Christian-Hebraism in England: 
William Wotten 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 alluded in their Justification.

(William Wotton, Preface Shabbat and Eruvin)

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 Eruvin 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. 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.

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. 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. 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.”

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

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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.


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.”

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 uxor adulterii suspecta* (Altdorf, 1674); Gustavo Peringero (Gustav von Lilienbad Peringer, 1651–1705), *Duo Codices Talmudici Avoa 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

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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.”

That there were a fair number of Hebraists in England in the seventeenth century is also well known. 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, *Yoma. 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
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.’”

Joma was preceded by Robert Wakefield’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.

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 Shikhah* (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 Surenhuis. 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.

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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, 1888), 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.

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 Mishnah-yot, 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 sine-cure of Llandrillo in Denbighshire. He was appointed curate in Brimpton on September 20, 1686, nominated by Richard Worrell, Vicar of the same and afterwards as Vicar, *ad Vicarium perpetuam*, in Lacock from October

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13 Chalmers, p. 310.
3, 1693. 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). 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.

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.”

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.”

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17 Quoted in Stoker, p. 12.
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 alleged 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.studylight.org/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 Man reaches forth his Hand into the House” (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 . . .”

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.” 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.

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. *Eruvin*, 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 Shamai 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 Perah 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 zinth [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 onthemainline 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. Shabath 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 Committation comes the Account of the unfortunate Man that gather’d Sticks, wherin 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...
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 Moēd, Order of stated Feasts.

8. Rosh Hashanah, Beginning of the Year. Henricus Houtingius.

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 Eruvin 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.’

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.”

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 Eruvin, 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.

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

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