

## **“Josephus and the Miracle of Jewish History”**

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In order to understand the influence of Josephus on post-Reformation English thought about Jewish history, we need to begin with Augustine. He believed the Jews had an important role in a Christian world. Although God had punished them by destroying Jerusalem and damning them to wander the earth, Christians should tolerate Jews because they were witnesses to the antiquity and thus the authenticity of Scripture, and by extension, Christianity itself.<sup>1</sup> In many ways, however, the Jews were marginalized as historical actors because medieval Christianity, following Augustine on this point as well, had a restrained vision of the end of time. The apocalypse, in Augustine’s view, described events beyond historical time. If the Jews were to be involved, as some thought, in the onset of the millennium, their role – as well as that of any other human being – took place beyond the normal boundaries of human time. If the future of the Jews was irrelevant, then surely their present was also without meaning. Whatever happened to the Jews between these two poles of punishment and ultimate redemption simply did not matter. At some point they would be gathered in, but what mattered about their present condition was their function as witnesses to God’s divine justice and Christian truth.

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<sup>1</sup> See Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York, 2008).

Other factors contributed to the lack of medieval, and to some extent, early modern interest in contemporary Jewish history among Christians. When they thought about Jewish life after the destruction of Jerusalem, most medieval Christian writers believed the religion had decayed into the obscurantism of the rabbis as embodied in the Talmud. The caricature and rhetoric about Jewish legalism, carnality, and criminality helped to stifle any curiosity about the experience of Jews after the destruction of the Temple. As more elaborate fantasies about Jewish atrocities developed after the 12<sup>th</sup> century, it would have been even harder for Christians to feel any real appreciation of contemporary Judaism or medieval Jews.

Even if Christians could have overcome their prejudices about Jews, the historiographical culture of the Middle Ages worked against seeing the Jews as a people with their own history. Most history writing by Christians was local, growing out of an interest in a monastery, or the actions of a particular king, or a military event.<sup>2</sup> The Jews were marginal to the central themes of these works. The Jews had no political structures, religious institutions, or military traditions in their own communities. Their experiences fell outside the parameters of most Christian historical writing. Nor did the Jews themselves, have a well-developed historical literature that might have provoked responses from Christians.<sup>3</sup>

Different obstacles to integrating Jews into normative historiography appeared in the more nuanced historical culture of the Renaissance. Where kings and monasteries

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<sup>2</sup> John Burrow, *A History of Histories: Epics, Chronicles, and Inquiries from Herodotus and Thucydides to the Twentieth Century* (Vintage, 2009), 168-258.

<sup>3</sup> Yosef Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (University of Washington Press, 1982).

had provided structure to medieval historical writing, the history of cities, such as Florence, became a central theme for many Renaissance writers. Jewish identity was not bound up with a city. For humanist authors interested in warfare, contemporary culture, contests among rulers, and the connection to the worlds of Rome and Greece, the Jewish experience simply did not fit into any of the usual categories of history writing as it evolved in the Renaissance.<sup>4</sup>

It seemed at first as if the Reformation would not fundamentally change the marginal position of the Jews in contemporary historical thinking. Luther first saw the Jews in a positive light because of their intimate connection with Jesus. That approbation turned to disdain, suspicion and hatred when they refused to embrace reformed Christianity. Unlike medieval writers, he did believe the Jews played an important role in contemporary society. He made them his enemies. The Jews became in Luther's later thought existential threats like the Turks and Catholics, and it was incumbent upon true Christians to eradicate them.<sup>5</sup> The Jews were part of the events marking the onset of the apocalyptic struggle against the devil and his allies. Luther's hatred of the Jews, however, did not really provide fertile ground for exploring the nature of Jewish history or contemporary Jewish life.

Other leaders of the early Reformation more or less shared Luther's attitudes to Jewish history, if not always to the Jews themselves. Even those Protestants who were more disposed to think of the Jews with greater compassion or to see them as a resource

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<sup>4</sup> Burrow, *History of Histories*, 259-282.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Kaufmann, "Luther and the Jews," in Dean Phillip Bell and Stephen G. Burnett, eds., *Jews, Judaism and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Brill, 2006), 69-104.

for understanding Scripture, still saw the historical destiny of the Jews as defined by the destruction of Jerusalem and their dispersion.<sup>6</sup> The continuing conditions of Jewish life after this divine punishment were largely irrelevant.

