

# What Do Christian Hebraists Have to Do with the Cultural History of Judaism?

ADAM G. BEAVER

*Princeton University*

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## INTRODUCTION

JOHANNES BUXTORF THE ELDER (1564–1629) was a brilliant and subtle philologist, a master of European and Oriental languages both ancient and modern.<sup>1</sup> The son of a Westphalian minister, Buxtorf studied at Herborn, Heidelberg, Basel, Zurich, and Geneva, where he rubbed elbows with the luminaries of mid-seventeenth-century Reformed Protestantism—including Heinrich Bullinger and Théodore de Bèze—while mastering the languages of biblical exegesis, especially Hebrew. Settling in Basel, where he became university professor of Hebrew, Buxtorf quickly sifted, collated, translated, and published his way to the pinnacle of the European Republic of Letters, revolutionizing the discipline of Christian Hebraism with a stunning array of learned bibles, dictionaries, concordances, and commentaries in Near Eastern languages. While his *Biblia Hebraica cum paraphrasi Chaldaica et commentariis rabbinorum* (1618) introduced a wide readership of Orientalists and exegetes the Hebrew text of the Bible, the Aramaic of the Targums, and an impressive array of medieval Jewish commentaries, his *Tiberias, sive commentarius Masoreticus* (1620) offered fellow specialists an uncommonly sophisticated insight into the historical context in which the masoretic text of the Bible was produced. Even without his greatest academic work, the posthumous *Lexicon Chaldaicum, Talmudicum, et Rabbinicum* (1632), which pioneered a new form of biblical concordance, Buxtorf would likely have remained a

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1. On Buxtorf, see Stephen G. Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564–1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden, 1996).

standard resource for Hebraists down to the nineteenth century. Yet for all this, Buxtorf was perhaps most famous among contemporaries as the source of a very different kind of access to Jewish knowledge—namely, his *Jüden-Schül* (1603), which promised its Christian readers nearly unprecedented entrée into the homes and observances of Buxtorf’s Jewish colleagues and neighbors, describing everything from the Passover seder to the rituals surrounding circumcision and menstruation. Unfortunately, in this arena, at least, Buxtorf was rather less distinguished than in his philological studies: as contemporaries quickly observed, *Jüden-Schül* is essentially a pastiche in which the morsels of trustworthy ethnographic knowledge Buxtorf had acquired from Jewish collaborators are far outweighed by textual tradition and Christian fantasy, not entirely unlike the libelous accounts of Jews and Judaism penned by sixteenth-century polemicists like Anthony Margaritha.<sup>2</sup>

Buxtorf, and other Christian Hebraists like him—including not only well-known figures like Johannes Reuchlin but also the obscure Dutch Orientalist Wilhelm Surenhusius—play a significant role in David Ruderman’s *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History*. They figure prominently, for example, in two different chapters, the first on the impact of print on Jewish learning (“Christian Hebraists and Their Judaic Publications” in chapter 3, “Knowledge Explosion”) and the second on Jewish converts to Christianity (“The Conflicting Loyalties of Christian Hebraists” in chapter 5, “Mingled Identities”). While page counts are always a crude measure of significance, it is hard to overlook the considerable space dedicated to Christian Judaica: on a per capita basis, Christian Hebraists and kabbalists like Pico della Mirandola drown out all but a handful of Jewish celebrities from the period, like the Abarbanel, Shabbetai Zevi and his antagonists Jacob Emden, Jacob Sasportas, and Moses Hagiz, the Luzzattos, or Spinoza. And the profile of Hebraizing Christians rises still further if one includes a second group of major importance to Ruderman: the conversos, who (as mentioned above) are the subject of their own chapter in large part because of their role as “intermediaries” between Jewish and Christian communities and cultures.

