Jew

The Protestant chaplain for the Levant Company, William Biddulph, described Jews in the early seventeenth century as a people who ‘to this day have no king nor country proper to themselves, but are dispersed throughout the whole world’.1 Despite this dispersal, Jewish communities retained strong and distinct connections rooted in their biblical heritage. ‘They are called by three names’, Biddulph wrote, but of Hebrews, Israelites, and Jews, ‘the most common name whereby they are called at this day is, the name of the Jewes’.2 The shared Abrahamic traditions between Christianity and Judaism compelled Christians to define points of diversion between their faiths. Some Christian theologians saw Christ as fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament, rendering Judaic belief a series of empty rituals.3 Since Jews were still awaiting their promised saviour, these early modern Christians believed Jews to be falsely interpreting biblical teachings in ways that left them outside salvation.4 After the Reformation, Protestants often drew similarities between Jews and Catholics, describing them as living in states of spiritual confusion and superstition.5 At the same time, followers of the Jewish faith were seen as a people particularly scorned by other faiths. As Biddulph noted, Jews ‘are of more vile account in the sight of Turkes th[a]n Christians […] And the poore Christians sojourning and dwelling in [Aleppo] doe hate them very uncharitably’.6

Jewish people had lived in England since the Roman era, welcomed by William the Conqueror as merchant traders. There were perhaps as many as 5000 Jewish people living in medieval England.7 The acceptance of Jews as merchants and circulators of economic wealth existed alongside popular views of ‘Jews’ as enemies of Christ, meaning that Jewish people were often severely persecuted on local, interpersonal levels. Accusations of ‘Jews’ committing violent crimes including blood sacrifice and ritual murder were

2 Ibid., sig. M3v.
4 Ibid., pp. 54, 60.
5 Ibid., p. 55.
made in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Bristol, Winchester, and London, among other cities and parishes. In 1290, all Jews were banished from England under Edward I’s Edict of Expulsion. The Edict has been interpreted as an act of nation-formation, drawing political boundaries in which ‘a sense of Englishness’ became explicitly ‘rooted in anti-Jewishness’, a trend that would continue in later periods.

Although officially banned from England, Jewish people reappeared under different statuses and identities in London and other English port cities in the sixteenth century. After the edicts of forced conversion and expulsion of Jews in Spain (1492) and Portugal (1496–1497) many opted to convert and others went into exile, setting up communities in cities such as Bordeaux, Toulouse, Nantes, Antwerp, Venice, Livorno, or Ferrara. These cities were part of trade routes in which Jewish tradesmen played pivotal roles, linked to Iberian hubs such as Lisbon and Seville. The violent Inquisitorial campaigns against crypto-Judaism in Spain and Portugal encouraged the continuous migration of Iberian Jews and conversos well into the end of the eighteenth century. London and Bristol were destinations for some Iberian Jews, but due to the 1290 edict these exiles officially entered English soil as Catholics. As Renee Levine Melammed noted, the adoption of a ‘Catholic façade’ was

9 Ibid.
a survival strategy that sought to circumvent the edict of expulsion. To assume a ‘Popish’ identity allowed such migrants to maintain a familiar and trusted strategy of religious dissimulation.\(^\text{13}\)

Those families who converted to Christianity could, on rare occasions, find a place in sixteenth-century England. Dunstan Anes (baptised Gonçalo Anes), a wealthy Portuguese crypto-Jewish merchant based in London, enjoyed commercial success and the ability to attract the interest of the English Crown during the reign of Mary I and then Elizabeth.\(^\text{14}\) In 1568, the College of Arms registered a coat of arms and a genealogy for Anes. In the same year, he became known as ‘a Purveyor and Marchant for the Queenes Ma[ies]tyes Grocery’.\(^\text{15}\) Throughout the 1580s and 1590s, Anes and his sons actively collaborated with the efforts of the Elizabethan espionage system to undermine the union of the Portuguese and Spanish crowns.\(^\text{16}\)

The majority of Portuguese and Spanish conversos and crypto-Jews who went to England, however, were considered politically and religiously suspect. Catholic ambassadors in London observed, with some concern, that ostensible Catholics met to observe Jewish feasts such as Passover and Yom Kippur.\(^\text{17}\) Anxieties about marking out Jewish difference often related to fears about immigration more widely, so that anti-Jewish discourse became anti-alien discourse.\(^\text{18}\) The case of Roderigo Lopez, a ‘denizened’ Portuguese crypto-Jew who converted to Protestantism and was accused of plotting the death of Elizabeth I, exposed many of these fears, as persistent anti-Semitic attitudes intermingled with anti-Hispanic feelings. The scandal over the physician Lopez’s ostensible attempt to poison Queen Elizabeth in 1594 brought the distrust of foreigners of privileged status, specifically Jews, to the fore of public debate in London. As the queen’s trusted physician, Lopez enjoyed the patronage of the Earl of Leicester and Elizabeth’s principal secretary, Francis Walsingham. Although he conformed to the Anglican Church, news and gossip following Lopez’s


\(^{16}\) Samuel, ‘Anes, Dunstan’.

