

***Christian-Hebraism in England:
William Wotton and the First Translation of the
Mishnah into English¹***

By: MARVIN J. HELLER

And if we consider that the Observations of this Fourth Commandment in the Decalogue, was guarded in the Pentateuch by more secondary Laws, than any other single Command, (if you will except the Prohibition of worshipping strange Gods,) it will not be unpleasant in so curious a Man as your self, to observe what Contrivances these Wise Men had to make it in very many Instances of none Effect, by their Traditions. For if these Constitutions be nicely examin'd, there are none of them but what have something which may be plausibly alledged in their Justification.

(William Wotton, Preface *Shabbat and Erwin*)

Christian-Hebraism, the serious gentile scholarship of Jewish sources, is an unusual flower, with both sweet and bitter buds. Its primary flowering was not of long duration, flourishing for only a few centuries. The lengthier Christian study of Jewish texts has a convoluted history, ranging from the reading of Hebrew books for the purpose of refuting the tenets of Judaism, to investigation of those same works by Christian-Hebraists to better understand their religion's roots. At times, Christian review of Jewish books, and perhaps it is unfair to attribute this to Hebraists, resulted in attacks, vicious and at times often physical, that is, the burning of Jewish books. In contrast, many Christian scholars produced bilingual Latin and Hebrew works of merit. Christian-Hebraism has been well studied

¹ I would like to thank Eli Genauer for reading this paper and for his suggestions and my son-in-law R. Moshe Tepfer for his assistance and research in the National Library of Israel. Illustrations for *Shabbat and Erwin* are Courtesy of the National Library of Israel.

Marvin J. Heller writes books and articles on Hebrew printing and bibliography. His *Printing the Talmud: A History of the Individual Treatises Printed from 1700 to 1750* (Brill, Leiden, 1999) and *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book: An Abridged Thesaurus* (Brill, Leiden, 2004) were, respectively, recipients of the 1999 and 2004 Research and Special Libraries Division Award of the Association of Jewish Libraries for Bibliography.

and is outside the scope of this work.² What has generally received less attention are the studies of early Hebraists in England, particularly as they relate to non-biblical Hebrew works.

This article will begin with a brief overview of Christian-Hebraism and translations of the Mishnah, primarily into Latin, in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, followed by a brief discussion of such works in England; then the life and background of William Wotton, whose translation of two tractates of the Mishnah is our subject; next his translation of those tractates; concluding with a brief summary.

² To note a brief number of the works addressing the activities of Christian Hebraism see Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson, Editors, *Hebraica Veritas?: Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia, 2004); Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony: Sixteenth-Century Christian-Hebraica in the Age of Renaissance Nostalgia* (Athens, Ohio, 1983); Aaron L. Katchen, "Christian Hebraism from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment," *Christian Hebraism: The Study of Jewish Culture by Christian Scholars in Medieval and Modern Times*. Proceedings of a colloquium and catalogue of an exhibition arranged by the Judaica Department of the Harvard College Library on the occasion of Harvard's 350th anniversary celebration. May 5, 1986. Arranged and Prepared by Charles Berlin and Aaron L. Katchen (Cambridge, Mass., 1986); and Frank E. Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism Through Christian Eyes* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992). In addition, there are several studies about particular Christian-Hebraists. Concerning the persecution of Hebrew books, particularly the Talmud in the medieval period, see Robert Chazan, "Christian Condemnation, Censorship, and Exploitation of the Talmud," in *Printing the Talmud: From Bomberg to Schottenstein*, eds. Sharon Lieberman Mintz and Gabriel M. Goldstein (New York: Yeshiva Univ. Museum, 2005), pp. 53–59; *idem.*, *Medieval Jewry In Northern France* (Baltimore, 1973); Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century* (New York, 1966); *idem.*, "Popes, Jews, and Inquisition," In *Essays on the Occasion of the Seventieth Anniversary of Dropsie University* (Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 151–85; Marvin J. Heller, *Printing the Talmud: A History of the Earliest Printed Editions of the Talmud* (Brooklyn, 1992), pp. 201–15; and Judah M. Rosenthal, "The Talmud on Trial," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, XLVII (1956), pp. 58–76, 145–69. Concerning the burning and censorship of the Talmud in the sixteenth century see Heller, *Printing the Talmud*, pp. 217–28; Kenneth R. Stow, "The Burning of the Talmud in 1553," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, XXXIV (1972), pp. 435–59; Avraham Yaari, "Burning the Talmud in Italy" in *Studies in Hebrew Booklore* (Jerusalem, 1958), pp. 198–234 [Hebrew] and for censorship of the Talmud see William Popper, *The Censorship of Hebrew Books* (reprint New York, 1968) and Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text: The Catholic Church and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon in the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 2007).

I

Protestants evinced considerable interest in the study of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). As a result, books were written, grammars, lexicographic works, and translations of Hebrew texts, among them translations of Mishnaic tractates, were printed with commentaries. Hebrew was considered to be of significance to students of theology and related texts were therefore of importance.³ Fuks and Fuks-Mansfeld note that when Hebrew texts were published, however, it was done with the explicit understanding that the university faculty members who prepared these works did so to “repudiate the fallacies of Jewish law.” Examples of prominent professors of Hebrew unambiguously so informed by the theological faculties of their universities are Constantin L’Empereur (1619–48) at Leiden and Johannes Leusden (1653–99) at Leusden.⁴ A somewhat more sanguine view is expressed by Aaron L. Katchen who writes that the basic works of rabbinic Judaism, Mishnah and Talmud, got a new hearing. Despite still being the subject of abuse, new editions of the Mishnah, with extracts of the Talmud, “often served to dispel illusions. Most often, to be sure, these works were produced for the greater glory of the Christian Republic of Letters.... However there was also a blunting of prejudice that sometimes came to the fore in such studies. For these studies reflect a mixture of Christian Purposes and a new vision of either rationalism or Enlightenment.”⁵

Elisheva Carlebach too observes that “Some of the Christian Talmudists were animated by polemical anti-Jewish motives.” She cites Johannes Leusden as an example for whom “Jewish adherence to the Talmud

³ Christian-Hebraism was not only a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century phenomenon, but had considerable earlier antecedents. Those scholars who expressed an interest in rabbinic subjects, for whatever reason, did not prepare translations of the Talmud. Concerning Christian-Hebraism in the sixteenth century, see Friedman; and Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (New York, 1959), pp. 137–64. Friedman, pp. 1–2, notes the controversial nature of Hebrew studies, for example, the Reuchlin-Dominican controversy, the Luther-Sabbatarian conflict, as well as the battles between the Hebraists of Basle and those of Wittenberg as to the proper use of Jewish sources and the optimum approach to rabbinic material. Apart from Hebraists with an interest in Hebrew texts were Christian scholars and clergymen who studied biblical Hebrew, for example, those who translated the Bible into English, most notably the King James Bible (1611) and its predecessors.

