen Rosenfeld and he wanted to meet me. Why so distinguished an historian would seek me out in the first place, I hardly understood then. Years later, I came to appreciate how many others like me were identified by Popkin, invited to engage him in conversation, and to ultimately connect with each other intellectually and socially. From this first meeting many others followed. I greatly valued the interventions of Dick in bringing Jewish history into the mainstream of historical scholarship. In those days when Jewish studies scholars still felt insecure in the academy, unsure if their colleagues would care at all about their subject and what they brought to the table, Dick became a legitimating support to argue that Jewish studies did count. Together with George Mosse and Natalie Zemon Davis, two other senior scholars who reached out to me and many other younger scholars, Dick became a critical intermediary between Judaic learning and the humanities.

Our relationship remained strong for many years. Dick was the reader for my science book for Yale press. His David Levi article, unpublished until I insisted he publish it in the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, was the inspiration for my book on the Jewish enlightenment in England. The crowning moment of our relationship took place in May 2000, when Dick joined 40 other scholars at a conference at Penn's Center for Advanced Judaic Studies culminating in a year of study on Christian Hebraism. It was a wonderfully exciting year and the conference was a gem. Its high point came as Dick addressed the enthusiastic audience in its concluding session, speaking about his own journey in studying the subject of Jewish-Christian relationships for more than forty years and how he had been a solitary figure when he began but at this conference he was embraced by an entire community of scholars. Both the conference and the subsequent volume the fellows produced were dedicated to Dick Popkin. It was a touching moment for all who were present.

All who know Dick's work will recall his fascination with the *Mishnah* project of Adam Boreel, Rabbi Leon Templo, Menasseh ben Israel and others. As recently as 1999 in the conference proceedings celebrating the library of Narcissus Marsh, Dick waxed eloquently about two rare editions of Boreel's vocalized *Mishnah* of 1646 found in the library. The book was published without the name of any Christian despite the great involvement of Boreel, Dury, Hartlib and others. Efforts to translate the *Mishnah* into Spanish and Latin had begun in Cambridge by Isaac Abendana but they were never completed until the end of the century. The culmination of almost of century of interest in the text for Christian usage was William Surenhusius's complete translation of the *Mishnah* in a handsome folio edition accompanied with translations of Maimonides, Bertinora, and Surenhusius's own work, a remarkable achievement of Christian rabbinic scholarship at the end of the seventeenth century.¹

In honor of Dick's memory, I would like to continue the story where he left off because indeed the story has a long and fascinating history after Boreel's death in 1661 and well into the eighteenth century both in Holland and in England. I can even see the gleam in his eyes as I embrace a subject so close to his heart.²

I begin my own narrative with a heated public debate that broke out in England in 1722. In that year William Whiston (1667–1752), the enthusiastic but eccentric advocate and popularizer of Newtonian cosmology and author of numerous works on mathematics, physics, and astronomy, published a book entitled *Essay Towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament and for Vindicating the Citations Made Thence in the New Testament*. Within a very

¹ See David S. Katz, "The Abendana Brothers and the Christian Hebraists of Seventeenth Century England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 40 (1989), 28–52; Jan Wilhelm Wesselius, "I Don't Know Whether He will Stay for Long: Isaac Abendana's Early Years in England and His Latin translation of the Mishnah," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 22 (1988), 85–96; Israel Abrahams, "Isaac Abendana's Cambridge Mishnah and Oxford Calendars", *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, 8 (1915–1917), 98–121; Ernestine van der Wall, "The Dutch Hebraist Adam Boreel and the Mishnah Project," *Lias* 16 (1989), 239–263; Richard Popkin, "Some Aspects of Jewish-Christian Theological Interchanges in Holland and England 1640–1700," in *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century: Studies and Documents*, eds. Jan van den Berg and Ernestine van der Wall (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1988), pp. 8–11, and Richard Popkin, "Two Treasures of Marsh's Library," in *Judaeo-Christian Intellectual Culture in the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Allison Coudert, Sarah Hutton, Richard Popkin, and Gordon Weiner (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999), pp. 1–12.

² The following narrative is a shortened version of the account found in my book, *Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth Century England* (Philadelphia, PA, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

short time, the work triggered an enormous storm of controversy throughout England and even beyond.³

Whiston's basic position with regard to biblical prophecy had long been evolving prior to 1722. As early as 1707, he presented the core of his argument within the framework of the distinguished Robert Boyle lectures and then published them a year later in London a book called *The Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies*. From the outset, Whiston emphasized how critical the study of prophecy was in demonstrating the Christian faith because of the inadequacy of the design argument in convincing deists and unbelievers that God existed and actively intervened in the world. Employing the methods of an experimental scientist, he claimed that the more proofs of prophecy he could muster from the Bible and even extra-biblical works like the Sibylline oracles, the more solid the foundations of Christianity would become. There was simply strength in numbers. His system of prophetic hermeneutics could only work, however, if each prophecy he identified had only one fulfillment, and that was in Jesus Christ.

Whiston knew well that his insistence on a literal understanding of prophetic fulfillment without recourse to allegorical interpretations or to the possibility that prophecies might apply simultaneously to more than one object was controversial and went against the grain of generations of Christian exegesis. But upholding this one to one correspondence between the Old Testament Prophecy and its outcome in Christian teaching was the only way in which the validity of Christianity could be upheld, so he maintained.