\(^{17}\) Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, p. 76.

arrest and trial frequently iterated his *converso* identity as both a ‘Portugal’ and ‘Jew’. Lopez’s foreignness was an important part of the mistrust levelled against his loyalty. In his notes on the trial, the solicitor general Edward Coke noted that ‘many Portuguese living under the Queen’s protection were concerned’ by a ‘Portuguese Jew’ serving the Queen of England so closely, suggesting that Lopez’s fellow Portuguese were all too willing to distance themselves from him by emphasising the potentially deceptive nature of his religious practices. Accusations of Lopez’s apparent Jewishness undermined his faithful service, and he was hanged, drawn, and quartered on 7 June 1594.

Many *conversos* described themselves as men or women of ‘the Hebrew nation’, or simply as belonging to the ‘nation’. Yet, as Lopez’s trial suggests, their Portuguese and Spanish origins often surpassed their identification with the ‘Hebrew nation’. In places such as Amsterdam, Venice, or even London, most *conversos* and crypto-Jews were first labelled as ‘Portuguese’ or ‘Spanish’. Many members of these *converso* communities, in an attempt to stand out from other Jewish communities, continued to present themselves as belonging to the *nação portuguesa* (‘Portuguese nation’) or the *nación española* (‘Spanish nation’). Such ambivalent belonging to a ‘nation’ was thus part of a strategy which allowed the *conversos* to develop a flexible identity that could be easily adjusted to the demands of Christian societies and other Jewish groups.

Unlike the names Jewish people used for themselves, Iberian *conversos* and crypto-Jewish exiles were often derogatively denoted *Marranos*, a Portuguese and Spanish term for ‘pig’. A series of royal edicts in Portugal and Castile sought to curb the use of terms such as *Marrano* by threatening heavy fines and even imprisonment, leading to a gradual decline in its usage, but in turn the term ‘Jew’ came to serve both as identifier and insult. Traces of the widespread use of *Marrano* in the Iberian Peninsula remained in other idioms. ‘Marrano’ appears in Edward Blount’s 1623 translation of Matias Alemán’s *Guzmán de Alfarache*. In his *Miscellaneies of divinitie*

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Edward Kellet related ‘Marrano’ to a complex evolution of Syriac, Greek, and Latin words about unbelief. 24

The English abroad often came into direct contact with Jews and Jewish converts. Travellers and merchants in Europe and across the Ottoman Empire were keenly aware that Jewish communities operated vast networks of trade and economic exchange, serving as conduits between ‘Constantinople, Aleppo, Damascus, Babylon, Grand Cayro, and every great Citie and place of Marchandise throughout all the Turkes dominions’. 25 In Coryats crudities (1611), the first English book to include the word ‘ghetto’, the traveller Thomas Coryate offered his readers rare details about the religious ceremonies, customs, and dress of the early seventeenth-century Venetian Jewish community, as well as observations about the refusal of Jews to convert to Christianity. 26 When the organ-builder Thomas Dallam travelled to Constantinople to deliver an instrument to Mehmed III at Elizabeth I’s behest, he reported lodging ‘3 nyghtes in the house of a Jew, who is by Inglishe men caled the honeste Jew, for he is verrie lovinge unto Inglishe men’. 27 Travellers noted city quarters where Jews were allowed to live and practice their faith, and expressed curiosity towards Jewish customs including circumcision and the matrilineal nature of Judaism, a concept at odds with the patriarchal hierarchy of early modern England. 28

On the London stage, Jewish characters were often merchant go-betweens and moneylenders. Robert Wilson’s The Three Ladies of London (printed 1584) offers an early and rare positive depiction of a Jewish character in the upright and good-natured moneylender Gerontius. However, the play’s personification of Usury is an Englishman of Jewish heritage, embodying anxieties over an unseen or unacknowledged Jewishness difficult to disentangle from English identity. Later plays often emphasise an active differentiation of Jewish subjects and bodies from their Christian and English counterparts. Christopher Marlowe’s The Jew of Malta (first performed 1592) drew on the 1565 Ottoman siege of Malta, with Jewish merchants acting ‘as commercial

