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Disciplines

Jewish Studies

An Atlantic Jewish Republic of Letters?¹

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Abstract

Atlantic port Jews began publishing English-language periodicals, pamphlets, and books during the 1840s as a means to advance an enlightened, observant form of Judaism, identified in large part with Sephardic rather than Ashkenazic religious culture and history. Three of their Jewish periodicals, the *Voice of Jacob*, edited by Jacob Franklin, Morris Raphall and David Aron de Sola and published in London, the *Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, edited by Isaac Leeser and published in Philadelphia, and the *First Fruits of the West*, edited by Moses N. Nathan and Lewis Ashenheim, and published in Kingston, Jamaica, provide historical evidence of the persistence of Atlantic port Jewish networks of commerce, communication, kinship and community well into the Victorian era. Publishing in a non-Jewish vernacular, and printing almost entirely in a non-Hebrew alphabet, this new “Atlantic Jewish Republic of Letters” did not however represent a secularizing trend. Rhetorically, ancient Jewish wisdom was invoked as the foundation, not the antithesis, of progress. The primary forces against which these editors, authors, and translators were reacting were religious, not secular in nature, namely Christian proselytizing and Jewish religious reform. Their self-conscious, programmatic activities led to the establishment of new kinds of enlightened religious educational institutions. Taken together, these phenomena constituted an Atlantic *haskalah*.

¹ I offer here my deep thanks and appreciation to Jonathan Karp, David Ruderman, Lois Dubin, and Kenneth Stow for their close readings and criticisms of earlier versions of this paper.

Along the coasts of the Atlantic world of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, Jews living in port cities formed networks of commerce, communication, kinship and community. These networks were not static. Nor were they limited by national boundaries. The relationships that emerged were constantly in motion, a fluid circulation of people and ideas, business and news. This maritime circulatory system did not end abruptly in the early nineteenth century. If anything, it was accelerated by new technologies and new modes of transportation: the industrialization of printing, which resulted in the mass production of cheap newspapers and books; the expansion of the railways, which connected inland areas to ports of call; and the birth of the transatlantic steamship, accompanied by the invention of the telegraph.²

These Atlantic Jewish networks persisted throughout the nineteenth century, and they did so in ways that are in part familiar, but also in need of being understood on their own terms. Yet neither “Atlanticists” nor students of “port Jewries” have directed their attention to this point.³ The perspectives of both can be applied usefully to the Atlantic Jewish world of the nineteenth century. To do this, I am adopting the synoptic approach David Armitage has called “circum-Atlantic.” “Circum-Atlantic history,” Armitage says, “. . . is the history of the Atlantic as a particular zone of exchange and interchange, circulation and transmission . . . it incorporates everything around the Atlantic basin, and it is mobile and connective, tracing circulations around the Atlantic world.”⁴

The Atlantic port city, both metaphorically and geographically, offers a valuable heuristic tool for analyzing and re-thinking the place of Atlantic Jewries in modern Jewish history. If for Paul Gilroy the “image of the ship – a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion” is his

² The literature on “Atlantic” history has grown enormously in the last ten years. See in general, David Armitage and Michael J. Raddick, eds., The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800 (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, 2002), and in particular David Armitage, there, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” 11-27 and most recently, Bernard Bailyn, Atlantic History: Concepts and Contours (Cambridge, MA, 2005). On Atlantic port cities, see ed. Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss, Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850 (Knoxville, TN, 1991). The editors make a compelling general case for a periodization that ends in 1850, but do not take into account the particular phenomena of Atlantic Jewish networks of commerce and communication that persist after this time. See Atlantic Port Cities, 4-6.

³ See most recently, ed. David Cesarani, Port Jews: Jewish Communities in Cosmopolitan Maritime Trading Centres, 1550-1950 (London and Portland, OR, 2002).

⁴ Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” 16-18.

organizing principle for the “Black Atlantic,”⁵ the image and the reality of the economically dynamic, socially cosmopolitan, relatively free entrepot called the port city is introduced here for the sake of propounding an Atlantic Jewish history. In the image of the port city, we find the distinctive situation of early modern Jewish “betweenness” – as “middle-men” and women, merchants and cultural brokers, prosperous and poor, who lived between toleration and citizenship, on the outer edges of empires, between Christian and Muslim lands, between Catholic and Protestant empires, ready to uproot and move as necessary, and whose legal status and religious identity were often in flux. During the nineteenth century, Jews continued to address this condition of betweenness. Though marked by the scars of collective and personal memories of exclusion and persecution, a progressive rhetoric emerged wedding enlightenment currents with religious fealty.

A circum-Atlantic network of Jewish publishers, authors and translators living in three port cities, London, Philadelphia, and Kingston, Jamaica became increasingly visible during the 1840s articulating these rhetorical strategies in print. This group can be considered a distinct sub-culture distinguished by the following features.⁶ The main actors were printers and preachers, merchants and professionals. They adopted English as their primary language of communication. Sephardic history informed their self-understandings and manner of worship. They defended the binding character of rabbinic tradition, the oral law, and Jewish ritual observances (proscriptive dietary regulations, the keeping of the Sabbath, and other holiday festivals and customs). They actively opposed Jewish religious reformers and Christian missionaries. They were involved in the emancipation arguments of their respective lands of relative political toleration and social inclusion. In short, they produced and circulated

⁵ Paul Gilroy, Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 4.

⁶ On the idea of a Jewish sub-culture, see David Sorkin, The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840 (New York and Oxford, 1990), 5-8. On the differences between the Atlantic and Continental European Jewish experiences, see below. In general, I understand the term "culture" historically (in relation to a public sphere of communication), in much the same way as Amos Funkenstein formulated the term: a "'new entity,' which became during the enlightenment and afterwards, a word that connoted more than 'mores' and less than 'learning.' It became the middle ground between specialized knowledge and ignorance." See Amos Funkenstein, Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century (Princeton, 1986), 359.

vernacular reading materials to promote a Victorian version of “Jewish enlightenment in an English key,” as David Ruderman has recently called it.⁷ These individuals and their collective efforts fashioned a new, refined version of enlightened observant Jewish existence that comported with the English-speaking Victorian cultural orbit in which they lived.

In arguing for their regional distinctiveness, the question is how different were their experiences from those of their counterparts living on the European continent during the same time period. Nearly a half-century ago Salo Baron distinguished the history of Anglo-American Jewish emancipation from that of Continental Europe. Continuing a line of argument first articulated in his 1928 essay “Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Tradition?,” Baron counter-posed the regnant historiographical versions of European Jewish “legal” emancipations—in particular, in France and Germany, which conferred legal rights and ultimately full citizenship upon Jews—to what he called “non-legal emancipation,” through which Jews acquired civic rights in England and the American colonies as a consequence of their *de facto* presence there.⁸ Related to this argument was Baron’s emphasis, among other things, on English common law traditions that favored historical precedents, gradual change, and local customs over abstract principles and innovative legal pronouncements. This common law tradition, Baron persuasively argued, was one of the most distinctive features that conditioned the voluntary character of Jewish communal life and its *de facto* acceptance in the English-speaking world.

It is, I would argue, precisely in light of this “non-legal” version of Jewish emancipation that the Victorian Jews discussed below who lived in the port cities of the Atlantic world are identifiable as “port Jews” (and not merely as Jews living in port cities). In the Atlantic context, the history of port Jews is not about precursors to the model of legal emancipation assigned primacy in European Jewish historiography. Atlantic Jewish history first of all needs to be analyzed on its own terms within its own historical contexts. Non-legal emancipation did not begin as a formal debate over

⁷ David B. Ruderman, Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry’s Construction of Modern Jewish Thought (Princeton, NJ, 2000).

⁸ Salo W. Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?,” *Menorah Journal* 14, 6 (1928), 515-526; idem., “Newer Approaches to Jewish Emancipation,” *Diogenes* 29 (1960), 56-81, and especially 75-80 for his “non-legal approach, and also see his “The Emancipation Movement and American Jewry,” in ed. Jeannette Meisel Baron, Stepped by Adversity: Essays and Addresses on American Jewish Life (Philadelphia, 1971).

Jews' capacity for citizenship. Rather, it was the preexisting condition of an open-ended social process. During the nineteenth century, a network of Victorian Jewish personal relationships, publishing ventures, and educational programs coalesced into a port Jewish history of ongoing "non-legal emancipation" in the Atlantic world.

The term "Victorian" refers here to a period of time (roughly from the 1840s to the 1890s), to the geography of English-speaking port cities around the Atlantic during this time, and to a set of socio-historical changes. These last were the emergence of occupational professionalization, changing gender roles assigned to the home and workplace, and a culture of refinement linked to upward mobility.⁹ In speaking of Victorian Jewish periodicals, I will be referring to a range of serialized publications, such as daily, weekly, fortnightly and monthly newspapers, magazines, journals and reviews.¹⁰

Republics of Letters

The concept of an Atlantic Jewish "republic of letters" is not simply a catch-phrase or a theoretical construct. It reproduces a contemporary self-consciousness that appears in print in the 1840s. B. Goldberg, writing in the *London Jewish Chronicle* about a literary project underwritten by Sir Moses Montefiore to translate into English the medieval Sephardic philosophical treatise *Yesod 'Olam*, for example, explicitly described Jews as members of the:

"Republic of Letters ... whose constitution acknowledges no privileged class; all ranks, nations, and religious professions enjoy perfect equal rights. It is one of the few states where the Jews were never branded with exclusion; nay, if history, politics, moral philosophy, legislation, and architecture, can give any claim to the citizenship of that state, the Jews must be allowed to be its most ancient citizens – the Pentateuch combining all the sciences we have mentioned. This republic is at perpetual war with the countries of darkness and ignorance."¹¹

⁹ On "Victorianism," see for example Daniel Walker Howe, "Victorian Culture in America," in ed. Daniel Walker Howe *Victorian America* (Philadelphia, 1976), 3-28.

¹⁰ On the difficulties of classifying Victorian serials, see the special issue on "Critical Theory and Periodical Research" in *Victorian Periodicals Review* 22, 3 (Fall 1989).

¹¹ B. Goldberg, letter to the editor, *London Jewish Chronicle* (October 6, 1848), 6-7. On the *topos* of the republic of letters and the Jews, see Frank Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism Through Christian Eyes* (Cambridge, MA and London, England, 1992), 115-128.

This Jewish turn to publishing and translating classic Jewish texts into English manifested a self-regard and claim of belonging to a trans-historical republic of letters. It also presumed, despite professions to the contrary, an elite status for Jews as its most ancient citizens. And not only did Jewish writers like these see themselves as their descendants. They regarded “their” Hebrew Bible both as an ancient source of wisdom and as a weapon in the enlightened battle against ignorance. Making available translations of post-Biblical classics of Jewish philosophy was designed to illuminate and enhance this understanding before the eyes both of Jews and non-Jews.

This nineteenth-century notion of an exemplary Jewish republic of letters ironically inverted the *topos* of the Biblical commonwealth popularized by Christian Hebraists in late sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. Petrus Cunaeus’ “Republic of the Hebrews” first published in 1617, for example, is perhaps the best-known representative of this genre of literature.¹² Dating from the mid-sixteenth century, the subsequent popularity of the *Republica Hebraeorum* has been noted by Frank Manuel who cogently observed that: “[Carlo] Imbonati in his 1694 *Bibliotheca [latino-Hebraica]*¹³ lists some hundred volumes by scholars in France, Italy, England, Germany, and Holland with titles that are essentially variants of [Cunaeus’] Republic of the Hebrews.”¹⁴ While some authors were royalist defenders and others radical republican advocates, all looked to the Hebrew Bible to justify their political theories of mixed governance.¹⁵

Victorian port Jews transformed this early modern Christian political *topos* into a literary figure in the nineteenth century to argue for Jewish cultural and political inclusion by claim of origins. Their Atlantic Jewish republic of letters represented an idealized past, an ideological construct, and a living literary culture. Their publishing efforts expressed the apologetic impulses then driving Jewish pleas as outsiders for social acceptance and political equality. And from their different port cities, these Victorian Jewish

¹² Petrus Cunaeus, *De Republica Hebraeorum (The Commonwealth of the Hebrews)*. Introduzione di Lea Campos Boralevi. Latin Text with English Translation (Firenze, 1996).

¹³ Carlo Giuseppe Imbonati. *Bibliotheca latino-hebraica sive, De scriptoribus latinis, qui ex diuersis nationibus contra Iudaeos, vel de re hebraica utcumque scripsere: additis obseruationibus criticis, & philologico-historicis ... Loco coronidis Adventus Messiae a Iudaeorum blas* [Variant Title: Magen ve-herav u-milhamah] (Romae, ex ty Sacrae congreg. de propag. fide, 1694). [Copy at the CAJS Library].

¹⁴ Frank E. Manuel, *The Broken Staff*, 120.

