

Episodes in Early
Modern and Modern
Christian-Jewish
Relations

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Diasporas, Dogmas, Differences

By

Paolo L. Bernardini

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For my family and for Laura, with gratitude

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PREFACE

This is a collection of 13 essays, some of them published here for the first time, others for the first time in an English translation, written over a long period of time spanning over two decades. The first, chronologically, was conceived and written in 1995, and published in 1996, while the last was published in 2015.

It would be extremely hard to look for internal coherence, either thematically or chronologically, in this volume; these 13 essays deal with several aspects, often not remotely related to one another, of the vast, undefined, fascinating and difficult discipline of Christian-Jewish studies. The first essay in the collection is an introductory chapter in which I try to overcome the difficulties of publishing a collection of essays in a single volume, and to offer a possible *fil rouge* for the entire collection. In presenting the material, I focus more on diversity than on unity. My attempt is not, and could not possibly be, that of offering a coherent volume. Rather, I wished to offer a perspective on the charming, multiple dimensions present in the discipline of Christian-Jewish studies, in particular as far as early and late modernity is concerned. Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary *par excellence*, the study of Christian-Jewish, or Jewish-Christian relations offers ample space for intellectual, social, political, and even global historians. Over the course of my career, I felt equally attracted to all, or almost all, those dimensions. For this reason, I dealt with Christian-Jewish studies, touching upon just some in the infinite number of their “episodes”, occasionally analysing historiography, occasionally attempting historical-philosophical reconstructions and hypothesis, and often using “tools” belonging to more than one historical sub-discipline, from political to legal history.

Over more than two decades, I incurred several intellectual debts. It is difficult to mention, here, every single institution, as well as every single scholar thanks to whose generosity, in terms of finance and, respectively, of scholarly advice and conversation, these essays were first conceived, then written and published. First of all, I would like to mention the newly established (October 2015) Maimonides Center for Advanced Studies-Jewish Scepticism, at the University of Hamburg, where I spent five months, from October 2015 to February 2016, and where this collection took shape. I wish to thank the Director of the Center, Prof. Dr. Giuseppe

Veltri, for his kind invitation, as well as the Center's staff, the co-director Prof. Dr. Racheli Haliva, and my colleagues Carsten Wilke (CEU), Roi Benbassat, and Charles Snyder, with whom I discussed the contents of this book. I wish also to thank Bill Rebiger, Anna Lissa, Michela Torbidoni, Giada Coppola, and all the other permanent academic staff. Last but not least, the scientific coordinator of MCAS-JS, Maria Wazinski, and my research assistant Marlene Heider, both deserve special thanks for their unremitting professional help. In the last weeks of my stay, I benefitted from several conversations with Professor David Ruderman (University of Pennsylvania), whom I would like to thank *ex imo corde* for his suggestions.

While I was at the Maimonides Center, my colleague Elisa Bianco at the University of Insubria took up some of my duties, and I am extremely grateful to her for her help in the last phase of the preparation of this text for print. My graduate student Francesco Mascellino (University of Insubria) offered me his help for other aspects of the text, with his usual professionalism; I am very thankful to him as well.

Seamus Taggart (OCSE) provided a careful revision of all the essays from the linguistic (and not just linguistic) point of view, and took care of most of the editorial work. A historian by training, Seamus advised me on several points, suggesting changes for some passages. Without his constant assistance, this work would have been inconceivable.

Many other colleagues and institutions provided me with the best environment for my study. In England, the Warburg Institute, the University of Essex, and the University of Southampton, where, at the newly established (in 1996) Parkes Institute, I worked in close contact with Professors Tony Kushner and Chris Woolgar. In the USA, I was privileged in being able to conduct research first at the John Carter Brown Library, beginning in 1994, then at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton in 1998-1999. Norman Fiering, at that time, director of the John Carter Brown Library, has been both a mentor and a friend. At the Institute for Advanced Study, I enjoyed the advice of the entire community of scholars and fellow members, and I would like to mention here Claudia Swan, whose friendship meant a lot to me.

More recently, I received grants from the Brine Charitable Trust, whose founder, Kevin Brine, invited me to work on the Biblical Judith in 2008, and from the Notre Dame Institute for Advanced Study, at the University of Notre Dame, in 2010-2011, where I had the privilege of being inaugural fellow. Prof. Dr. Vittorio Hösle, inaugural director of the NDIAS, and all the other fellows offered me a most stimulating, as well as challenging, intellectual environment. Professor Felipe Fernández-

Armesto, of the University of Notre Dame as well, has been a constant point of reference for my research since 1995. He taught me (and many other scholars in the world) to widen horizons and perspectives, and challenge common assumptions both within and outside of the profession.

Most recently, Professor Gigliola di Renzo Villata (University of Milan) invited me to reflect on the global dimensions of the Jewish cemeteries, and so began a fruitful collaboration. I wish to thank her as well as Dr. Stefania Salvi of the same university. My former colleagues at Boston University, Piergabriele Mancuso and Gadi Luzzatto Voghera deserve a particular mention, for their relentless advice and sincere friendship. Professor Marco Dogo and Tullia Catalan kindly gave me the permission to publish a revised version of the paper I presented at the international conference “The Jews and the Nation-States of South-Eastern Europe from the 1848 Revolutions to the Great Depression: Combining Viewpoints on a Controversial Story”, held at the University of Trieste on May 12th and 13th of 2014. Chronologically, it is the last essay I wrote for this book. I also wish to thank Katerina Spathia for her very professional editing in the final stage of the preparation of the manuscript for print.