⁴ L. Fuks and R. G. Fuks-Mansfeld, *Hebrew Typography in the Northern Netherlands 1585–1815 I* (Leiden, 1984–87), p. 14.

⁵ Katchen, p. 11.

proved that Jews were in a perpetual state of disobedience to God, having abandoned the Bible for the Talmud.” Carlebach, however, also observes that Aramaic lexicons and grammars, particularly from the Buxtorfs, “provided welcome tools for serious students of Talmud.”⁶ Christian interests in the Talmud were varied; their interest in the developing new relationship of states and their legal systems is exemplified by L’Empereur’s translation of *Bava Kamma* (Leiden, 1637), dealing with civil law, whereas others, such as John Lightfoot, searched the Talmud for insight into the Christian Bible, and Hugo Grotius cited the Talmud as proof that God had bestowed laws applicable to mankind in addition to those specifically applicable to Jews, viewing the Talmud as a natural evolution of biblical law for contemporary society.

The study of Jewish sources centered primarily on Bible and grammar. Nevertheless, a number of Hebraists addressed rabbinic texts, translating several tractates of the Mishnah into Latin. We have already noted Constantin L’Empereur and Johannes Leusden. Among the many others are such scholars as Johannes Cocceius Coccejus (1603–69), *Sanhedrin et Maccoth* (Amsterdam, 1629); Johann Christof Wagenseil (1633–1705), *Sota: Hoc est: liber mischnicus de uxore adulterii suspecta* (Altdorf, 1674); Gustavo Peringero (Gustav von Lilienbad Peringer, 1651–1705), *Duo Codices Talmudici Avoda Sara et Tamid...* (Altdorf, 1690); and Wilhelm Surenhuis (Surenhuys, Surenhuysen, Gulielmus Surenhusius, 1698–1703), *Sive Legum Mischnicarum, Liber qui inscribitur* (Amsterdam, 1698–1703), to name but a few.

That there were Christian-Hebraists at this time in England is not in dispute. What is little known is that there were such Hebraists in the medieval period. Judith Olszowy-Schlanger informs of a unique Hebrew-Latin–Old French dictionary written in 13th-century England by Christian scholars. She describes it as an exceptional work, one that did not follow the patristic tradition of Christian Hebraism but instead utilized Jewish rabbinic and medieval sources to understand the text of the Hebrew Bible. She notes that 26 bilingual Hebrew-Latin manuscripts are known today, produced in England from the mid-12th through the late 13th centuries, explicitly for the use of Christian-Hebraists. There is substantial evidence that these English Christian scholars possessed and studied Hebrew books, that is, the Bible, Rashi, and grammars. This is in contrast to the low opinion of modern historiography as to the knowledge of the Hebrew language and grammar of medieval Christian scholars, exemplified by the remark by Roger Bacon (c. 1214–1294) in his *Opus Tertium* that, among his contemporaries, “fewer than four of which knew Hebrew grammar

⁶ Elisheva Carlebach, “The Status of the Talmud in Early Modern Europe” in *Printing the Talmud: From Bomberg to Schottenstein*, pp. 85-86.

well enough to teach it.” Olszowy-Schlanger writes that it is something of an irony that most of the Christian scholars who did master the Hebrew language and were able to study Hebrew texts are not known to us by name, while Roger Bacon “... and his Franciscan milieu came to be acclaimed ‘the Christian Hebraists of the Middle Ages’ *par excellence*, despite the lack of evidence that they achieved any proficiency in Hebrew.”⁷

That there were a fair number of Hebraists in England in the seventeenth century is also well known.⁸ Of interest is Hugh Broughton (1549–1612), who not only mastered Hebrew but also studied Jewish classical works, including *Seder Olam*, adopting that title for one of his own chronological works; among his titles is *The Familie of David (Familia Davidis, Amsterdam, 1605)*, a treatise on the lineage of King David printed in bilingual Hebrew-English and Hebrew-Latin editions.

The first published translation of a Mishnah in London, this of *Yoma* into Latin, *Joma. Codex Talmudicus, in quo agitur de sacrificiis . . .* (London, 1648) with annotations, was by Robert Sheringham (1602–78). It is one of only a few books with Hebrew letters to be printed in that period in London, then devoid of Jews. Sheringham was a proctor of Cambridge

⁷ Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, “A School of Christian Hebraists in Thirteenth Century England: a Unique Hebrew-Latin-French and English Dictionary and its Sources,” *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 1:2 (Leiden, 2008) pp. 249–51. Also see Raphael Loewe, “The Mediaeval Christian Hebraists of England: Herbert of Bosham and Earlier Scholars” *Transactions of The Jewish Historical Society of England* 17 (1951–52), pp. 225–49; *idem.*, “the Mediaeval Christian Hebraists of England: The *Superscriptio Lincolnensis*” *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 28 (1957), pp. 205–252; and C. Phillip E. Northaft, “Robert of Leicester’s treatise on the Hebrew *computus* and the study of Jewish knowledge in medieval England,” *Jewish Historical Studies* 45, pp. 63–78.