It was not until the English Reformation began to craft its own particular approach to the theological meaning of history and the future that the post biblical history of the Jews became important to Christians. Their deep attachment to and intimacy with Scripture, particularly to what they saw as the pure, literal truth of the Hebrew Bible (as opposed to the allegorical readings of the Catholics) – as well as their own identification with the Israelites--made Protestants more likely to *see* Jews more clearly as a people with a real history in time and place.

The historical culture of early modern Europe also helped to make post-biblical Jews a more legitimate or acceptable subject for study. The scholarly efforts of Renaissance humanists to recover an accurate text of the Bible, or to reveal Christian truths hidden in Jewish mystical traditions, opened new pathways for Jewish culture to enter mainstream scholarship. Both Protestants and Catholics mined the Jewish past looking for precedents or authorities for their respective practices. The encyclopedic, universal, and antiquarian instincts of Reformation and post-Reformation intellectuals certainly contributed to a widening of vision that could more easily encompass the

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<sup>6</sup> See Timothy J. Wengert, "Philip Melanchthon and the Jews: A Reappraisal," in Bell and Burnett, 105-136; R. Gerald Hobbs, "Bucer, the Jews, and Judaism," in Bell and Burnett, 137-170; Hans-Martin Kirn, "Ulrich Zwingli, the Jews and Judaism," in Bell and Burnett, 171-196; Achim Detmers, "Calvin, the Jews, and Judaism," in Bell and Burnett, 197-218.

Jews.<sup>7</sup> Book like Raleigh's *History of the World* or the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, which aspired to collect virtually all knowledge, had space for aspects of the Jewish experience. Unlike the political or institutional narratives of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the more expansive historical agenda of these universal histories made room for the Jews, albeit in very limited ways. With the discovery of the native peoples of the new world, and the growth of new and often demonized Christian communities, the Jews were no longer the only people who did not fit within the traditional confines of local, civic, or national histories. The historical and theological culture of the English Reformation itself marked a break with previous attitudes. First, history came to play an increasingly vital role in the way English Protestants sought to assert the legitimacy of their church. They looked to history for evidence to attack Catholic claims of priority and authenticity and establish the antiquity of the English Reformed Church. It was a way to guarantee the truth of the Reformed church without having to rely on miracles – a kind evidence that was no longer acceptable. Miracles had clearly ceased; Catholic miracles were patently fraudulent.<sup>8</sup>

For English Protestants, ultimately, the past was not just the record of human actions; it was also where God had acted in history. Scripture provided this blueprint for God's intervention in history.<sup>9</sup> He redeemed the Israelites and brought the Gospel into the world. They could see similar proof of God's hand in their own day in the rise

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<sup>7</sup> Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (Yale, 1998), 152-161, 188-216.

<sup>8</sup> Jane Shaw, *Miracles in Enlightenment England* (Yale, 2006), 21-50; and Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Avihu Zakai, "Reformation, History and Eschatology in English Protestantism," *History and Theory* 26 (1987), 300-318.

of reformed monarchs in England and the defeat of the Spanish Armada. History was truly one continuum of events that offered proof of God's power and justice. This instinct made it very easy for them to feel a deep connection to God's destruction of Jerusalem.

The future of the Jews became a crucial issue as well for English Protestants. Instead of an Augustinian idea of the apocalypse coalescing beyond human time, the devout saw the imminent perfection of society as a precursor to the millennium. Human beings were instrumental in preparing the world for the end time. Part of that preparation began to focus on the Jews since biblical prophecies predicted that God would not abandon them in the end. They would accept Christ and return to Palestine as a necessary preparation for the perfection of society.<sup>10</sup> English believers seized upon this idea as a controlling factor in how to understand the future. The fate of the Jews was thus part of Protestant efforts to forge a redeemed society. God had punished the Jews and dispersed them to wander the earth, but they would be recalled and accept Christian truth as part of the preparation for Christ's return. This belief would drive later Protestant attempts at conversion and support for the Jews to return to Palestine. In this new mindset about the Jews' role in redemption, they naturally paid more attention to the fate of the Jews after the destruction of the Temple.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Zakai, "Poetics of History and the Destiny of Israel: The Role of the Jews in English Apocalyptic Thought During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 5(1996), 319.