26 Thomas Coryate, Coryats crudities (London, 1611; STC 5808).
28 Biddulph, The travels of certaine Englishmen; Fynes Moryson, An itinerary (London 1617; STC 18205); John Taylor, Three weekes, three daies, and three hours observations and travel, from London to Hamburgh in Germanie (London, 1617; STC 23807); James Howell, Instructions for forreigne travell (London, 1642; Wing H3082); William Mountague, The delights of Holland (London, 1696; Wing M2477); T. C., The New Atlas (London, 1698; Wing C139).
intermediaries’ moving between Christian and Islamic worlds. 29 Like Shylock in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* (c. 1597), Marlowe’s Barabas offers a famous example of the pejorative depiction of Jewish men in early modern drama. Conniving and brutally murderous, Barabas is publicly punished on stage, his death a violent redress against the supposedly merciless Jew. These literary retributions are most viciously exemplified by Thomas Nashe’s picaresque prose fiction, *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594), where the Italian Jew Zadok suffers an extraordinary and lengthy torture and execution. In Robert Daborne’s play, *A Christian Turn’d Turk* (1612), the double-dealing, slave-trading Benwash and his assistant Rabshake are converts to Islam for economic reasons, counterpointing the pirate John Ward’s conversion for love. Yet as Aaron Kitch points out in his analysis of the Jewish figure in Thomas Middleton’s City pageant, ‘Triumph of Honour and Industry’ (1617), more positive depictions of Jews could acknowledge their important place in the early modern political economy. 30

Jewish women often became subjects of attention. Some accounts, including that of George Sandys, took pains to record their ‘sluttish corpulency’ with a misogynistic vehemence closely linked to derogatory comments about Jewish physical features usually directed at men. 31 Others, like Coryate, insisted that the Jewish women he met were ‘as beautiful as ever I saw’, and admired their lavish ‘apparel, jewels, chains of gold, and rings adorned with precious stones’ which to him surpassed the wealth and elegance of ‘English countesses’. 32 Coryate used the opulence and beauty of Jewish women to play with anti-Semitic stereotypes relating to the supposed material well-being of Jews, but also to suggest the physical attractiveness of Jewish women. 33 Those perceptions are still present in the observations made by John Evelyn, another English visitor of the Venetian ghetto, in 1646. In his diary, Evelyn described attending a lavish Jewish wedding with a ‘fine banquet’ and ‘divers very beautiful Portuguese Jewesses with whom we had some conversation’. 34 This fascination was echoed in popular theatre of the period. Both Shakespeare’s Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice* and Christopher Marlowe’s Abigail in *The Jew of Malta* (first performed in 1592) demonstrate

the ways in which women were often perceived to be easier to convert, as they were less obviously associated with external markers of Jewish identity (such as wearing a kippah and being circumcised) than men.\(^{35}\)

Positive English representations of female Jewish beauty gesture not only to an implicit acknowledgement of Jewish economic power, but also to the place which the Hebraic tradition occupied within cultural and Christian religious beliefs. To view Jews as mere ‘others’ in seventeenth-century England, as Achsah Guibbory argues, prevents an understanding of ‘certain kinds of continuity and identity’ that the English held towards ancient Jews.\(^{36}\) That continuity was often articulated through the figures of Jewish women from the Old Testament: Deborah, Judith, Hester, and Mariam often appeared as counterparts and exemplars to the virtues of Christian women such as Elizabeth I.\(^{37}\) Issues of virtue, duty, gender, and racial identity were present in Elizabeth Cary’s *The tragedie of Mariam* (1613), the first known female-authored play to be published in England.\(^{38}\) In Cary’s play, the distinction between the ‘fair’ proto-Christian Mariam and ‘blackamoor’ Salome (IV.vii.462) creates a distinction between Edomites and Israelites that plays out as much in terms of race and colour as religion.\(^{39}\)

As Cary had done with the sources for *The tragedie of Mariam*, post-Reformation English theologians revisited the Hebraic/Jewish past in attempts to inform their historical understandings of nationhood and Englishness.\(^{40}\) Protestants aligned themselves with what they viewed as ‘positive’ aspects of Jewishness, including being God’s chosen people, while accusing their opponents of its perceived negative aspects, such as legalism or heresy.\(^{41}\) Puritans who sought to establish a ‘New Jerusalem’ in New

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\(^{38}\) Elizabeth Cary, *The tragedie of Mariam, the faire queene of Jewry* (London, 1613; STC 4613).


\(^{40}\) Guibbory, *Christian Identity, Jews, and Israel*, pp. 7–8.

England by converting ‘heathens’ sought answers to enduring questions about the dispersed twelve tribes of Israel as a signal of the end times. Reformation scholars in Holland and Geneva retained close networks with English Puritans and sympathised with their zeal for uncovering Hebraic truths. The Calvinist minister Franciscus Junius dedicated his *Grammatica Hebraeae Linguae* (1580) to Philip Sidney, writing that

> the reason, obviously, why I like to offer [this book] to your country, is that I conclude from long conversations which I used to have with some of your fellow countrymen that they particularly were friends of art and friends of Hebrew; that their souls breathed only Hebraic flowers [...] that their houses seemed to be all decorated with Hebrew letters and their table-talk never without them.