Finally, I wish to mention my former students and now colleagues, Dr. Diego Lucci (American University in Bulgaria) and Dr. Luigi Robuschi (University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg), who sustain a constant intellectual conversation with me on several topics related both to the present collection of essays, and to my intellectual and scholarly work in general. Our conversations always provide me with a stimulus towards approaching new themes and confront new ideas.

CHAPTER ONE

CHRISTIANS, JEWS AND MODERNITY: AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

The study of the relations between Christians and Jews, by now a well-established field of research, is in need of constant rethinking, and of reflections on its very same object(s). Global history, dominating the historical paradigm of the last 20 years, forces Christian-Jewish, or Jewish-Christian relations, into a limited space, within the broader context of Western monotheism, or even of monotheism in general. Within this context, differences in terms of beliefs, attitudes, dogmas, which played a decisive role in Western medieval and early modern times, are reduced to a minimum. Global history apparently confines to the realm of erudition, and “traditional” local history, the same discipline of “Christian-Jewish” relations. Identities, similarities, and basically the same belonging to a common religious tradition are stressed, much more than divergences and oppositions. Furthermore, Christianity’s paramount contribution to the shaping of modernity, and in general of the Western World, makes the contribution of Judaism to the same process either less evident, or ancillary and tributary, to that provided by Christianity, both before and after the Reformation. It was a “deviated” development of Christianity, after the Reformation, but also the controversial establishment of “sceptical” Judaism, that led, via Spinoza, and not just Spinoza, to the Radical Enlightenment conceptualised by Jonathan Israel. Atheism, materialism, and the like, grew both from the rediscovery of classical sources, from Democritus to Epicurus, and from an extension of the principle of rational (and empirical) inquiry, that, from the late Renaissance to the early Enlightenment, brought scepticism to unprecedented peaks, first within a theistic, later on within a deistic paradigm. The 17th century played a pivotal role in this process, as Richard Popkin and his school have amply demonstrated.

Furthermore, the study of Christian-Jewish (or Jewish-Christian) relations needs a number of preliminary specifications. While Christianity was, and, as a matter of fact, still is, the religion of a multitude of nations

and peoples, Judaism is *par excellence*, and still with few exceptions, the religion of a “nation”, however difficult it could be, and can be, to trace its characteristics and scientifically, or even instrumentally or heuristically—for the sake of our research—define its identity. Moreover, after the Reformation, we witness a multiplication of the Christian denominations, which is not found, at least not to such an extent, in Judaism, although “heretics” populated the oldest monotheistic religion consistently since Biblical times. This difficulty mirrors another; one which is even stronger than the first. “Christian-Jewish” relations imply a very high number of levels. They include religious, political, intellectual, economic and social relations. While the dimension of the “dialogue”, the most accredited, as well as the softest and most productive relation, is normally confined to the intellectual realm, political dimensions of the relations are often, too often, dominated by extra-cultural and extra-intellectual models and patterns.

While history saw the formation of Christian states and even Christian empires, the Jews remained confined to a marginal political dimension, before and after the erection of the first Ghetto, that of Venice (1516), whose fifth centenary is being celebrated as I write this introductory essay, in a very controversial way (the controversies remind me of those that emerged, dramatically both in 1989, on the occasion of the second centenary of the French Revolution, and in 1992, on the occasion of the most troubled and occasionally disturbing celebrations of the fifth centenary of the “discovery” or rather “contact” initiated by Columbus. It is worth remembering that a “Jewish” element was strong in both events). The long-awaited, but no less controversial creation of the State of Israel put an end to a “marginal” position of the Jews in the political context of Europe, and possibly of the world, giving birth, however, to new forms of conflicts, and of “marginalities”.

The birth of the state of Israel did not put an end to disturbing, but symptomatic phenomena such as judeophobia and anti-Semitism. “Anti-Sionism”, a new coinage, powerfully entered the scene, even before the creation of the state of Israel. Immediately, therefore, Christian-Jewish studies are identified by dialectical concepts, from hate to hatred, in the diverging, but ultimately very similar, paradigms of “philo-Semitism”, and “anti-Semitism”, as if a neutral stance were not possible in this encounter. Almost inevitably, Jewish history has to be seen as Christian-Jewish or Jewish-Christian history, even though some of the most conservative Jewish historiography is still reluctant to accept this position. At the same time, Jewish history, or Christian-Jewish history, cannot escape a teleological perspective. The Shoah is such an immense event that its dark

shadow is inevitably cast well before WWII, possibly back to the very origins and the same lore of the Jewish people, since time immemorial. Its epochal dimension, however, makes us forget, too often, that the “Christian” element is not present in the Shoah, for the forces that conceived, and coherently brought forward such an atrocity were not Christian at all. Legions of historians, in the aftermath of the genocide and following a precise ideological goal, tried to involve Christians, and especially the Catholic Church, in the events and ensuing responsibilities. The “black legend” of the Catholic Church reached, in this way, an unprecedented, albeit unjustifiable, unjust, flawed and false peak. The extermination of the Jews followed other guidelines, and the link, artificially created, between theoretical and theological judeophobia and racist anti-Semitism, was and is but an artificial creation of some of the most indiscriminating anti-Catholic rhetoric.