<sup>11</sup> *Canaans calamitie, Ieruselems misery, and Englands mirror. The dolefull destruction of faire Ierusalem by Titus, the sonne of Vespasian Emperour of Rome, in the yeare of Christs incarnation 74. Wherein is shewed the wonderfull miseries which God brought upon that citty for sinne, being utterly ouerthrowne and destroyed by sword, pestilence, and famine. Briefly gathered into this small volume, for the benefit of all well disposed persons, wherein they shall*

As English Protestants began to think in these new ways about history, the manifestation of God in history, the past and future importance of the Jews, they made Josephus and his narrative of the destruction of Jerusalem a fundamental point of reference. He already had occupied an important place as an authority on the Jewish past.<sup>12</sup> Christians could get closer to the world of the Gospels by reading the *Jewish War*. His *Jewish Antiquities* provided a deeper context for the Jewish culture and religion that had produced Christianity. Jesus himself appeared in Josephus' work even if that crucial passage in the *Jewish War* attracted recurring criticism and doubt. Perhaps most importantly, at least to English Protestants, Josephus' account of the destruction of Jerusalem offered vivid, dramatic, and unimpeachable proof that scriptural predictions of divine punishment of the Jews were true.

By bringing Josephus into the heart of their theological and historical culture, English Protestants sparked a slow change in the perception of Jewish history that continued to evolve in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the beginning of this process, at least, the vivid detail of Josephus's work, its confirmation of Scripture, and the interest in Jews that developed in Reformation-era England, all inspired the creation of metaphorical and literal "continuations" of Josephus. As it happens, it was a French

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*find many strange and notable things, worthy to be regarded and had in remembrance.* , At London : Printed by Tho: Purfoot, and are to be sould by Robert Bird, at the signe of the Bible in Cheapeside, 1625.

<sup>12</sup>NOTE: Josephus as source for medieval authors interested in biblical events. See, for example, Peter Comestor. By the Renaissance, Josephus had become a standard authority on many questions of Jewish custom, law, and chronology as well as Roman history. See for example, Polydore Vergil, *On Discovery*, Brian P. Copenhaver, trans. (Harvard, 2002). There were also many early modern editions and translations of Josephus' various works. See EEBO.

Hugeunot historian who created the first and most significant continuation of Josephus. Jacques Basnage's *Histoire des Juifs* was translated into English in 1708 and became the basis, often unacknowledged, for various continuations and other subsequent histories of the Jews.<sup>13</sup> Very soon these continuations of Josephus evolved into separate narrative accounts of Jewish history, although even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they still largely retained the structure of Basnage's work and often relied upon content derived from his book.

The larger purpose of Basnage's history has been the subject of recent debate (see my article and Sutcliff's rejoinder), but what matters here is how the structure and approach of his work shaped later presentations of Jewish history in the Anglo-Protestant tradition. Very soon after the English translation of Basnage appeared, several important editions of Josephus' collected works were published, containing so-called "continuations" of Josephus. These were essentially adaptations of Basnage's review of post-biblical Jewish history. The most elaborate edition of this new combination of texts is that of Maynard, which appeared in 1792.<sup>14</sup> In this case, Maynard essentially plagiarized several chapters from Basnage to create his

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<sup>13</sup> *The History of the Jews, from Jesus Christ to the Present Time: Containing their Antiquities, their Religion, their Rites, The Dispersion of the Ten Tribes in the East, and the Persecutions this Nation has suffer'd in the West. Being a Supplement and Continuation of the History of Josephus.* Written in French by Mr. Basnage. Translated into English by Tho. Taylor. See Jonathan Elukin, "Jacques Basnage and the History of the Jews: Anti-Catholic Polemic and Historical Allegory in the Republic of Letters," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992): 603-3.

<sup>14</sup> Maynard, ed., *The whole genuine and complete works of Flavius Josephus, the learned and authentic Jewish historian and celebrated warrior... Works. English 1792 translated from the original in the Greek language and diligently revised...; to which is added various useful indexes; also a continuation of the history of the Jews, from Josephus down to the present time... by George Henry Maynard; illustrated with marginal references and notes by the Rev. Edward Kimpton...*

continuation.<sup>15</sup> Other less elegant editions of Josephus, with a continuation also essentially plagiarized from the English translation of Basnage, quickly followed Maynard's edition.<sup>16</sup>

The center of historical and theological interest did not shift immediately from Josephus' account of Jerusalem's destruction to post-Temple history. The role of Josephus in proving the truth of Christianity by making clear the fulfillment of scriptural prophecies remained central to 18<sup>th</sup> century historical exegesis. Bradshaw, for example, reminded his readers: "The Writings of Flavius Josephus have always been esteemed by the Pious and Learned, for their uniform tendency to elucidate the History