The prominence of these Christian authors—particularly of those who, like Buxtorf, remained willfully ignorant or ambivalent about contemporary Jewish customs in spite of their considerable interest in

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2. Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg, *“I Have Always Loved the Holy Tongue”: Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a Forgotten Chapter in Renaissance Scholarship* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011), chap. 3.

ancient Hebrew philology—sounds a discordant note in a book so self-consciously devoted to recovering the rich symphony of the Jewish experience in early modern Europe. This discordant note becomes even more pronounced as one reaches the book's appendix, in which Ruderman dissects the reigning synthesis of early modern European Jewish life, Jonathan Israel's landmark *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550–1750*.<sup>3</sup> According to Ruderman, Israel's book is but a "partial" accounting of his subject precisely because Israel considered "Jewish intellectual and cultural history" a legitimate subject only insofar as it either (1) exhibited similar trends and tendencies to those found among Christian culture or (2) could be proven to have attracted the attention of contemporary Christians like Buxtorf:

Israel's depiction of early modern Jewish culture rests on two strongly held premises: that the decline of religion and its authority over Christian and Jewish populations was ultimately a liberating force that represented the primary factor in creating a secularized modern world; and that Jewish intellectual history is essentially derivative. It generally represents a Jewish version of a universal European trend. Furthermore, from the perspective of early modern Europe as a whole, Jewish intellectual history is interesting in the ways it contributes to and informs non-Jewish society. On its own terms and in its engagement with its own tradition and intellectual past, it exhibits little intrinsic significance. (p. 212)

This is an astute reading of Israel's perspective, but it poses a problem for Ruderman as well. If Israel's sin was to filter Judaism through a Christian lens, what are we to make of Ruderman's decision to structure so much of his own discussion around Christian Hebraists' interest in Jewish learning? The answer, or answers, to this question, I would suggest, are quite revealing and penetrate to the very heart of what it means not only to write the history of "Jewish culture" in the early modern period, but also to write the history of any one of the many groups and subcultures that began to acquire recognizable form in early modern Europe—be they social classes, professional associations, or other non-Jewish groups of a religious or pseudo-"national" nature. As such, a full discussion of these issues could easily outrun the space allotted to this forum and greatly exceed my abilities as a historian interested in early

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3. Jonathan I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550–1750* (Oxford, 1985).

modern (Christian) Orientalism. In the pages that follow, therefore, I will do no more than to venture some tentative answers to the question posed in my title, and to reflect on some of the ways in which Ruderman's new synthesis converges or departs from broader themes in early modern cultural history.

#### CONNECTING THE COVENANTS

The prominence of Christian Hebraists and conversos in *Early Modern Jewry*, it seems to me, serves at least two purposes and is driven by two different motivations—one a voluntary methodological commitment, the other an unavoidable methodological conundrum. Let us begin with the voluntary commitment, which I take to be Ruderman's ambition to replace Jonathan Israel's aforementioned "thin" model of Jewish-Christian exchange—in which Jewish culture appears essentially as Christian Europe's poor cousin—with a much richer vision of how the Jewish tradition's internal dynamics shaped its contributions to early modern European intellectual history. Not to reject Israel's interest in Jewish-Christian relations, in other words, but to complicate it. This ambition should come as no surprise to readers familiar with Ruderman's long and distinguished bibliography, which has always been marked by a belief in the necessity of setting Jewish thinkers and writers within the social and intellectual contexts of their majority Christian societies without obscuring the traditions and preoccupations which they inherited by virtue of their Judaism. In a series of books ranging across more than two decades, Ruderman has deftly reconstructed the conversations and interactions between a wide array of Jewish and Christian intellectuals, be they historians or scientists, in an effort to show how his Jewish protagonists were negotiating the needs and demands imposed upon them by their coreligionists at the same time as they were interacting with the majority Christian culture within which they were immersed.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, Ruderman has helped to craft a new way for scholars to think about how the rise of a large field of Christian-Jewish contact (which includes the explosion of early modern Christian Hebraica) and the massive changes and dislocations forced upon all Europeans as a result of the major technological, religious, and political innovations of the early modern centuries (including everything from the discovery of