The relations between Jews and Christians, and the relevant “Christian-Jewish” studies, are therefore to be understood under a multiplicity of perspectives, and are not always interrelated. The phenomenon of conversion exposes, among other aspects, the blurred border between Judaism and Christianity: a Jew can “become”, at least from the religious point of view—the only valid one and perceived as such in early modernity, where racism and social Darwinism were not present, nor conceivable—a Christian. A Christian can become (although this less often) a Jew, a “convert”, a proselyte in Maimonides’ sense. The fact that this “conversion”, or reversal, is no longer applicable in a racial-racist context, as blood is different to faith and not a matter of choice, carries the same meaning as the “Christian-Jewish” encounter (and relevant studies); they are deeply altered with the positivistic biology of the 19th century.

All through the Middle Ages and early modern times, Jewish-Christian relations are of a mild character, occasionally exacerbated by staunch and blind enemies of the Jews; friars and other fanatics, or kings, queens, and princes are extremely fascinating when they touch upon the theological sphere, with all its cognate areas, philosophy, and science. When scholars decide to approach the realm of society and politics, they enter a context where the Jewish-Christian opposition reveals a level of violence that is not present, with all its destructive potential, in the intellectual sphere. At the same time, from the point of view of the scholarly inquiry, there is no other field with such a number of traps, and prejudices. This is the case in the studies on the blood libel accusation. The pioneering work by Ariel Toaff opened up the path to a reappraisal of this minefield. The reaction to the books in Italy, Israel, and elsewhere, unfortunately demonstrated that the analogous historical area in “Christian-Jewish” studies is full of biases.

The ritual murder legend was a legend, and should forever remain as such. Historiography, prone to ideology, proved in this, and other cases, to be a slave to a *thema probandum*. On a personal level, at least, I have encouraged young scholars to deal dispassionately with the blood libel accusation: admitting that assumptions and *themata probanda* are absolutely bad in historiography, and that some Jews might have killed some Christians, abusing and misinterpreting Talmudic rituals and prescriptions, or rather without looking for any theological justification for their violent actions. This “neutral” approach has brought Francesca Mancini at least to re-present to the public, in an Italian translation, with one of the examples of Baroque judeophobic literature, *Das Endinger Judenspiel* (forthcoming).

This historiographic bias reveals one of the weaknesses of Christian-Jewish studies. Jews have too often been kept “frozen” from the mainstream of history, seen as a perpetual victim, in the too well-known, and fortunately too often criticised, “lachrymose” history of the Jewish people. Tears almost exclusively came from the actions of the Christians. Controversies, at the intellectual level, reveal, among other things, that Jews were all but passive. My former colleague at Boston University, Piergabriele Mancuso, by studying the long-forgotten Briel-Pinamonti controversy of the late 17th and early 18th century, has shed light on the ability, and relative aggressiveness, of the Jews in defending themselves, and safeguarding, on the intellectual level, the tenets and foundations of their faith. Personally, as a guest of the Maimonides Center for Advanced Studies-Jewish Scepticism, at the University of Hamburg, in 2015-2016, I worked on the commented edition of the *Porta veritatis*, an unpublished anti-Christian treatise of 1634-1640, written, under his Jewish name of Jacob ben Amram, by Bento Pinhel, a Portuguese marrano active in Pisa (under his third name, Benedetto Pinelli), where he was—in the same university where Galileo worked—and in those same years, a professor of Law. Among other things, this text shows the immense intellectual vitality of a Jew arguing in favour of the (mainly anti-Christian) principles of his own faith.

Christian-Jewish, or Jewish-Christian, studies are a vast field of inquiry. Jewish history has been completely intertwined with Christian history, as is obvious and self-evident since the birth of Christianity and, even before, the birth of Christ (the two things, as the great Elias Bickerman made clear more than once, are quite different).

In this collection of essays, some of them unpublished (the published essays have been revised from the original, to varying degrees), I am addressing some fragments - little or marginal episodes, in the ever-

expanding constellation of Christian-Jewish encounters. They have been written over the course of more than 20 years, and, related as they occasionally are, to scholarly events and teaching units, they also partially reveal my personal track in Christian-Jewish studies.

The first essay (or second chapter) deals with the historiography of the Jews in colonial America(s) before 1996. It was written in preparation for a major conference held at Brown University (John Carter Brown Library), in June 1997. The conference paved the way to a (still growing) number of works devoted to the Jewish presence in the New World from 1492 until the beginning of the 19th century. In 1996, 20 years ago, this was still a relatively new field of research, in spite of a number of works devoted to the early American-Jewish experience. My essay attempts to show all the ambiguities, problems, and solutions (or lack thereof) related to the American and European historiography when dealing with the Jewish “presence” on the continent right after Columbus and right before Simón Bolívar. In a context in which global history did not play a major role, as a discipline in the making, pre-1996 American-Jewish historiography faced a high degree of uneasiness in dealing with the Jewish minority, and the role this minority played in colonial times, both in North, and in Latin America. The Brown conference, and the book of proceedings (that I co-edited with Norman Fiering in 2001), played a pivotal role in placing American-Jewish history (and historiography) in a global-history context, liberating a large portion of it from parochial or otherwise limited perspectives.