¹⁵ See especially Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (Cambridge, England, 2003), 42-57.

publishers self-consciously articulated their geographical membership in an Atlantic community of interests,¹⁶ sharing in its creative opportunities but also in its dangers. As Isaac Leeser, editor of the *Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, would lament from Philadelphia in November of 1843: “we Israelites living in England, America and the West Indies are laboring under a fatal disease which has destroyed many a precious soul and threatens still to carry its havoc much farther...”¹⁷ To remedy what they diagnosed to be the common ailments afflicting their Jewish communities, namely, ignorance of the Hebrew language, religious reform, conversion to Christianity, crass materialism and intolerance, the editors adopted similar ideological and practical strategies, indeed, even similar page formats and font choices.

External forces and common threats were not all that drove their activities. This popular Jewish intelligentsia also resorted to journalism and the book trade to generate an enlightened Jewish public sphere.¹⁸ Beginning in the 1840s, Victorian Jewish periodicals began to be filled with the rhetoric of social and cultural refinement, moral and physical amelioration, and faithfulness to religious traditions and ritual observances. In short, the “Atlantic Jewish Republic of Letters” was a self-conscious cultural project constituted by a network of opinion makers, information providers, authors, and translators, who exploited the agency of print both for positive and apologetic purposes.

Three Ports and their Jewish Periodicals

London

Within the three-year span between 1841 and 1844, three Jewish monthly or bi-monthly periodicals began publication in London, Philadelphia, and Kingston. The language of publication was English. Respectively, these periodicals were the *Voice of Jacob (Kol Ya’akob)*, the

¹⁶ Jewish editors in California during this time spoke of their “Eastern subscribers” as “our friends in the Atlantic States.” See the “Circular to Our Friends and Agents” issued by *The Weekly Gleaner* [in English]; *ha-Measef* [in Hebrew], ed. Julius Eckman ([San Francisco]: Office No. 110 Sacramento Street, second floor, [1856?]). [Copy in the Isaac Leeser collection, Box 9, FF6, at the CAJS library].

¹⁷ Leeser, *Occident*, 1, 8 (November 1843), quoted in Samuel J. Hurwitz and Edith Hurwitz, “A Beacon for Judaism: The First Fruits of the West,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 56, 1 (September, 1966), 17.

¹⁸ Cf. David Sorkin, “Ideology and the Public Sphere,” *The Transformation of German Jewry*, 79-104.

Occident and American Jewish Advocate, and the *First Fruits of the West* (*Bikure ha-yam*). The editors of these newspapers officiated at traditionally observant Sephardic congregations or were among these congregations' members. They subscribed to each other's periodicals, purchased each other's publications, corresponded with each other in English, shared a similar enlightened religious outlook, followed the news of Jewish communities around the world closely, identified with Sephardic history and culture, and vigorously resisted Christian missionizing. They also opposed the burgeoning Jewish Reform movement.

The first issue of the *Voice of Jacob* appeared in London on the first day of the Jewish New Year 5602, September 16, 1841. According to its masthead, the new periodical intended to “promote the spiritual and general welfare of the Jews, by dissemination of intelligence on subjects affecting their interests, and by the advocacy and defence of their religious institutions.”¹⁹ The proof text of its mission, what the editors referred to as the “Vocation of Israel,” was a quotation from Genesis 28:14 in Hebrew followed by an English translation that recounts the blessings that will come to all the families of the earth through Jacob's offspring.²⁰ The name of the periodical undoubtedly referred to the first name of its principle editor, Jacob Franklin; it also suggestively echoed the title of an anti-missionary tract bearing the slightly different spelling *Koul Jacob*, published in Liverpool in 1814 by Jacob Nikelsburger.²¹

¹⁹ *Voice of Jacob* 1, 1 (September 1, 1841) [Copies of the first years of publication are in the personal library of Isaac Leeser, now at the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies Library, University of Pennsylvania [henceforth CAJS library]. In subsequent footnotes, I will note whenever possible the physical holdings of the Isaac Leeser Library as evidence of the circulation of these periodicals and publications]. Eight months later, on Friday evening, May 27, 1842, another periodical bearing the same name, with a different subtitle: “*The Voice of Jacob. Or, the Hebrews' Monthly Miscellany*” began publication in Sydney, Australia. The Australian Cooperative Digitisation Project provides on-line access to the first three nos. at: www.nla.gov.au/ferg/bfull/1440334X_bfull.html (cached on Google as of May 1, 2005).

²⁰ [“And thy seed shall be as dust of the earth, and] Thou shalt spread abroad to the west and the east, and to the north and to the south; and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” (Genesis 28:14). Curiously, the translator omitted the initial phrase in the Hebrew quotation.

²¹ Jacob Nikelsburger, *Koul Jacob, in defence of the Jewish religion: containing the arguments of the Rev. C.F. Frey, one of the committee of the London Society for the Conversion of the Jews, and answers thereto* (Liverpool: Printed by D. Dean, 1814). [Copy at the CAJS library, originally from Leeser's personal library].

Franklin partnered with Morris Raphall and later with David Aaron De Sola to edit the *Voice of Jacob*.²² Born in Portsmouth and raised an observant Jew, Franklin had worked as an optician and merchant trader with the West Indies before embarking on his career as a publisher.²³ Raphall, originally from Stockholm, had served as rabbi in Birmingham before coming to London where he edited the short-lived London *Hebrew Review and [monthly] Magazine of Rabbinical Literature* from 1834 to 1836.²⁴ He also was the inaugural speaker at the opening of London's first Jewish literary association in January of 1845.²⁵ Officially called the "Jews and General Literary and Scientific Institution," Sussex Hall (as it was informally known) made its mission to educate, uplift, and enlighten. Its organizers included some of the same Sephardic communal leaders, for instance, Moses Montefiore, Hananel De Castro and Haym Guedalla, who helped establish the *Voice of Jacob*, and subsequently supported the *Occident* and the *First Fruits*.²⁶

The third editor of the *Voice of Jacob*, David Aron De Sola, was born in Amsterdam and ministered at *Sha'ar Shamayim* in Bevis Marks, the historic Spanish and Portuguese congregation in London. Among De Sola's literary projects was the publication of a "cheap Jewish library" of Jewish stories in English aimed to inspire attachment to Judaism among poor Jews being targeted by missionaries. He also co-published an edition of the

²² On the competitive, at times acrimonious early years of Anglo-Jewish journalism, see James Picciotto, *Sketches of Anglo-Jewish History*. Revised and Edited, with a Prologue, Notes and an Epilogue by Israel Finestine (London, 1956), 397-404; *Three Centuries of Anglo-Jewish History*. Edited by Vivian D. Lipman (Cambridge, 1961), 88-90; David Katz, *Jews in the History of England* (Oxford, 1994), 356-358; David Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1991* (Cambridge, England, 1994), 1-40. See also John M. Shaftesley, "Dr. Abraham Benisch as newspaper editor," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 21 (1968), 214-231, and esp. 217 and Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 regarding the role Abraham Benisch played in organizing the *Voice of Jacob*, before going to work for the *Jewish Chronicle*, founded by Isaac Valentine.

²³ On Jacob Franklin and the *Voice of Jacob*, see Picciotto, *Sketches of Anglo-Jewish History*, 399-401 and V.D. Lipman, "Franklin Family," *Encyclopedia Judaica* 16 vols. (Jerusalem and New York, [1972]), 7:103-104.

²⁴ *The Hebrew Review and Magazine of Rabbinical Literature* 1, 1 (Oct. 3, 1834) - 3, 78 (July 22, 1836). (London: Published for the proprietors by Simpkin and Marshall, 1834-1836) [Copies at the CAJS library from Leeser's personal library].

²⁵ Arthur Barnett, "Sussex Hall—The First Anglo-Jewish Venture in Popular Education," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 19 (1960), 65-79.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Mishnah with Raphall in 1845.²⁷ Within four years, De Sola's son Abraham as well as Raphall had crossed the Atlantic to serve as ministers at Jewish congregations in North America.

The editors devoted a fair amount of column space, in addition to political news, editorials, regular advertisements for employment and for new publications, to original poetry and literary compositions, Sabbath discourses and stories. The writings of Grace Aguilar, who died in 1847 at the age of thirty-one, were particularly popular, and on both sides of the Atlantic. The editors of the *Occident* and the *First Fruits* published her prose, poetry, and reviews of her works as well. In her own day and continuing after her death, Aguilar acquired a kind of culturally iconic status as a female defender of an enlightened, observant version of Jewish tradition and family, and a symbol of resistance to missionary activity.²⁸ Notably, Aguilar drew upon the Sephardic historical experience of persecution under the Inquisition to dramatize her point about the trials of past Jews in remaining loyal to their faith.²⁹

In the *Voice of Jacob*, as well as in the *Occident* and the *First Fruits*, Sephardic philosophical sources and historical experiences played a prominent role. In a serialized feature in the *Voice of Jacob*, for example, medieval Sephardic authorities like Maimonides, Ibn Ezra, and Judah ha-Levi were cited in support of arguments defending the divine origins of the oral law and the binding character of rabbinic traditions.³⁰ We also find English translations, usually abridged, of contemporary German and French-

²⁷ On David Aron De Sola, see *Biography of David Aaron De Sola, Late Senior Minister of the Portuguese Community in London by his son, The Rev. Dr. Abraham De Sola, of Montreal* (Philadelphia: W.M.H. Jones and Son, Printers, no. 510 Minor Street, 5624 [1864]) [copy in the CAJS library]. On the publication of the "Cheap Jewish Library," see *Biography of David Aaron De Sola*, 28; Review of "*The Cheap Jewish Library. Dedicated to the Working Classes. Evenings in Judea. Parts I and II* (London: Abrahams, Solomon, and all Booksellers, [n.d.])," in the [London] *Jewish Chronicle* 5, 45 (August 17, 1849), 362-363.

²⁸ See Piciotto, *Sketches*, 354-356, whose laudatory words echo the contemporary sentiment felt for her. Aguilar's works could be read at the Sussex Hall library, where she bequeathed "a small legacy" to the institution, according to Arthur Barnett, "Sussex Hall", 69-70.

²⁹ See Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr* (New York: D. Appleton & Company; Philadelphia: Geo. S. Appleton, 1850) and recently, *Grace Aguilar: Selected Writings*. Edited by Michael Galchinsky (Peterborough, Ont.; Orchard Park, N.Y., 2003).

³⁰ "Is the Oral Law of Divine Origin, And Therefore Binding Upon the Jews?" *Voice of Jacob*, 1, 19 (June 10, 1842), 145-148; 1, 20 (June 24, 1842), 153-155; 1, 21 (July 8, 1842), 161-162 (apparently the series skipped no. 22, July 22, 1842) and concluded with 1, 23 (August 5, 1842), 179-181.

Jewish writings, which highlighted Sephardic history.³¹ Typical of this trend was Ludwig Philipson's *The Marranos, A Jewish Romance of the Fifteenth-Century*, translated into English from German and serialized in the initial numbers of the Jamaican *First Fruits*.³² This type of literature embraced the Sephardic experience as a potent example of religious steadfastness in the face of persecution and as a paradigm of cultural openness that did not require the sacrifice of Jewish particularity. These literary works, translations, and exchanges of news with continental European Jewish periodicals helped to cement the cosmopolitan character of the Atlantic Jewish publishing networks.

In August of 1842, at the conclusion of their first year in business, the editors of the *Voice of Jacob* issued a prospectus that defined anew the periodical's aims. It was intended to serve as: "I.) An organ for the mutual improvement of all Jews speaking the English language; II.) A medium of communication between the Jews of England, and those of the Continent, the Colonies, and other parts of the world; III.) An organ between Jews and those professing other creeds."³³ A "List of Annual Subscribers published a month later documents the distribution of *Voice of Jacob* across England, *inter alia*, in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Cheltenham, Plymouth, Dover, Portsmouth, Canterbury, and on to Edinburgh, Scotland, to the West Indian islands of St. Thomas, Curacao, and Barbados, to the U.S. port cities of Charleston, South Carolina and

³¹ Notably, we also find translations *into* Hebrew, for example, of the poem "Rural Life" by Alexander Pope in the *London Jewish Chronicle* (August 21, 1846), 202. Nearly a century earlier, Moses Mendelssohn had already engaged in such translation efforts from non-Jewish vernaculars into Hebrew in his monthly literary periodical *Kohelet Musar*. I thank Jonathan Karp for pointing this out to me. See further, Jonathan Karp, "The Aesthetic Difference: Moses Mendelssohn's *Kohelet Musar* and the Inception of the Berlin Haskalah," Renewing the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture: From Al-Andalus to the Haskalah. Edited by Ross Brann and Adam Sutcliffe (Philadelphia, 2004), 93-120.

³² "The Marranos. A Jewish Historical Romance of the Fifteenth Century (From the German of Dr. Ludwig Philipson)," *First Fruits of the West and Monthly Jewish Magazine* 1,1 (February 1844), 27-38; 1,2 (March 1844), 76-83; 1,3 (April 1844), 111-119; 1,4 (May 1844), 166-171; 1,5 (June 1844), 210-219; 1,6 (July 1844), 257-264; 1,7 (August & September 1844), 310-329. We see in the figure of Philipson, founder and life-long editor of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, an example of the identification of Ashkenazim with Sephardic culture. On this phenomenon, see especially Ismar Schorsch, "The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 34 (1989), 47-66 and recently, Arthur Kiron, "Varieties of Haskalah: Sabato Morais' Program of Sephardic Rabbinic Humanism in Victorian America," Renewing the Past, 125-126.