⁸ The interest in Jewish studies can be appreciated from a list of Christian-Hebraists of note in London and Cambridge in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the caveat that there were certainly many more not worthy of mention, this despite the absence of a formal Jewish community. Those worthy of mention are: London: William Bedwell (1561–1632), John Dove (c. 1746), John Gill (1697–1771), Hilaric Prache (b. 1614– 1679), Thomas Smith (b. 1638–1710), William Wotton, (1666–1720), Elisabeth Tansfeld (d. 1639), Paulus Fagius (Buchlin) (1504–49), W. H. Lowe, Henry More, (1614–1687), Rob. Sheringham (1602–1678, Cambridge), and Franc Taylor. (1660). Not really germane to our subject but of interest is that inserted into unsold copies of the famed London Polyglot Bible (1653–57) in 1660 were two dedications, one to Oliver Cromwell, the other to Charles II, inserted by Royalist scholars “marooned in Cromwell’s London or revolutionary Oxford” (Peter N. Miller, “The ‘Antiquarianization’ of Biblical Scholarship and the London Polyglot Bible (1653–57),” *Journal of the History of Ideas* (2001), pp. 469–70.

University, but, due to his adherence to the royalist cause, was ejected from his fellowship, at Caius, soon after. He retired to London, and then to Holland, where he instructed in Hebrew and Arabic at Rotterdam and in other towns. On the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Sheringham was restored to his fellowship, thereafter leading a studious and retired life, being “esteemed ‘a most excellent linguist, as also admirably well versed in the original antiquities of the English nation.’”⁹ *Joma* was preceded by Robert Wakefeld’s *Oratio de laudibus et utilitate trium linguarum Arabice Chaldaice et Hebraice* (1524), a woodblock book with a few Hebrew words, and, in 1643, the first book with a significant amount of Hebrew letters, a Psalms with Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and English.¹⁰

Two other translations of Mishnayot in England at this time, these by Jews, need to be noted. The first was prepared by R. Jacob ben Joseph Abendana (1630–85), *hakham* of the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue in London, who published, together with his brother Isaac, R. Solomon ibn Melekh’s Bible commentary, *Mikhlol Yofi*, with a super-commentary, *Lekket Shikḥah* (1660-61) with approbations from Christian-Hebraists, among them Johannes Buxtorf. Abendana, under commission from Christian-Hebraists, translated the Mishnah into Spanish (c. 1660). It was later used by several Christian-Hebraists, among them William Surenhusius. Never published, it is no longer extant. R. Isaac Abendana translated the Mishnah into Latin for the Cambridge scholars between 1662 and 1675. Also never published, the manuscript is now in the University Library of Cambridge.¹¹

⁹ Thompson Cooper, “Sheringham, Robert” *Dictionary of National Biography*, (London: Smith, Elder, & co., 1885–1900), <http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Sheringham,_Robert_%28DNB00%29>.

¹⁰ Freimann, *Gazetteer*, p. 46; Cecil Roth, *Magna Bibliotheca Anglo-Judaica; a Bibliographical Guide to Anglo-Jewish History* (London, 1937), p. 361 no. 2. Roth, in that work, in the section on Christian Hebrew Scholarship (B 14), representing works “in the Mocatta Library with a few others of outstanding importance,” records 113 titles from 1558 through 1837 under that heading, 67 of them through 1749. Wotten is not represented in the listing; Isaac BenJacob, *Otzar ha-Sefarim* (Vilna, 1880), p. 574 no. 459, records a 1596 *Shir al ha-Otiyot* by R. Sa’adiah ben Joseph (Gaon?) [Hebrew]. Additional works of possible Jewish interest but without Hebrew were printed, such as an English translation of the *Travels of Benjamin of Tudela* (1625), but Hebrew printing in London by and for Jews begins only in the first decade of the eighteenth century.

¹¹ Harm den Boer, “Abendana, Jacob ben Joseph,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (EJ). Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, I (Detroit, 2007), 251; Cecil Roth, “Abendana, Isaac,” *EJI*, 250. Concerning this translation see J.W. Wesselius, “I

II

William Wotton (1666–1727) and his *Shabbat and Eruvin*, addressed here, gives us insight into the background and perspective of a Christian-Hebraist, what kind of person he was, and, it being in English rather than in Latin as are almost all of the other contemporary translations of Mishnayot, is more accessible to most readers of this article. Wotton, an erudite person of considerable accomplishments, indeed a prodigy and a polymath, has been described by Alexander Chalmers as “an English divine of uncommon parts and learning . . . and well skilled in Oriental Languages.” In a letter dated September 16, 1671, by Sir Philip Skippon to Mr. John Ray, we read about Wotton’s background,

I shall somewhat surprise you with what I have seen in a little boy, William Wotton, five years old the last month, the son of Mr. Wotton, minister of this parish, who hath instructed his child within the last three quarters of a year in the reading the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages, which he can read almost as well as English; and that tongue he could read at four years and three months old as well as most lads of twice his age.¹²

Chalmers continues, concerning Wotton’s memory, that he is “never forgetting anything.”¹³ Wotton was admitted to Catherine Hall, Cambridge several months prior to his tenth birthday, where the masters of the college praised his learning and skill in languages. He received his B. A. when twelve and five months, his M. A. in 1683, and commenced his Bachelor of Divinity in 1691. In the same year, Wotton received the sinecure of Llandrillo in Denbigshire. He was appointed curate in Brimpton on September 20, 1686, nominated by Richard Worrell, Vicar of the same and afterwards as Vicar, *ad Vicariam perpetuamin*, in Lacock from October

don’t know whether he will stay for long’: Isaac Abendana’s early years in England and his Latin translation of the Mishnah,” *Studia Rosenthaliana*, 22:2 (1988) pp. 85–96. Also see David S. Katz, “The Abendana Brothers and the Christian Hebraists of Seventeenth-Century England,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical Hebrew* 40:1 (1989), pp. 28–52.

¹² Alexander Chalmers, *The General Biographical Dictionary: Containing an Historical and Critical Account of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Persons in Every Nation, Particularly the British and Irish, from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time XXXII* (London, 1817), p. 306. Wotton’s skill as a linguist is also noted in George Godfrey Cunningham’s *A History of England in the Lives of Englishmen* 4 (London, 1853), pp. 241, where it states, “he died in 1726, leaving behind him no competitor, perhaps, in variety of acquisitions as a linguist.”

