in the thick of things, but it remains personal rather than successfully analytic.

Tom Shippey  
Saint Louis University


The early modern era in European history witnessed a new and an intense interest in Judaism, Judaica, and the Hebrew language among Christian scholars, a phenomenon generally termed Christian Hebraism. Arising, many suppose, as part of the humanist desire to recover the pristine wisdom (or *prisca theologica*) of antiquity, and gaining considerable impetus from Reformation theologians concerned with establishing the reliability of biblical texts, Christian Hebraism had long-term and still little understood effects on European culture, religious belief, identity, and philosophy, for both Jews and non-Jews. The present volume, *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, which is the product of a year-long seminar on Christian Hebraism held at the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Advanced Judaic Studies in 1999–2000, explores the reasons for and repercussions of this new focused scholarly interest in Hebraica both for European Christian as well as Jewish society. Containing essays by many eminent scholars, the volume offers an excellent reassessment of the history of early modern Christian Hebraism, as well as of the history of Christian-Jewish relations.

Perhaps the most important contribution of scholarship in recent decades to the field of Jewish Studies has been the rejection of teleological modes of analysis.1 In refuting the philosophical foundations of grand narratives, historical ends, and discernable historical patterns common to all periods and peoples, scholars have made it impossible to justify any longer the “lachrymose” view of Jewish history, famously articulated by Salo W. Baron, that sees the Holocaust as the end of Jewish-Christian relations in Europe.2 By lifting the fetters of teleology from our historical consciousness, such scholarship has challenged monolithic perceptions of European history as, for

---

1. Envoi vol. 11, no. 2 (Fall 2007). © 2007 by Envoi Publications. May be photocopied for nonprofit academic use only.
example, unproblematically Christian. In fact, our view of what constitutes European Christian identity itself has become more nuanced and less subject to hegemonic interpretations. The collapse of the old certainties has, thus, opened the way toward a reappraisal of Jewish-Christian relations in medieval and early modern Europe that examines the historically rooted social dynamics between the two religious groups without the blinders that accompany teleological assumptions. As the editors write in the Introduction, the contributors to the present volume are at the vanguard of this new historical consciousness that integrates “Jewish history within the context of European history as a whole,” and they depart from their predecessors in the study of Christian Hebraism by “featuring the centrality of exchange and interaction between Jews and Christians” (1, italics original). This approach does not deny the existence of Christian persecution of Jews. Instead, this approach erases an artificial division between the two religious communities—a division that replicates the desires of some medieval authorities, such as Pope Innocent III, but which never reflected the reality of either medieval or early modern Jewish-Christian relations. The scholars who contribute to the present volume reveal and analyze the new forms of intellectual and cultural interaction between Jews and Christians in the early modern era. Rather than treating early modern Christian Hebraism as “an extension and intensification of the hostility” that earlier scholars saw as characteristic of the Middle Ages, the scholars in this volume stress the ways in which Christian Hebraism—an intellectual phenomenon that was not at all merely the creation of Christians—helped to redefine a European civilization in the early modern era that included Christians and Jews of all sorts (5).

The twelve essays here are divided into two parts. The essays of Part One, “Negotiating Dialogue,” examine the emergence of Christian Hebraism as a fraught and problematic dialogue between Christians and Jews. Although the essays detail many positive, or seemingly positive, examples of dialogue, such examples must be seen in light of the growing anti-Judaism of the Reformation era, when large-scale and cataclysmic social unrest forced Europeans to redefine their religious, national, and personal identities. The essays of Part Two, “Imagining Differences,” take up the subject of Christian Hebraism in this
new era of general intolerance when both Christian and Jewish identities were redefined. Following a temporal trajectory from the Reformation to the Enlightenment, the essays reveal a transformation of Christian Hebraist perceptions of Jews and Jewishness that parallels the vast changes in the ways Europeans thought of themselves—a transformation that also mutated anti-Judaism into what we understand now as antisemitism.