³³ *Voice of Jacob*, 1, 23 (August 5, 1842), 178-179.

Philadelphia, to Wellington, New Zealand, as well as to Smyrna, Paris, Odessa, and Corfu.³⁴ Despite its wide distribution, the number of individual subscriptions was insufficient to sustain the periodical. The *Voice of Jacob* merged with the rival the *London Jewish Chronicle* in 1848, after unsuccessfully competing with it for the English-reading market.³⁵ Nonetheless, the model of publishing it initiated, down to its page formatting and typography, subsequently was adopted by the *Occident* and *First Fruits of the West*.

Philadelphia

Listed as the sole Philadelphia subscriber to the *Voice of Jacob* in 1842, a year later, Isaac Leeser launched his own periodical, the *Occident and American Jewish Advocate*.³⁶ Leeser was not a Sephardi by birth and by a curious irony of history neither were most of the members of Mikveh Israel, the Spanish and Portuguese congregation in Philadelphia where he ministered.³⁷ By the late eighteenth century, Ashkenazic migration had eclipsed the number of Sephardim in the city, and henceforth the majority of the congregation's members were of Ashkenazic descent, as was the case in most of the mid-Atlantic Jewish communities under British rule. Leeser

³⁴“List of Annual Subscribers.” *Voice of Jacob* 2 (September 19, 1842), n.p..

³⁵ *Voice of Jacob*. Volumes 1-7 (September 16, 1841 - August 18, 1848).

³⁶ There have been a number of studies of Leeser and the contents of the *Occident*. See Lance J. Sussman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism* (Detroit, 1995), *passim* for the most authoritative study and see additional bibliography below. On the American Jewish press in Philadelphia in the nineteenth century, see Henry S. Morais, *The Jews of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, The Levytype Co., 5604—1894), 356-359; on the Jewish press in the United States during the nineteenth century, see Mayer Sulzberger, "Jewish Journalism," *Occident* 26, 6 (September 1868), 241-249; Albert M. Friedenberg, "American Jewish Journalism to the Close of the Civil War," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 26 (1918), 270-273; Robert Singerman, "The American Jewish Press, 1823-1983: A Bibliographic Survey of Research and Studies," *American Jewish History* 73, 4 (June 1984), 422-444; Arthur A. Goren, "The Jewish Press," *The Ethnic Press in the United States: A Historical Analysis and Handbook*, Edited by Sally M. Miller (New York, Westport, CT, and London, 1987), 203-228 and for additional comparative perspective, see *Outsiders in Nineteenth Century Press History: Multicultural Perspectives*, eds. Frankie Hutton and Barbara Strauss Reed (Bowling Green, OH, 1995). On the circulation of the Anglo-Jewish press, see Rudolf Glanz, "Where the Jewish Press was Distributed in Pre-Civil War America," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 5 (1972-73), 1-14. I am grateful to Arthur A. Goren for calling this essay to my attention.

³⁷ Edwin Wolf 2nd and Maxwell Whiteman, *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia: From Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1957), 53.

himself was born in the village of Neuenkirchen in German Westphalia in 1806, and he grew up under the tutelage of Abraham Sutro, a strong Ashkenazic critic of the nascent German-Jewish movement for religious reform. Orphaned early in life, in 1824 Leeser emigrated while still a teenager to Richmond, Virginia to live with his uncle Zalma Rehine, who ran a dry goods business and introduced Leeser to the world of commerce.

In Richmond, Leeser attended a Sephardic synagogue, whose Sephardic-born minister, Isaac Seixas, taught him to chant the prayer service according to its particular order and pronunciation. In 1826, he launched his career in journalism with the publication in the Richmond *Constitutional Whig* of a polemical response to a missionary tract authored by the Jewish convert Joseph Wolff that had been published in the *London Quarterly Review*.³⁸ Leeser's outspokenness drew the attention of the leaders of Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, who, in 1829, invited him to apply for the position of *Hazan*, a quasi-rabbinic position as leader of the congregation's prayer service.

By the controversial end, in 1850, of Leeser's tenure as minister,³⁹ which was brought about in part by the independent bully pulpit he presided over as editor of the *Occident*, the city was home to four synagogues: one Sephardic, one German, one Polish and one leaning towards Reform.⁴⁰ A

³⁸ Leeser's personal papers and library are held at the CAJS library. On Leeser's early life in Westphalia, see Lance J. Sussman, Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism (Detroit, 1995), 15-30 and subsequent chapters for his life in Richmond and Philadelphia. For additional bibliography about Leeser, see Dianne Ashton, The Philadelphia Group: A Guide to Archival and Bibliographic Collections (Philadelphia, 1993), 62-65, 108-113; Arthur Kiron, "Isaac Leeser Collection. Finding Aid," (Philadelphia: Annenberg Research Institute, 1992); Maxine Sellers, "Isaac Leeser, Architect of the American Jewish Community," (Thesis (Ph.D.): University of Pennsylvania, 1965); Bertram Wallace Korn, "Isaac Leeser: Centennial Reflections," *American Jewish Archives* 19-20 (November 1967), 127-141.

³⁹ On Leeser and his break with Mikveh Israel, see *A Review of the Late Controversy Between the Rev. Isaac Leeser and the Congregation Mikveh Israel* (Philadelphia: [n.p.], 1850) and *A Review of "The Review" of the Late Controversy Between the Rev. Isaac Leeser and the Philadelphia Congregation "Mikve Israel" by an Israelite* (Philadelphia: Published at the Office of the Asmonean, 1850) [Singerman, *Judaica Americana*, 1:227 (#1158 and 1159) [Copies in the Leeser Library at the CAJS library]. See Lance J. Sussman, Isaac Leeser, 155-178; Maxine Sellers, "Isaac Leeser, Architect of the American Jewish Community," 19-20.

⁴⁰ On the history of Philadelphia's earliest Jewish congregations in the nineteenth century, see Henry S. Morais, Jews of Philadelphia, 15-21, 70-110; Wolf and Whiteman, History

fifth, Dutch Jewish congregation was established two years later, in 1852. Synagogue membership increasingly functioned during the Victorian era as a social marker of honor and prestige. Jews in Philadelphia had numbered less than 2,000 in 1840 and approximately 15,000 by 1880, on the eve of Jewish mass migration from Eastern Europe.⁴¹ Already by the 1840s, many of the Ashkenazim who belonged to the historic Mikveh Israel sought to differentiate themselves from the influx of Yiddish-speaking new immigrants. Not only had the native-born been raised to worship according to the Sephardic order and pronunciation of the prayer service, they also identified with their congregation's elite, historic status and Sephardic heritage, and not with the traditions and "jargon" of their recently arrived, poorer brethren from Central and Eastern Europe.

Leeser's *Occident and American Jewish Advocate* was the first and most important monthly Jewish periodical published in the United States and the most successful of the three periodicals discussed here. Its inaugural installment was published in April of 1843, and it subsequently appeared monthly (and as a weekly from 1859-1861) for the next sixteen years.⁴² Its

of the Jews, 222-243. On the multiplication of synagogues in nineteenth-century America, see Leon A. Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue* (Hannover, N.H., 1983), 97-113.

⁴¹ For Jewish population figures for Philadelphia and in comparison with other Jewish and general American population figures, see the figures collected in Jacob Rader Marcus, *To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585-1984* (Lanham, New York, London, 1990), 193-194 and 237-241; Edwin Wolf 2nd, "The German-Jewish Influence in Philadelphia's Jewish Charities," *Jewish Life in Philadelphia, 1830-1940*. Edited by Murray Friedman (Philadelphia, 1983), 325, n. 4; Harry S. Linfield, *Statistics of Jews and Jewish Organizations. Historical Review of Ten Censuses. 1850-1937* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1939) and *Statistics of the Jews of the United States, Compiled under the authority of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations* (Philadelphia, 1880), 5. See Julius L. Greifer, "Neighborhood Centre -- A Study of the Adjustment of a Cultural Group in America" (Thesis (Ph.D.): New York University, 1948), 104-110 for a discussion and figures for general population trends in Philadelphia and the United States, compiled from the U.S. Census, between 1790 and 1940.

⁴² Monthly publication was suspended from December of 1852 through March of 1853 because, according to Leeser, he was "...absent from the city [Philadelphia] for nearly four months." See Leeser's introduction to his translation of Moses Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* [1st ed., Berlin, 1783], published as a "complement" to volume nine of the *Occident*. Mayer Sulzberger edited the *Occident*, with the Sabato Morais and "other distinguished scholars" for one more year after Leeser's death in 1868. See Henry S. Morais, *The Jews of Philadelphia*, 303. Leeser's personal library at the CAJS library

motto and introductory remarks set the agenda for the coming years of continuous publication. It was to be “a monthly periodical devoted to the diffusion of knowledge on Jewish Literature and Religion.” The motto, a Hebrew phrase, derived from the second blessing (the so-called “*ahavah rabbah*” benediction) recited before the “Shema” found in the daily Jewish liturgy, appeared on the cover of the *Occident* in Hebrew font (*lilmod u-lelamed, lishmor ve-la’asot*), followed by an English translation: “To learn and to teach, to observe and to do.”⁴³ “In choosing these words as the standard of our periodical,” Leeser explained, “we at once meant to convey our object in taking up the character of a public teacher, by becoming the editor of a religious periodical.”⁴⁴ According to Leeser, that public educational mission embraced not only religious topics, but “all accessible sciences.”⁴⁵ “Thus, “the history of the world” he wrote “becomes an auxiliary to the Biblical student; mathematics, natural history, the philosophy of the human mind, researches into antiquity, the structure of languages, all will serve to help him in expounding the word of God.”⁴⁶ The substance of Leeser’s enlightened, observant Jewish outlook, what amounts to a Victorian version of *haskalah* (Jewish enlightenment movement) is summed up here.⁴⁷

Subscribers came from the far corners of North America, including Montreal and Quebec in “Lower Canada” as well as from St. Thomas, Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica, Port Cabello, Venezuela and from across the Atlantic in Hackney, London and Liverpool.⁴⁸ In the fourth number of the *Occident*, Leeser printed a three page “First List of Subscribers to the *Occident*,” which documents subscriptions received from fifteen U.S. states and the District of Columbia, as well as the locations already mentioned. Rudolf Glanz, in his study of the *Occident*’s subscription lists, found that “254 settlement points in thirty-three states and territories were reached by

contains the weekly issues of the *Occident*, 17-18 (n.s) (1859-61), along with a full set of the rest of its monthly publications. For the weeklies, see Leeser Collection, Box 19, CAJS library.

⁴³ *Occident* 1, 3 (June 1843), 109-112.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴⁷ For an expanded argument for a Victorian version of *haskalah*, see Arthur Kiron, “Varieties of *Haskalah*: Sabato Morais’ Program of Sephardic Rabbinic Humanism in Victorian America,” *Renewing the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture*, 121-145.

⁴⁸ See Rudolf Glanz, “Where the Jewish Press Was Distributed in Pre-Civil War America,” *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 5 (1972-73), 1-14.

the *Occident* during the eighteen years of its ante-bellum existence.” In Kingston alone there were thirty-seven named subscribers.⁴⁹ By contrast to his English and Jamaican counterparts, Leeser personally handled and/or supervised all aspects of the publication, including editing, advertising, and distribution. The printing of the periodical was carried out by C. Sherman.

Significantly, the *Occident's* readership (like that of the *Voice of Jacob* and the *First Fruits*) was not limited to Jews. Letters from Christian ministers often graced its pages. Moreover, it was not uncommon for news items published in these Jewish periodicals to find their way into the general, non-Jewish press, and vice-versa. What the Victorian Jewish press did was to provide a kind of town hall, or “medium,” as the *Voice of Jacob* called it, in which Jews and non-Jews of all different backgrounds, ideological commitments, and geographical locations could metaphorically sit together (providing they conducted themselves with civility) and learn about each others' views and circumstances. They also could talk back, as the letters to the editor make abundantly clear. In addition to creating this public organ of communication, Leeser launched English-speaking Jewish literary associations in Philadelphia (as also had been the case with the editors in London and Kingston), setting in motion a cultural pattern that would continue for the rest of the century.⁵⁰

Leeser stands out among all the individual editors discussed here as a singular driving force behind early Victorian Jewish religious publishing in North America. Between 1837 and 1838, for example, he produced the first American edition in English translation of the Sephardic prayer book, bound in six beautifully tooled leather volumes. Leeser explicitly followed the translation of David Levi, published in London in the eighteenth century.⁵¹ As Abraham Karp, in his study of “America’s pioneer Jewish prayer books,” keenly observed, Leeser’s intended readership for *Sifte Tsadikim* (“Lips of the Righteous”), was “not only for the Jews of the United States, but also for those of the West Indies and England. It therefore contains both “A Prayer for a Royal Government (p. 114) and “A Prayer for A Republican

⁴⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁰ On Philadelphia’s Jewish literary associations, see Henry S. Morais, *Jews of Philadelphia*, 162-171; Kiron, “Varieties of Haskalah,” 123-131. See J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884* 3 vols. (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts, 1884), 2:1099-1224 for a detailed history of the literary culture and associations in Philadelphia up to 1884.