The second essay (third chapter), on the concept of time in the Renaissance, falls within a completely different category. In this essay I try to reconfigure the concept of “future” within the Christian-Jewish messianic dimension of Western philosophy. In this case, Christian-Jewish, or rather Jewish-Christian elements are part of the same theoretical pattern. For this reason, I dealt with both Christian and Jewish authors, since the same concept of time is a strong binding element in the Jewish-Christian theological and, later, philosophical traditions. Christian-Jewish relations are seen, here, from the perspective of speculation and reflexion, so they do not imply real physical, political, and social encounters. This is but one of the possible “reconciliations” between the two elements. This essay, written at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton in 1998-1999, was largely inspired by the multidisciplinary, free and unbiased environment of the IAS. Here, more than elsewhere in the volume, the Jewish-Christian tradition is seen and treated as a single element, a *totum*, a universe of thought in which the two monotheistic religions once again mingle to provide the common feature of the Western thought.

The third essay (fourth chapter) deals with the tradition of the “*republica hebraeorum*”, recently re-discovered, and brought back to the international scholarly attention, thanks to the works, *inter alios et alias*, of Eric Nelson (Harvard). This is quite an interesting chapter in the history of Western political thought, which I had the pleasure to discuss with Michael Walzer once again at the IAS in 1998-1999. From *Exodus and Revolution* by Walzer (1985) to Eric Nelson’s *The Hebrew Republic* (2010), not to mention early classics such as Leo Strauss, the problem of the element of “novelty” brought in by Jewish political thought in the Western tradition has been widely debated. Did the Jews introduce the first forms of “collectivism”, eventually leading to Socialism; did they pave the way for modern egalitarian thought? Dealing with Diego Quagliioni’s and Lea Campos Boralevi’s work, I attempted to provide some guidelines to approaching the “Commonwealth of the Jews” in the early modern discourse.

The fourth essay (chapter five) was conceived and written while I was a fellow of the Parkes Institute at the University of Southampton, in 1996. Here, I deal with a crucial time period in the history of the Christian-Jewish relations, the first decades of the 18th century in England. It was an important period due to not only the creation, or rather “invention” of the “Britons”—as Linda Colley splendidly showed in her 1992 book—but also due to the new perspectives British intellectuals, including Jewish authors, had on the Jewish and Jewish-Christian past, and the current situation of the Jewish community, informally, and later on formally, re-admitted in Britain. The interest in those decades and figures, which were quite important in the shaping of British attitudes towards the Jews, reaching well beyond the academic sphere, has been revamped, quite recently, by David Ruderman’s convincing reconstruction of the intellectual scene in which Judaism and Christianity met in early 18th century Britain. Professor Ruderman’s *Connecting the Covenants* (2007) explores in depth the creation, or rather attempted creation, of a common ground, on a clean slate, for Judaism and Christianity in early Hanoverian England. My essay was originally published in the volume in memory of James Parkes (1896-1981). Parkes’ works have pioneered a new approach to Jewish-Christian relations whose importance has too often been neglected. Works such as *The Conflict of the Church and Synagogue: a Study in the Origins of Anti-Semitism* (1934) and *The Jew and his Neighbour: A Study in the Causes of Anti-Semitism* (1930), among many others Parkes wrote in his long and prolific life, are well worth a re-appraisal.

The fifth essay (chapter six) is also the last devoted to early modern times. While the object is not immediately related to Christian-Jewish relations, my point is that even in the development of the modern concept of “tolerance”, the reflection on the Jews played a certain role. The essay deals with a German religious controversy, affecting the Lutheran world, which took place in the middle of the 18th century.

With the sixth essay (chapter seven) we abandon early modernity and enter later modern and contemporary history. After the Emancipation, most of the common paradigms in Christian-Jewish relations suffered through many changes. In this essay I deal with Isidore Loeb and the Jewish question in the former Ottoman Empire. After the Emancipation, the Jews ceased to be only passive players in history, and the involvement of scholars like Loeb and powerful associations such as the Alliance Israélite Universelle, founded in 1860, began to play a major, decisive role in world history. This new position of some Jewish élites marked a watershed in Jewish-Christian relations. Too often, however, a blind faith in the value of the modern state as embodied by revolutionary France brought many Jews to underestimate the potential dangers and threats for the Jews themselves (and for other minorities, such as the Armenians) that were present in the ideologies of the new states born from the dissolution of the Ottoman (or other) empire.

In the seventh essay (chapter eight), I move to a completely different subject, the Jewish cemetery and its appraisal within a world-history context. Within a European context, and a Christian-Jewish framework, Jewish cemeteries, such as the one at San Nicolò in the Lido Island in the Venetian lagoon, were pioneering spaces, which paved the way to the modern cemetery, meant as a separate space, and politically institutionalised by Napoleon in 1804.

The two succeeding essays (eighth and ninth; chapter nine and chapter ten respectively) are devoted to the Biblical Judith in the Italian context. In this case, Biblical history shows the convergence, and defies the oppositions, of the Jewish and the Christian tradition(s).

The tenth essay (chapter 11) deals with one of the major figures in the Jewish community of 19th century Hamburg, Gabriel Riesser. Riesser was the heir of the great Enlightenment tradition of Moses Mendelssohn, and his brilliant career is a testimony, once again, to the new role taken up by the Jews in 19th century Europe.