Christian scholarly interest in Judaism—in Hebrew Truth—did not spring suddenly into existence in the early modern era fully formed like Athena from the head of Zeus. Instead, early modern Hebraism was a transformation of a medieval form of Hebraism that widened the range of contact between Christians and Jews. The first articles in the volume detail this transformation. Michael Signer’s piece, “Polemic and Exegesis: The Varieties of Twelfth-Century Hebraism,” examines new contact between scholastic theologians and Jews in the twelfth century. Arguing against Jeremy Cohen’s thesis in *Living Letters of the Law* (1999) that the “hermeneutical Jew” constructed by Augustine “shaped the writings of later theologians,” Signer suggests that the critical methods of scholasticism led theologians to challenge the Augustinian trope of the “hermeneutical Jew” with the “real” or “living” Jew (21). For a small group of Christian theologians, communication with Jews became critical to developing new theological interpretations, thus giving birth to a form of Hebraism in the Christian scholarly tradition. To be sure, these first Hebraists may have sought out real, live Jews with whom to speak, but few modern scholars would call the result true communication, filtered as it was through fantastical assumptions. In its earliest phase, which Signer terms “cultural Hebraism,” Christian theologians could not read the Hebrew language themselves, but believed that by talking to Jews they could access a special knowledge they believed Jews possessed about the Old Testament. As Signer writes, “The spoken word by the Jew himself becomes the authoritative interpretation of any difficult passage in the Old Testament, the *Hebraica Veritas*” (23). Over the course of the twelfth and into the thirteenth centuries, Signer argues, cultural Hebraism transformed into “lexical Hebraism.” In this new phase of medieval Hebraism, theologians learned Hebrew in order to study the Hebrew Bible, believing the Jews of Ptolemaic Alexandria who had translated the Bible into Greek (the Pentateuch) had deliberately obscured certain passages that ultimately confirmed Christian principles. Truth was to be found in the Hebrew language.
Despite the Christianist assumptions—one might say biases—in the first forms of Hebraism, such work paved the way toward more intense examples of Christian-Jewish scholarly communication in the early modern era. Moshe Idel, in “Man as the ‘Possible’ Entity in Some Jewish and Renaissance Sources,” argues that the positive attitude toward “man” that arose in the Renaissance, as well as a new Renaissance veneration for the “vita activa” as opposed to the Medieval ideal of the “vita contemplativa,” had its sources in Jewish, particularly Kabbalistic, thought. Carefully tracing the concept of “man” in Jewish writings from the twelfth century through the late fifteenth century, Idel makes the fascinating—although highly speculative—claim that Pico della Mirandola wrote his famous Oration on the Dignity of Man (1486) while in close contact with the Jewish philosopher, Yohanan Alemanno. Fabrizio Lelli, in “Jews, Humanists, and the Reappraisal of Pagan Wisdom Associated with the Ideal of the Dignitas Hominis,” takes up the same theme as Idel to demonstrate how deeply Italian Jewish thinkers of the early Renaissance were involved in the humanistic reappraisal of Hebraica Veritas that otherwise characterized Italian Christian Humanist writing. Both Christians and Jews, argues Lelli, became concerned less with the prophetic aspects of sacred Biblical figures, and more concerned with their human characteristics. In the Humanist reappraisal, Biblical figures became, because of their greater antiquity, more accurate possessors of ancient wisdom and virtue, or prisca philosophia, than pagan philosophers. “If Humanists believe in the antiquity of the pagan wise men,” states Lelli, “and they think Moses was their contemporary, then Abraham and the patriarchs, being more ancient and closer to God, would have witnessed a more reliable form of knowledge” (57). Such views led Christian Humanists to raise Biblical figures to the status of (often mythical) pagan philosophers such as Prometheus, Hermes Trismegistus, and Aristotle, if not higher. But these views also led Jewish Humanists to reinterpret those same Biblical personages according to classical patterns. In short, Idel and Lelli argue that Jews played an integral role in the development of Renaissance Humanism.