¹³ Chalmers, p. 310.

3, 1693.¹⁴ Among Wotton's positions and achievements was that he was a scholar of St. John's College, Cambridge, a Fellow of the Royal Society, and a prebend of Salisbury.

In 1694, Wotton published *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning*, addressing the branches of literature, arts, and sciences, as extended by both ancients and Moderns. It is a defense of the moderns, for which Jonathan Swift attacked and satirized Wotton in his *Tale of a Tub* and *Battle of the Books* (1704).¹⁵ Wotton described *Tale of a Tub* as having "a good deal of wild wit" but on the whole being "the profanest piece of ribaldry" since Rabelais. Among Wotton's other titles is a *History of Rome* (1701), and he is also remembered for his collection and translation of Welsh works. In 1714, Wotton relocated to Carmarthen, Wales, where he learned to speak and write Welsh, writing *Legis Wallicae*, largely printed in 1727, the finished work published posthumously in 1730 by his son-in-law.¹⁶

Given the above, much was expected of Wotton. His personal life, however, and the circumstances that resulted in relocations and Wotton's not fully achieving the positions and successes anticipated of him, can be attributed to his personal failings, having feet of clay. The antiquary Abraham de la Pryme described Wotton in his diary as "a most excellent preacher, but a drunken whoring soul." Such comments were repeated over the years, William Cole, rector of a neighboring parish, writing that Wotton was "known in the learned World for his ingenious writings in the country where he inhabited for his Levities and Imprudencies."¹⁷

While all of this reflects poorly on his personal life it does not detract from his many intellectual and literary accomplishments, among them the translation of tractates *Shabbat* and *Eruvin*. Indeed, while living in Carmarthen, and having become reformed, now a model clergyman, visiting the sick and resuming his studies, Wotton undertook this work, in 1714, to give young divinity students a basic understanding of Jewish learning, in order to "show of what authority it was and what use it might be made of within Christian teaching."¹⁸

¹⁴ *CCEd, the Clergy of the Church of England database*, <<http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/search/index.jsp>>.

¹⁵ Berlin and Katchen, *Christian Hebraism*, p. 55 no. 108.

¹⁶ David Stoker, "William Wotton's exile and redemption: an account of the genesis and publication of *Leges Wallicae*" *Y Llyfr yng Nghymru/Welsh Book Studies*, 7 (2006), pp. 7–106, a detailed work on *Legis Wallicae*, as the book is known, with considerable detail on Wotton's life.

¹⁷ Quoted in Stoker, p. 12.

¹⁸ Stoker, p. 24.

III

We turn now to that second translation of Mishnayot with a London imprint, the very first in English, this the edition of *Shabbat and Eruvin*:... *Translated into English, with Annotations* by W. Wotton. *Shabbat and Eruvin* is part two of a two-volume work entitled *Miscellaneous Discourses relating to the traditions and usages of the Scribes and Pharisees*... (1718). Part one, *Texts relating to the religious observation of one day in seven, with annotations*, begins with a dedication to William, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, followed by a lengthy preface ([i], ii-l) in which Wotton relates how he came to write this work. Four years previously a “very ingenious Gentleman, whose Curiosity had led him to make Enquiries into things not relating to his Profession (which is the Law of the *England*), had a long discourse with me concerning the Reasons of Christians not observing the Sabbath which is enjoined by the fourth Commandment.” This gentleman remarked that whereas the Catholic Church “unanimously” denied the *Mosaic Sabbath*, in their Church, regularly, every Sunday, “the *Mosaic Sabbath* is expressly commanded to be remembered.”

Wotton set about responding to his friend, resolving to do so as soon as he had leisure, reviewing all the pertinent texts, resulting in this work. The text of the first volume is, as the title informs, discourses on the nature, authority, and usefulness of the Mishnah; the contents of all the titles of the Mishnah; the recital of the Shema, phylacteries, schedules of gates and door-posts; and text relating to the religious observance of one day in seven.

It is the second volume ([16], [1] folded leaf, 279, [25] pp.), comprised of the Hebrew and the English translation of the Mishnah of two tracts, that is of interest to us. The text of the title page begins,

SHABBATH
AND
ERUVIN
Two Titles of the
MISNA or **CODE**
Of the
Traditional Laws,
Which were observed by the
Scribes and Pharisees...

...

Printed by *W. Bowyer*, for T. Goodwin at the Queens-Head against St. *Dunstan's Church* in Fleetstreet. 1718.¹⁹

The volume begins with a dedication, also the preface, to Thomas Kilpin of the Middle Temple, Esq., indicative of Wotton's positive view towards his subject matter and its rabbinic authors. There are critical remarks about Judaism, to be expected, consistent with Wotton's beliefs and position as a Protestant clergyman. He writes, "You will wonder possibly, Sir, that I should prefix your Name to two Hebrew Tracts, when your Studies have all along lain in so different a Road. But when you see that they are Decrees and Constitutions of eminent Lawyers, upon a Subject of no less Importance than one of the Ten Commandments, your Wonder, I hope, will cease. . . . They are part of the Text of the Talmud, which was the true authentic Law of the Pharisees . . ." He refers to the authors as those inspired Writers and notes that

You will see there is an incredible Minuteness in Things seemingly the most trivial, which frequently appears very impertinent; and yet you will also observe that these Masters had constant Rules by which they proceeded, which were subservient still to one main End, which was to teach Men how to evade the Law, when they seemed most solicitous to observe it. . . . For if these Constitutions be nicely examin'd, there are none of them but what have something which may be plausibly alledged in their Justification.

Whether the Jews, that live among us in these Western Parts of Europe, are pleased to see that these their Mysteries have been laid open to Christians, in this and the last Age, I know not. They will by this means, however, appear not to have been such a weak, stupid Nation, as learned Men have described them to be. Their Blindness has not been intellectual, but moral. Their Hearts have been harden'd, and not their Heads. . . .²⁰

¹⁹ William Bowyer the elder (1663–1737) was a leading printer in late seventeenth, early eighteenth century England. He was nominated as one of the twenty printers allowed by the Star Chamber. His son, also a William Bowyer (1699–1777), worked together with his father. The Bowyer press was considered among the most learned of contemporary presses. Their activities are recorded in a four-volume work, *The Bowyer Ledgers*, ed. Keith Maslen and John Lancaster (London, 1991), p. xxvi (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1911: <<http://www.studydrive.net/encyclopedias/bri/view.cgi?n=34709&search=bowyer#bowyer>>).