The eleventh essay (chapter 12) is thematically, at least in the main, close to the first in this collection. It deals with the historiography of the Italian Jews of the 19th century. Written in 1994, this essay gave, at the time, a fairly accurate picture of the state of the art of works devoted, until

then, to the complex history of the “most ancient of minorities” in Italy, the Jews, as for the long 19th century. After 1994, the literature on the Jews in Italy in the 19th century grew immensely, thanks to American, European, and Italian scholars, from Bruno Maida to Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, among several others.

The last essay (chapter 13) deals with a post-Shoah theme, the cult of memory. Post-1945 Christian-Jewish relations place the same idea of “memory” at the centre of the intellectual, social, political, and even theological stage. In the post-modern world, where (apparently) anti-Semitism is no longer a threat and judeophobia is kept at bay and denied within Christianity—memory (and, often, the memory of evil) has turned into a powerful ideological weapon, in the hands of modern democracies. This provoking essay sheds some light on the positive, as well as negative potential of the cult of memory.

This collection of 13 essays does not aim at providing a coherent work, and there is only a very loose *fil rouge* connecting them, either chronologically or thematically. They have been written over a long period of time, covering more than two decades. For this very reason, both in their contents and in their arguments, they came of age, at least some of them, and can occasionally be considered “old”. Their value, however, goes beyond the coherence, or lack thereof, in the collection. They rather hint at the plurality of perspectives, levels, dimensions, in which Christian-Jewish, or Jewish-Christian “relations” unfold. Their value, therefore, is more than documentary, even though they do also have a strictly documentary value. This is true, to my understanding, of essays in historiography.

Christian-Jewish relations, even in a post-modern world, dominated by world/global history, retain a major interest: they testify to paramount fractures within the Western tradition, but, at the same time, are themselves *the* Western tradition. Every book on Christian-Jewish relations is a book on the European, and the Western, legacy.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LITERATURE ON THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS IN THE NEW WORLD FROM S.W. BARON AND J.R. MARCUS, TO THE PRESENT (1996): A CRITICAL SURVEY OF SOME SELECT WORKS

Foreword

This chapter aims to offer the reader simultaneously more and less than what is promised in the title. It will offer *more*, in the sense that I will also address some general theoretical questions in the first part of my paper. It will offer *less*, in the sense that, as a consequence of what I argue in the first part, I will devote the second part of the paper only to the historiography of the Jews in North (British) America. I will briefly discuss only a very limited number of the scholarly works devoted to the Jews in the Americas. I will not deal with a large number of articles published in Europe and Israel. This would go beyond the limit of a paper aimed at raising questions, and awareness on their general significance, rather than provide definitive conclusions.

The questions that arise from the more recent, as well as from the remotest historiography (which keeps growing at a fast pace), about the Jews in the New World outnumber the solutions provided by that same historiography. This phenomenon is particularly evident when dealing with Spanish-Portuguese America.

I will begin with some methodological as well as theoretical issues which emerge not only from the select historiography on the subject which I have studied, but also and even more cogently, from the title of this

* Paper prepared (but not read) for the international conference: "The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West 1400-1800", John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, 16-18 June 1997.

conference itself, “The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West 1400-1800”.

I will also resist the easy temptation to include comments on what has been presented over the preceding days, hoping that this will be a matter of discussion after my presentation. Given that some of the *impasses* to which I refer here, especially the difficulty in encompassing North, Caribbean, and Spanish-Portuguese America with the same treatment, seems not only to have been approached, but also partially resolved over these rich and enriching four days.

Which America, What is a Jew? Some Basic Distinctions

First of all: if it is rather clear what *New World* means; it is somewhat less clear what the category of *Jew* means, especially in this context, but also in the European context after 1492.

It is doubtlessly correct to speak in terms of *Jews* and *Jewry* only with regard to those who settled in colonial North America and the Caribbean Islands under Dutch, French and British rule.

Everywhere else in Spanish and Portuguese America it is far more appropriate to speak of crypto-Jews, *marranos*, *conversos*, and judaising New Christians.

I underline the ‘judaising’ in that the New Christian population—and too often historiography, tends to forget this fact—could also be completely faithful to the new faith. I think it is unproductive to dispute the use of one term or the other in historiography inasmuch as this terminology indicates only heuristic categories and does not refer to the real terminology used in the primary sources.

Now, I do not want to argue that only a daylight Jew is entitled to be called a *Jew*, and thus that this label would not apply to secret Jews. Judaism can be defined, much more than Christianity, as a state of mind. This, however, does not help historical research. *I just want to point out that being legally entitled to practice Judaism represents a totally different situation, from the point of view of every or almost every branch of historical research, than being forced to practice it in secrecy and under threat.* This fact exposes a gulf between the historiography dealing with the Jews in colonial North America and the Caribbean Islands where tolerance—in legal terms—was variously granted to the Jews on the one side, and historiography dealing with Spanish and Portuguese America on the other. As Haim Ayni stated in 1974, referring to the very enlightening history of the Latin American Jewish communities in the aftermath of the Wars of Independence:

...until the beginning of the 19th century this subcontinent was virtually closed to Jews, as were the mother countries in the Iberian Peninsula. If any Jews made their way into Latin America, they were breaking the law and could not live openly as a community.