More than a century and a half after Pico and Alemanno, and across the Alps in Provence, the new attitudes promoted by Renaissance Humanism helped to produce the remarkably open Christian-Jewish scholarly collaboration of Nicholas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc and Rabbi Salomon Azubi of Carpentras. In beautiful prose, Peter Miller recaptures the friendly intellectual partnership of these two
men from 1630 to 1635 in “The Mechanics of Christian-Jewish Intellectual Collaboration in Seventeenth-Century Provence: N.-C. Fabri de Peiresc and Salomon Azubi.” The truly remarkable aspect of their collaboration, Miller writes, was its mundane, quotidian nature. Peiresc invited Azubi to his home for weeks at a time so the two men could pour over Samaritan and Hebrew inscriptions, and ancient Hebrew astronomical texts, pen and paper before them, without a hint of religious antagonism, despite the fact that the one, Peiresc, was a abbé commendataire, and the other, Azubi, a Sephardic rabbi. But Peiresc was a rare, if not unique, individual, a living incarnation of the Renaissance Humanist ethic translated to seventeenth-century Provence. When the Jesuit linguist and master Hebraist Athanasius Kircher intruded on Peiresc’s and Azubi’s happy partnership in 1632, Peiresc’s exceptionality was starkly revealed in a world where anti-Judaism still predominated. Innocently introduced to Azubi by Peiresc, Kircher pretended to treat Azubi as an intellectual equal but only to gain his confidence in an attempt to convert him to Christianity. In the face of Kircher’s proselytizing, Azubi haughtily told Kircher off, and Kircher, in fury, wrote to Peiresc to condemn Azubi’s “inhumanity, insubordination and manifest haughtiness—in one word, the sign of a Jewish spirit and stiff-neckedness” (87–88). The story has a happy ending, however: Peiresc took Azubi’s side in the quarrel. As Miller writes, “It is proof that he [Peiresc] lived his declared antipathy to dogmatism” (93).

Peiresc was rare but not unique. His British contemporary, the Hebraist John Selden, expressed the same sort of Humanistic tolerance of difference, as Jason Rosenblatt reveals in his chapter, “John Selden’s De Jure Naturali . . . Juxta Disciplinam Ebraeorum and Religious Toleration.” Setting his investigation of Selden off against James Shapiro’s Shakespeare and the Jews (1996), Rosenblatt admits the “precious” rarity of Selden in a world where “vile racist stereotypes” and “the most destructive myths” characterized the views of most (103–4). Through his intense study of rabbinic law, Selden came to a remarkably universalistic appreciation of Judaism that was well received only by the most liberal-minded of his Christian contemporaries. Nevertheless, Rosenblatt writes, “it is at least worth remembering that in the first half of the seventeenth century the most learned person in England rejected the biblical decalogue as intended only for the Jews
and accepted the rabbinic Noachide laws as binding upon all of hu-
mankind” (119).

Such examples of toleration are, indeed, worth remembering. But how far does the recognition of such oddities as Peiresc and Selden get us in understanding Christian Hebraism as a phenomenon since so many Christian Hebraists remained “in thrall to narrow prejudice” (119)? In fact, the history of human affairs can rarely be broken down easily into the acts and beliefs of good and bad people, as Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin demonstrates brilliantly in “Censorship, Editing, and the Reshaping of Jewish Identity: The Catholic Church and Hebrew Literature in the Sixteenth Century.” In this piece, Raz-Krakotzkin shows, counter-intuitively, that Church censorship of Jew-

ish texts, particularly the Talmud, while appearing harsh and illi-

beral—and perhaps even intended as so on some level—nevertheless had a positive historical result in reshaping European Jewish identity and limiting Christian anti-Judaic impulses. Although we all have an almost instinctive revulsion to censorship, Raz-Krakotzkin forces us to take a more complicated view. “The approach that is satisfied in presenting Catholic censorship as an oppressive agent directed against the Jews,” he writes, “follows a positivistic historical approach, which describes the history of culture as the struggle of ‘the free and creative spirit’ against the oppressive power that prevents its realization and progress” (127). Church censorship, Raz-Krakotzkin argues, had a “constitutive role” (126). The crisis of authority that resulted from the Protestant Reformation (not to mention the discovery of the New World) forced Church officials to adopt a new tack with regard to heterodox writing: Rather than burn such works, the Church decided to attempt to control them through official censorship. Burning, Raz-

Krakotzkin argues, proved an insufficient means of limiting the boundaries of orthodoxy, particularly when printing technology greatly expanded the number of available copies of texts, and gave way to “serious discussion of various beliefs and bodies of knowl-

dge” (131). Such “serious discussion” forced Christians to read Jew-

ish texts carefully and, at last, to engage in real dialogue with Jews themselves regarding the printing of their texts. Moreover, most of the censors were converts who had complicated attitudes toward Jew-

ish identity. Although they regarded their duty as the erasing of texts widely considered anti-Christian, they also desired to preserve the Hebrew tradition. In many cases, Raz-Krakotzkin shows, the Jewish public accepted the censors’ changes and omissions and even volun-
tarily participated in the censorship. The result was the formation of a new, autonomous Jewish identity not predicated on anti-Christian polemic. “Censorship,” Raz-Krakotzkin concludes, “thus participated in the larger process of the transition of Jewish identity to modernity” (143).