The problem Whiston soon discovered was that finding a one-to-one correspondence between prophetic statements in the Old Testament and their fulfillment in the New was not as easy as it appeared. Some prophecies could not easily be interpreted to apply exclusively to Jesus. If indeed his allegedly scientific project of Christian prophetic hermeneutics could not be properly carried out, all Christian claims of divine truth might be called into question. There was accordingly only one conceivable way of explaining the gap between the two Testaments: the original Hebrew text had been corrupted. This was the inevitable conclusion Whiston reached in his 1722 publication. Since the present Hebrew copies of the Old Testament do not quite correspond

³On Whiston, see Stephen D. Snobelen, "Whiston, William (1667–1752)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29217>; James E. Force, *William Whiston, Honest Newtonian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Maureen Farrell, *William Whiston* (New York: Arno, 1981); Stephen D. Snobelen, "William Whiston: Natural Philosopher, Prophet, Primitive Christian," Ph.D. Dissertation (Cambridge University, 2000).

to the texts “cited by our Saviour, his Apostles, and the rest of the Writers of the New Testament, out of the Old”, it stands to reason that over the course of the years the present version of the Hebrew Bible was altered and the culprits in this falsification were none other than the Jews.⁴

The argument thus framed was a frontal attack against the Jews for consciously and purposefully corrupting their own sacred text. They took this radical step since “they had therefore no other possible Way of stopping the farther Progress of the Gospel among them, in their own Power, but this, of altering and corrupting their own Copies.” Since Christians subsequently did not study the Hebrew language, and “that, by Consequence, the original Sacred Books were alone in the Jewish Hands,” Christians were easily deceived.⁵

Whiston insisted that his argument was legitimated by the remarkable strides in the study of the texts of extra-biblical literature of antiquity now being edited and published in his day including the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Apostolic Constitutions, the Greek Psalms, and especially Josephus, all of which provided alternative readings of the Hebrew text of the Bible. Some forty years prior to the ambitious project of Benjamin Kennicott and Robert Lowth to create a Christian version of the Hebrew Bible, Whiston was already calling for a similar initiative whereby “a great search should be made in all Parts of the World for Hebrew Copies, that have never come into the hands of the Masorets.”⁶

Almost from the moment that Whiston’s book appeared, his critics were lining up to challenge his highly controversial conclusions. This rising tide of opposition appeared to make Whiston more defiant and ready to take on each and every one of his detractors. In 1724, the stakes were raised considerably when Anthony Collins entered the public arena with a scathing attack against Whiston. Anthony Collins (1676–1729), the well-known freethinker associated with both John Toland and Matthew Tindal, entered the fray

⁴William Whiston, *An Essay Towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament and for Vindicating the Citations Made Thence in the New Testament to Which is Subjoined a Large Appendix* (London, 1722), pp. 220 (proposition xii), and 281 (proposition xiii).

⁵Whiston, *An Essay Towards Restoring the True Text*, pp. 223–224.

⁶Whiston, *An Essay Towards Restoring the True Text*, p. 333. On the project of Kennicott and Lowth, see David Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry’s Construction of Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), chaps. I and II, and David S. Katz, *God’s Last Words: Reading the English Bible from the Reformation to Fundamentalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

surrounding William Whiston in 1724 when he published *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*.⁷

While he claimed he was a believing Christian, his enemies labeled him a skeptic, a cynic, a deist, even an atheist. Modern scholarship on Collins is similarly divided in trying to assess his true convictions. Whatever they actually were, the tempest over his *Discourse* was spectacular, evoking no less than 35 responses in print.

Collins clearly understood the predicament Whiston had addressed and presented it in even starker terms. At present, he claimed, Old Testament prophecies referred to in the New Testament often did not correspond with their originals. These prophecies meaningfully can only refer to one object which is an event in the life of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, they can only be understood literally, not figuratively and not allegorically to have any real meaning. If indeed there is a gap between the two testaments, either Christianity is foundationless and false, or alternatively, the text we presently have of the Old Testament is corrupted and unreliable. If we could construct its original text, we would again find full correspondence between the two documents.

But Collins found the notion that the Old Testament is corrupted absurd and unfounded. The Jews had no reason to corrupt the text, as Whiston had asserted. If they had, Collins added, the ancient Christians would have detected their forgeries long ago. Furthermore, even if Whiston was correct that the present text of the Old Testament is false, he will never have been able to restore a better text, based on extra-biblical literature such as Philo or Josephus, who are even more unreliable. His conclusion utterly mocked the pretentious effort of Whiston to discover a new Hebrew Bible to replace the present one: "So that I will venture to say that a Bible restor'd, according to

⁷ On Collins, see J. Dybikowski, "Collins, Anthony (1676–1729)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5933>; James O'Higgins, S. J., *Anthony Collins: The Man and his Works* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970); David Berman, *A History of Atheism in Britain from Hobbes to Russell* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), chap. 3, pp. 70–87, and his "Deism, Immorality, and the Art of Lying," in *Deism, Masonry, and the Enlightenment, Essays Honoring Alfred Owen Aldridge*, ed. J.A. Leo Lemay (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1987), pp. 61–78; Pascal Taranto, *Du deisme à l'atheisme: la libre-pensée d'Anthony Collins* (Paris: Champion, 2000); and Stephen Snobelen, "The Argument over Prophecy: An Eighteenth-Century Debate between William Whiston and Anthony Collins," *Lumen* 15 (1996), 195–213.

Mr. Whiston's Theory, will be a mere Whistonian Bible, a Bible confounding and not containing the true Text of the Old Testament."⁸

Collins had seemingly succeeded in undermining Whiston's entire scheme. If Christianity rested on a scientific method of reading prophecies literally based on a direct correspondence between the New and Old Testament, but the correspondence was hopelessly impossible to retrieve, Christians had reached a dead end, or in Collins' words: "For if the Grounds and Reasons for Christianity, contained in the Old Testament, were lost, Christianity was then lost."⁹