I would add that for them was also rather difficult to live openly even as single individuals or as a family.

Still, the simple differentiation between *Jews* and *Judaizing New Christians* as such is not fertile in historiography, unless we determine it more narrowly and explain why this difference affects a comprehensive approach to the Jews in the New World. The characteristics of this distinction may appear obvious: different plight, different chronology, different sources and goals of historical research. However, we can understand these characteristics more completely if we consider that the differences between English, French and Dutch America, and Spanish-Portuguese America *broadly reflect and mirror the differences* between Holland, France and England on one side, and Portugal and Spain on the other.

This is particularly true when we refer to the history of Judaism and the Jews as a people, without categorising them as individuals, families, merchants, traders and planters in the context of economic history—a context I do not want to deal with in this article. In that context, the Jewish factor plays a different, non religious role, and has to be understood on the basis of general economic history of networks created by whatever majority or minority group rather than on that of Jewish history. So a history like that is peculiar in that it combines religion and ethnicity on a very different level than is the case regarding other minorities.

Here, the European expansion plays a further, fundamental, role. Jews migrating to the New World from Europe brought with them a distinctive and peculiar experience that had been molded and accumulated since the fall of the Second Temple and, particularly in the Middle Ages, with the formation of *kahal* or *kehilla*. This was, roughly speaking, the Jewish guild or *universitas*, as embodied and represented by its leadership (*kahal*), and ideally reproducing in its political autonomy the old Palestinian state in the context of the Christian majority state which tolerated that particular guild (essentially being a *state within the state*).

Portuguese and Spanish-Portuguese New Christians, in contrast, brought a rather more recent, dramatic experience with them, in which the Jewish heritage, still in some forms present and recalled, had to suffer deep changes, adaptations, and crises. This fact helps us reflect on the distinct identity of Jews and New Christians even more than the sheer terminological distinction does.

Communal and Individual Identity in British and Dutch America

A key role in this definition is played by *communal identity* and the completely different shape and destiny of the Jewish communities in the two areas of North American-Caribbean Islands and Spanish-Portuguese America. Those Jews who emigrated to North America from Europe, as the late Professor Marcus has widely demonstrated, wished (at least part of them) to recreate the communal structures they had left at home. To recreate the community with all its satellite institutions (*hevrot* [charities], *bet din* [civil tribunal] and so on), to build up public synagogues, and to foster public-communal institutions as much as it was possible, meant to adhere to, and to be willing to perpetuate, the European tradition, possibly without the burden of the ghettos. It is also true that all of British American Colonial Jewry had not led in this direction. The conflict between *kahal* and single individuals who were jealous of their own personal liberty and protected their money from the communal fees (as was the situation in Europe from 1600 to ca. 1800) was apparently more or less repeated in the colonies:

- A. What was happening to the European Jewish Communities was by far, and without a notable time lag, reproduced in the North American Colonies, and
- B. North American Jewish identity can be explained as *communal identity*, both for those who wanted to recreate the community and *kahal*, and for those who rejected it as a burden on individual freedom as well as, after 1776, on the allegiance to the new federal states.

The evolution of the *kahal* in colonial North America and in the Caribbean Islands can be regarded as parallel or almost parallel, with the differences related to substantial shifts caused by geography, culture and environment, to the evolution and crisis of the institution in Europe.

This fact must be re-thought in terms of European or Old World “expansion” broadly conceived, for the community and the *kahal*, its ruling elite, are typical of the Old World Diaspora and not of classical Jewish political structures.

Apart from the highly interesting, substantial, but for my argument-marginal, differences between the North American Jewish settlement and the one in the Caribbean Islands, both establishments can historically be treated on the basis of the same or almost the same kind of sources, if they

are extant, and with the same methodology as in the case of European Jewry. This assumption legitimated the treatment of a subject as “the Jews”, properly speaking, *only in North America and the Caribbean Islands*.

Communal and Individual Identity in Spanish-Portuguese America

The case of communal identity in Spanish-Portuguese America is utterly different. Here we enter quite another world. The fact that obviously no community was formally allowed, because no Jews were allowed to settle, makes the identity of communities as problematic as that of individuals. This uncertain condition, both for the objects of our history and even more for the historians, once again mirrors the European, in this case Spanish-Portuguese, situation. I do not intend to underestimate the qualitative as well as quantitative, and geographical as well as chronological differences; however the similarities are clearly striking.

The question of communal identity is of extreme importance, especially in those cases where the opportunity to create a *community* or something similar came up, occasionally in Brazilian history under Dutch rule, or in all Latin America after the Wars of Independence. This history seems to point to the fact that communal identity, in the sense of *guild* identity, with all its implications, individual and social, political and religious, implied by this institution, or at least the sense and proper meaning of it, was close to being forgotten in all these extraordinary political contingencies.

Historians dealing with Latin America have too often given but uncertain definitions of those more or less secret communities that shaped individuals probably as much as families and collective memory did. Seymour Liebman wrote of a “religio-ethnic” group in his last book, *New World Jewry* (1982). But this definition is flawed in that both the religious, and especially the ethnic, elements were quite uncertain. On the other hand, Hermann Kellenbenz wrote of these communities as “clans”, and this definition seems to me at least more viable.

The *individual* identity of the Judaizing New Christians considered, we are facing even more complex problems.