Raz-Krakotzkin’s piece does not, of course, deny that anti-Judaic prejudice continued to play a central role in Christian-Jewish relations in the early modern era, but the essay does demonstrate the dialogical nature of a relationship that transformed both Jewish and Christian identities—although, admittedly, having its most profound effect on Jewish identity. Christian Hebraism was a nexus of this dialogic relationship, a position made even more poignant by the fact that many Christian Hebraists were, in fact, converts. Ora Limor and Israel Jacob Yuval take up the issue of conversion in the dialogic of early modern Christian-Jewish relations in “Skepticism and Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Doubters in Sefer ha-Nizzabon,” the first chapter of Part Two, “Imagining Differences.” Limor and Yuval point out that converts initiated much of the Christian anti-Jewish polemic of the late Medieval and early modern eras and, in the process, gave birth to Hebraism. Limor and Yuval’s goal, however, is to examine Jewish reaction to the problem of conversion in what they term “Jewish counter-polemics,” particularly in a famous early fifteenth-century work, Sefer ha-Nizzabon (Book of Contention or Book of Victory) by Rabbi Yom-Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen. Lipmann wrote his book “specifically to address the problem of conversion, which was indeed acute for fifteenth-century German Jews” (160–161). The motive of Lipmann’s painstaking defense of Judaism, Limor and Yuval argue, was to establish a normative form of Judaism that did not define itself polemically against Christianity. Lipmann, the authors assert, hoped to “cleanse Judaism of any form of heresy and present it to Christians in a legitimate orthodox form” in the wake of a 1399 blood-libel accusation and resulting massacre of Jews (164). In defining normative Judaism, the effect of Sefer ha-Nizzabon was to re-establish the boundaries of Jewish orthodoxy more in line with Christian developments, particularly by presenting a philosophic form of Judaism that would attract Jewish intellectuals otherwise captivated by the vibrant intellectual culture of Christian universities—thus, hopefully, preventing their conversion.

How little native Christian Hebraists cared about Jewish attempts to redefine Jewish orthodoxy in ways more acceptable to
Christian culture, however, becomes apparent in Stephen G. Burnett’s essay “Reassessing the ‘Basel-Wittenberg Conflict’: Dimensions of the Reformation-Era Discussion of Hebrew Scholarship.” As Christian Hebraists in the Reformation era became more competent users of the Hebrew language—often having learned at the feet of converts—they became less willing to accept the Biblical interpretations of the rabbis. By the 1530s, Burnett demonstrates, German Christians dominated the study and teaching of Hebrew in the Holy Roman Empire. These German scholars had little need to rely on Jewish writings, and—especially in the case of Luther—became scornful of Jewish scholarship. Although Luther admitted that Jews sometimes “have some wisdom where it concerns the grammatical sense of the Bible,” he questioned the authority of Jewish grammatical scholarship on the basis that Jews clearly did not understand Scripture (189–191). Falling back on Medieval tropes of Jewish “blindness,” Luther argued that while Jewish scholars might have a long tradition of scholarship regarding the individual words in Biblical verses, they did not know the “subject matter” of Scripture. In other words, the Jews may know the word (verba) but not the thing itself (res). The res of Scripture, the “subject matter” was Christ, and “[e]xpressing the ‘subject matter’ properly meant rendering Old Testament passages in light of the new, in light of Christ and the Gospel” (191). Savagely attacking his colleagues, especially Sebastian Münster, for their use of rabbinical interpretations, Luther argued that by citing rabbinical commentary Christians gave such interpretations credence—a situation that (horror of horrors!) could possibly lead to Christians converting to Judaism.