²⁰ The observant reader will have noted that, in contrast to modern English usage, all nouns are capitalized in Wotton's text, for example, "the poor **M**an reaches forth his **H**and into the **H**ouse" (emphasis added). David Crystal (*The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, 1996, p. 67) explains that from the beginning

Wotton observes a difficulty under which he has labored is that “no Christian has commented upon these titles, that I have seen” and that the Jewish commentators are obscure because they wrote for a Jewish readership, assuming a knowledgeable public, but thereby unfamiliar to strangers. Wotton’s remark that “no Christian has commented upon these titles, that I have seen” is surprising, given, as noted above, the attention of Christian-Hebraists in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to rabbinic works. It is reported that in Wales despite having a “great deal of leisure, he had a few books; but being of too active a genius to be idle, he drew up at the request of Brown Willis Esq.; who afterwards published them, the memoirs of the Cathedral Church of St. David in 1717, and of Landaff in 1719; and here he wrote his *Miscellaneous Discourses* . . .”²¹

Wotton, fluent in Latin, the language of the translations, and a prodigious scholar, was certainly aware of the European Hebraists’ translations of and commentaries on several tractates of Mishnayot; indeed, even in Wales, distant from the centers of English Hebraists, he is known to have made use of the works of several of them, such as William Guise and William Surenhusius, even recording them and others in an appendix to the volume. In addition, he particularly mentions Edward Pococke, John Lightfoote, and John Seldon, referring to them in the text, thereby, as Ruderman remarks, “situating himself in a living tradition of Christian scholars, proudly regarding his own scholarship a direct continuation of all of theirs.”²² Wotton’s remarks then most likely are addressed to these particular tractates only and the subject of the Jewish observance of the Sabbath, this despite the existence of Latin translations of both *Shabbat* and *Eruvin* by Sebastian Schmidt (Leipzig, 1661), for how else can they be understood?

of the eighteenth century, under Continental influence, all nouns considered important were capitalized, a practice extended to encompass all or most nouns. He suggests that it was done either for aesthetic reasons or “perhaps because printers were uncertain about which nouns to capitalize, and so capitalized them all.” By the end of the 18th century grammarians were displeased by the lack of order and discipline so that the nouns that took a capital were dramatically reduced.

²¹ Bayle, Pierre, *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical: in Which a New and Accurate TRANSLATION of that of the Celebrated MR. BAYLE...*, By the Reverend Mr. John Peter Bernard; the Reverend Mr. Thomas Birch; Mr. John Lockman; and other hands, vol. x (London, 1746), p. 206.

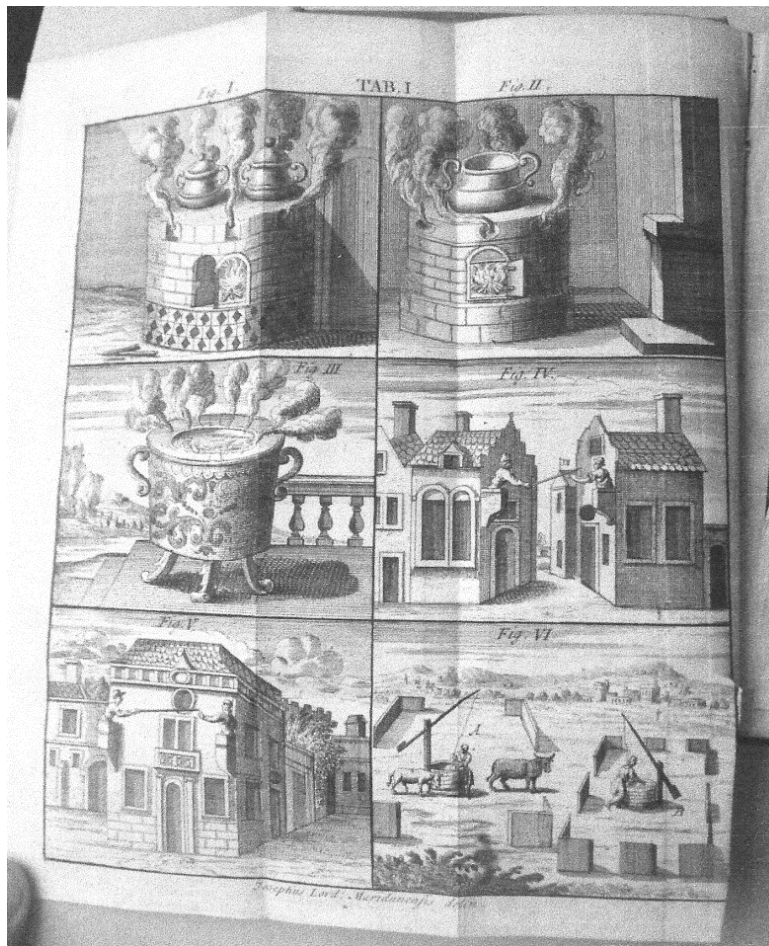
²² David B. Ruderman, “the Study of the Mishnah and the Quest for Christian Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England: Completing a Narrative Initiated by Richard Popkin” in *The Legacies of Richard Popkin (International Archives of the History of Ideas Archives internationales d'histoire des idées)*, editor Jeremy D. Popkin (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2008), p. 137.