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<sup>15</sup> Maynard, in fact, went out of his way to claim that his work was original: "To compleat the work, we have annexed a Supplement, collected from authentic Manuscripts, bringing down the Jewish history to the present times, which, being an attempt entirely new, we flatter ourselves, will stamp an additional value upon our undertaking, and make it in every respect worthy of the patronage of a judicious and candid public." (translator's preface). For example, here is Basnage: "...yet it offers to the Publick View an Object worthy of admiration; and the greatest Prodigy imaginable, in the preservation of the Jewish Nation in the midst of all the Calamities they have run through for Seventeen Hundred Years." (VI,i,465) And here is Maynard: "There is not a circumstance amongst the various events of revolving time more worthy of admiration than the preservation of the people of the Jews, in the midst of all the calamities they have undergone for the space of upwards of 1700 years." (I, i, 549) The entire text follows Basnage with only minor changes in language.

<sup>16</sup> Bradshaw, ed., *The Whole Genuine and Complete Works of Flavius Josephus, the learned and authentic Jewish Historian and Celebrated warrior. Containing New and Elegant Edition of his whole works....and the Writings of Contemporary Authors of different Nations; tending to prove the Authenticity of these Works, to which is added, to render this edition as complete as possible, A Continuation of the History of the Jews, from the Death of Josephus to the Present Time, including a Period of more than 1700 years. containing an account of their Dispersion into the Various Parts of Europe.* One book acknowledged Basnage as well as other sources. Crull, *The Jewish History, as well as ecclesiastical as civil, from the creation of the world, to this present time. Being an abridgment of Sr. Roger L'Estrange's Josephus. With a continuation from the most authentick records, the Imperial laws, the Decrees of council, the Mishnah, the Thalmud, Maimonides, Benjamin de Tudela, Leo de Modena, Selden, Spencer, Monsieur Basnage, &c.* 1708.

of the Old Testament in many obscure passages; to corroborate, by concurring testimony, its general Veracity; and consequently to increase the Evidence of that Religion we profess, as the Disciples of and Believers in Jesus Christ.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, we can find books in the 18<sup>th</sup> century still focused on the destruction of Jerusalem *tout court* as evidence for the sacred perfection of Scripture.<sup>18</sup> Hannah Adams, in her nineteenth-century *History of the Jews*, emphasized Josephus’ account of the destruction of Jerusalem:

It has pleased Providence, that this important part of history should be transmitted to us by Josephus, one of the Jewish nation, who was an eyewitness, and had himself a great share in the principal events. He has, unintentionally, given us a striking demonstration of the truth of the Christian religion, but exhibiting, in the most lively manner, how the prophecies of our blessed Lord, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, were literally fulfilled in their fullest extent.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Bradshaw, preface.

<sup>18</sup> AUTHOR ANON., *The History, Fall, and miserable ruine of the Jews with the Sacking, Burning, and Destroying of Jerusalem, and the Death of Three Hundred Thousand Jews that fell by Famine and War, shewn by many Texts in Scripture as an infallible Token of God's Judgment and Wrath against those Stiff-Necked People for the Death of our Bessed Saviour Jesus Christ, which happen'd about Thirty Years before* (1720); Robert Millar, *The history of the Jews, from the death of Herod the great, to the final destruction of their city, Temple, and nation: containing, the cause and rise of that war; the number of the killed and prisoners taken in it, and during the siege of Jerusalem; the grievous famine, and great necessity the Jews were reduced to during the siege, with the alarming signs and prodigies that appear in the air before the commencement of the war. By all which, it will plainly appear, that the predictions of our Lord, and the desolation spoken of by Daniel; the threatnings of the law of Moses, and the vengeance they imprecated upon themselves, when at crucifying our Saviour, were all signally accomplished. By Mr. R. Miller, late Minister of Paistey...* (1782); Daniel Smith, *The Destruction of Jerusalem: abridged from the history of the Jewish wars by Flavius Josephus with a description of Palestine, and Brief Sketch of the History of Jerusalem Before the War; together with an epitome of its modern history the whole being intended to illustrate the fulfillment of the predictions of Moses and the Messiah* New York (1840).

<sup>19</sup> Hannah Adams, *History of the Jews* (1812), 90.