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4. Among the many examples of Ruderman's work in this vein, see *Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth-Century England* (Philadelphia, 2007); with Giuseppe Veltri, ed., *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy* (Philadelphia, 2004); and *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven, Conn., 1995).

the New World and the introduction of printing to confessionalization and open religious war) shaped, and were shaped by preexisting Jewish tradition. Crucial here is the fact that, in *Early Modern Jewry* as in his earlier works, Ruderman conceives of Jewish-Christian relations less in terms of specific sites or discrete moments of contact than as a permanent symbiosis from which both traditions emerged transformed—and not always solely by each other. In Ruderman's work, it is often the interplay of external phenomena with the internal dynamics of each community that catalyzes the intellectual and social transformations he seeks to explain. Hence the importance of Christian Hebraists to the story: in many ways, their personal intellectual trajectories provide the clearest evidence for the resilience (some might say "agency") of Jewish culture even under the duress of Christian scrutiny, as Ruderman highlights several examples of "Hebraists who were significantly transformed by their encounter with Jewish sacred texts so that their own Christian faiths were enriched, revitalized, reshaped, and even attenuated"—who, in other words, "often came away with a deeper understanding of themselves and their own beliefs" (p. 174). The model is one of creative appropriation rather than expropriation, a model that rings even truer with the many conversos who, like Samuel Pallache, "engaged in repeated conversions, shuttling between Judaism and Christianity"—not to mention Islam—"at several junctures of their lives" (p. 162).<sup>5</sup>

This insistence on the resilience rather than quiescence of Jewish tradition strikes me as a valuable example for all early modern cultural historians, and particularly for those who are just beginning to tackle the many other kinds of cross-cultural and interfaith encounters to which Europeans were exposed in the early modern centuries, be they with Muslims, Chinese, or Aztecs. In the meantime, its impact is already visible within the new historiography of early modern Judaism. The past decade or so has witnessed a proliferation of erudite and provocative new monographs that conceive of Jewish intellectual and cultural history along the same lines as *Early Modern Jewry*: as a tradition in conversation with, but never determined by, its Christian context. Ruderman has been at the front of a movement to nudge the field even further away from seeing Jewish intellectuals solely in terms of the unique but limited roles which their majority Christian societies assigned them; instead, we are coming to appreciate the adaptations that early modern Jewish culture produced

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5. On Pallache, see Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers, *A Man of Three Worlds: Samuel Pallache, a Moroccan Jew in Catholic and Protestant Europe*, trans. M. Beagles (Baltimore, Md., 2007).

in response to the same kinds of transformative forces that altered the experiences of all of the religious and corporate subcultures within contemporary European society. In this new frame—a frame present in recent books by David Sorkin, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, Elisheva Carlebach, and Yaacob Dweck, among many others—one finds Jewish figures whose cultural output is shaped in response to three, rather than only two, factors: the expectations and pressures of their Christian interlocutors and the new technological, geopolitical, and economic realities of early modern Europe, to be sure; but also the internal dynamics of early modern Judaism itself.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE BIRTH OF “JEWISH CULTURE”

If Christian Hebraists and conversos thus help Ruderman tell a more complicated story about Jewish resilience and adaptation in the early modern period, they are also, as I mentioned above, put to work in a second, more instrumental way in *Early Modern Jewry*, to which I now turn. In essence, I want to argue that Ruderman needs them as a proof of concept that such a thing as “early modern Jewish culture” exists.