Few scholars have traditionally drawn attention to this key aspect – until very recently. Anita Novinsky dealt with the subject in a pioneering way in her 1972 monograph about the New Christians of Bahia. Already Haim Beinart had addressed the question in 1967. Later on, the identity theme brought up fierce debates, involving again Anita Novinsky and Benzion Netanyahu in 1982, as well as Judith Laikin Elkin and Zvi

Locker. Recent work of research, including the one of Netanyahu's, has pointed to an even more complex and subtle definition of Judaizing New Christian identity. The focus tends to be on religious practice, adherence *to* and *knowledge of* traditional Judaism or/and lack of them, syncretism, self- and God-representation, marriage strategies and cultural attitudes, not to mention the interaction with the indigenous community (interaction which was absent in the North).

All research results point to a complete re-definition of the Jewish *elements* in the crypto-Jews, so that even the apparently neutral definition of crypto-Jews now seems questionable.

Gulfs in History, Gulfs in Historiography

There is a substantial difference between the two Americas. A difference that, apart from the occasional binding elements of economical and mercantile links, family ties between the two subcontinents, and trade via the Caribbean, especially Curaçao, seems to grow, the more historiography moves towards the definition of identity.

A "Euro-Jew" on the north side, privately and publicly practicing Jewish religion under legal entitlement and eventually protection, being free of the requirement to declare himself a 'Jew', can enter trade, professions and so on as a common man, without discrimination on the basis of faith. On the south-central side, the Judaizing New Christian is continually trying to avoid denunciations, with conflicting public and private identities, constantly under pressure, on the verge of schizophrenia.

Thus there is the recognised authority of *kahal* and colonial state, both potentially friendly, and the spiritual guidance of permitted texts and rabbis. On the other side, there is the lack of such authority, and its transfer to material, secret, unsupervised teaching; the lack of written reservoirs of memory, at least those legally allowed. Still there is the necessity of adaption to deal with another external authority, in this case not to be followed but, to be understood, and identified, in order to escape from it: this is the Inquisition.

From an external observer's point of view, as in my case, the patent, abysmal difference that is characteristic of history has been marking historiography too. For this matter, it is possible to draw a coherent line of evolution in the historiography of the Jews in British America from well before Marcus or Baron. This evolution reflects trends and developments in US historiography in general; but it seems to be more difficult to me to do the like with the historiography of Spanish-Portuguese America.

In the former case, objects, instruments, and often an ideological *thema probandum* are clear enough; and we can place them in a coherent framework as I will attempt to illustrate later on.

In the latter case, on the contrary, the lack of precise definition of the subject makes even historians meander into the realms of biography, prosopography, narrative and antiquarian history, history of single families, *autos-da-fe*, *procesos*, and other case studies. I certainly do not wish to infer that these kinds of historical writing should be underestimated. On the contrary, I think that it might be enriched by analysis based on selective identification of questions and quantity as well as selection of data; since the amounts of data, to mention only the proceedings of the Inquisition, are immense. Nor do I wish to underestimate the most recent contributions that go beyond this traditional treatment of the subject.

That being said, the reading of works such as the biographies of Luis de Carvajal by Martin Cohen and others, or Eva Uchmany's recent fresco of the sad saga of the Diaz Nieto family, is both highly entertaining and informative, since those works shed new light on key figures of both American and European-Jewish history.

However, if we give proper weight to the religious and communal elements, as well as to the overtly maintained and "classical"—in the sense of both European and Jewish—identity, I think that a paper the *Jews* could but be either on the North American, or on the Caribbean experience.

To Make the Long Story (and Historiography) Short

To write an essay on the history of historiography is not a task easily performed. One needs not only to have read and studied a great amount of primary sources as well as of literature on the subject, but, as the late Franco Venturi used to remind his students, possibly also to have written widely on that same subject. This is not the case for the present writer, at least for the second requirement suggested by my late mentor. A further problem arises in the case of the historiography of the Jews in North America. This was a field fairly neglected until the middle of the present century, cultivated only among those historians once labeled as "amateurs" by Salo W. Baron. Those amateurs unveiled a quantity of archival sources related to the Jews and their life in North America. The names of many of the major contributors to this field seem to have been forgotten: from Abraham Barnett Elzas to Meyer Keiserling; from Peter Wiernick to Charles Patrick Daly; from A. M. Friedenberg to George Cohen. Isaac Markens's *Hebrew-American Portraits* appeared as early as 1888, in the

prosopography fashion of the time. Lee Max Friedmann, whose *Early American Jews* concluded an era of more or less amateur historiography at the dawn of the professionalisation of the field, appeared in 1934, coming out just three years after another gentle presentation of North American Jewish history. Anita Libman Lebeson's *Jewish Pioneers in America, 1492-1848* was published in New York in 1931.

Had the "Land of Liberty" offered a major haven to the Jews, I might have, along with other "sectarian" historians of the "Jewish experience", been tempted to avoid a "communal" history of the North American Jews—integrated, occasionally perfectly, into the local, growing society: a perfect ingredient in the melting pot.

From the middle of this century onwards, however, the history of the Jews in colonial North America has been an extremely popular subject and the number of respective articles, books and conferences continues to grow. This growth in interest originated primarily from the necessity of establishing, securing and "increasing" the memory of Jewish people and of their history in the aftermath of the Holocaust, as well as, in more practical terms, from the creation of the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati in 1947.