Histories of the Jews without the Josephus frame or a “continuation” still emphasized Josephus’ role in providing proof of scriptural prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews.<sup>20</sup> Josephus remained an important authority and source, even into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He retained much of his caché as a crucial witness to God’s plan.<sup>21</sup>

With Josephus as an accepted starting point, Christian writers enlarged the theological meaning of the dispersion of the Jews. Instead of merely cataloguing evidence of their dispersion and sufferings, the continuations of Josephus and the independent narratives in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries emphasized the seemingly miraculous *survival* of the Jews as a separate people. That the Jews survived as a people was, of course, necessary for it was their ultimate conversion that was part of the onset of the millennium. Nevertheless, Christian writers emphasized with great passion the continued existence, rather than just the sufferings, of the Jews as a miracle in of itself. Jews were no longer merely the passive receivers of God’s punishment. In a way, they were to be admired and wondered at for their survival. Such a shift slowly cast a more

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Millar, *The history of the Church under the Old Testament, from the creation of the world,...and the State of the Jews from the Babylonish Captivity to the present Time, are particularly considered.* (1730); Thomas Reader, *Memorable remarks upon the ancient and modern state of the Jewish nation; with several other particulars relating to the Jews....*(1786); ANON, *Israel's salvation: or, an account from the prophecies of scripture of the grand events which await the Jews, to the end of time* (1788).

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Newton, *Dissertations on the Prophecies which have remarkably been fulfilled, and at the time are fulfilling the world* (1850), 383: "Josephus himself was no less wonderfully preserved than Titus, the one to destroy the city, and the other to record its destruction....Thus was he saved from the most imminent destruction; and he himself esteemed it, as it certainly was, a singular instance of divine providence."

positive penumbra of the miraculous over the Jews. Their miraculous lives, guided by God to be sure, had value to Christians in understanding the movement of time towards redemption. Indeed, their survival offered a continuing miracle of the truth of Christianity.

The first expression of this idea, or at least the expression of it that had the most impact on subsequent authors, was found in Basnage's history. Subsequent histories relied heavily or even exclusively on Basnage's language. Some books, like that of Marsh, included a "condensed" version of Basnage's discussion of the dispersion of the Jews in a separate section.<sup>22</sup> Others, like Adams and Milman, in particular, followed Basnage's organization and sometimes his language in writing their narrative of Jewish history after the destruction of the Temple. Most importantly, almost all of these eighteenth and nineteenth century texts imitated Basnage in embracing the miraculous nature of Jewish survival. Here is the core text from the English translation of Basnage that made its way into many of the continuations and narratives that appeared in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

Notwithstanding the driness and barrenness of the History we are upon, yet it offers to the Publick View an Object worthy of admiration; and the greatest Prodigy imaginable, is the preservation of the Jewish nation in the midst of all the Calamities they have run through for Seventeen Hundred Years. Religions depend upon temporal Prosperity; they triumph under the Protection of a Conquering Prince; and fall and languish with decaying Monarchies. The old Heathenism, that over-flow'd the Earth, is sunk and vanish'd. ...However, we shall here see a Church, that has been hated and persecuted for Seventeen Hundred Years, subsisting and still numerous. Kings have often employ'd the severity of Edicts, and the Hand of the Executioner to destroy it. The seditious Multitude has perform'd Massacres and Executions infinitely more tragical

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<sup>22</sup> *An epitome of general ecclesiastical history: from the earliest period to the present time. With an appendix giving a condensed history of the Jews, from the destruction of Jerusalem to the present day. Illustrated by maps and engravings* (New York, 1836).

than the Princes. Both Kings and People, Heathens, Christians, and Mahometans, who are opposite in so many Things, have united in the Design of ruining this Nation, and have not been able to effect it. The Bush of Moses surrounded with Flames, has always burnt without consuming. The Jews have been driven from all Places of the World, which has only serv'd to disperse them into all the Parts of the Universe. They have from Age to Age run through Misery and Persecution, and Torrents of their own Blood. They still live in spite of the Disgrace and Hatred that attends them in all Places, whilst nothing remains of the greatest Monarchies but the Name...since in spite of so long a train of Miseries, and a so long tried Patience, the Jewish Nation is still kept up, and preserved by Providence...<sup>23</sup>

The translator's preface to Basnage's English edition reflected a similar feeling:

To the Right Reverend Father in God, Jonathan, Lord Bishop of Winchester, Prelate of the Most Noble Order of the Garter....Because one of the chiefest Designs of this Book, is to lay before the Scoffers and Despisers of our Religion, an Argument of its Truth in a Language they understand: An Argument which if a Deist could consider in that amazing Chain of Providence it is involved in, would effectually convince him, that not a Tittle shall fail of all the Promises and Menaces of the Gospel...If he demand a present Miracle for his Faith; Behold! here the greatest, of more than sixteen hundred Years Continuance, the Jews wandring, and dispersed into all Corners of the Earth, by the Malediction of Heaven: Often massacred and exil'd in as great Multitudes as came from Egypt; Despised, hated, persecuted by all Nations; and tho mingled and confounded with them, still distinguished in their Laws, Customs, and Religion, remaining a standing Evidence of Divine Vengeance upon Unbelief, and an indelible Monument of the Truth of Christianity."<sup>24</sup>

Other English writers took up Basnage's language almost immediately. Maynard more or less copied Basnage on the miraculous nature of Jewish history in the continuation he included in his edition of Josephus.<sup>25</sup> Bradshaw's edition even went beyond Basnage's language echoed the fundamental wonder at the survival of the Jews:

"There is no circumstance more remarkable amongst all the events of this transitory state, than the dispersion of the Jews over the face of the whole earth; and their continuing a distinct and separate body amidst the various nations, people, and languages whither they have been driven. The history of nations does not furnish us

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<sup>23</sup> Basnage, *History of the Jews*, 465.

<sup>24</sup> Basnage, *History*, iii-iv.

<sup>25</sup> See note 15 above.

with any thing similar; and we are obliged to look to the fulfilment of the prophecy relative to this peculiar people, and there to find the cause of their wonderful situation, which is exhibited as a constant and living miracle before our eyes. Christians of the present day have this additional proof of the divinity and excellence of their religion: not only Moses, and the prophets; not only Christ, and his apostles; but every son and daughter of Abraham whom they meet in the streets, corroborates the testimony, that the Bible is true. Notwithstanding their poverty and distress, and the various calamities to which the modern Jews are subject, they remain separate and detached, waiting the fulfilment of the residue of prophecy in their behalf; waiting the for the accomplishment of those purposes of mercy and reserved for them as the descendants of the chosen and elect of God.<sup>26</sup>

One published sermon from 1812, whose unnamed author seems to have been associated with the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews, proclaimed to his readers (or originally listeners) that:

after a dispersion of above 1700 years in a state of ignominy, have, notwithstanding, subsisted distinct and separate from all other nations in the world. To any reflecting mind, this undoubtedly must appear to be a permanent miracle; and when it is considered that the most illustrious nations upon earth, and the most powerful, who all in succession held the government of the ancient world, are dissolved, and sunk into the mass of mankind, no other cause can be assigned for the preservation of the Jews entire, than the absolute will and extraordinary interposition of Providence exerted to that end.<sup>27</sup>

The wonder at the survival of the Jews soon came to characterize more extended treatments of Jewish history. Writing in 1824, a M. Mayer, concurred:

And since their final expulsion from their own land, they have been 'scattered among all people from the one end of the earth even unto the other,' yet have they been

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<sup>26</sup> Bradshaw, page.

<sup>27</sup> *The Selection, Dispersion, and Preservation of the Jews: A Sermon by a Country Vicar*, p. 10. Perhaps more important to the author was that the survival of the Jews demonstrated that they would be recalled to God, 5: "My present object however is solely directed towards that one remarkable prophecy, the *gathering in* of the Jews, and the re-establishment in their own country."

enabled to preserve existence, through a lapse of nearly eighteen hundred years, amidst the hatred, execration, and persecution of all nations among whom they have been dispersed. They have wonderfully distinguished, conducted and preserved; and are still kept separate from the rest of mankind, presenting distinctive features of body, of mind, of habits, and behavior; and all this is, because eternal Providence entertains purposes of wisdom, love, and mercy concerning them, which are advancing to their final accomplishment.<sup>28</sup>

We find similar comments throughout the range of 19<sup>th</sup> century works on Jewish history in the English or later, American Protestant milieu. In the appendix to Jahn's *History of the Hebrew Commonwealth*, we find another echo of Basnage: "The preservation of the Jews as a distinct people is an event unparalleled in the annals of history, and is one of the most signal and illustrious acts of Divine Providence."<sup>29</sup> In the *History of the Jews from the Babylonian Captivity to the Present Time*, the preface declares:

To the student of human nature, by the medium of history, the documents in which the circumstances of the Jews are detailed, will ever afford the most valuable instruction; but it is on the Christian, and viewed in the light in which Christianity presents it, that

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<sup>28</sup> Mayer, *The History of the Jews from their Origin to their ultimate dispersion* (London, 1824), 476.