This is not to say that Puritans did not share anti-Jewish prejudices, but that many Protestant scholars and theologians engaged with Judaism. A shared textual heritage ensured an intellectual engagement with Jewishness that the English were less inclined to extend to Islam.

As the seventeenth century progressed, English merchants, churchmen, and policymakers weighed questions of assimilation and tolerance with economic necessity. Doubtlessly influenced by encountering Jewish people abroad, the gentleman traveller Thomas Sherley the younger returned to England from Constantinople in 1607 and penned a proposal arguing for the importance of Jews to the English rise to global power. Enticing Jewish people to England, Sherley maintained, would induce them to leave Portugal and thus bring their trade with Brazil to English ports. Throughout, Sherley remained pragmatic. ‘Daily occasions will be offered to make greater commodities out of them if once you have hold of their person and goods’, he promised. ‘But at first [the Jewes] must be tenderly used, for there is a great difference in alluring wild birds and handling them when they are caught.’

Sherley’s project, though it did not come to fruition, demonstrates how politically minded Englishmen in the seventeenth century sought to benefit from Jewish networks of trade. This idea of Jews as global circulators of wealth sat alongside the apocalyptic-mindedness of the more militant or

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43 Ibid., p. 44.
45 ‘Thomas Sherley’s project’, [early seventeenth century], Hatfield House, CP 124/152.
radical religious dissenters of the Stuart period. The puritan belief that Jews might be converted before the end times, and thus be used by God as a scourge against the Ottomans to usher a godly Protestant kingdom in Palestine, fed into enduring fantasies about ‘repossessing’ the East. The political potential of this fantasy had been apparent in the West since the Crusades, but it increasingly became situated within a worldview which increasingly also looked to the Atlantic as a place of salvation. In 1654, keen to bolster English mercantile activity, the Committee of Trade and Plantations issued a charter for ‘Privileges granted to the People of the Hebrew Nation that are to go into the Willde’ rainforests of South America and establish a Jewish colony for the English in Surinam. Although this colony failed, English officials revived the project in 1665, when the governor of Surinam offered Jewish people the opportunity to become ‘true subjects of our Sovereign Lord the King of England’ in the colony.

Over 350 years after their expulsion, Oliver Cromwell sought to formally readmit Jews into the country after repeated petitions and requests from Jewish leaders in Europe, particularly the rabbi Menasseh ben Israel. Born in Portugal and baptised as Manuel Dias Soeiro, Menasseh and his family were *conversos* who settled in Amsterdam around 1610 after fleeing from the Portuguese Inquisition. His interest in Jewish readmission to England was sparked after the visit of an English trade delegation to his synagogue in 1650, where the English discussed the possibility of drawing trade to England by offering Jewish people the same rights that they enjoyed in Amsterdam. In 1655, Menasseh left for England with his family and a small group from his community to argue for the formal recognition of Jewish settlement. In an open letter to Cromwell, Manasseh wrote that ‘[p]agans of old’ had often ‘granted most willingly free liberty, even to apostate Jewes’, and that ‘we, that are not Apostate or runagate Jewes’ hoped for much the same reception from Cromwell, since we ‘adore the same one onely God of

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Israel, together’. However, Menasseh was not favourably disposed towards all Jewish communities and tried to distinguish between the Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities, favouring the latter over the former. Despite the council’s encouraging response to Jewish readmission the results were inconclusive, and the official acceptance of Jews in England with royal protection only began in 1664, seven years after Menasseh’s death.

The readmission of Jews in England coincided with the presence of *converso* communities in the English Caribbean, formed by Portuguese *conversos* following the ill-fated Dutch attempt to invade north-west Brazil. After the Portuguese recapture of Pernambuco in 1654, many Jewish people opted to resettle in the Caribbean, including in the English-held island of Jamaica and Barbados. Although English authorities encouraged their settlement, these descendants of Portuguese *conversos* had discriminatory status in the English Caribbean. In Barbados, their testimony in courts had no validity and they faced restrictions in their possession of enslaved peoples. Those who migrated to Jamaica were not allowed to vote or be elected to civic institutions, and the colonies established a ‘Jew Tax’ in 1692. Most of these restrictions echoed the legislation which had been created to regulate the Jewish presence in England from 1656. Jewish people were prevented from entering the Levant Company or becoming board members of the West or East India Companies. Though tolerated and readmitted for their economic utility, they continued to face restrictions that sought to hinder their participation both in English overseas trade and in the economic and financial expansion of London’s activities.

Related keywords: broker, convert, merchant

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53 Ibid.
55 Ibid., p. 114.