⁵¹ On David Levi, see Richard H. Popkin, “David Levi, Anglo-Jewish Theologian,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 87, 1-2 (1996), 79-101 and Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 57-88.

Government (p. 115)."⁵² A decade later, in 1848, Leeser published an English translation of the Ashkenazic prayer book, *Divre tsadikim* ["Words of the Righteous"] in one volume, bound in red moroccan leather and embossed in gold.

Leeser's publications exhibited all the trappings of refinement for display, and the purchase prices bear this out. An advertisement printed on the back page of a spelling book Leeser published in 1838 put the cost of purchasing a set of the six-volume Sephardic prayer books at twenty dollars.⁵³ His editions were distinguished by a high grade of paper, fine bindings, and a decorative presentation. In the prayer books, whose pagination went from right to left, the Hebrew text faced the English translation on the opposite page. This visual page layout suggests that Leeser intended his ideal reader literally to perform harmoniously his or her Jewish heritage and Anglo-American identity through alternating readings of the Hebrew prayers and the English language into which they were fluently translated.

Kingston

Kingston, Jamaica would seem an unlikely home for Victorian Jewish publishing, but the appearance there of a monthly Jewish periodical from February to September of 1844, less than a year after the *Occident* first appeared, was not unprecedented. Nor was the use of Hebrew font to print its title. Multi-lingual fonts had been available on the island since the eighteenth century. They are witnessed, for example, by the publication in Kingston in 1788 of a Jewish apologetic tract, "Reason and Faith" whose Hebrew title "*Emet ve-emunah*" was printed in Hebrew characters. Notably, the work was reissued in Philadelphia within three years by F. Bailey, whose printing shop was located at no. 116 Yorick's Head, Market-Street, not far from the city's main port.⁵⁴

By 1840, this Caribbean island was home to approximately 1,500-2,000 Jews, roughly ten percent of London's perhaps 20,000 Jewish inhabitants, but perhaps more comparable to approximately the same

⁵² Abraham J. Karp, "America's Pioneer Prayerbooks," *Jewish Book Annual* 36-37 (1977-78), 18.

⁵³ This observation was made by Abraham J. Karp, *From the Ends of the Earth: Judaic Treasures of the Library of Congress* (Washington, D.C., 1991), 273.

⁵⁴ Discussed in Frank Cundall, "The Press and Printers of Jamaica Prior to 1820," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, n.s. vol. 26 (1916), 325, 411-412. Authorship of the work has been ascribed to Joshua Hezekiah De Cordova by Bertram W. Korn, "The Haham DeCordova of Jamaica," *American Jewish Archives* vol. 18, no. 2 (November 1966), 141-154.

number (1,500 Jews) thought to have been living in Philadelphia in that year.⁵⁵ Although their population sizes varied, the Jews of all three of these port cities supported a comparable number of congregations. Kingston maintained two synagogues, one of which followed the Spanish and Portuguese custom, the other serving “English and German” Jews, who followed the Ashkenazic rite. In 1840, Philadelphia was home to three houses of worship, while London had five established synagogues, one Sephardic, three Ashkenazic and a third, the West London reform synagogue. No doubt there were also many immigrant houses of worship (*shtiblekh*).⁵⁶

In February of 1844, R. J. DeCordova, of 66 West Harbour Street, Kingston,⁵⁷ Jamaica, printed the first number of “[*Bikure ha-yam*]: The First Fruits of the West and Jewish Monthly Magazine; A Periodical, specially devoted to Jewish Interests. [It was] Edited by The Rev. M.N. Nathan, and Lewis Ashenheim, M.D.”⁵⁸ Printed in English on the cover page was the Hebrew date, transliterated in the Sephardic manner as “Sebat, 5604” [1844]. The cover also featured a bi-lingual title with the Hebrew left un-

⁵⁵ On the Jamaican Jewish community during the nineteenth century, see Thomas G. August, “An Historical Profile of the Jewish Community of Jamaica,” *Jewish Social Studies* 49 (Summer-Fall 1987), 303-316 and additionally, in Spanish and Portuguese Jews in the Caribbean and the Guianas: A Bibliography. Compiled by Mordechai Arbell. Edited for the John Carter Brown Library by Dennis C. Landis and Ann Barry (Providence, RI and New York, 1999), 45-53. For the estimated population figures presented here, see for Jamaica, Thomas G. August, “An Historical Profile,” 312, and 314, n. 28, for which I have conservatively derived a figure of 1,500 in 1844 from a census taken in 1871, which lists 1,798 Jews following a period of Jewish out-migration; for comparative America Jewish population figures, see Jacob Rader Marcus, To Count A People, 193-194 for Philadelphia; for England, see Todd M. Endelman, The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000 (Berkeley, 2002), 79-80 (where he provides a figure of 20,000 for 1830, but notes the slowed immigration and out migration to the United States [as well as to Canada and the Caribbean] during the following two decades. For a detailed review of the population figure of 20,000 Jews in London during this time, see Steven Singer, “Orthodox Judaism in Early Victorian London, 1840-1858,” (Thesis (Ph.D.): Yeshiva University, 1981), 16-17, n. 2.

⁵⁶ For background on the London Jewish community during the 1840s and about this split in particular, see e.g., David Feldman, Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914 (New Haven and London, 1994), 66-71; David Katz, Jews in the History of England, 1485-1850 (Oxford, 1994), 336-343; Todd M. Endelman, The Jews of Britain, 1656-2000, 110-122.

⁵⁷ By its last issue, the printing had passed to D.Y. Henriques, at 13 King-Street. See the cover of volume 1, numbers 7- 8 (August-September 1844).

⁵⁸ A complete set, from Isaac Leeser’s personal library, is held at the CAJS library.

transliterated. The second word in the title phrase [*“Bikure ha-yam”*] or “first fruits of the sea” undoubtedly referred to their Caribbean-based newspaper, but the initial word *“bikure”* (“first fruits [of]”) perhaps also alluded to the enlightened Jewish journal *Bikure ha-‘itim* published in Vienna from 1820-31. The decision to translate the word (*yam*) figuratively as “west” (like Leeser’s *Occident*) instead of literally as “sea” indicates that the editors perceived their island press in the broad hemispheric context of the port cities of the Atlantic, not limited to the local or regional terms of the Caribbean.

The cover of the first issue was designed with a simple, square border depicting floral decorations in each corner. By the fifth number (in July of 1844), the cover was embellished by an intricate, decorative Moorish style, evidence of an increasingly common visual aesthetic at the heart of this Victorian Jewish culture of refinement, and one that gained popularity in Continental Europe as well.⁵⁹

The inclusion of the editors’ titles on the cover of the newspaper functioned to reinforce their professional standing. The concern for propriety and respectability was a central theme of their opening editorial address, written in genteel Victorian prose. The editors pledged “sedulously to avoid everything which may have a tendency to lead us into the improper path” ...to “treat the *matter*, not the *person*,” (italics in original), to embrace “legitimate and argumentative reasoning” but to reject “tirades, sarcastic witticisms, inflated harangues, pompous declamations, or invidious personalities.”⁶⁰

The printing and editing were handled separately. DeCordova, the printer and bookseller, was a descendant of a Dutch Sephardic family of enlightened orthodox preachers and printers, including the Jamaican Haham Joshua Hezekiah DeCordova, the author of the above mentioned 1788 apologetic tract “Reason and Faith.”⁶¹ The editors, Moses N. Nathan, and Lewis Ashenheim, were, respectively, a Jewish minister, at the Kingston “English and German congregation” and a medical doctor, who came from

⁵⁹ The building on Cherry Street where Leeser led Mikveh Israel’s prayer services was designed in the “Egyptian” style by William Strickland and opened its doors in 1824; later in the century the turn to the Moorish or Oriental style became quite pronounced. See Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Architecture of the European Synagogue* (Philadelphia, 1964), 198-214 and idem, *Synagogue Architecture in the United States, History and Interpretation* (Philadelphia, 1955), 28, 45-47, 67-91.

⁶⁰ *First Fruits of the West* 1, 1 (1844), 1-3.

⁶¹ See Bertram W. Korn, “The Haham DeCordova of Jamaica” *American Jewish Archives* 18, 2 (November 1966), 141-154.

“a wealthy Edinburgh Jewish family.”⁶² In 1841, “Dr. Ashenheim” had been listed among the first sponsors and subscribers to the *Voice of Jacob*. In Kingston, Ashenheim became the president in 1846 of a “Jewish and General Literary and Scientific Society” that was modeled on the Sussex Hall literary society in London. Indeed, the first public notice of and support for Sussex Hall, which appeared in the *Voice of Jacob* in January of 1844, quickly circulated to Jamaica with the inauguration of *First Fruits of the West*.⁶³

The Rev. Moses Nathan’s biography typifies the “maritime circulatory system” and network of relationships discussed earlier. He was born in London on November 20, 1806. While still in his teens, Nathan began teaching at the city’s recently inaugurated Jews’ Free School. He then relocated to the port city of Liverpool where he established a school for Jewish religious instruction. Like Leeser, he was among the first to preach in the English vernacular. In 1834, Nathan crossed the Atlantic to minister to the Ashkenazic “English and German” congregation at Kingston, Jamaica. Nathan fell out of favor with his Ashkenazic congregation in Kingston and resigned his post in May of 1844 and sailed to St. Thomas the following year to minister at the island’s Sephardic synagogue.

During these years, Nathan and Leeser, who were both born in 1806, began a regular correspondence and friendship. In one of his letters to Leeser, Nathan described his sea travels: a trip in 1850, near the conclusion of his first tenure at St. Thomas, to dedicate a new synagogue in New Orleans involved traveling by boat via Havana, where he said he “was detained waiting the arrival of the steamer.” Because of this delay, and “not wanting to go to Vera Cruz and Tampico, and with no direct offering for New Orleans, I was forced to go to Savannah [Georgia] and thence by stage, steam, and railroad, arriving [in New Orleans] “28 days (emphasis in original) after my departure from Jamaica.”⁶⁴ Subsequently, Nathan and

⁶² Information about the editors appears in Samuel J. Hurwitz and Edith Hurwitz, “A Beacon for Judaism: The First Fruits of the West,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 56, 1 (September 1966), 5. There is only scattered and conflicting biographical information about Nathan. I follow here the account given in Judah M. Cohen, Through the Sands of Time: a History of the Jewish Community of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands (Hanover and London, 2004), 79-86, based on contemporary information and see also, Lewis Ashenheim, “The Rev. M.N. Nathan’s Resignation,” *First Fruits of the West* 1, 5 (June 1844), 187-188.

⁶³ *First Fruits of the West* 1, 1 (1844), 1-3.

⁶⁴ Autograph letter from M.N. Nathan to Isaac Leeser, February 12, 1850. Isaac Leeser Collection, Box 1, FF7. CAJS Library.

Leeser officiated together in New Orleans at the dedication for the Spanish and Portuguese congregation “*Nefutzoth Yehudah*” (“Dispersed of Judah”), where Nathan had successfully applied to be the minister. The dedication sermon Nathan delivered in New Orleans, however, was not printed locally but in Philadelphia by C. Sherman, who regularly printed Jewish publications appearing under Leeser’s auspices.⁶⁵ The New Orleans philanthropist Judah Touro (1775-1854), meanwhile, who had paid to convert a former Church into his congregation’s new synagogue building in that city, left \$3,000 in his will to “my friends, the Rev. Moses N. Nathan, now of London, and his wife, to be equally divided between them.”⁶⁶ Nathan, recurrently owed money from the congregation for his services, by then had left New Orleans and returned to London, where Touro saw fit to provide for him. In 1859, Nathan returned to Kingston and by the Jewish High Holidays of 1863, had resumed his post at the Sephardic congregation in St. Thomas. He spent his last years back in London, and died in Bath, in 1883. In other words: individuals and families, goods and services, news and publications, indeed even pensions were in constant motion, circulating around these Atlantic port cities.

Editors and Education

These editors were directly involved in the establishment of Jewish educational institutions that served to implement agendas first articulated publicly in their periodicals. In Philadelphia, as already seen, Leeser explicitly defined his role as editor in terms of serving as a “public teacher.” Leeser went on to found the first American Jewish Publication Society in 1845 (the AJPS was the predecessor of the modern Jewish Publication Society (JPS), established in 1888);⁶⁷ by the end of the decade he established the first Hebrew Education Society (HES), a kind of Jewish secondary school, in 1849.⁶⁸ Indeed, Lance Sussman has spelled out the significance of

⁶⁵ For a copy of the sermon delivered on that occasion, see *Consecration Sermon delivered at the opening of the New Synagogue Nefutzoth Yehudah, at New Orleans, on Tuesday, the third of Sivan, 5610, May 14, 1850. By the Rev. M.N. Nathan, Minister of the Congregation. Philadelphia: C. Sherman, Printer, 5610* [Copy in the Leeser Library at the CAJS library].