To write a book asserting the existence of a distinctively early modern era within a coherent “Jewish culture” is to open oneself, as Ruderman is aware, to all manner of objections from specialists in the various sectors of Jewish history. In some sense, this is the same problem faced by any broad historical synthesis; there will always be those who feel that particular facets of the story have been distorted or ignored by the demands of summation and generalization. But Jewish history presents a unique and particularly acute version of this conundrum, as there is a compelling case to be made that early modern “Jewish culture” itself is a chimerical concept. At the center of that case lies the tremendous variation and variability of the Jewish experience in these centuries, which sees Jews divided by language, ritual, genealogy, and geography. It would, in fact, be only a modest exaggeration to say that the scattering or fragmentation of Jewish life has long been one of the central leitmotifs of early modern Jewish historiography. There is perhaps no better example of this fragmentation than the aftereffects of the Iberian expulsions of the 1490s. Not only did

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6. David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton, N.J., 2008); 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); Elisheva Carlebach, *Palaces of Time: Jewish Calendar and Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011), reviewed in this issue; Yaacob Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah: Leon Modena, Jewish Mysticism, Early Modern Venice* (Princeton, N.J., 2011).

Iberian Jews flee to quite disparate destinations, making new homes in societies as diverse as Venice, eastern Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and North Africa; they also demonstrated, nearly everywhere they went, a deeply rooted inability to live and worship with each other as a single “Iberian nation,” preferring instead to live separately as Castilians, Aragonese, and Catalans according to their particular textual and ritual traditions—what we might call their separate cultures.<sup>7</sup> When considered from this perspective, Ruderman’s characterization of this kind of atomization as “the richly textured complexity of Jewish cultural life in early modern Europe” will, no doubt, strike at least some readers as too euphemistic, too sanguine, or too simplistic as a description of the irreducible diversity of early modern Jewish life (p. 5). Is it really possible—or, for that matter, legitimate—for the modern historian to reduce so many different Jewish experiences into a single “culture”?

Ruderman clearly has devoted a significant amount of thought to this question, and his answer provides *Early Modern Jewry* its central theme. Rather than assert the existence of a unique, fully formed culture among the Jews of early modern Europe, Ruderman frames his book as the history of the construction of that culture; it is precisely that process of construction, he suggests, that makes the early modern period a distinctive phase within the larger history of Jewish life (p. 11). *Early Modern Jewry*, therefore, is less an ethnography of a mature culture and more a sociological study of an incipient culture under formation. (In this respect, at least, Ruderman’s version of cultural history parts ways with the best-known examples of early modern cultural history, which typically take the form of ethnographies—or, in a favorite image, of archaeological excavations—of relatively static, subterranean mentalités.)<sup>8</sup>

In keeping with the theme of cultural formation, much of the book is dedicated to explicating the process (or processes) by which Ruderman believes the divergent traditions and experiences of his Jewish subjects began to converge, however haltingly, into a coherent Jewish culture. As any reader will recognize, Ruderman focuses most intently on the five most important catalysts of this convergence, each of which receives its

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7. Jonathan S. Ray, *After Expulsion: 1492 and the Making of Sephardic Jewry* (New York, 2013), 84.

8. On cultural history as a genre, see Miri Rubin, “What Is Cultural History Now?” in *What Is History Now?* ed. D. Cannadine (New York, 2002), 80–94. For a classic example of early modern cultural history seen as the ethnography of static cultures, see Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. J. Tedeschi and A. Tedeschi (Baltimore, Md., 1992).

own chapter: mobility (including expulsion and diaspora as well as routine migration); increasing communal cohesiveness (driven, in large part, by influential laity rather than the rabbinate); the decline in rabbinical authority (and a corresponding growth in messianism); the dramatic expansion of print culture; and the blurring of lines between religious faiths and confessions (caused largely by the movements of conversos back and forth across religious boundaries). It is, I must confess, somewhat striking to see these five features of early modern life associated so closely with the construction of a uniquely Jewish culture, for I suspect that many historians would protest that these five factors characterize all early modern societies. Everyone in early modern Europe, from artisans to theologians, was forced to grapple with the impact of print;<sup>9</sup> vast swaths of the European population experienced mobility as a fact of life, including not only picaresque translators, merchants, and diplomats but also the working poor;<sup>10</sup> and Catholics and Protestants, particularly in contested areas like Britain and the Netherlands, also came to see confessional identities as blurry and fungible.<sup>11</sup> To what extent, then, were the processes that forged early modern Jewish culture distinct from those that shaped other cultures on the road to European modernity?