The only recourse for saving Christianity was to adopt an allegorical reading of prophecy. There was no reason to believe that when the New Testament cites the Old, it always does so in a literal way. Christianity need not rise and fall on the arbitrary and rigid notions of Whiston's system. At this point, Collins offered an alternative way of solving the hermeneutical impasse Christians faced. He relates that he recently learned of an entirely novel approach proposed by a distinguished professor of Hebrew studies at the University of Amsterdam named William Surenhusius. Surenhusius "has made an ample Discovery to the World of the Rules, by which, the Apostles cite the Old Testament, and argu'd from thence in a Treatise ... wherein the whole Mystery of the Apostles applying Scripture in a secondary or typical or mystical, or allegorical Sense seems unfolded." Based on the English report of the journalist Michel de la Roche of Surenhusius' book published in 1713, Collins related the following background. Surenhusius met a rabbi in Amsterdam, "well skill'd in the Talmud, the Cabbala, and the allegorical Books of the Jews," Surenhusius shared with the rabbi his exegetical predicament of not knowing how to understand the lack of correspondence between the passages cited in the Old and New Testaments. The rabbi, to his surprise, had no difficulty in reconciling these passages based on his intimate knowledge of rabbinic literature and rabbinic modes of reading and citation. By reading the New Testament by the rules and practices of rabbinic writing, the text becomes fully comprehensible, he maintained. Surenhusius was initially reluctant to consider the manner the rabbis cited biblical passages until "I saw St. Paul do so too, my anger was appeas'd."¹⁰

Collins could not help but offer a note of sarcasm in noting how a rabbi had apparently offered a solution to Christians on how to read and appreciate

⁸Anthony Collins, *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion in two parts ... The second containing an Examination of the Scheme advanc'd by Mr. Whiston in his Essay towards restoring the true text of the Old Testament, and for vindicating the Citations thence made in the New Testament* (London, 1724), p. 225.

⁹Collins, *A Discourse of the Grounds*, p. 112.

¹⁰Collins, *A Discourse of the Grounds*, pp. 53–58.

their own scriptural tradition. This meeting between Surenhusius and the rabbi was analogous, so it seemed, to that between Luther and the devil: "The Rabbin establishes Christianity; and the Devil Protestantism." Collins offered a generous sampling of examples of how the rabbis cited the Bible and how this directly illuminates a similar method of citation employed in the New Testament. The conclusion was thus inescapable: "Christianity is the allegorical sense of the Old Testament, and is not improperly called mystical Judaism." Collins unabashedly remarked that perhaps the glory of Christianity rests on allegory, not criticism, and that Christianity is ultimately confirmed by rabbinic learning.

Among contemporary scholars who have written on Collins, all see him as insincere in attempting to offer a serious alternative to the quandary Whiston had created for Christianity. Having demolished Whiston's system of literal prophecy as the foundation of Christian belief, he then discovered an odd-ball named Surenhusius to demonstrate cynically the futility of an allegorical reading. He would enhance the ludicrousness of his argument by offering a comical scenario of a great Christian scholar consorting with a suspect Jewish rabbi, just as Luther had consorted with the devil, to supposedly resolve the critical problem of Christian exegesis. The allegorical solution was not only ineffectual; it was tainted by its "mystical", "cabbalist", and Jewish origins. In trying to assert their own independence from Jewish modes of interpreting Scripture, the Christians, Collins claimed, had no other recourse than to return to the rabbis for their exegetical deliverance. The scoundrel Collins could not have invented a better script than this!

I do not wish to challenge this general opinion about Collins's ultimate motives regarding Surenhusius but rather to read Collins in a different way, in relation to his sources, that is, to the narrative of Michel de la Roche upon which he based his summary of Surenhusius' book, and in relation to Surenhusius himself. And I would also like to ask another set of questions: Whether Collins took Surenhusius seriously or not, did La Roche take him seriously, and were there others in Collins's era who might not have regarded him as the kook contemporary scholars seem to take him to be? What might appear patently absurd to recent historians of Collins's thought might have seemed somewhat more credible and worthy of consideration by at least some of Collins's readers. Collins might indeed have been disingenuous in approvingly presenting Surenhusius's method, but this need not deny the fact that others approved it, that it was deemed innovative by some in utilizing previously unexploited hermeneutical tools for understanding foundational Christian texts, and that Surenhusius and his project were ultimately a significant part of a larger defining moment in the history of Christian thought and scholarship and in the history of Jewish-Christian interactions at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Michel de la Roche (c. 1680–1742) was a French Huguenot who settled in England via Holland. In 1701, he was received into the Anglican Church and naturalized as an English citizen soon after. In subsequent years, he traveled widely in Europe, sustained a long relationship with Pierre Bayle, and even translated a part of his *Dictionnaire* into English. His primary contribution to cultural life was his literary journals produced both in French and English, serving as major conduits of scholarly information through highly informative reviews of books on the Continent for English readers and visa versa, for French readers. In all of these journals, the *Bibliothèque Angloise*, the *Mémoires littéraires de la Grande Bretagne*, *Memoirs of Literature*, *New Memoirs of Literature*, and *A Literary Journal*, La Roche consistently advocated toleration and freedom of thought, attacking religious persecution wherever he found it. He was particularly eager to publicize the well known cases of Catholic and Calvinist intolerance such as those of Michael Servetus and Sebastian Castello, as well as the less known Nicolas Anthoine, as we shall see shortly. Through his European travels, he established contact with a wide range of intellectuals with similar political and religious proclivities, especially the leading members of the Huguenot community in London. He was clearly connected ideologically with the Latitudinarians in England, especially Samuel Clarke, William Whiston, and Benjamin Hoadly, and was in sympathy with their unorthodox views.¹¹

Even a quick perusal of some of the many reviews in his journals provides the distinct impression of his remarkable interest in biblical and Hebrew studies, as well as religious history and theology.¹² He was well aware of the Whiston-Collins debate, and although a friend of Whiston, treated the broad issues both men raised with fairness, notwithstanding his own role in the controversy regarding Surenhusius.