⁶⁶ Leon Huhner, *The Life of Judah Touro (1775-1854)* (Philadelphia, 5707-1946), 138, for the reprinting of Touro’s will.

⁶⁷ For the authoritative study, see Jonathan D. Sarna, *JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture, 1888-1988* (Philadelphia, 1989).

⁶⁸ *Constitution and By-Laws of the Hebrew Education Society of Philadelphia. Adopted at a Town Meeting of Israelites on Sunday, Sivan 3, 5608, June 4, 1848* (Philadelphia, 5608 [1848]) [copy at the CAJS library from the Leeser Library]. See also, *Fifty Years of the*

what he calls a "Philadelphia Pattern" of antebellum American Jewish institution-building creativity that was imitated across the Midwest in the burgeoning metropolises of Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis, and points further west across the expanding frontier during the Victorian era of American history.⁶⁹

From Robert Singerman's magisterial *Judaica Americana: A Bibliography of Publications to 1900* we get a fuller sense of the scope of the overall Jewish cultural production in Philadelphia and how it relates to the emergence of an Atlantic Jewish Republic of Letters.⁷⁰ In the introduction, Singerman explained that for the sake of his bibliography "Judaic subject matter, and not the author's ancestry, is the determining factor in judging the appropriateness of a work for inclusion."⁷¹ By these criteria, there were one hundred ninety-one assorted books and printed materials, and seventy-three serials of *Judaica* published in Philadelphia between 1763 and 1900.⁷² The types of printed works include prayer books, catechisms, Bibles and Bible translations, histories, reports of fraternal orders, broadsides, calendars, constitutions, by-laws, minutes of synagogues and relief organizations, books of poetry and travel, birthday and bar mitzvah addresses, dramas (including comedies and tragedies based on Bible stories), apologetic literature, philosemitic and antisemitic works, polemical exchanges among Jews themselves, and millenarian tracts. And though the

Hebrew Education Society of Philadelphia, 1848-1898 (Philadelphia [n.p.], 1899, 20, for a reprinting of the act of incorporation and also see Henry S. Morais, Jews of Philadelphia, 154-160 for a sketch of the history of the HES. The first history of the HES, written in Hebrew, was composed sometime between 1889 and 1893, and signed in the name of Moses Aaron Dropsie, at that time "Chief Director" of the institution. According to Menahem M. Glenn, Rabbi Sabato Morais' Report on the Hebrew Education Society of Philadelphia (Cincinnati, 1958), reprinted from Essays in American Jewish History, To Commemorate the Tenth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Jewish Archives under the Direction of Jacob Rader Marcus (Cincinnati, 1958), the author was Sabato Morais.

⁶⁹ See Lance Sussman, "Philadelphia Pattern," in ed. Murray Friedman, When Philadelphia Was the Capital of Jewish America (Philadelphia, London and Toronto, 1993), 22-33.

⁷⁰ Robert Singerman, compiler, Judaica Americana: A Bibliography of Publications to 1900. Foreword by Jonathan D. Sarna. 2 vols. (New York, Westwood, CT., London, 1990).

⁷¹ Singerman, Judaica Americana, 1:xxviii.

⁷² Singerman, Judaica Americana, 2:1263-1264 (index, s.v. "Philadelphia").

Philadelphia output of Judaica was considerable, this evidence only represents works of Judaica *published* in Philadelphia; clearly, these were not the only works available *to read* in Philadelphia. In the great private collections of Judaica assembled in Philadelphia during the nineteenth century, such as the Leeser and Sulzberger libraries, were hundreds of other works, in Hebrew, English, German, Yiddish, French, Spanish, Latin and Greek, published elsewhere in the U. S. as well as in Canada, Latin America and in Europe.⁷³ The types of publications being produced for purchase and for reading bear witness both to the output and to the market for these kinds of materials—not only in Philadelphia but also in other Jewish communities around the Atlantic. In London and Kingston, as in Philadelphia, a large number and variety of voluntary associations and in particular, as mentioned earlier, literary societies were established to provide social space and public contexts for this Victorian Jewish culture of reading.⁷⁴

Like the religious agendas editorialized in the pages of the *Voice of Jacob*, the *Occident* and the *First Fruits of the West*, the educational programs advocated by their editors had three main goals: the first, to

⁷³ See Cyrus Adler's catalogues of the Isaac Leeser Library and the Joshua I. Cohen library as a measure of what was known, collected and available to read in Victorian Jewish Philadelphia: *Catalogue of the Leeser Library*. Compiled by Cyrus Adler, A.B. (Philadelphia [s.n.], 1883) and idem, *Catalogue of a Hebrew library: being the collection, with a few additions, of the late Joshua I. Cohen, M.D. of Baltimore now in the possession of Mrs. Harriett Cohen [now held at the CAJS library]* compiled by Cyrus Adler (Baltimore: privately printed; press of Isaac Friedenwald, 1887). See also the catalogue of Mayer Sulzberger's library by Ephraim Deinard, *Or me'ir kolel reshimat sifre Yi'sra'el, kitve yad ve-nidpasim, ha-nimtsa'im be-Vet Otsar sefarim ... shel .. Me'ir Zultsberger ... = Or Mayer, Catalogue of the old Hebrew manuscripts & printed books of the library of Hon. M. Sulzberger ...* (New York, 1896). On Deinard, see Simha Berkowitz, "Deinard's 'Or Mayer' catalogue," *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 21 (2000), 53-73.

⁷⁴ See Henry S. Morais, *Jews of Philadelphia*, 111-195. On the emergence of popular Victorian reading practices, see especially Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago and London, 1963) and see more recently, see Toni Johnson-Woods, "The Virtual Reading Communities of the *London Journal*, the *New York Ledger* and the *Australian Journal*," in ed. Laurel Brake, Bill Bell, and David Finkelstein, *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities* (Hampshire, [Eng.]; New York, 2000), 350-361; and note the fascinating study of Mary Kelley, "Reading Women, Women Reading: The Making of Learned Women in Antebellum America," *The Journal of American History* 83, 2 (September 1996), 401-24 as well as Barbara Sicherman's "Reading and Middle-Class Identity in Victorian America: Cultural Consumption, Conspicuous and Otherwise," in ed. Barbara Ryan and Amy M. Thomas, *Reading Acts: U.S. Readers' Interactions with Literature, 1800-1950* (Knoxville, 2002), 137-160 [Mary Ryan's essay is reprinted in this volume].

combat missionary pressures and Christian evangelical groups. The second goal was to defend traditional Jewish religious beliefs and to promote the observance of Jewish ritual practices and customs, particularly in the face of a rising tide of religious reform. The third goal was to create a new kind of refined Jewish citizen, based on an enlightenment belief in the value of education (which meant the belief that through education each individual was capable of bettering his or herself – and girls’ education was deemed important – and that by so doing he or she could improve society as a whole).⁷⁵

Leeser promoted just such an enlightened and refined Jewish educational program through the medium of publishing and translation. The American Jewish Publication Society devoted particular attention to the dissemination of the Anglo-Victorian Jewish literary culture of the 1840s. In a series entitled "Jewish Miscellanies" published by the AJPS, for example, Leeser chose to disseminate works by Victorian Jews like Grace Aguilar, Hyman Hurwitz, and Moses Samuel, including (Samuel’s) biography of Moses Mendelssohn, as well as other English Jewish authors and translations. Leeser defined the purpose of the publishing project as two-fold: "to obtain a knowledge [sic!] of the faith and proper weapons to defend it against the assaults of proselyte-makers on the one side and of infidels on the other."⁷⁶ Leeser viewed publishing and specifically publishing in the English language as tools in the battle to shape public opinion in defense of Judaism. He exhorted Jews to use the press in the same way their adversaries had used it against them. As he put it in his prefatory address to the first issue of the *Jewish Miscellany* in 1845: "The press is at our service; the thoughts which animate those favored with the knowledge of the Lord can be sent abroad though the writers themselves are unable to travel. The words

⁷⁵ See for example the serialized, front page article, "Anglo-Jewish Education" in the *Voice of Jacob* 3, 81 (August 30, 1844), 209-210; 3, 82 (September 6, 1844), 217-218.

⁷⁶ On the AJPS, see *Constitution and By-Laws of the American Jewish Publication Society, (founded on the 9th of Heshvan). Adopted at Philadelphia on Sunday, November 30, 1845, Kislev 1, 5605* (Philadelphia: American Jewish Publication Society, 5606 [1845]) [copy at the CAJSL from Isaac Leeser’s personal library]; Henry S. Morais, *Jews of Philadelphia*, 175-176; Solomon Grayzel, "The First American Jewish Publication Society," *Jewish Book Annual* (1944), 42-44, which provides a list of the projected series of publications and the statement of purpose. See also, Jonathan D. Sarna, *JPS*, 1-4 and Sussman, *Isaac Leeser*, 152-154 for discussion.

of peace can be transmitted to every house ... This is, in fact, the plan adopted by our opponents. And shall we not profit by them?"⁷⁷

The Jewish free school movement and the publications employed in them around the Atlantic emerged not only in reaction to missionary activity, however, but also are traceable to enlightenment currents of civic reform.⁷⁸ The first proposal for a Jewish free school in Philadelphia, for example, written by Mikveh Israel's newly installed minister, Emanuel Nunes Carvalho, dates from 1815 and predates by twenty-three years the Hebrew Sunday School (HSS) created by Rebecca Gratz. The Carvalho proposal has never been factored into discussions of the HSS, in part because the original proposal, extant only in manuscript and apparently never implemented, has only recently come to light. Despite nearly two centuries of obscurity, this proposal provides a crucial source for understanding some of the underlying principles basic to the project of Jewish education around the port communities of the Atlantic.⁷⁹

Carvalho, a Sephardi and a republican, was a controversial figure who had fled London in 1798 for what appear to have been political reasons to seek haven in colonial Barbados.⁸⁰ Strife between himself and the local

⁷⁷ [Isaac Leeser], "Address of the Jewish Publication Committee to the Israelites of America," preface to The Jewish Miscellany [no. 1 *Caleb Asher*] (Philadelphia 5605 [1845]), 2 [Copy at the CAJS library from the Leeser Library].

⁷⁸ For London, see "Salmond S. Levin, "The Origins of the Jews' Free School," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 19-20 (1955-61), 97-114 and Curtis E. Cassell, "The West Metropolitan Jewish School 1845-1897," in *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 19-20 (1955-61), 115-128.

⁷⁹ It originally was discovered in the archives of the Dropsie College. The manuscript was brought to the attention of Cyrus Adler, but he apparently never found time to publish it. I came across it in 1992 while working at what was then the Annenberg Research Institute (today the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at Penn) in a file of miscellaneous manuscripts. On Jewish education in the United States during this time, see Judah Pilch, ed., A History of Jewish Education in America ([New York], 1969; in Philadelphia, see David Uriah Todes, "The History of Jewish Education in Philadelphia, 1782-1873" (Unpublished Ph.D.: Dropsie College, 1952).

⁸⁰ For Carvalho's biography, see David N. Carvalho, "The Late E.N. Carvalho," *Occident*, 5, 12 (March 1848), 599-601; [n.a.] "Items Relating to the Jews of Philadelphia," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 27 (1920), 463-465; Wolf and Whiteman, History of the Jews of Philadelphia, 249-250; Charles Reznikoff with the collaboration of Uriah Z. Engleman, The Jews of Charleston: A History of an American Jewish Community (Philadelphia, 1950), 14-15; Albert Montefiore Hyamson, The Sephardim of England: a History of the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish community, 1492-1951 (London, 1951), 153-154; A History of Jewish Education in America, 14-16; Todd Endelman, The Jews of Georgian England, 1714-

Jewish community along with a bout of yellow fever spurred him on to New York City to assume a teaching position at the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Shearith Israel's Polonies Talmud Torah. This elementary school provided free education to needy Jewish children and tuition-based education for families with means. The school, however, was not a traditional Talmud Torah with a *melamed*, or teacher of young pupils, who drilled youngsters in traditional Jewish subjects. The curriculum included instruction in Hebrew and English and came to be patterned in its manner of pedagogy on the free school movement initiated in New York City, headed by Dewitt Clinton, in 1805, which followed the Quaker reformer Joseph Lancaster's educational system of student monitors.

Lancaster personally brought his ideas about how to redress the problems of poverty through education from London to Philadelphia beginning in 1818.⁸¹ His methods of rote instruction were not concerned with the kind of individual formation that was central to enlightenment educational theorists like Jean Jacques Rousseau and those influenced by him such as Jean Henri Pestalozzi. However, his plan to compensate for the lack of trained teachers with student monitors was in use in America before his arrival and directly influenced the course of Jewish education around the Atlantic during the first half of the nineteenth century.⁸²

The Polonies Talmud Torah had begun operating in May of 1803 with the support of a generous bequest received in 1801 from Myer Polonies to establish a "Hebrew school." Carvalho spent five years in New York City before departing in 1811 for Charleston, South Carolina to serve at the Sephardic Congregation Beth Elohim. On arrival in Charleston, one of Carvalho's first efforts was to establish a free congregational school to teach Jewish youths providing "instruction ... in Latin, French, English, and Spanish, besides Hebrew."⁸³ During the course of his stay in South Carolina, Carvalho also became immortalized in the state's legal records for causing a

1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society (Ann Arbor, 1999), 276; Jacob Rader Marcus, United States Jewry, 1776-1985. 4 vols. (Detroit, 1985-93), 1:276-277 and additional citations, 1:732, n. 8.