Towards the conclusion of the preface, Wotton expresses a positive view of rabbinic activity, noting the rationality of Mishnah, for “*I have endeavor’d to assign the Grounds upon which these Masters went in all these Constitutions; and where they are rational, as many of them are, I have given my Judgment in their Favor. . .*”

There are two pages of foldouts illustrating various Sabbath activities, described in a section entitled “an Explication of the Two Figures.” An example of this text is,

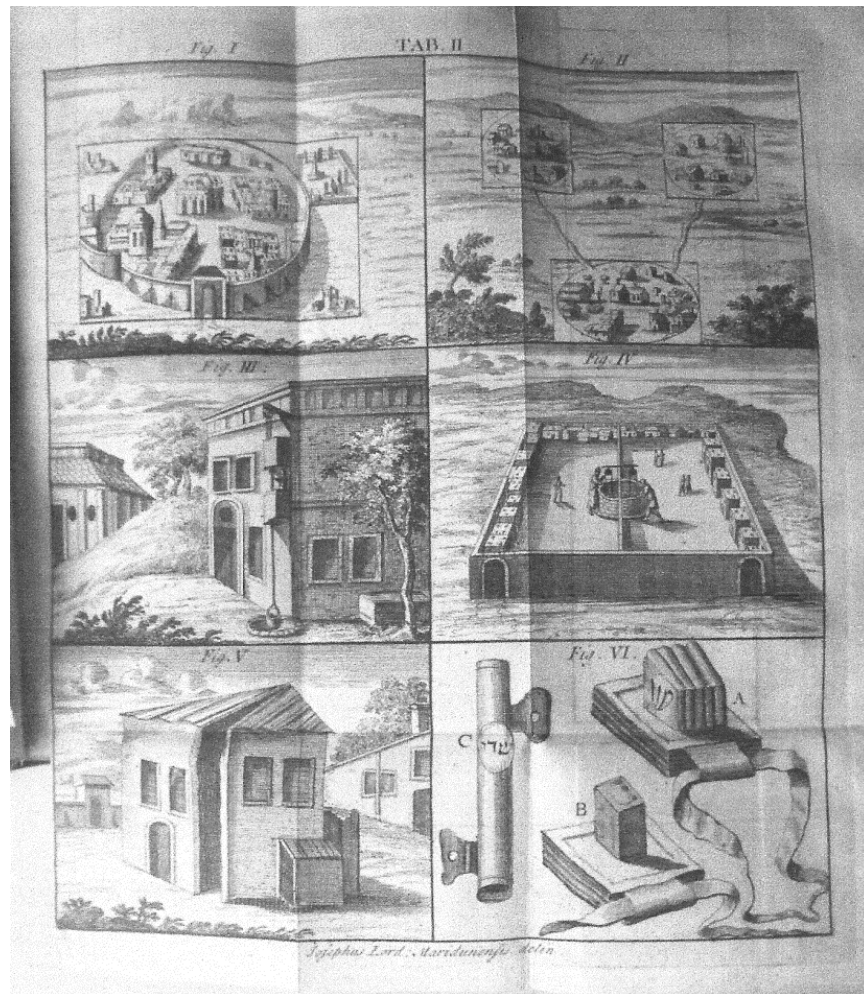
TAB. I

Fig. V. Here are two Balconies in the same house, with the Street underneath. One Man in one Balcony holds forth a Stick to another Man in the Second, who reaches out his Hand to take it from him. *Shabbath*, XI. 2.



TAB. II

Fig. V. We have here a House broken through to one of its Corners, by which means part of the Wall on both Sides is fallen down. This Breach then could not be mistaken for a Door. *Erwin*, IX. 3



Each volume begins with a brief description of the contents of the various chapters. For example, the first chapter of Shabbat is described as:

REMOVALS, what, and how many Eighteen Constitutions chiefly Sabbatical, which were decided according to the Shammaeans. Other Constitutions wherein the Houses of Shammai and Hillel differ'd. Of giving Cloths to Dyers, Fullers and other Artificers, on the Sabbath Eve, when the Work could not be finished that Day. Of employing Gentiles to work for one on the Sabbath. Of baking and roasting the Evening before. Of Dressing the Paschal Lamb on the Sabbath Eve.

The text follows, in parallel Hebrew and English columns, accompanied by Wotton's extensive commentary. Below is Wotton's translation of the first Mishnah in *Shabbat* followed by a modern translation of the same text, that of Mesorah Publications (ArtScroll).

Wotton

Removals upon the Sabbath-Day are two, which within [a Place] are four; and two [likewise] which without [a Place] are four. How so: If a poor Man stands without, and the Master of the House within; the poor Man reaches forth his Hand into the House, and puts something into the Hand of the Master of the House, Or takes something out of his Hand, and carries it away; the poor Man [then] is guilty, and the Master free. If the Master puts his Hand out of the House, and gives [something] to the poor Man, or takes something from him, and draws his Hand in again; he is guilty, and the poor Man is free. If a poor Man reaches his Hand into a House, and the Master takes something out of it, or puts something into it, and the poor Man then goes off, they are both free. If the Master puts His Hand out, and the poor Man takes [something] out of his Hand, or puts any thing into it, and the Master draws his Hand in again, they are both free.

Mesorah Publications (ArtScroll)

The [types of] transfers on the Sabbath are two which are [in reality] four within, and two which are [in reality] four outside.

How is this so? The poor man is standing outside, and the householder inside: If the poor man extended his hand inside and placed [an object] into the householder's hand, or if he took [an object] from it and brought [that object] out – the poor man is liable and the householder is exempt;

if the householder extended his hand outside and placed [an object] into the poor man's hand, or if he took [an object] out of it and brought the [that object] in – the householder is liable and the poor man is exempt;

if the poor man extended his hand inside and the householder took [an object] from it, or placed [an object] into it and he [the poor man] brought [that object] out – both are exempt;

if the householder extended his hand outside and the poor man took [an object] from it, or placed [an object] into it and he [the householder] brought [that object] in – both are exempt.^{23 24}

Wotton's translation of the Mishnah is accompanied by a detailed commentary. In preparing it he utilized Jewish sources, referencing such authorities as Moses Maimonides (Rambam, c. 1135–1204) and Obadiah

²³ *Mishnayot Seder Mo'ed 'im Perush Yad Avraham* (Brooklyn, 1979). Another example of the variations in the translation of this Mishnah can be seen from Soncino Publications, which states, "The carryings out of the Sabbath are two which are four within, and two which are four without. How so? The poor man stands without and the master of the house within: [i] if the poor man stretches his hand within and places [an article] into the hand of the master of the house, or [ii] if he takes [an article] from it and carries it out, the poor man is liable, and the master of the house is exempt. [again] [i] if the master of the house stretches his hand without and places [an object] in the poor man's hand, or [ii] takes [an object] there from and carries it in, the master is liable, while the poor man is exempt. [iii] if the poor man stretches his hand within and the master takes [an object] from it, or places [an object] therein and he carries it out, both are exempt; [iv] if the master stretches his hand without and the poor man takes [an object] from it, or places [an article] therein and he carries it inside, both are exempt" (Soncino Talmud, 1973).