Luther’s fears were undoubtedly overblown, but there was a certain logic to his claims that lent them influence among German Christian Hebraists. The conflicts of the Reformation brought about a hardening of theological positions, making interfaith communication less possible than before because the stakes for establishing religious authority were so much higher. In fact, what often appeared to perhaps overly hopeful Jewish eyes as Christian respect for and interest in the Jewish religion was yet another form of anti-Jewish polemic, transformed into “ethnography,” and intended to discredit Judaism. Yaacov Deutsch’s essay, “Polemical Ethnographies: Descriptions of Yom Kippur in the Writings of Christian Hebraists and Jewish Converts to Christianity in Early Modern Europe,” examines the motivations for the flourishing from the sixteenth through the eighteenth
centuries of Christian writings “devoted to descriptions of the rituals and ceremonies of contemporary Jews” (203). Since these “ethnographies,” the majority of which focused on the rituals of Yom Kippur, made no claims to objectivity, and in fact were usually negative, Deutsch asserts they should be termed “polemical ethnographies.” As such, Deutsch argues that four primary motivations distinguish them: “revealing the absurdity of Jewish ritual; revealing the superstitious character of Jewish ceremony; revealing the anti-Christian nature of Jewish practice; and showing the deviation of Judaism from biblical text” (218). Although Deutsch offers no theories, we might suppose that the reasoning behind the motives for discrediting Judaism had to do with the need of Protestants and Catholics to establish their own religious authority in the era after the Reformation. Deutsche points out that the writers of these polemical ethnographies often unfairly singled out bizarre practices—for example the infamous Kapparot ritual which involved the waving of a rooster over one’s head to expiate sins—that were condemned as superstitious by rabbis as well. Moreover, it is quite telling that Protestants were more likely to attack Jewish rituals than were Catholics, and they sometimes attacked Jews and Catholics for the same or similar practices (219).

Of course, Jews, being in a position of greater weakness in Europe, were more likely to be affected by such writings than Catholics. Although Deutsche does not examine the issue, he notes that we should not “ignore the influence of this literature . . . on the internal Jewish process of abandoning customs that were considered by many as superstitious” (224). So, what we have with polemical ethnography, like censorship, is a method of discipline intended to force minority groups to adopt behaviors considered acceptable by the elites in power. This sort of disciplining was happening all over Europe in the era of Reformation and Counter-Reformation as authorities, both new and old, attempted to re-establish order. In that way, polemical ethnography was just another method of control. Importantly, however, such writing “fostered the process of disenchantment with Judaism,” making Jews just another group that needed regulating.

The Christian Hebraist response to the Sabbatai Zevi episode of the mid-seventeenth century underscores the fact that Jews and Judaism were caught up in the general crisis of authority of the early modern period when beleaguered powers sought to suppress rebellious behavior and establish order. Although Sabbatai Zevi’s claim to be the
messiah sparked a major millenarian movement within Judaism, Christian Europeans generally lumped Sabbatai Zevi and his followers in with the many other “enthusiastic” religious movements—mostly Christian—that, they believed, threatened authority and order. As Michael Heyd notes in his essay, “The ‘Jewish Quaker’: Christian Perceptions of Sabbatai Zevi as an Enthusiast,” reports and pamphlets all over Europe contained “explicit analogies between Sabbatai Zevi and the Quakers and other ‘enthusiastic’ movements” (235). All of these writings, of course, denounced Zevi as an imposter, and derided as delusional the antics of his followers. But no longer were such polemics intended merely to discredit Judaism—although they intended that, too. Instead, they attacked the dangerous beliefs of “enthusiasts” in all forms. As one author claimed regarding both Christian and Jewish messianism in 1708, “[t]hey both seem to have the same Source, and to be indeed the same Thing, and have both produc’d abundance of Imposters” (250). The dangers of “enthusiasm,” Heyd points out, included for many the “new philosophers”—those men we now consider among the founders of modern rationalist thought—such as Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Bekker, “who were considered dangerous ‘free spirits’” who challenged authority (245). In an era of upheaval, anyone who did not uphold the orthodoxies of the day could be a danger.