This reappraisal and new, steady interest were, broadly speaking, also generated by the advancement of scholarship and of the history profession all over the Western World, now in long-lasting peace. The creation of the State of Israel and its university system also contributed to the blossoming of American-Jewish history, though Israeli scholars have turned their attention to American-Jewish history only rather recently, as Jonathan Sarna's recent comprehensive bibliography testifies. The flow of scholarly works devoted to the subject in several languages is truly remarkable and is difficult to command in its entirety.

The second part of my paper is a selective critical overview of this impressive production. I shall attempt to draw a line of development within the field, starting with its very origins, passing through the epochal works by Cecil Roth but especially by Salo Wittmaier Baron and Jacob Rader Marcus, to conclude with a brief overview of the present state of historiography.

Current historiography marks a separation and challenge to some old assumptions about American-Jewish history. Nevertheless, it still adheres to the old principles and methodology that informed the very first approach to the subject by professional historians; as well as the pioneering "amateurs" from the late 19th century to the first four decades of the present century.

I will argue that some historiographical assumptions on North American Jewry can lead to a misinterpretation of the entire Jewish history; and that there are some sub-fields in American-Jewish history, which are worth exploring in depth. It is worthwhile addressing some important issues not only in this area, but also in European and World history, in order to avoid the *cul-de-sac* often met with when research relies on commonplaces.

A Destiny of Glory and Triumph? The Jews in British America

It is true, as Professor David Katz reminded us at the beginning of his paper read at the present conference, that in the Bible there were no references to America (how could there have been?). At least, it is clear by now that God did not assign this portion of unknown and unimagined land to any of Moses's descendants.

It is also true that the scant references in the Old Testament to this remote country are only a matter of speculation, such as in the case of the mythical *Ophir* of Salomon's travel, which some Renaissance Jewish scholars, including Azariah de' Rossi, identified with America, other however with Africa or India.

It is nonetheless undeniable that the historiography of the North American Jews, until very recently at least, had generated a solid, well built, almost unchallenged and unquestionable myth or *topos*: that of America as a land of freedom, tolerance, blossoming and equal opportunities, integration into the gentile society, and smooth assimilation, as a quasi-Zion or a real Zion to be viewed as a viable, not heretic alternative to Israel, the Promised Land. One of the more balanced defenders of this myth, Henry L. Feingold, wrote about the Jews in the US in his 1978 major monograph *Zion in America*. This position appears in almost teleological terms in one of the several books meant for the general public, which deal with the North American Jewish experience. It is the well-known series edited by the same Feingold, *The Jewish People in America*, and sponsored by the American Jewish Historical Society, first published in 1992. The titles of the five volumes express more than any explanation could: *A Time for Planting* for the period of the first migration until 1820; *A Time for Gathering*, 1820-1880; *A Time for Building*, 1880-1920; *A Time for Searching*, 1920-1945; and finally *A Time for Healing*, covering the period since WWII.

A clearly distinguishable philosophy of history, drawn from the Old Testament, informs this project: planting, gathering, building, searching,

and finally healing. Not only the “healing” is enigmatic, recalling the New, even more than the Old Testament. But so is the “searching”, especially if we consider that, after the innovative recent works by Leonard Dinnerstein and Frederic Jaher, it has been made clear that the period covered by this “searching” is that of the rise of American anti-Semitism, a marginal and negligible phenomenon in American history.

This *topos* or myth—which can also be a perfect interpretation of past and present reality, an issue I cannot discuss here and now—dates back to the very origins of the historiography on North-American Jewry. Even before professional historians first and exclusively dealt with the American Jewish experience, those historians who wrote about Anglo-Jewish history, of which, at least politically, the American-Jewish history can justly be regarded as a branch until 1776, viewed the American land as one of freedom and opportunity in comparison to Europe, but also to England traditionally praised too highly by its first historians.

Albert M. Hyamson, a pioneer in the field of Anglo-Jewish history devoted only some lines to the description of the conditions of life of the Jews in Barbados, Jamaica and Rhode Island, “where the most tolerant government then existing was to be found” in his 1908 work *A History of the Jews in England*. In the case of Hyamson, and later of Cecil Roth, the praise was, above all, for the British government, which extended its Jewish policy in its colonies, so that when Surinam, for instance, passed from British to Dutch rule in 1667, according to Hyamson:

...many of the Jews, having once tasted English rule, seemed desirous of retaining it, and sought a new home elsewhere under the English flag.

The myth of the idyllic relationship between Jews and Englishmen, and between Jews and British government, dates back to the late 18th century and is nothing but a part of the more general construction of the myth of the English state with its political constitution and corresponding respect for individuals, widely fostered by Voltaire, Montesquieu and other men of the Enlightenment in the 1730s.

In the field of Jewish historiography, the myth attracted the most illustrious historians of the 19th century, including the pioneer Markus Jost—according to his major biographer Reuven Michael, the “Voltaire of Jewish historiography”—who wrote in the 1820s. Jost was however a minor figure if compared to Graetz.

When the monumental history of the Jews by Heinrich Graetz was eventually translated into English in 1891, 15 years after the publication of the last of its ten volumes (in German, 1857-1874), thanks to the efforts of