¹¹ On Michel de la Roche, see R. Julian Roberts, “Roche, Michael de la (c. 1680–1742),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23913>; Uta Janssens-Knorsch, “Michel de la Roche,” in *Dictionary of Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Dutch Philosophers* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 2003), 2: 845–847; Walter Graham, *English Literary Periodicals* (New York: Octagon Books, 1930), pp. 196–199; Margaret D. Thomas, “Michel de la Roche,” *Dictionnaire des journalistes*, ed. Jean Sgard (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999); Margaret D. Thomas, “Michel de la Roche: A Huguenot Critic of Calvin,” *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 238 (1985), 97–195; George King, “Michel de la Roche et ses Mémoires Littéraires de la Grande Bretagne,” *Revue de littérature comparée* 15 (1943), 298–300.

¹² See *Memoirs of Literature* 3 (London, 1722), pp. 351–359 and 7 (London, 1722), pp. 393–397; *Memoirs of Literature* 2 (London, 1722), p. 317; *Memoirs of Literature* 4 (London, 1722), pp. 11–14; *Memoirs of Literature* 4 (London, 1722), pp. 314–319; *Memoirs of Literature* 7 (London, 1722), pp. 82–87; *New Memoirs of Literature*, 3 (London, 1726), pp. 102–107; *New Memoirs of Literature*, 5 (London, 1727), pp. 14–16.

Prior to publishing his long review of Surenhusius's study of rabbinic hermeneutics that caught Anthony Collins' eye, La Roche reviewed the six volume edition of the *Mishnah* Surenhusius had published several years earlier, which included the original text, a Latin translation of the text as well as the commentaries of Bertinoro and Maimonides, and the learned comments of Surenhusius himself. La Roche described the entire six tomes, giving full credit to the early translators of various tractates upon which Surenhusius had relied in finishing his edition. La Roche does not completely hide his biases with respect to the rabbinic tradition. Nevertheless, he fully appreciated the value of this work, especially in understanding Christian Scripture.

Some nine years he published his review of Surenhusius' groundbreaking study of rabbinic exegesis. He devoted considerable space to it and published it in three installments. From the very beginning, La Roche seemed generally excited by this book. "Who would have thought," he writes, "that Rabbinical and Talmudical Learning would have occasioned such an excellent Performance? Mr. Surenhusius may be said to have raised a Noble and Magnificent Building out of Materials which appeared very contemptible and insignificant."¹³

La Roche proceeded to offer a detailed summary of the preface to the work, explaining how Surenhusius was perplexed by the differences between the citations of the Old Testament in the original and in the New Testament, how he had spent considerable time with learned Jews discussing the problem, and how some had even volunteered to convert to Christianity if he could find a way of reconciling these seemingly corrupt citations. He finally met the rabbi learned in Talmud and Cabala, who had tried to convert to Christianity but returned to Judaism, but most importantly, did not believe the New Testament was a corrupted book. Surenhusius then asked the rabbi to help him solve the impasse of citation that challenged so seriously the credibility of the New Testament. The rabbi proposed the following: "to peruse a great part of the Talmud, and the Allegorical and Literal Commentaries of the most Ancient Jewish Writers; to observe their several ways of quoting and interpreting the Scripture, and to collect as many Materials of that kind as would be sufficient for that Purpose."¹⁴

Surenhusius was inspired by the rabbi's ambitious project and he launched a broad investigation presented in four sections to his readers. He focused on the

¹³Memoirs of Literature 6 (London,1722), pp. 110–118. The citations are on pp. 110–111. Surenhusius' book is entitled: *המשנה ספר השו"ת sive in quo secundum veterum Theologorum Hebraeorum Formulas allegandi, & Mosos Intepretandi Conciliantur loca ex. V. in N.T. allegata Auctore Guililelmo Surenhusio, Hebraicarum & Graecarum Literarum in Illustri Amsteliaedamensium Athenaeo Professore* (Amsterdam, 1713).

¹⁴*Memoirs of Literature* 6: 113.

different ways in which the rabbis cite biblical passages, how they refer to God, why passages are alleged to have been cited without being cited previously, and why some traditions are simply forgotten. Surenhusius soon realized how the Jewish exegetes took certain liberties in referring to the Old Testament, how “the authors of Gemara and ancient Allegorical writers change the literal sense into a noble and spiritual sense,” and how they idiosyncratically presented their genealogies. What became evident to him the more he mastered his subject was that the writers of the New Testament “have done nothing in the present Case but what was practiced by the ancient Hebrew Theologians.”¹⁵

If one might object to the use of later rabbinic literature to elucidate the New Testament’s narrative form, Surenhusius would answer that the Jewish rabbinic tradition remained relatively intact since its inception; the later materials had indeed preserved its ancient forms. Furthermore, there existed such conformity between the matter of quotations in the New Testament and in rabbinic literature, it was simply impossible that it could have happened by chance. La Roche, despite his reluctance to appreciate rabbinic literature in its own right, has nothing but praise for this endeavor: “The Readers will admire the great Labour and Industry of the Author, and wonder that a Writer so full of Talmudical and Rabbinical Learning should have such a clear Head, and express himself with so much Perspicuity. I add that they will thank him for those very things which they do not approve.”¹⁶

In the second installment of his review of Surenhusius, La Roche takes an unusual turn, by introducing a subject close to his heart but hardly relevant, so it seems, to the Amsterdam scholar’s work. Here is his justification for the digression:

“As I was going to give a further Account of Mr. Surenhusius’s Book . . . , it came to my Mind, that Nicolas Anthoine forsook the Christian Religion, and embraced Judaism, for no other Reason, but because he could not reconcile those two Genealogies, and the Quotations of the Evangelists and Apostles. A Book, like that of Mr. Surenhusius, would doubtless have prevented his Apostasy. I shall insert here the History of that Man that everybody may be the more sensible of the Usefulness and Importance of Mr. Surenhusius’s Work; and I am apt to believe the second Extract of his Book will be more acceptable to the Readers, after they have read the following Piece.”¹⁷

This was not the first time that La Roche had publicized the fascinating story of the Catholic Nicolas Anthoine who had attempted to convert to

¹⁵ *Memoirs of Literature* 6:115,117.