As a corollary, it is also striking to note that almost all of these drivers of Jewish cultural formation not only acted upon, but actually originated in, Christian society. From Spain's Catholic Monarchs, who set in motion the most significant episode of Jewish "mobility" with the edict of expulsion in 1492, to Christian printers like Daniel Bomberg (d. 1549), who were responsible for bringing reams of *Hebraica* to market in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Christians are never far from the levers of power.<sup>12</sup> Yet they are not, by any means, the sole determinants of the trajectory of the Jewish experience in this period, as Ruderman offers an exemplary case study of the interpretive strategy sketched out in the first part of this essay. While his Jewish characters often find themselves reacting to forces originating outside their communities, whether political

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9. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1979).

10. E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2011); Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago, 2006).

11. Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400–c. 1580* (New Haven, Conn., 1992).

12. On Bomberg, see Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry*, 111.



or religious pressures imposed by Christian authorities or agnostic technological forces like the printing press, the individuals and groups whom Ruderman profiles typically structure their responses to these challenges in a way that maximizes the strength and survival of their religious identity, remodeling and transforming it in subtle ways without forsaking it.

It is worth noting, however, that when one adds up all of those transformations—the effect of mobility, of cohesion, of conversion, and so on—the picture that emerges of this new Jewish culture is not uniformly flattering. One gets a strong sense that “dynamism” and “mobility,” particularly in the context of early modern Europe, were not always the virtues they are now taken to be. The decline of rabbinical authority, for example, while perhaps democratizing in some small way, also seems quite clearly to be part of a larger charisma drain, as local variations in the glossing and interpretation of religious texts were replaced by a fixed textual tradition standardized across communal and territorial lines by the international printing industry. The printing in Krakow in 1578 of a Sephardic legal compendium (Joseph Karo’s *Shulḥan ‘arukh*) in the same volume as its Ashkenazi gloss (Moses Isserles’s *Mapah*) is a significant milestone for Ruderman; he deems it “a lasting icon that a unified culture fusing Sephardic law with Ashkenazic custom was emerging among early modern Jews” (p. 100). Yet one should also pause perhaps a bit longer to wonder what is lost in this kind of depersonalization and “bureaucratization” of Jewish life, as well as the even more drastic consequences that forced conversion (often accompanied by “reconversion”) visited on the multitude of conversos profiled here.<sup>13</sup> Ruderman seems rather sanguine about the ease, success, and desirability of the kinds of cultural homogenization that Isserles’s edition of the *Shulḥan ‘arukh* represents. Other historians—particularly cultural historians—have been at somewhat greater pains to emphasize the dislocations and resistance to such efforts to codify or flatten Jewish intellectual life. Elisheva Carlebach, for instance, has written of the sense among German Jewish communities that their local “customs and teachings” were “under siege . . . threatened by Eastern European Jewish culture and the growing influence of Sephardic tradition on Jewish codes of law and of mysticism.”<sup>14</sup>

Of course, gauging the “success” of cultural change, and the degree of

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13. On the “bureaucratization” of Jewish communal life, see *ibid.*, 80. For one (arguably exaggerated) take on the psychic consequences of converso identity, see Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Other Within: The Marranos: Split Identity and Emerging Modernity* (Princeton, N.J., 2009).

14. Elisheva Carlebach, *Palaces of Time*, 74.

resistance to it, is a perennial problem shared by all cultural historians, regardless of their subjects. More often than not, the very concept of “success” is an empty signifier, as cultural change is almost always syncretic and rarely unidirectional. For an early modern case with intriguing parallels to that of Ruderman’s Jewish subjects, one need look no further than the Reformation, whose modern historians are famously undecided as to how one might best measure the depth and sincerity of Protestant sentiments among populations who at least wished to think of themselves as reformed<sup>15</sup>—not to mention how one ought to interpret their penchant for repurposing selected patterns of Catholic practice for Lutheran ends.<sup>16</sup> Cultural history is, by its very nature, better at finding exceptions to norms and demolishing models of human behavior than it is at constructing them—a fact that makes the broad sweep and analytical ambition of Ruderman’s tale all the more noteworthy.