By the eighteenth century, as modern states were beginning to emerge from the crucible of early modern crisis, the rationalist thought of the “free spirits” began to play a more central role in the desired rationalization of society and polity that characterized modernity. Consequently, the Christian-Jewish polemics that Heyd examines in the preceding essay did not at all disappear; instead, they transformed into vehicles for secularized critiques of Judaism. Nils Roemer, in his essay, “Colliding Visions: Jewish Messianism and German Scholarship in the Eighteenth Century,” argues that, in fact, “the secularization of Christian beliefs entailed an intense discussion of Jewish messianic movements and doctrines” (266). Roemer draws upon a now well-worn thesis put forth more than half a century ago by Karl Löwith that “the modern idea of progress appears as the transformed successor to Christian religious messianic expectations” (266). Although I think Löwith’s thesis is a grossly reductive interpretation of the Enlightenment discourse on progress, Roemer is, nevertheless, right to note that Christian Enlightenment thinkers, particularly German ones, considered Jewish belief in the messiah to be a serious
“obstacle to Jewish integration into the emerging civic societies” (266). Like the seventeenth-century Christian-Jewish polemicists whom Heyd studies, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment polemicists of Roemer’s essay desired to discipline Jews—and by extension other “enthusiastic,” millenarian, or chiliastic sects—by mocking and discrediting their beliefs. Aufklärer such as Immanuel Kant—certainly one of the greatest apologists for the rationalization of the Prussian state—represented the growing Enlightenment skepticism of millenarian expectations. By arguing that it was impossible to know the future, thinkers such as Kant “presented the future as solely dependent on the past and present” (274). To those who adopted this new, secular view of time, belief in a coming messianic age appeared gullible, and worse, an impediment to improvement—which meant modernization, or adaptation to the civic society of the modern state. Thus, some polemicists “opined that Jews would never integrate themselves into German society because their hopes would continue to be directed at their return to Palestine,” while others declared that “once civic improvement set in Jews would undoubtedly reform their religious practices as well”—meaning, of course, they would give up their ridiculous belief in a coming earthly messiah (274).

In the volume’s concluding essay, “Five Seventeenth-Century Christian Hebraists,” Allison Coudert seems intent on finishing the volume with an ironic flourish. Coudert states that Jewish-Christian encounters played a crucial role “in raising and answering uncomfortable questions about the nature of religious identity and religious truth”—a statement that, in light of many of the other essays in this volume, seems true with regard to early modern Jewish identity and Jewish religious truth (287). It was, after all, most often Jewish identities and religious practices that suffered manipulation and transformation as a result of the early modern Christian-Jewish interactions studied in the preceding essays. Only in the essays by Idel and Rosenblatt are we given examples of Christian identities influenced by or transformed through direct interaction with Judaism or Jews: the Jewish theological influence on Pico della Mirandola’s work and the philosemitic theological writings of John Selden, respectively. But Coudert means that Christians faced these uncomfortable questions, too, which she argues is proven, or at any rate suggested, by the fact that one of the five most influential Christian Hebraists of the later seventeenth century, Johann Peter Späth, converted to Judaism. Al-
though universally regarded as a scandal by the other four Hebraists she considers in her essay, the conversion of Späth meant different things to each Hebraist, depending on his particular philosophical or theological commitments. To the dedicated Lutheran Hebraist, Späth’s conversion “reinforced the dangers of Judaism” that Luther had pointed out in the sixteenth century (see Burnett’s essay, discussed above) (286). To the Kabbalist Hebraists, the conversion offended their belief that, through the Kabbalah, they could find a universal religious truth that transcended all particular religious identities (an effective way of appropriating Hebrew Truth for the purposes of Christian universalism, I might add). To the free-thinking, anti-religious, possibly atheist Hebraist, the conversion revealed the “utter bankruptcy of . . . revealed religion in general” (287). To the poor Späth, who had apparently already converted from Catholicism to Lutheranism, back to Catholicism, and then to Quakerism before coming under the influence of Christian Kabbalists who “appropriated Jewish philosophy for their own purposes while discarding Christian fundamentals,” conversion to Judaism was the only logical conclusion to his religious confusion (297). Desperately seeking some religious truth, and casting about wildly for any answer, he decided the “real kernel of truth lay in Judaism” (297). According to the unsympathetic biography of Späth by the Lutheran Hebraist Schudt, Späth found no solace in Judaism, however: He lived in dire poverty after his conversion, “suffered from uncertainty, doubt, and anxiety,” and was treated contemptuously by his new fellow coreligionists, who finally murdered him “because he would not condone their Talmudic fables” (292). Schudt also took sadistic pleasure in noting that the mohel apparently botched Späth’s circumcision, causing him prolonged pain (290). Serves him right! Schudt must have thought grimly.