¹⁶ *Memoirs of Literature* 6:117.

¹⁷ *Memoirs of Literature* 6:131. This entire installment runs from pp. 131–154. On Nicholas Antoine, see Julien Weill, “Nicolas Antoine: Un Pasteur protestant brulé à Genève en 1632 pour crime de Judaïsme,” *Revue des études juives* 36 (1898), 161–198; 37 (1898): 161–180.

Protestantism, then consulted Jews in Metz, Venice, and Padua before secretly converting to Judaism on his own, and was finally executed by the Church authorities of Geneva in 1632. In fact, he had published the story no less than four times, three times in English and once in French. La Roche had so been fascinated by the story that he collected several contemporary accounts of it, including material from the Geneva archives, presented them both in French and in English translation, and clearly advocated more humane treatment for those deviating from orthodox Christianity.¹⁸

In the present instance, La Roche linked the Anthoine story to the challenge of understanding the relationship between Old Testament prophecy and its fulfillment in the New. Anthoine's immoral treatment at the hands of the Calvinist authorities was the reason La Roche was initially moved to write about his case. Having reported how the young man struggled to find meaning in his Christian identity and adopted Judaism instead, even after being spurned by contemporary Jews, La Roche struggled to understand why the Christian faith had failed the man in the first place. If indeed Surenhusius was capable of making the New Testament credible by contextualizing it within rabbinic modes of interpretation and quotation, he had done a marvelous service to his fellow Christians, far more significant than solving a scholarly problem.

La Roche fully understood that Christianity rose or fell on the matter of how the promises of biblical prophecy were fulfilled through its teaching. Christians had failed doubly in treating this bewildered man in his search for divine truth by murdering him and by previously not offering him the proper theological and exegetical guidance to return him to the right path. Defining Anthoine's failure to find meaning in the Christian faith as a matter of flawed exegesis and offering the solution of Surenhusius made perfect sense for an editor consistently fascinated by the study of Hebrew and the Bible, and committed to publicizing these matters in the pages of his journals.¹⁹

Whatever Collins was to make of this method, there is no doubt that he had read a full report of it from a highly faithful and sympathetic reporter. If there was indeed deception on his part in presenting Surenhusius' book as a serious solution to the crisis of Christian exegesis, it did not come from La Roche, who overcame his aversion to rabbinic literature to treat Surenhusius respectably and even enthusiastically. His insertion of Nicolas Anthoine's life story represented an even stronger endorsement of Surenhusius' new and bold scholarly tools to make sense of Christian Scripture. Indeed the sad case of Anthoine underscored dramatically the urgency of such a project!

¹⁸ See Thomas, "Michel de la Roche," especially pp. 160–162.

¹⁹ Compare Thomas, "Michel de la Roche," p. 163, who questions the sincerity of La Roche's praise of Surenhusius, viewing the Anthoine story "as a counter to Surenhusius' work".

Collins would also have been hard pressed to imply that the scholar William Surenhusius (1666–1729) he had seemingly recruited for his cause was anything other than a highly learned and original authority, one increasingly noticed by his contemporaries both in England and on the continent. He was in fact a scholar's scholar, hardly interested in participating in the polemical exchanges Collins and his contemporaries pursued almost as sport. He preferred instead the life of the mind, of editing texts and commenting about them in endless detail, in reading books, and in collecting a remarkable private library containing most of the major classical and contemporary Hebrew writings of Jewish authors.²⁰

In many respects, the beautiful folio volumes of the Surenhusius *Mishnah* represent a culmination of over a hundred years of Christian scholarship on the classic Jewish code. Surenhusius built on the foundations of several earlier translators whose work he graciously acknowledged. He faithfully translated the two most important Jewish commentaries of the text, and then added his own elaborate one. His oration on the value of the study of the *Mishnah* rings with a deep appreciation of the rational methods of the rabbis who should be compared with those of Roman law. He also elicits a deep sense of Christian commitment which is the driving force behind his decision to devote a lifetime of study to rabbinic texts. For Surenhusius, the *Mishnah* was the word of God. While Christians and Jews found different ways to express the divine will, they were ultimately connected in their faiths. A Christian Hebraist should not use his knowledge to vilify the Jewish tradition but should embrace the good fortune of having discovered this remarkable resource for the Christian faith. Surenhusius was proud of his close relations with Jews, and that they had been well treated in his native city. He was also in favor of Christian preaching among Jews so that Jews would also come to know and appreciate Christianity more fully.²¹

²⁰The auction catalogue of his private library is extant and was published in Amsterdam in 1730 as *Bibliotheca Surenhusiana*. Even a casual look at its contents suggests the remarkably high level of Surenhusius' Hebraic knowledge. What is especially impressive are the titles of sixteenth and seventeenth century books in all fields from halacha, to kabbalah, science, history, moral literature and more.

²¹Giulielmus Surenhusius, *Mischna sive Totius Hebraeorum Juris, Rituum, Antiquitatum, ac Legum Oralium Systema, cum clarissimorum Rabbiorum Maimonides & Barrnotae Commentariis Integris*, 6 vols. (Amsterdam, 1698–1703), especially vol. 1 "Praefatio ad Lectorem". On Surenhusius and his work on the *Mishnah*, see the Dutch article by Peter van Rooden, "Willem Surenhis' Opuatting van de Misjna," in Jan de Roos, Arie Schippers, and Jan W. Wesselius, eds. *Driehonderd jaar oosterse talen in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Juda Palache Instituut, 1986), pp. 43–54, and the almost identical English article by the same author, "The Amsterdam Translation of the Mishnah," in *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda*, ed. William Horbury (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999), pp. 257–267.