⁸¹ On Lancaster's time in Philadelphia, see Edgar P. Richardson, "The Athens of America: 1800-1825," in ed. Russell F. Weigley, associate editors, Nicholas B. Wainwright, Edwin Wolf, 2nd, Philadelphia : A 300 Year History (New York, 1982), 226.

⁸² Sam B. Warner, The Private City : Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth (Philadelphia, 1987), 111-123 and David G. LoRomer, Merchants and Reform in Livorno, 1814-1868 (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1987), 176-177.

⁸³ Quoted by Seymour Fromer, "In the Colonial Period," in A History of Jewish Education in America, 14.

riot during a Sabbath service.⁸⁴ The volatile Carvalho subsequently found his way north to Philadelphia in 1815 to assume the ministry of Mikveh Israel. He lived there for two more years until his death in 1817 at the age of forty-six. A generation later he was memorialized in the *Occident* in 1848.⁸⁵

Shortly after his arrival to Philadelphia in 1815, Carvalho submitted a proposal for what he called a "seminary for the instruction of Youth of both sexes" to the congregation's parnass Hyman Marks and to the congregation's board members, Levy Phillips, Samuel Hays and Simon Gratz (the brother of Rebecca Gratz). In the cover letter accompanying his proposal, Carvalho explained that the "chief objects of this establishment (were) to promote morality and virtue among the rising generation and to *impress on their minds* (emphasis added) the divine origin of our holy religion." His plan for a Jewish school, to meet from 12-2 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, was explicitly intended to serve the Jewish poor of the city. Carvalho makes no reference to missionaries. Although Carvalho's plans for a free school was not realized during his lifetime, he did manage to publish in 1815 the first Hebrew textbook by a Jew to appear in Philadelphia, called *Mafteach Leshon Ivrit* (or "Key to the Hebrew Language"), conceived in all probability for use in the proposed school.⁸⁶ The primary concern running

⁸⁴ According to a letter from Mordecai Manuel Noah reporting the occurrence to his uncle, Naphtali Phillips, Carvalho apparently had trained a children's choir which had won the favor of the congregation, but then forbade them from singing for reasons that are not entirely clear. His defiance led to his suspension which culminated in a riot "aided and abetted" by Carvalho in which "the whole meeting parnass & all were battling with clubs and bruising boxing etc. . . ." Quoted in Reznikoff, *Jews of Charleston*, 114-115. The Charleston incident illustrates the divisive social tensions within the Charleston congregation that preceded the formal call for religious reform a decade later, which led to a split within the congregation. See Robert Liberles, "Conflict over Reform: The Case of Congregation Beth Elohim, Charleston, South Carolina," in ed. Jack Wertheimer, *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed* (Cambridge, England and New York, 1987), 274-296.

⁸⁵ For Carvalho's biography, see David N. Carvalho, "The Late E.N. Carvalho," *Occident* 5, 12 (March 1848), 599-601.

⁸⁶ Emanuel Nunes Carvalho, [*Mafteah Leshon 'ivrit*]. *A Key to the Hebrew Tongues, Containing the [alef bet] Alphabet, with the Various Vowel Points, Accompanied by Easy Lessons of One and More Syllables, with the English Translation Affixed Thereto, so that the Learner may Understand as He Proceeds. To Which is Added An Introduction to the Hebrew Grammar, with Points, Intended to Facilitate the Scholar in His Progress to the Attainment of the Primitive Languages* (Philadelphia: William Fry, Printer, 1815) [Singerman, *Judaica Americana*, 1:58 (#0243)]. On Carvalho's grammar, see William Chomsky, "Hebrew Grammar and Textbook Writing in Early Nineteenth-Century America," *Essays in American Jewish History* (Cincinnati, 1958), 128-131.

throughout all of these efforts is religious education. Most striking about his plan are the sources of his ideas.

Carvalho's proposal resembles, in its embrace of the rhetoric of civic virtue, its egalitarian impulses, and its concern for the poor, other enlightenment-based educational reform programs. Civic virtue was to be instilled through the promotion among the poorer and working classes of moral comportment, productive labor, a spirit of mutual responsibility, orderliness and respect for property.⁸⁷ At the same time, the language of "impress on their minds" did not merely paraphrase the familiar Jewish command to instill in one's children the laws of Moses [*"shinantam le-vanekhah"* from Deuteronomy (6:4-9) recited in the daily liturgy]. It also offered a popularized version of the empiricist educational ideas of John Locke, the seventeenth century English philosopher, who viewed the young mind as a *tabula rasa* upon which the world and educators make their mark.⁸⁸

Key words like "impress," "nursery," and "piety" resonated with the nuances of enlightened thinking about the importance of early education then popular among religious leaders in the Atlantic-Jewish orbit. The Rev. Moses Nathan, for example, while visiting Philadelphia in 1840 from Kingston explained the underlying significance of Jewish education for the young in similar terms. In an address he delivered at the Second Annual Examination of the Hebrew Sunday School, on March 29, 1840, Nathan spoke of the HSS as a "nursery of piety," and praised efforts to teach Jewish children the "sacred law" that "illumines and refines." (14). The phrase "a nursery of piety" also recurs in the opening remarks made by Isaac Leeser on that occasion.

Speaking in 1853 at the first charity dinner to raise money for the Hebrew Education and Fuel Society, Sabato Morais, Leeser's successor at Mikveh Israel, also employed the phrase "a nursery of true knowledge and piety." Morais was a product of an enlightened merchant reform program in his native port city of Livorno, where he also received his rabbinical ordination in 1846. That same year he moved to London to serve as a teacher at the Orphan school attached to the same Sephardic congregation at Bevis Marks where David Aaron de Sola, one of the editors of the *Voice of Jacob*,

⁸⁷ See LoRomer, *Merchants and Reform*, 88-89, 171-188.

⁸⁸ John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, chapter 38, section 8; *Some Thoughts on Education* (1693), reprinted in James Axtell, ed. *The Educational Writings of John Locke* (London, 1968). On the significance of Locke's ideas about education in the American milieu, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1993), 149-151.

served as senior minister. Morais arrived to Philadelphia on the steamer “Asia” in 1851 to apply for the position of Hazan at Mikveh Israel.⁸⁹

Morais invoked the phrase (“nursery of piety”) to capture the essence of the function of Jewish education in Philadelphia as the need to make an early and lasting impression on the minds of the young. As the motto inscribed in the 1858 publication of the constitution of the Hebrew Sunday School (to which Morais was a signatory) put it: "Train a child in the way he should go and when he is older, he will not depart from it" [based on Proverbs 22:6]. And as had been the case with Carvalho's plan, the adage did not merely reproduce a Biblical meaning; it also resonated with enlightened educational concepts. These Hebrew Sunday School programs fused together Biblical and empiricist sensibilities without any apparent concern for the difference.

Interestingly, in the course of an essay about David Nieto, the eighteenth-century Sephardic minister in at Bevis Marks, Morais referred to the Republic of Venice where both Nieto and the “art of printing” were born as a "nursery of learning." Through printing, Morais explained, "critical minds" revised the Hebrew Bible and its commentaries, "freed them from the blunders of copyists" and "disclosed in the Jews of Italy abilities of a very high order."⁹⁰ In his inaugural speech as the first president of the Jewish Theological Seminary, published in 1888 in the first biennial proceedings of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Morais again spoke of his native Italy, this time in more general terms, as a "nursery of learning of Hebrew lore." Just as the human mind came to be viewed as a clean slate, requiring early nurturing in order that correct and lasting impressions be made upon it, Italy itself, in Morais' mind, was such a "nursery" of culture, which through the art of printing had made a lasting impression on modern, enlightened critical thought among Jews and non-Jews.

Plans like that of Carvalho, if not his specific proposal, were known to Rebecca Gratz, a member of his congregation.⁹¹ Traces of both

⁸⁹ On Morais' life in Livorno and London, see Arthur Kiron, “Golden Ages, Promised Lands,” chapters one and two.

⁹⁰ Sabato Morais, Italian Hebrew Literature, ed. Julius H. Greenstone, with a foreword by Henry S. Morais (New York, 1926), 68. On Nieto, see David B. Ruderman, Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe (New Haven and London, 1995), 310-31 and Ruderman, Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key, xi, xiii, 25, 154, 184, 185-186, 187, 198, 201.

⁹¹ Wolf and Whiteman, History of the Jews of Philadelphia, 304, relying on a letter written in 1818, by Rebecca Gratz to her close friend Maria (Fenno) Hoffman, discovered "a glimpse of a fleeting attempt to organize what twenty years later was crystallized as

enlightenment ideas and traditional Jewish notions of *tsedakah*, the duty to provide aid to the poor were basic to his educational project. They also are evident in the type of school Gratz ultimately established two decades later in 1838. Rebecca Gratz' plan for a Hebrew Sunday School, in fact, in at least one respect resembled the first Sunday Schools established in the 1790s by the Philadelphia physician and revolutionary leader Benjamin Rush. The first (Protestant) Sunday schools in Philadelphia, according to Sam Bass Warner, came into existence on Sundays not firstly for the purpose of catechistic instruction; rather, these "poor schools" that were established on the Christian day of rest offered impoverished children a time when they might acquire an elementary literacy.⁹²

The immediate crisis to which Gratz was reacting when she founded the Hebrew Sunday School during the 1830s, however, is abundantly clear. Christian evangelicals had launched a global effort to seek out and convert Jews dwelling in even the most remote locations.⁹³ Their zealous efforts were inspired by millenarian beliefs and expectations that by converting Jews to Christianity they would hasten the Second Coming. At the same time, however, it is important to recognize that the names of missionary groups like the "Society for Meliorating the Condition of Jews" reflected both the religious impulse to convert Jewish souls and enlightenment ideas

the Hebrew Sunday School Society [sic! -- the word society was not added until after 1838]." Gratz goes on to mention a "young gentleman of good education in the sacred language lately arrived here who was desirous of opening a school in the congregation and applied to my brothers on the subject." She calls him "a German and not sufficiently acquainted with the English to conduct a large school with facility." According to Gratz, this young man published in Richmond in 1817 "a little tract called "Elements of Jewish Faith." If so, he can be identified positively as Solomon I. Cohen. See Singerman, Judaica Americana, 1:64 (#0271); see also, A History of Jewish Education in America, 16. Unlike Carvalho's work, Cohen's *Elements* constituted a catechism, not a grammar. On Solomon I. Cohen, see David Ruderman, Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key, 250, 252, 253-56, 258, 270.

⁹² Warner, Private City, 112. Note that when Gratz established the first Hebrew Sunday School in 1838, she did so in the wake of a bitter agitation in Philadelphia over the creation of a free public school system to provide adequate education to the city's needy young.

⁹³ On the connection between missionary pressures and the creation of the HSS, see Dianne Ashton, "Rebecca Gratz and the Domestication of American Judaism" (Thesis (Ph.D.): Temple University, 1986); idem., Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America (Detroit, MI, 1997); for additional background on the climate of missionary activities during this time, see especially George L. Berlin, Defenders of the Faith: Nineteenth-Century American Jewish Writings on Christianity and Jesus (Albany, New York, 1989).

about civic and political regeneration.⁹⁴ The idea of "amelioration" basic to both the theoretical and practical aims of these missionary groups combined the salvific thrust of religious conversion and the civic political ideals of the late eighteenth-century European society. Perhaps the most well-known non-evangelical articulation is found in the pamphlet of the German jurist Christian Dohm, writing in 1781, who called for the *Verbesserung* or "amelioration" of the legal status and economic position of the Jews in relation to the transformation of civic society as a whole.⁹⁵

The language of "regeneration" was widespread in Germany, France, Italy and elsewhere in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁹⁶ In the Atlantic orbit, regeneration as amelioration represented a dual transformation: conversion of the Jewish body and soul. Elias Boudinot, who founded The American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews (ASM CJ) in New York in 1820 under the influence of the German-born Jewish convert, Joseph Frey, launched agricultural colonies to implement this agenda.⁹⁸ Frey had recently arrived to New York from London where he headed a conversion society and publishing enterprises like the monthly "Israel's Advocate" that promoted its activities.⁹⁹ In his study of this period, George Berlin points out that "the first Jewish literary

⁹⁴ The names under which the American missionary society originally proposed to incorporate spoke of "Evangelizing" and "Colonizing," not "meliorating." Only after objections had been voiced did the Society later adopt the word "meliorate" in order to gain the approval of the New York legislature. See Linda P. Lerman, "Solomon H. Jackson's 'The Jew'; a Contemporary American Jewish Response," Studies in Bibliography and Booklore 20 (1998), 51-52. While the name did change, the program adopted emphasized both spiritual and physical conversions.