²⁴ A comparison of the first line of several translations of the same Mishnah (Shabbat 6:6) over time is provided at <<http://onthemainline.blogspot.com/search?q=wotton>>. The entries are: **1718**. Women may go out with a Piece of Money ty'd to a Sore. (Wotton); **1843**. Women may go out with a coin fastened on a swelling in their feet. (Raphall & de Sola); **1878**. A woman may go out with a coin on a sore foot. (Barclay); **1896**. Women may go out with a coin fastened to a swelling on their feet. (Rodkinson); **1927**. One may go out [on the Sabbath] with a sela on a corn. (Oesterley); **1933**. They may go out with the sela that is put on a bunion. (Danby); **1935ish**. She may go forth with the sela on a zinith [callus]. (Soncino); **1963**. A woman may go out with a sela upon a corn. (Blackman); **1982**. She may go out with the sela that is on the wound [on the sole of her foot]. (Artscroll); **1991**. She goes out with a sela coin on a bunion. (Neusner); **1996**. **[A woman] may go out on the Sabbath with a sela that is bound upon a tzinis.** (Artscroll); **1999**. A woman may go out with a Sela on a bunion. (Haberman). These entries are followed at onthefmainline by more complete translations of the Mishnah.

Bertinoro (c. 1445 – c. 1515). Below is an example of Wotton’s commentary on *Shabbat*, and facing it a reproduction of the text and commentary on *Eruvin*.

MISNA.

Shabbath

3

This Law was made capital afterwards upon a Man’s gathering sticks on the Sabbath, (*Numb. Xv. 32–36.*) who was stoned for that Offense, because he did it *presumptuously*, as appears by what went before (*V. 30.31.*) i.e. he knew that he gather’d those Sticks on the Sabbath, and that such Work was then forbidden, and yet notwithstanding that his Knowledge, he was resolved to do it, let the Event be what it would. For whereas *Sins of Ignorance*, even in Sabbatical Cases, were expiable by Sacrifice, as appears in the Words foregoing, (*Numb. xv. 27, 28, 29.*) whatsoever was done *presumptuously* was threaten’d with *Excision*. *But the Soul that doth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the Land or a Stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord: and that Soul shall be cut off from among his People: because he hath despised the Word of the Lord, and hath broken his Commandment; that Soul shall be utterly cut off; his Iniquity shall be upon him.* (*V. 30, 31.*) And then Immediately after this Commitiation comes the Account of the unfortunate Man that gather’d Sticks, wherein the Lord was Consulted, either because they did not know how far the Excision threaten’d (*V. 30.*) might extend; or, as it seems to me very probable, those Penalties threaten’d against *Sins of Presumption* in general were given at first upon that Account.

The Laws of Atonement in case of Sins of Ignorance committed by the Priest, by the Congregation, by a Ruler, or by One of the People of the Land, were at large set down before in the fourth Chapter of Leviticus. The punishment for *presumptuous Sins* in general is not there mention’d. The first flagrant Instance (probably) that happen’d in the Wilderness, was this of the Man that gather’d Sticks. . .

MISNA. Erwin. 169

Cubits, (which comes to about nineteen Foot) it cannot well pass for a Door or Gate, unless it be made expressly of that Form, in which Case it is allow'd.

<p>ט : מקיפין שלשה חבלים זה למעלה מזה וזה למעלה מזה ובלבד שלא יהא בין חבל לחבירו שלשה טפחים : שיעור חבלים ועוביין יתר על טפח כרו שיהא הכל עשרה טפחים :</p>	<p>§. 9. These Enclosures [may be made] with three Ropes [surrounding the Camp in a parallel Order] one above another; only there must not be three Palms Distance between Rope and Rope. The Measure then and Thick- nefs of the three Ropes [taken jointly] must be above a Palm, that the Height of the whole may be full ten Palms.</p>
--	--

We are told, that *Moses* left it as one of the *Constitutions* which he brought from *Mount Sinai*, that whatsoever wants of three Palms superficial Measure, is only an Appendix of the thing that is next it: The three Ropes therefore being not three Palms asunder from one another, are in the *Talmudic Style* joined together, and so constitute one entire Enclosure. Then if the *Breadth or Thickness* of the three Ropes together makes any thing more than a Palm, the whole Hedge will be full ten Palms high: I say, *Breadth or Thickness*. Whatsoever is three Palms in Circumference, though it be exactly circular, is supposed to be a Palm broad. *Maimonides* observes this is not geometrically true, the *Ratio* of a *Circle* to its *Diameter* being some small matter more than three to one; which small matter in Practice is generally overlook'd. *Bartenora*, who frequently owns that he cannot understand the Calculations of *Maimonides*, contents himself with telling us, that *Solomon's Brazen Sea* was thirty Cubits in Circumference, and 10 Cubits from Brim to Brim, 1 *Kings* vii. 23. Hence it is that the Thickness of these Ropes, and of the Posts, (by which they rectified their Entries) was to be taken.

§. 10. These

At the end of the volume is "A list of those Learned Men who have translated the Mishna into Latin," arranged by *Seder* (Order), an Addenda, contents of the second volume, errata, and the final leaf reportedly being an advertisement, although lacking from the examined copy. The "list of those Learned Men" for *Seder Mo'ed* is reproduced below, indicative of the interrelationship and dependence of the commentaries of the Christian-Hebraists addressed in the previous chapter.

Seder Moëd, Order of stated Feasts.