In the final analysis, Surenhusius believed that rabbinic literature was more than a pragmatic scholarly resource to better understand Christianity's historical roots. The *Mishnah* especially was part of the divine revelation, offering the key to reconciliation between Jews and Christians. Since ultimately the New Testament and the *Mishnah* ushered from the same divine source, Christians and Jews would join in the same faith through their mutual study. Surenhusius had not only brought Christian rabbinic learning to a new scholarly level; he had made textual study the ultimate spiritual task for Jewish-Christian rapprochement. Through the *Mishnah* Christians would be better able to recognize their true faith and Jews would come to understand as well that their rabbinic digest of laws ultimately conveyed a Christian truth. In Surenhusius, a new engagement in Jewish sources had provided Christians with a profound way of apprehending the testimony of their own faith through that of the Jews. By studying the *Mishnah*, a Christian might come to learn that the New Testament was indeed the fulfillment not the falsification of the Old. Centuries of acrimonious dispute could now be overcome through mutual study and respectful dialogue. In the end, the ultimate conversion of the Jews would be inaugurated through the efforts of the Christian scholars of Jewish texts.

Whether Collins fully appreciated the achievements of Surenhusius or not, whether he had been favorably convinced by the positive appraisal of La Roche, he found the notion that rabbinic study could enrich Christian self-understanding to be at least worthy of mention, and he basically reported it to his readers as a reasonable alternative to Whiston's approach, without distorting or falsifying what La Roche had provided him. It is true that he could not help himself from embellishing his narrative by comparing Surenhusius' meeting with the rabbi to Luther's pact with the devil. And while Surenhusius' project has little to do with the "cabbalists," Collins had no hesitation in equating the figurative or typical way of reading Scripture to cabbalism, a kind of Judaic madness which Christian exegetes had willfully adopted. Collins may have stretched the truth somewhat to bring out a more cynical reading of his source, but his was still a relatively accurate and fair accounting of what La Roche had said. It had been embraced by a man, theological liar though he may have been, who valued Jewish sources, read Jewish books, and even secured valuable Jewish manuscripts for his personal library.

One need not make the case that Collins was sincere in his use of Surenhusius to appreciate, nevertheless, that this Dutch scholar had built a serious reputation among certain clerical circles throughout Europe. More importantly, when Collins wrote, the study of rabbinic texts was very much a passionate interest for a growing number of scholars, especially in England. They cited Surenhusius, they continued to apply and refine his methods, and they even initiated the difficult task of translating the *Mishnah* into the English language. By the first decades of the eighteenth century, the Christian study of rabbinics

had been transformed from a relatively esoteric field of antiquarian scholarship to a more primary means of re-invigorating the study of Christianity itself. No serious Christian scholar could ignore this fact unless he was willing to face the peril of imperfectly understanding the foundations of his faith.

The primary exponent of the methods of Surenhusius on English soil was William Wotton (1666–1727). Wotton was a child prodigy, especially gifted in learning languages. He later acquired proficiency in Arabic, Syriac, and Aramaic, along with a broad education in several disciplines at Cambridge. In 1694, he gained considerable recognition in English and European learned society with the publication of his *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning*, a thoughtful discussion of the merits of the moderns over the ancients in a variety of academic fields and literary endeavors, as well as a spirited defense of the Royal Society of which he was a fellow. Wotton's role as a student of rabbinics is particularly interesting when considered in the light of his self-consciousness about living in a modern age, vastly superior to previous ones.²²

Wotton's primary achievement in enhancing Jewish learning in England was the publication of his learned English translation of two tractates of the *Mishnah*, including a long excursus on the value of rabbinic learning for Christians. While he labored on this project primarily on his own, he received the enthusiastic support of two of his close friends and colleagues, Simon Ockley (1679–1720), primarily known as an historian of Islam at Cambridge, and David Wilkins (1685–1745), chaplain of William Wake, the archbishop of Canterbury.²³

Wotton's *Miscellaneous Discourses Relating to the Traditions and Uses of the Scribes and Pharisees in the Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ's Time* was published in London in 1718. In the preface, Wotton explained the genesis of the work in

²² On William Wotton, see David Stoker, "William Wotton (1666–1727)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30005>; Joseph M. Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustine Age* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1991); A.R. Hall, "William Wotton and the History of Science," *Archives Internationales d'Histoire des Sciences* 9 (1949), 1047–1062.

²³ On Ockley, see Peter M. Holt, "Ockley, Simon (bap. 1679, d. 1720)" *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20494>. Azza Kararah, "Simon Ockley: His Contribution to Arabic Studies and Influence on Western Thought," Ph.D. Dissertation (Cambridge University, 1955); and Arthur J. Arberry, *Oriental Essays: Portraits of Seven Scholars* (Richmond, Surrey, 1977), pp. 11–47; On Wilkins, see the entry by Alastair Hamilton, "Wilkins, David (1685–1745)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/articles/29/29417>, and David C. Douglas, *English Scholars 1660–1730* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939, 1951), pp. 212–220.

a conversation he had with “a very ingenious Gentleman” about the origins of the observance of the Sabbath, and specifically among Christians. Dissatisfied with the existing literature on the subject, “I determin’d therefore to examine into the Traditions of the Elders, and to see how the Scribes and Pharisees in our blessed Saviour’s Time commanded the Sabbath to be observed”. When he examined their ancient texts, he was pleasantly surprised to find the *Mishnah* to be a most substantial work, notwithstanding the degree of contempt it has received from many learned men.²⁴ He extolled the work’s integrity and reliability, so that “wherever it gives light to any Custom, Passage, or Phrase mentioned in the Old and New Testaments, its light may certainly be depended on.”²⁵ He not only insisted on the *Mishnah*’s reliability; he saw it as a major source of understanding the phraseology and the larger background of the New Testament. He was thoroughly convinced that Josephus could not provide a more reliable witness than the rabbis and provided an important confirmation of this opinion by the learned David Wilkins.²⁶

Wotton also paid his full respect to an entire community of scholars who had preceded him in his appreciation of the *Mishnah*, especially Edward Pococke, John Lightfoot, and John Selden.²⁷ In so doing, he carefully situated himself in a living tradition of Christian scholars, proudly regarding his own scholarship a direct continuation of all of theirs. He not only referred to them throughout his text but assigned both a special chapter and a closing appendix for listing each of their contributions. The work of the early eighteenth century scholars of the *Mishnah*, as Wotton and certainly Surenhuisius saw it, was to continue what the pioneers of the previous century had begun. The case has already been effectively made by these seventeenth-century polymaths for the scholarly importance of rabbinic scholarship in illuminating ancient Christian literature and religion. It was up to Wotton and his colleagues to complete the task.