<sup>29</sup> *History of the Hebrew commonwealth. Translated from the German of John Jahn...with an appendix containing the continuation of the history of the Jews to the reign of Adrian. Translated from Basnage. By Calvin E. Stowe* (1828), 480: "Thus the divine truth is pledged for the perpetual preservation of some remnant at least of the Jewish race, as a distinct people; however apparently dispersed and abandoned. And this promise has been hitherto accomplished during three thousand years from its delivery, a duration of distinct existence unparalleled in the history of any other nation." See, also Newton, *Dissertations on the Prophecies which have remarkably been fulfilled, and at the time are fulfilling the world* (1850), 376: "And for what reason can we believe, that though they are dispersed among all the nations, yet by a constant miracle they are kept distinct from all, but for the farther manifestation of God's purposes towards them? The prophecies have been accomplished to the greatest exactness in the destruction of their city, and its continuing still subject to strangers, in the dispersion of their people, and their living still separate from all people; and why should not the remaining parts of the same prophecies be as fully accomplished too in their restoration, at the proper season, when the 'times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled.'

the condition of the Jews urges its claims to consideration, with a force that none can resist who have felt the power of divine truth on their hearts.<sup>30</sup>

One of the most detailed and passionate descriptions of the miraculous nature of Jewish

history is found in Hannah Adams' *History of the Jews*:

'The Jews,' says a late Christian author, "are a living and continual miracle, continuing to subsist as a distinct and peculiar race for upwards of three thousand years, and even in the midst of other nations; flowing forward in a full and continued stream, like the waters of the Rhone, without mixing with the waves of the expansive lake through which the passage lies to the ocean of eternity.' (Adam's Religious World Displayed, vol. i, p. 16)<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Huie and Brownlee, *The history of the Jews: from the Babylonian captivity to the present time; comprising Their conquests, dispersions, wanderings, persecutions, commercial enterprises, literature, manners, customs, and Forms of Worship with an account of the various efforts made for their conversion compiled from the most authentic sources; with a pref. by William Jenks* (1847), 7: "In every point of view in which the state of the Jews can be contemplated, it must be regarded as an object fraught with the deepest interest. They have been a wonderful people from the beginning. Their history, commencing with the call of Abraham, extending onward to the periods of their captivity--and the destruction of Jerusalem--and embracing the subsequent judgments that overtook them--their present dispersion--and their future glorious prospects, ---is a history full of meaning and of interest, and valuable for the lessons which it teaches. It differs, in many important respects, from the history of any other portion of the human race."

<sup>31</sup> Hannah Adams, *The history of the Jews from the destruction of Jerusalem to the nineteenth century* (Boston, 1812), 552. And, 551; "The preservation of the Jews as a distinct people, is an event unparalleled in the annals of history. To use the animated language of a modern writer of their own nation, 'Braving all kinds of torments, the pangs of death, the still more terrible pangs of life, we have withstood the impetuous torrent of time, sweeping indiscriminately in its course, nations, religions, and countries. What is become of those celebrated empires whose very name still excites our admiration by the ideas of splendid greatness attached to them, and whose power embraced the whole surface of the know globe? They are only remembered as monuments of the vanity of human greatness. Rome and Greece are no more; their descendants, mixed with other nations, have lost even the traces of their origin; while a population of a few millions of men, so often subjugated, stands the test of thirty revolving centuries, and the fiery ordeal of fifteen centuries of persecution. We still preserve laws which were given to us in the first days of the world, in the infancy of nature. The last followers of a religion

Finally, Henry Milman, perhaps the most popular and influential gentile historian to write about Jews in the nineteenth-century English-speaking world, expressed a similar wonder at the survival of the Jews. Alone among the authors studied so far, however, Milman seemed to be trying to cast the preservation of the Jews in more secular terms, without completely losing its miraculous quality:

The history of the Jews is written, as it were, in their blood; they show no signs of life but in their cries of agony; they only appear in the annals of the world to be oppressed, robbed, tortured, massacred. Perpetually plundered; yet always wealthy; massacred by thousands, yet springing up again from their undying stock; the Jews appear at all times, and in all regions. Their perpetuity, their national immortality, is at once the most curious problem to the political inquirer--to the religious man a subject of profound and awful admiration.<sup>32</sup>