1. *Shabbath*, The Sabbath. *Sebastianus Schmidius*.
2. *Erwin*, Sabbatic Mixtures. *Idem*.
3. *Pesachim*, Paschal Laws. *Surenbusius*.
4. *Shekalim*, Shekels. *Johan. Henr. Ottho, Johannes Wulferus*, *
5. *Joma*, The Day of Expiation. *Robertus Sheringhamius*.
6. *Succa*, Feast of Tabernacles. *Surenbusius*.
7. *Jom-Tob*, Feast-Day. *Idem*.
8. Rosh Hashanah, Beginning of the Year. *Henricus Houtingius*.
9. *Taanith*, Fasts, *Daniel Lundius*.
10. Megilah, The Roll. *Surenbusius*.
11. *Moëd Katan*, Lesser stated Feast-Days. *Idem*.
12. Chagigah, Solemn Feasts. *Surenbusius*, Job. Henr. Hottingerus.*

There are also numerous varied head and tail-pieces.

IV

By mid-eighteenth century, the interest of Christian-Hebraists in rabbinic literature and studies had diminished. Observations as to the end of this period of Christian attentiveness to Jewish studies are noted by both Carlebach and J.W. Wesselius, the former writing that by the second half of the eighteenth century interest in the Talmud by Christians had waned but that “the preservation and study of the Talmud by Christian scholars in any measure might be regarded as one of the small miracles of the modern period.” The latter comments, in a similar vein, that “for some time in the sixteenth century, and even more in the seventeenth century, a strong possibility had existed that the scholarly study of traditional Jewish literature would gain a permanent place in the universities of Europe. By the end of the first half of the eighteenth century, however, the attention of theologians and Hebraists had shifted away from rabbinic literature to other ways of studying the Old Testament. . . .”²⁵

Given the above, one might say that Wotton had come somewhat late to the study of rabbinic (Talmudic) literature. Nevertheless, it was still a period when such studies were valued. How was *Shabbat and Erwin* viewed by Wotton’s contemporaries? What, in retrospect, almost three centuries after its publication, was the impact of *Miscellaneous Discourses relating to the traditions and usages of the Scribes and Pharisees*?

²⁵ Carlebach, pp. 85–88; Wesselius, p. 60.

Among Wotton's immediate and near contemporaries, both Bayle and Chalmers quote Jean Le Clerc's *Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne* (Amsterdam, 1714–30), where we are told,

that 'great advantage may be made by reading the writings of the Rabbins; and that the public is highly obliged to Mr. Seldon, for instance, and to Dr. John Lightfoot, for the assistances which they have drawn thence, and communicated to those who study the holy scripture. Those who do not read their works, which are not adapted to the capacity of every person, will be greatly obliged to Dr. Wotton for the introduction which he has given them into that kind of learning.'²⁶

Simon Ockley (1678–1720), a British orientalist, distinguished Cambridge professor and Adams professor of Arabic and vicar of Swavesey, endorsed Wotton's efforts in an unambiguous and warm letter dated March 15, 1717, which Wotton had made great efforts to obtain. In the letter Ockley emphasizes the importance of Hebrew learning for Christians. Indeed, Ruderman observes that Ockley stated bluntly that "Christians needed Jews and their religious traditions to understand themselves."²⁷

A modern perspective is also positive. David B. Ruderman considers Wotton's greatest achievement in enhancing Jewish learning in England to be in *Shabbat and Erwin*, which include a lengthy excursus on the value of rabbinic studies for Christians. Wotton, when examining these texts, was pleasantly surprised to find the Mishnah to be a most substantial work, notwithstanding the negativity of many learned men. He insists on its reliability. Wotton made substantial use of his predecessors, among them William Guise, William Surenhusius, and John Lightfoot.²⁸

Wotton's translations of *Shabbat* and *Erwin* are recorded in Erich Bischoff's *Thalmud-Übersetzungen*, a bibliography of translations of the Talmud, as, respectively, the third and second translations, of those tracts.²⁹ All of this is evidence that Wotton's work is known and remembered positively today.

²⁶ Bayle, p. 207, Chalmers, p. 309.

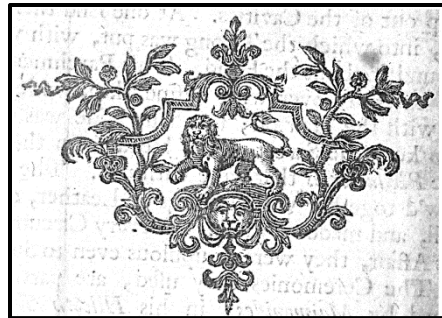
²⁷ Ruderman, "the Study of the Mishnah," p. 139. Ruderman considers the letter sufficiently important to reproduce it in the article.

²⁸ Ruderman, David B. Ruderman, *Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth-Century England* (Philadelphia, 2007), pp. 77–81.

²⁹ Erich Bischoff, *Kritische Geschichte der Thalmud-Übersetzungen aller Zeiten und Zungen* (Frankfurt a. Main, 1899), pp. 37–38.

None of this, however, suggests that *Miscellaneous Discourses relating to the traditions and usages of the Scribes and Pharisees* was influential, reflected in the work of later scholars. Indeed, *Shabbat and Eruvin* was not reissued until 2010 and does not appear to be seriously referenced in later works. How to account for this relative neglect? I would suggest three possibilities. Firstly, as noted above, is the waning interest in such studies in the mid-eighteenth century, not long after *Miscellaneous Discourses . . .* was published; secondly, Wotton's translation is in English, at a time when the scholarly language of Hebraists was Latin; and thirdly, perhaps most importantly, Wotton was writing not for scholars, as suggested by Le Clerc, but "to give young divinity students a basic understanding of Jewish learning," who might not have been as interested in the subject as Wotton thought they might be.

All this notwithstanding, Wotton's achievement is not to be underestimated. A truly erudite scholar undertakes to translate and publish with commentary two lengthy and complex tractates. His translations, allowing for linguistic changes over the centuries, are consistent with accepted Jewish translations, and his commentary is erudite, utilizing accepted Jewish sources. Not a mean accomplishment for a Christian clergyman in Carmarthen, Wales. ❧



Tail-piece