²⁴William Wotton, *Miscellaneous Discourses Relating to the Traditions and Uses of the Scribes and Pharisees in the Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ’s Time*, 2 vols. (London: William Bowyer, 1718), pp. i–iv.

²⁵Wotton, *Miscellaneous Discourses*, pp. v–xxvi.

²⁶Wotton, *Miscellaneous Discourses*, p. xlvii.

²⁷Wotton, *Miscellaneous Discourses*, p. xlix. On Pococke, see Gerald J. Toomer, “Pococke, Edward (1604–1691),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22430>. On Lightfoot, see Newton E. Key, “Lightfoot, John (1602–1675),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16648>. On Selden (1584–1654), see Paul Christianson, “Selden, John (1584–1654),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25052>; and especially Jason Rosenblatt, *Renaissance England’s Chief Rabbi: John Selden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Yet despite their acknowledged dependence on their scholarship, Wotton and his contemporaries, writing more than half a century after Pococke, Lightfoot, and Selden had produced their impressive scholarship, were not merely replicating what has been done before them. In fact, one might argue that they were self-consciously aware that their publications represented an advance over those of the previous generation. In the first place, they wrote with a greater self-assurance that their new work was significant because of its linkage with the efforts of the giants who preceded them. They were not creating a new field; they were continuing a scholarly tradition that had been fully legitimated and regularized within the scholarly community in which they participated. At the same time, they produced their work with a greater urgency than in previous generations because they felt, more than ever before, that Christianity could only be fully understood and legitimated through their scholarship. In the wake of the exegetical crisis engendered by historicism and philology so dramatically displayed in the public debate between Whiston and Collins, they understood more acutely than ever before the immense value of rabbinic learning for Christian self-understanding. And most importantly, by beginning the process of translating the *Mishnah* into English, they also grasped the import of their work in reaching beyond the coterie of scholars who wrote in Latin to a wider readership of vernacular literature. Selden and his colleagues had written to elite Latinists. In the new cultural world of the early eighteenth century, their findings along with those of their successors now accessible in English were to reach a wider lay readership through the efforts of Wotton and his circle of collaborators.

Following Wilkins' note, Wotton presented a letter from Simon Ockley, dated March 15, 1717, a letter he had expended considerable effort to solicit. The letter is important as an unambiguous and powerful endorsement of the study of rabbinics by Christians and I wish to cite it in full. Wotton was surely overjoyed by the directness in which Ockley composed his remarks and by the personal support he had received from his distinguished friend:

"We are obliged to you, for having evinced beyond all Contradictions that Hebrew Learning is necessary for us Christians. If I had ever had an Opportunity, I wou'd most certainly have gone thro' the New Testament under a Jew... that they understand it infinitely better than we do. They are thoroughly acquainted with all the Forms of Speech, and all the Allusions, which (because they occur but rarely) are obscure to us, tho' in common use and very familiar among them; as has been admirably demonstrated by the learned Surenhusius in his *Reconciliator*. I remember having read in F.[Richard] Simon... in the Appendix to Leo Modena, that he once offered the Epistle to the Hebrews in Hebrew to a learned rabbi in Paris, who "after he had perused it, without taking any manner of notice of the difference in Religion, said, that whosoever was the Author of that Book, he was a great Mekubbal [a Jewish mystic] and

thoroughly versed in all the Traditions of the Jewish Nation.”...We do not make use of the Opinions of modern Rabbis, nor their uncertain Conjectures for the Confirmation of any Thing. But when we find Expressions and Allusions exactly the same with those in the New Testament; several Petitions in the Lord’s Prayer; and some of our Lord’s Parables in the Talmud: Are we to suppose that they came thither by Chance; or which is most ridiculous, that the Jews borrow’d them from the Christians; or rather which is the only true way of accounting for them, that they were in familiar Use among the Jews in our blessed Saviour’s Time?...The Misna is undoubtedly a very venerable piece of Antiquity; collected with great Judgment, and digested with utmost exactness by that great and learned Rabbi, Judah, a Person, than whom none since the Destruction of the Temple, that we know of, had greater Advantages both of Wisdom, Learning, Riches, and Interest to furnish him with all the Materials necessary for the completing so great a Work.”²⁸

This is the most conspicuous and earnest affirmation of the Surenhusius project we have seen from any contemporary, articulated in the most provocative of language, sure to be noticed by even the most indifferent of readers. Ockley referred to Surenhusius’ book only four years after its publication, and seven years before Collins’ endorsement would give it the notoriety its author had never sought. But it was not merely the mention of Surenhusius and his hermeneutical program that was tantalizing. It was Ockley’s goading assertion that Jews could understand the New Testament “infinitely better than we do,” and that if Ockley ever had the opportunity, he would most certainly have chosen a Jew to teach him the foundational text of his faith.

If Anthony Collins had written these lines, it would surely have been offered as testimony of his cynicism by modern historians. But this was Simon Ockley, distinguished Cambridge professor, who purposely avoided high society because of his lack of ease in the company of politicians and socialites and sometimes expressed concern about how he was perceived in the public eye. Even Wotton himself could not have expected such a bombshell. Ockley stated more bluntly than any Christian theologian before him how critically Christians needed Jews and their religious traditions to understand themselves.