The nature of belief in the miraculous had no doubt changed since the seventeenth century. By the nineteenth century, devout Protestants who wished to preserve their faith in the truth of Scripture and the belief that God acted in history had

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which had embraced the universe have disappeared these fifteen centuries, and out temples are still standing. We alone have been spared by the indiscriminating hand of time, like a column left standing amidst the wreck of worlds, and the ruins of nature. The history of this people connects present times with the first ages of the world, by the testimony it bears of the existence of those early periods. It begins at the cradle of mankind, and its remnants are likely to be preserved to the very day of universal destruction.' (M. Michael Berr's *Appeal to the Justice of Kings and Nations*, written and published at Strasburg in 1801, and cited in the *Transactions* of the Parisian Sanhedrim.)"

<sup>32</sup> Milman, *History of the Jews from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (1832), 406. I have found one other nineteenth century English history of the Jews that dispenses altogether with recognition of the miraculous nature of their survival. See Alfred Edersheim, *History of the Jewish Nation after the Destruction of Jerusalem under Titus* (Edinburgh, 1857). He was working in a university setting, which may have discouraged enthusiastic embellishments even if he shared the sense of the miraculous quality of Jewish history.

to face increasing pressure from a post-Enlightenment culture where secularization was proceeding apace. It was in this context that the seemingly miraculous survival of the Jews may have become of particular interest and utility. The preservation of the Jews as a distinct people in the face of persecution and assimilation was a different kind of miracle than the destruction of the Temple. Jerusalem's destruction was far in the past. It was a single catastrophic event. Could God really have orchestrated something like that? Was it too much like the miracles the Protestant tradition had disparaged? It surely was remarkable that this people without a government, country or common language survived as a distinct people up until the current day. Here was a miracle that was grounded in the details of historical and ongoing events, involving people that many Christians recognized as part of their world. In the accounts of post-Temple Jewish history, they now had access to vivid evidence of the extent of this miraculous survival.

It is the nature of that evidence that brings us back to Josephus. Josephus' reception in English culture was crucial to the development of these attempts to respond to and shape perception of the reality of post-biblical Jewish history. Josephus' status and authority as a witness to the fate of Jerusalem had given Jewish history a foothold in English theological and historical culture. He was the starting point for any narrative of Jewish history. That history could not be discounted as irrelevant or unimportant as it offered dramatic evidence that the scriptural prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem had been fulfilled.

In the course of providing this evidence, Josephus had also brought his readers closer to the experience of the Jews in the last days of Jerusalem. He made them real people facing their deaths. The intimacy and vividness of his portraits of individual Jews, such as the woman who ate her child, demanded that readers pay attention to their fate as human beings. Even readers who looked only for confirmation that justice was meted out to the Jews could not ignore the pathos and tragedy of Josephus' account. Basnage saw the same drama and compelling human history in the later sufferings of the Jews. He called directly for Christians to respond to that suffering with human charity: "There is no exaggeration in it. I content myself with pointing to notorious Facts, and so far am I from designing to render the Nation odious by its Misery, that I conclude, that it ought to be looked upon as one of those Wonders we admire, without fathoming the depth of 'em,...Christians ought to quicken their Regard and Charity of Men whom God so long preserves."<sup>33</sup>

The continuations of Josephus, and the later narratives of Jewish history that built upon Basnage's book, conjured up real people, albeit ones who had not recognized the truth of Christianity, but whose humanity nevertheless increasingly impinged on Christian consciousness. Of course, Christians saw in the continuing suffering, persecution, and survival of the Jews in the diaspora what they wanted to see: proof of God's power and the truth of Scripture. But their exposure to Jewish history over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even through a narrative prism that emphasized the miraculous quality of the survival of the Jews, brought Christians closer

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<sup>33</sup> Basnage, *History of the Jews*, 466.

to the lived Jewish experience. Believing the Jews to be living miracles may have drawn the Christian gaze to Jewish history, but it also made it possible to see the Jews who lived after the destruction of the Temple as human beings with their own history. Indeed, some of that wonder at the survival of the Jews may have made it easier for Christians to accept the legitimacy of Jewish history.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Jewish scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement in Germany inherited the Jewish understanding of the diaspora as a divine punishment. This may have focused their scholarly attention on the diaspora, but it certainly did not shape their historical analysis or conclusions. Nils Roemer, *Jewish Scholarship and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Madison, 2005), 15-25.