⁹⁵ Christian Wilhelm von Dohm, *Ueber die burgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* (Berlin: F. Nicolai, 1781-1783); For an English translation, see Concerning the Amelioration of the Civil Status of the Jews. Translated by Helen Lederer (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1957).

⁹⁶ For a valuable overview of the concept of regeneration in the continental European context, see Mona Ozouf, "Regeneration," in ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf, and Eng. trans., Arthur Goldhammer, A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 781-791. I am grateful to Jonathan Karp for this reference. For the Italian context, see also Massimo and Roberto D'Azeglio, *Dell'emancipazione civile degli Israeliti* (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1848); Mario Rossi, "Emancipation of Italian Jews," Jewish Social Studies (1953), 122-123.

⁹⁸ On Boudinot, who also was active in Pennsylvania as the president of the American Bible Society, see George Adams Boyd, Elias Boudinot: Patriot and Statesman: 1740-1821 (Princeton, 1952), 257-262.

⁹⁹ On Frey, see George L. Berlin, "Joseph S. C. Frey, the Jews and Early Nineteenth Century Millenarianism," *Journal of the Early American Republic* 1 (Spring 1981), 27-49 and idem., Defenders of the Faith, 177, n. 1 for additional bibliography.

response” to the emergence of the ASMCJ was the American edition of Nikelsburger’s *Koul Jacob*, “reprinted for John Reid, bookseller” in New York City in 1816.¹⁰⁰ As Frey crossed the Atlantic to expand his activities in the United States, Nikelsburger’s work followed him to rebut the same set of ideas Frey had published two years earlier under the auspices of the “London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews.”¹⁰¹

For these missionaries, their organizations, and their publications amelioration was not merely a theological principle of concern for the fate of the souls of Jews. Their program clearly sought to change the core beliefs of Jews but it also was committed to help them adjust to new economic and political conditions. The purchase of land for agricultural settlements attests to a concrete social and economic transformation, as well as a spiritual one, for the new converts. Over the course of the nineteenth century, these groups created elaborate networks of social welfare organizations, vocational schools, and a variety of publications to serve their new flocks.¹⁰²

Gratz in turn sought to defend Jewish identity in the face of these missionary pressures and to inculcate Jewish pride and self-awareness by teaching a domestic piety founded on a bibliocentric view of the Jewish

¹⁰⁰ Jacob Nikelsburger, *Koul Jacob in defence of the Jewish religion: containing the arguments of the Rev. C. F. Frey, one of the committee of the London Society for the Conversion of the Jews, and answers thereto* (Liverpool, printed. New-York: re-printed for John Reid, bookseller ... 1816) [copy at the CAJS library] and Berlin, Defenders of the Faith, 7-8.

¹⁰¹ Jacob Nikelsburger, *Koul Jacob in defence of the Jewish religion: containing the arguments of the Rev. C. F. Frey, one of the committee of the London Society for the Conversion of the Jews, and answers thereto* (Liverpool: Printed by D. Dean, 1814) [copy in the Isaac Leiser Library at the CAJS library].

¹⁰² See Walter Licht, Industrializing America: The Nineteenth Century (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), for the argument that "Antebellum Protestant Evangelism had a positive, perfectionist core (it shared much with Enlightenment thought), and religiously inspired reformers sought to rehabilitate and not simply to discipline and dominate." For additional primary sources documenting Jewish-Christian relations during this time, see the evangelical newspapers in the Abraham and Deborah Karp Collection, catalogued and annotated by Arthur Kiron in News About Jews, now available on-line from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America Library: <http://www.jtsa.edu/library/digitalcollections.shtml> and see the important studies by Jonathan D. Sarna, "The American Jewish Response to Nineteenth Century Christian Missions," Journal of American History, 68 (June 1981), 35-51; idem., "The Freethinker, the Jews, and the Missionaries: George Houston and the Mystery of Israel Vindicated," AJS Review, 5 (1980), 101-114 and note his "American Christian Opposition to Missions to the Jews (1816-1900)," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 23, 2 (Spring 1986), 225-238.

religion.¹⁰³ The Hebrew Sunday School created by Gratz was the first of its kind in the United States and turned out to be different from subsequent institutions that, though bearing the same name, sometimes met on Saturdays. Philadelphia's Sunday School set aside a "secular" day, the Christian Sabbath (Sunday), to teach and promote the ritual observance of the Jewish Sabbath on Saturday, while stressing the importance of the home to Jewish Sabbath observance.¹⁰⁴ The word "Hebrew" in the school's title referred to the type of people attending, not to the Hebrew language, just as "Sunday" in its title originally referred not to a Christian Sabbath, but to a day of no work.¹⁰⁵

Enlightened Jewish education began to take on an increasingly gendered understanding as the responsibility for a proper upbringing became centered in the domestic sphere. As Dianne Ashton has shown, at the Hebrew Sunday School Jewish children were taught "the equation that loyalty to Judaism is equal to loyalty to your mother..."¹⁰⁶ When the HSS first began meeting in Simha Peixotto's house on Walnut St. above Fourth St. in March of 1838, instruction was open to all members of the Jewish community. It was intended to educate Jewish boys and girls, rich and poor. The enlightened concern for all "classes" of uneducated young people, thus, was not restricted to the unrealized plans of Carvalho. Gratz shared with Carvalho the desire to improve the lot of all Jewish youths, regardless of their gender or economic circumstances. In her report on the Hebrew Sunday School, published in the *Occident* in 1852, Rebecca Gratz explained this significance, in her role as superintendent, when she reminded her readers of the "intelligent minds of both sexes," who were participating in the "higher classes" of the school.¹⁰⁷ Gratz adds that "(I)t is a privilege, enjoyed by the Israelites of the present day, to possess religious books in the vernacular tongue, which, in all former ages, were only accessible to those learned in the holy language, and but scantily distributed to the mass of people; now every precept of the law, social and divine, is placed before us in language not to be misunderstood, and so exemplified, that its truth, its value, and its applicability to our individual and collective observance is plain as the sun at

¹⁰³ On the bibliocentric character of the Hebrew Sunday School, see Ashton, "Rebecca Gratz and the Domestication of American Judaism," 231-246.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁰⁵ Some "Sunday" schools met on Saturdays. See Lloyd P. Gartner, "Introduction," in ed. and introduced, Lloyd P. Gartner, Jewish Education in the United States: A Documentary History (New York, 1969), 9.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁰⁷ *Occident* 10, 1 (April 1852), 39-40.

noon-day.”¹⁰⁸ Translation, far from being considered an inadequate or unacceptable path to religious truth, was prized as an agent of democratization and popularization for the education of young boys and girls.

When Leaser's Hebrew Education Society (HES) opened its doors in April of 1851, special measures were taken to guarantee that "no one, except the Board of School Directors, knew who were pay scholars and who were not."¹⁰⁹ Anticipating his critics, Leaser decried fears that the children of the better-off might suffer harm from associating with the less fortunate. He argued instead that a "leveling upward" occurs when "the humble" are brought "in contact with those of better manner and greater refinement."¹¹⁰ This commitment to equal education contrasts with the more exclusive character of synagogue membership and worship that had emerged by mid-century.¹¹¹ Leaser's educational program was also egalitarian in its admission of boys and girls, departing from the exclusion of Jewish girls from traditional Jewish education in Central and Eastern Europe during the eighteenth and earlier in the nineteenth century. Of the original sixty-seven applicant names received in the spring of 1851 planning to attend the HES (and even counting the unidentified L.G. Bloomingdale as male), a ratio of thirty-five boys to thirty-one girls is given. Ultimately, the importance of Leaser's report, which distinguishes it from the example of the HSS, is the fact that the HES was conceived as a kind of high school, an advanced educational institution.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰⁹ Fifty Years' Work of the Hebrew Education Society, 23-24.

¹¹⁰ See Isaac Leaser, *The Testimony. An Address Delivered at the Schoolhouse of the Hebrew Education Society of Philadelphia, at the First Opening of their School, on Sunday, the 4th of Nisan, 5611 (April 6th, 1851)* (Philadelphia, 5651 [1851]), 17-18 [Copy at the CAJS library is from Isaac Leaser's personal library]. The term leveler, which has its own interesting history within English politics of the seventeenth century, also appeared in the title of Abraham Kohn's, *Mefales nativ. The Leveler of the Path, Hebrew Reader and Translator, for the Use of Schools. From the Second Edition of the Work* [Petah sefat 'ever], which was revised by S. Mannheimer (New York: J. Lehrberger at Roedelheim, 1873). On its printing history and changed authorship, see Singerman, Judaica Americana, 1:422 (#2401).

¹¹¹ Amidst the U.S. Civil War, for example, Mikveh Israel's board of managers met on May 31, 1863 to set the rates and assessment of the seats in the congregations' new synagogue building. The membership was divided into five classes, a hierarchy subsequently published and circulated. See Mikveh Israel Circular, *Extract of a Meeting of the Board of Managers of KKMI held on the 31st of May, 1863* [Copy in the Leaser personal papers collection, Box 9, FF6, CAJS library].

Leeser's program for post-day school Jewish education for boys and girls dated from a long-standing aspiration already in circulation in the *Voice of Jacob* and the *Occident* in the early 1840s; namely, to establish a "college, in which children born of Jewish parents could be instructed in English and the classics, in the liberal arts and in the Hebrew language and literature..."¹¹² Unlike the first Sunday School, the HES made the study of Hebrew part of its basic curriculum, and in its constitution, adopted on June 4, 1848, reflected the importance assigned to Hebrew language study when its founders named the society (in English and in Hebrew, respectively): "The Hebrew Education Society of Philadelphia" followed by "*Hebrat Hinukh Ne'arim*"¹¹³ (in Hebrew). The "college" idea, referring essentially to a school for young Jews leading up to and beyond the age of bar mitzvah (thirteen), represented the next step in the building of a Jewish educational infrastructure in Philadelphia.

The motives underlying the founding of HES represented and transcended commitments to Hebrew language instruction. Bi-lingual Jewish religious education hinted at the kind of parlor-education then deemed necessary to produce refined Jews knowledgeable in subjects like Hebrew grammar and Catechism, Latin and Greek, English grammar, German and French, mathematics, geography, and history.¹¹⁴ Leeser's vision, like that of Carvalho and Gratz, twinned Jewish literacy with civic reform, social cultivation and refinement. As Leeser, exhorting his audience at the opening of the HES, on April 6, 1851, put it: "we not merely charge ourselves with simple education; we wish to return your children to you at the end of each season improved in manners and morals." Leeser emphasized, in particular, the need for bodily cleanliness as a basic element of Jewish education: "nothing so promotes good conduct and proficiency in study," Leeser declared, "as scrupulous cleanliness; in a dirty body a dirty soul too often dwells, and the exterior is mostly a fair index of the inward man." Both the

¹¹² *Occident*, 1, 6 (September 1843), 303; Fifty Years of the HES, 1. See also, Bertram W. Korn, "The First American Jewish Theological Seminary: Maimonides College, 1867-1873," Eventful Years and Experiences: Studies in Nineteenth Century American Jewish History (Cincinnati, 1954), 151-213; *Voice of Jacob*, 1, 5 (November 26, 1841), 34; 1, 6 (December 10, 1841), 43-44; 1, 7 (December 24, 1841), 51-52; 1, 8 (January 7, 1842), 59-60; 1, 9 (January 21, 1842), 68-69; 1, 10 (February 4, 1842), 74-76; 1, 11 (February 18, 1842), 82-83 (includes a plan and a proposed budget).

¹¹³ An institution by this name appeared in New York City at Congregation Shearith Israel in 1825. It is unclear if Leeser was aware of this earlier institution or in any way modeled or named the HES after it. See A History of Jewish Education in America, 22.

¹¹⁴ Fifty Years of the Hebrew Education Society, 2.

Jewish body, the practical useful aspect, and the Jewish soul, the religious and moral aspect, had to be properly nurtured in order to cultivate a new kind of refined Jewish citizen.

In this last respect, Leeser's Hebrew Education Society marked a new advance in the history of Victorian Jewish education in Philadelphia and eventually led to the establishment in 1867 of Maimonides College, founded by Leeser along with Sabato Morais, Marcus Jastrow and others. The short-lived Maimonides College was the first practical effort to train a new generation of American rabbis committed to traditional religious beliefs and practices. Interestingly, one of the forgotten chapters in the College's history was the publication of a weekly newspaper, the *Jewish Index*, which temporarily filled the vacuum created by the cessation of the publication of the *Occident* in 1869. The first issue of the *Jewish Index* appeared on October 2, 1872 under the editorship of Samuel Mendelsohn. According to Morais' son Henry, in his *History of the Jews of Philadelphia*, the student editor benefited from "the constant assistance of the Rev. Dr. S. Morais, who contributed a large amount of matter to each issue."¹¹⁵ From clippings preserved in Morais' personal scrapbook, we know that the first English translations of important works of Italian Jewish literature appeared in the *Jewish Index*. Among these was Samuel David Luzzatto's "Lessons in Moral Theology", which Morais published in eleven serialized installments between October of 1872 and January of 1873.¹¹⁶

Morais' program of Jewish education concerned what he called in an 1888 Hebrew Sunday School address "the three agencies of education": "the pulpit, the press, and the school." Morais' efforts, like that of his predecessors, were rooted in enlightenment egalitarian beliefs, including the idea that education offered each person a means of achieving social and moral improvement. His program also was motivated by a belief in the practical utility of education as a means to combat missionary activities and to resist the impulse towards religious reform. A proper Jewish education, Morais maintained, involved cultivating among young Jews correct thinking, right behavior, good manners, personal hygiene, self-reliance, and patriotism, including the idea that America had come into existence by an act of providence to provide an asylum from Old World prejudices and religious persecution. Such a Jewish education, Morais believed, was the

¹¹⁵ Henry S. Morais, *Jews of Philadelphia*, 196-197.