²⁸Wotton, *Miscellaneous Discourses*, postscript of Mr. Simon Ockley, professor of Arabic at Cambridge, at the end of the preface. He refers to the edition of the Venetian rabbi Leon Modena’s compendium of Jewish life published in French translation by Richard Simon and then published in English by Ockley himself. On Simon see, Justin Champion, “Pere Richard Simon and English Biblical Criticism 1680–1700,” in *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin: Essays in His Honor*, eds. James E. Force and David S. Katz (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), pp. 39–61

I wish to close this discussion of Wotton's fascination with the *Mishnah* by considering one additional work he composed in which he underscored even more dramatically his wish that rabbinic study by Christians might become the common property of clerics far beyond his limited circle of friends and colleagues. In a book entitled *Some Thoughts Concerning a Proper Method of Studying Divinity* (written only a few years before his *Miscellaneous Discourses* had appeared, but only published posthumously in 1734) Wotton turned his attention to the matter of theological education. He was just as emphatic in this context as he had been in his special work on the *Mishnah* regarding the critical importance of Hebrew and rabbinics in the education of the Christian divine. Writing only a short time after Surenhusius' book on rabbinic hermeneutics had appeared, he eagerly recommended it to students of the clergy. But first he mentioned his edition of the *Mishnah*: "If he (our student) has a mind thoroughly to understand those Traditions of the Scribes and Pharisees, for which they are so severely rebuked by our blessed Saviour in the Evangelists, he will find a compleat System of them in Surenhusius's Edition of the Misna with the Commentaries of Maimonides and Bartenora . . . It is a noble and authentick Collection of what the Jews have built upon Moses's Law in every particular."²⁹ Later, he prominently featured Surenhusius' second work:

"There he particularly shews how our blessed Saviour and his Disciples prov'd what they said out of Moses, and the Prophets, and why they quoted every Passage that they thought proper for their Purpose, in the particular Manner in which we see it alleged. He compare their Methods of Argumentation with those which are used by the Jewish Masters; and thereby demonstrates the Cogency of many Arguments produced by St. Paul which have perplexed most Christian Interpreters, and so shows the Connections between the Covenants in a fully and convincing Manner. And tho' his design led him to quote the Hebrew Text at every Turn, yet his Work is so contrived, that those that do not understand Hebrew, need not be frightened since most of his Allegations are exactly translated, and by that Means the Thread of his Arguments may be very easily comprehended."³⁰

That Wotton had familiarized himself with Surenhusius's work so soon after its publication is impressive enough. That he recommended it so emphatically as part of a curriculum for students of theology, even if they cannot read Hebrew, offers eloquent testimony of its importance for Christian pedagogy. But reading Surenhusius's works is only a small part of the Jewish education

²⁹William Wotton, *Some Thoughts Concerning a Proper Method of Studying Divinity* (London: William Bowyer, 1734; Dublin and London, 1751), pp. 385–386.

³⁰Wotton, *Some Thoughts Concerning a Proper Method*, p. 398.

Wotton sought to impart to his potential students. The education of the Christian cleric in Judaism was to include both mastery of ancient literature along with a familiarity with contemporary Jewish life gleaned from recent Christian handbooks.³¹

Yet reading the secondary accounts of the primary sources of ancient Judaism and Christianity were not sufficient for Wotton to demonstrate the profound interrelationship between the two faiths and their respective literary traditions. Wotton returned again to consider the *Mishnah* edition of Surenhusius, this time to provide hands-on advice on how to use this resource as one reads the New Testament. In reading these amazing instructions, we have moved from the realm of theory to practice, from the setting of theological discussion and debate to that of a teacher and his classroom. Here are Wotton's specific instructions to students:

"I would advise him to read the respective Titles in the Misna in the order of which they lie in the Pentateuch without any regard to the Order in which they be in the Misna itself. As for instance, when the Chapter of the Waters of Jealousy, in the fifth of Numbers, or that of taking a Brother's Wife, in the 25th of Deuteronomy, are read in the Pentateuch; then the titles Sota and Jevammoth which correspond to those Laws, shou'd be read in the Misna, and so of the rest. The Misna and its Commentators will appear very dry, and perhaps ridiculous at first to men wholly unacquainted with that Learning, but Use will soon conquer that, and the Benefit which will thence arise towards the Understanding of the Mosaic Law, will abundantly compensate the Pains; and I speak from Experience, that all the Christian Commentators put together (at least those I have used) will not get a tenth Part of the Light to the Understanding the Law of Moses, that may be had by the Help of the Jewish Traditions."³²

Wotton cautioned, however, that this method should be tried only on advanced students of the Pentateuch so that "it will then be easier, pleasanter, and more profitable."³³ The rest of Wotton's instructions on clerical education are taken up with bibliography in other fields, such as books against the deists, Catholics, and other enemies of the Church. Nevertheless, the conspicuous place Wotton afforded Judaic education, and specifically the study of the *Mishnah* is striking. He clearly had not compartmentalized his interest in the subject to one well researched book but considered it a vital dimension of Christian education in general, as this fascinating pamphlet readily illustrates.

³¹Wotton, *Some Thoughts Concerning a Proper Method*, pp. 386, 398.

³²Wotton, *Some Thoughts Concerning a Proper Method*, pp. 399–400.

³³Wotton, *Some Thoughts Concerning a Proper Method*, p. 400.

As Wotton well understood, he and his colleagues had brought to fruition the pioneering work of Adam Boreel, Rabbi Leon Templo, Menasseh ben Israel, and the many others who had labored to introduce the value of rabbinic literature for the self-understanding of Christians. In completing this story introduced so brilliantly and enthusiastically by the late Richard Popkin, I wish to acknowledge his pioneering efforts in this ripe field of scholarship and to underscore how his scholarly legacy continues to stimulate a younger generation of scholars for whom he has led the way.