Späth certainly suffered from a troubled psyche. Coudert argues that Späth’s conversion “provides an example of the way increasing contact between Christians and Jews in the early modern period contributed to religious skepticism” (297). Perhaps, but I wonder if she, and other contributors to this volume, confound symptom with cause. Späth’s post-conversion polemics against Christianity may have helped to sow the seeds of doubt, but his own religious travels, we are told, predate his interest in Hebraism or his interaction with Jews. Richard Popkin argued decades ago now that the major intellectual challenge of the Protestant Reformation was to render uncertain the fundamental criteria of religious truth that had guided most of Chris-
tian Europe for a thousand years. Further research by scholars such as Anthony Pagden has suggested that the challenge to canon authorities that exploded during the Reformation began with the discovery of the New World, which refused to fit into accepted categories of knowledge. At any rate, the collapse of religious authority was profoundly disorienting to European Christians, leading to a general crisis of authority in which millions of people cast about for some certainty.

The essays in this volume provide excellent examples of the dialogic nature of Christian-Jewish relations in the early modern era. Their work thus helps to integrate Jewish history into European history as a whole, getting it out of the ghetto of history. The dialogic of Christian-Jewish relations was not the same thing as dialogue, however. The story that emerges from the essays in this volume shows that communication was rather one-sided. Except for rare instances of true contact, it was Jews and Judaism that responded and reacted to Christians and Christianity. Perhaps, then, Jewish-Christian contact was not the nexus of the transformation of religious identity for Christians in the early modern era; it was merely the symptom of the collapse of authority and the desperate need to find—or to make—a new authority that would provide some satisfying criterion for determining truth. Some found that authority in the resurgent Counter-Reformation Catholic Church; others in the sola scriptura of various Protestant denominations; still others in the objective probabilities of natural philosophy; and yet others in the ancient knowledge of Hebraica Veritas.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Part I: Negotiating Difference

- Michael A. Signer, “Polemic and Exegesis: The Varieties of Twelfth-Century Hebraism”
- Moshe Idel, “Man as the ‘Possible’ Entity in Some Jewish and Renaissance Sources”
Reviews


• Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Censorship, Editing, and the Reshaping of Jewish Identity: The Catholic Church and Hebrew Literature in the Sixteenth Century”

Part II: Imagining Differences

• Ora Limor and Israel Jacob Yuval, “Skepticism and Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Doubters in Sefer ba-Nizzahon”


• Yaacov Deutsch, “Polemical Ethnographies: Descriptions of Yom Kippur in the Writings of Christian Hebraists and Jewish Converts to Christianity in Early Modern Europe”

• Michael Heyd, “The ‘Jewish Quaker’: Christian Perceptions of Sabbatai Zevi as an Enthusiast”

• Nils Roemer, “Colliding Visions: Jewish Messianism and German Scholarship in the Eighteenth Century”

• Allison P. Coudert, “Five Seventeenth-Century Christian Hebraists

G. Matthew Adkins
Queensborough Community College
The City University of New York

Notes

1 In medieval studies, see David Nirenberg, Communities of Violence (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), and Kathleen Biddick, The Typological Imaginary ( ). Thanks to Miriamne Krummel for pointing these texts out to me.


From J. Schudt, *Jüdische Merkwürdigkeiten* (Frankfurt, 1714).

Coudert cites Schudt, who states that Späth had already converted from Catholicism to Lutheranism and back to Catholicism when he moved to Amsterdam, and made contact with Christian enthusiasts who introduced him to Jews and Christian Kabbalists; see 288.


The proliferation of scholarship on medieval women writers in the past few decades has rendered virtually obsolete the claim that the term “medieval woman writer” is anachronistic. Feminist and reception-oriented studies have been particularly beneficial in this endeavor, helping scholars reexamine fundamental categories such as author, text and reader. In spite of these reassessments, however, a nagging concern has remained about the act of bridging the gap between past and present. The editors of this volume in the Cambridge Companion series, Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace, address this issue both directly and indirectly by interrogating categories often used to examine medieval women and writing. The collection consists of seventeen essays and is divided into three parts. “Part I: Estates of women” explores the basic descriptives of women, such as wives, widows and virgins; “Part II: Texts and other spaces” expands on categories often associated with medieval writing communities, such as authorship, enclosure and preaching; and “Part III: Medieval women” looks at the writers themselves, ranging from Heloise and anonymous lyrics to Margery Kempe and Joan of Arc.