¹¹⁶ The clippings of Morais' translation from the Italian into English, found in his personal scrapbook, "The Morais Ledger," are held at the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies Library, Morais Collection, Box 17 and now are viewable on-line at: <http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/morais/>

antidote to calls to reform Judaism and otherwise to thwart efforts to "ape" Christian worship.¹¹⁷ In 1886, Morais succeeded in establishing his own institutional framework for inculcating and transmitting these values: the Jewish Theological Seminary. Heading the first printed circular that announced the principles and aims of the proposed institution appears the motto, first in Hebrew, then in English: *lilmod u-lelamed, lishmor ve-la'asot*;" "To Learn and to Teach, To Observe and to Practice." The same motto had appeared on the cover of the first number of Leeser's *Occident*, in April of 1843.¹¹⁸

In sum, Carvalho wanted to transmit a basic Jewish literacy as a means of improving Jews and others in relation to grander universal principles. Gratz, though she shared these beliefs, primarily wanted to protect Jewish youth and Judaism from Christian missionaries, defending a domestic Judaism in its particularity in an American Victorian idiom taught in English. Leeser wanted to educate a religiously enlightened group of proper Jews, both boys and girls, beyond the rudiments of bar mitzvah and mere rote learning, in effect pioneering the structures and values of adult Jewish education, and used the vehicle of English translations to achieve these ends. Morais ultimately succeeded, where his predecessors had failed, in establishing a Seminary based on Sephardic and Italian rabbinic humanist principles to train a new generation of English-speaking enlightened

¹¹⁷ For his aversion to "aping" Gentile practices, see Morais' responses to the organ controversies at Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia and at other congregations in New York between 1869-71, including his *An Address ... Delivered on the Feast of Pentecost, Sunday May 16, 5629-1869, Before His Congregation at the Synagogue "Mickve Israel," in Seventh Street Above Arch, Being the Ninth Anniversary of the Consecration of that Building* (Philadelphia: Collins, Printer, 5629-1869); idem., "The Organ Question," *Jewish Messenger* (January 12, 1872) [clipping found in the *Sabato Morais Ledger*, 47, at the CAJS library] and note the similar language that appeared in the 1818 responsum issued by Livornese rabbis about the Hamburg Temple organ and other practices which the rabbis called "hikui ha-goyim" (literally, imitating or "aping" gentile ways). See Daniel Goldschmidt, "Il Rabbinate Livornese e la Riforma del 1818," *Scritti in Memoria di Guido Bedarida* (Florence [n.p.], 1966), 77-86, including a transcription of the responsum and especially Lois C. Dubin, "The Rise and Fall of the Italian Jewish Model in Germany: From Haskalah to Reform, 1780-1820," in ed. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and David N. Myers, *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi* (Hanover and London, 1998), 271-295.

¹¹⁸ The circular is pasted in the *Sabato Morais Ledger*, page 352. The Ledger was donated to the Annenberg Research Institute by Marvin Weiner and now forms part of the Sabato Morais Collection, CAJS library, Box 17. To view it on-line, see: <http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/morais/> (and browse to page 352).

observant Jewish religious leaders to continue to fulfill this religious vocation.

By the mid-nineteenth century, almost all the leading English-language Jewish publishers active in these kinds of educational projects had lived for sometime in London before crossing the Atlantic. This group included Samuel Jackson, who had edited the first American Jewish newspaper, “*The Jew*,” an anti-missionary organ (from 1823-1825 in NYC), Robert Lyon, editor of the *Asmonean* (1849-1857 in NYC), Samuel M. Isaacs, editor of the *Jewish Messenger* (1857-1901, in NYC), as well as Morais, with the *Jewish Index* (1872-73). Though in many respects Leeser shared their enlightened religious outlook, he was the only anomaly to this Victorian Jewish pattern. He had not spent any time in England, but had emigrated, as noted earlier, from his native Westphalia directly to Richmond, Virginia where he learned English and was Americanized to the Sephardic liturgy.

How, then, should we characterize the enlightened observant Judaism being expressed by these Victorian port Jews? Surely, many parallels, resemblances, and similarities to their religious outlooks can be found among “Orthodox,” “neo-Orthodox,” “Conservative” or “Reform” movements that first began to emerge among Ashkenazic Jews in Central and Eastern European lands around the same time. Nonetheless, I want to argue that the ways of seeing the world characteristic of these Victorian Jews cannot be reduced to those denominational classifications. In the United States, formal denominations did not begin to come into being until the last third of the nineteenth century, when the various editorial “camps” began to institutionalize into the (Reform) Union of American Hebrew Congregations (1873) and Hebrew Union College (1875); the Sephardic Jewish Theological Seminary (1886); the Ashkenazic orthodox Isaac Elhanan Yeshiva (1897); and the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary of America (1902).

Denominational classifications are unsuitable for these Victorian port Jews because they risk generating misplaced and anachronistic comparisons. They are misplaced because they invoke surface resemblances without adequate geographical and historical contextualization. They are anachronistic insofar as they post-date the period under discussion. The term “conservative,” for example, is perhaps the most glaring example of a word

that generally stood for opposition to reform, but not a new denomination.¹¹⁹ Victorian Jewish conservatives (lower case, non-denominational “c”) spoke of conservatism in the sense of protection and preservation of ancestral traditions. Their Victorian version of Judaism combined *halakhic* praxis with an openness to non-Jewish culture, science, and the English language. Moreover, they advocated a decorous, orthodox Judaism in explicitly Sephardic rather than in Ashkenazic terms.¹²⁰ These same “orthodox” conservatives were busy translating Hebrew religious works into the English vernacular as adjuncts to learning, even as they maintained a profound commitment to the preservation and veneration of the Hebrew language. Resorting to denominational terminology would distort our ability to understand these people and their history, and it would set artificial limits on the range of geographical settings, time frames, and the possibilities for nuanced interpretation.

In addition, recent historiography has explained the origins of the Jewish press by pointing to “modernization,” “secularization,” and the “legal” aspects of emancipation, in particular, the Jews’ acquisition of citizenship and its accompanying rights and privileges. Note has also been made of contact with non-Jewish society and the break-down of traditional Jewish communal life and identity.¹²¹ A clear example of explanations like these is the argument of Daniel Gutwein, who writes that the “relatively late appearance” of the Jewish press in the post-Napoleonic era “affords ample proof that it was not the Diaspora – i.e., the world-wide dispersion of Jews, nor their international commerce ... that generated Jewish modern communication. Rather this network developed in the wake of the

¹¹⁹ On this point, see Arthur Kiron, “Golden Ages, Promised Lands,” 318-363 (for the argument that the Jewish Theological Seminary founded in New York City in 1886 was based in principle on Sephardic and Italian rather than positive-historical traditions, the latter more accurately characterizing the Conservative seminary after 1902 when it was reorganized and renamed the “The Jewish Theological Seminary of America”) and esp. 349-350.

¹²⁰ A congregational resolution issued in Jamaica in 1883 expresses the essence of this version of Anglo-Sephardic “orthodoxy”: “the members of the K.K.S.H. will adhere strictly to the Orthodox Minhagim, pronunciation and Tonic inflexion of the Sephardim, and will not alter any part of the same unless we are convinced that such alteration is made by such Ecclesiastical body who is superior in wisdom to Ibn Ezra (Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra) who constituted our present form of prayer. Quoted in Jacob A.P.M. Andrade, compiler. A Record of the Jews in Jamaica Illustrated (Kingston, Jamaica, 1941), 69.

¹²¹ See again, the special issue of *Jewish History* 14, 1 (2000) on “The Press and the Jewish Public Sphere.”

modernization process. . . .”¹²² The Jewish press, he argues, “resulted from the accelerated pace of Jewish modernization and closer economic, cultural, and political contacts with non-Jewish society.”¹²³ “Engendered by local conditions, the Jewish press developed and spread as a substitute for the declining traditional, all-Jewish sphere by creating a new sense of solidarity, *based on political rather than religious sentiments* (emphasis added).”¹²⁴

The Victorian Jewish periodicals discussed here counter this argument forcefully. They all came into existence under conditions of “non-legal” emancipation. They were neither a result nor an effect of post-(legal) Emancipation in Continental Europe. More, their political and religious content was integrally intertwined; the former did not take the place of a declining latter. This press functioned instrumentally, as a means toward a stated end, not causally. The most significant external impulses motivating its editors were resistance to *religious* (both Jewish reform and Christian missionary) activity, not the modernizing effects of the collapse of the autonomous Jewish community or the secularizing ones of new scientific knowledge and technology. The voluntary character of Jewish communal existence in the Atlantic world was a precondition, not a cause for circulation, whether of people or the publications themselves

Similarly, vernacular publishing as a sign of increased contact with the non-Jewish population did not signify assimilation. The intensive penetration of the English language into modern Jewish life is often assumed to be a marker of assimilation, but very often, the truth was just the opposite. The most salient feature of the Victorian Jewish press was its adaptation of the English language to advance an enlightened observant religious agenda. Defending Jewish solidarity in political *and* religious terms in a non-Jewish vernacular language posed for them no apparent ideological difficulty.

Finally, enlightened versions of observant Judaism being advanced in the port cities of the Atlantic derived from, or claimed allegiance to, English and Sephardic rather than Continental and Ashkenazic traditions. This was true even when these versions were being articulated by individuals of Ashkenazic, Continental European origins.¹²⁵ Consider, by way of contrast, the editors of German Jewish reform newspapers such as Isaac Mayer Wise and his *American Israelite*. Figures like Wise came to the United States

¹²² Daniel Gutwein, “Traditional and Modern Communication: The Jewish Context,” *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora*, ed. Sophia Menache (Leiden, New York, Koln, 1996), 408-426.

¹²³ Gutwein, “Traditional and Modern Communication,” 426.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Isaac Leeser being a prime example.

directly from German-speaking lands, often without a strong knowledge of or experience speaking English. According to Wise, he taught himself English prior to his departure to the U.S. from a “set of [American] journals from 1770-1790,” which he had purchased at “an antiquarian bookstore in the city of Prague.”¹²⁶

Victorian port Jews *self-consciously* promoted an Atlantic *haskalah* in English.¹²⁷ This cultural movement for enlightened observant Judaism was constituted by formal organs of communication, a clear ideological agenda, as well as programmatic, especially educational, activities to secure the hopes of its advocates. These editors were not writing, editing, printing, or reading in isolation. They communicated with each other across space and time through the medium of the printed word and directly through their own travels. Their goal was to counter the temptations of radical assimilation with a Sephardic version of Jewish religious allegiance. This is not to say that one had to be a Sephardic Jew or a defender of tradition to publish in English. Yet these Atlantic Jewish *maskilim* constituted a distinct sub-culture. They were bent on protecting both Judaism itself and what it meant for them personally and collectively to be Jewish in an English-speaking world. Doing this was especially important in a time of questioning of Jewish ritual observance and widespread Christian mission. Through the publication of news and editorials, original prose and poetry, serialized historical novels, polemical and scholarly tracts, and translations of religious works into English, and through the creation of educational institutions, they communicated their worldviews to both Jewish and general audiences. From their Atlantic ports-of-call, these Victorian Jewish publishers struggled

¹²⁶ James G. Heller, Isaac Mayer Wise: His Life, Work, and Thought (New York, 1965), 92-93, 98. The first American Jewish weekly *Israels Herold* edited by Isidore Busch was published in German because of its editor’s poor English and his desire not to compete with Leeser. A month before the first issue appeared, Busch wrote to Leeser in February of 1849 to explain his undertaking: “several people ask me [sic!] to publish my journal in both languages, English and German. On the one hand, I don’t master the English well enough to write in it, on the other hand, it would be ignoring your fine publication. Some may not take it so well, but I am convinced [my English] won’t improve much, no matter how hard I work.” The original document is featured in Raynor’s Limited Edition, Historical Collectible Auctions catalog for Thursday, March 24th, 2005. A facsimile of the letter appears there and the quotation is taken from the body of the description of the item for sale.

¹²⁷ For a valuable survey of the recent debates over the scope, meaning, and applications of the term *haskalah*, see David B. Ruderman, Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key, 10-20.

against the threatening currents of their time to promote an enlightened observant version of the Jewish Republic of Letters.