Ultimately, this begs the question of how Ruderman himself wishes to evaluate the “success”—perhaps one should say thoroughness—of the processes he credits with constructing a single early modern Jewish culture. It is here, I think, that Buxtorf and his fellow Christian Hebraists play their most essential role in *Early Modern Jewry*. Even in spite of their numerous shortcomings as ethnographers—their aforementioned habit of larding their limited personal knowledge of Jewish life and ritual with textual traditions and wild Christian fantasies—Buxtorf et al. were arguably the first unconverted Christians to master a sufficient corpus of Hebrew learning to be able to boast that they understood (some aspects of) “the Jewish tradition, especially the Hebrew Bible, better than the Jews themselves.”<sup>17</sup> For the first time, Christians began to see Judaism and Jewish tradition not as a static, unchanging Law but rather as a living culture whose literary, artistic, and ritualistic productions—the very stuff of “culture”—could change, and had changed, quite dramatically across the centuries.<sup>18</sup>

15. Gerald Strauss, “Success and Failure in the German Reformation,” *Past & Present* 67 (1975): 30–63; Strauss, “The Reformation and Its Public in an Age of Orthodoxy,” in *The German People and the Reformation*, ed. R. P. Hsia (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988), 194–214; Geoffrey Parker, “Success and Failure during the First Century of the Reformation,” *Past & Present* 136 (1992): 43–82; Christopher Haigh, “Success and Failure in the English Reformation,” *Past & Present* 173 (2001): 28–49.

16. R. W. Scribner, “Incombustible Luther: The Image of the Reformer in Early Modern Germany,” *Past & Present* 110 (1986): 38–68.

17. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry*, 119.

18. Interestingly, Christians and Jews may have arrived at this recognition at approximately the same time—Christians via their academic study of ancient and medieval Hebrew literature, and Jews via the resumption of history writing in the aftermath of the expulsions of the 1490s. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*:

The first signs of this newly historicized appreciation for the cultural legacy of Judaism appear on the horizon of Christian Hebraist scholarship in the 1570s, in the work of exegetes like the Spaniard Benito Arias Montano (1527–98). As Zur Shalev has demonstrated, Arias Montano and his collaborators on the Antwerp Polyglot Bible were among the first Christian Hebraists to recognize that the Hebrew language, let alone Jewish history, had undergone significant transformations since antiquity, rendering it more difficult than they had anticipated to mine Hebrew commentaries for evidence of the meanings and locations of obscure terms and toponyms from the Hebrew Bible. Their response was creative and provides solid evidence that Ruderman is correct in thinking that “Jewish culture” had become an operational category for these Christians and their Jewish collaborators. Casting back into the past, beyond the late-medieval commentaries usually favored by Christian Hebraists, Montano alighted upon the twelfth-century travelogue of the Sephardic Jew Benjamin of Tudela as an example of a (slightly more) “ancient” text with which to explore the Hebrew toponymy of the premodern Mediterranean.<sup>19</sup> Less than a generation later, Isaac Casaubon would go still further, formulating an inchoate theory of the descent and relationship of Semitic languages from the survey of Hebrew sources he had undertaken with the aid of various Jewish amanuenses.<sup>20</sup> Whether we regard these indagations into Jewish sources as reverential or hostile, respectful or imperialistic, it is hard to deny that the scholars who undertook them believed in a living tradition of “Jewish culture” unknown to their forebears just one or two generations prior. How that came to be seems eminently worthy of the modern historian’s attention.

#### THE HISTORICISM IN CULTURAL HISTORY

By way of a coda, it seems worth mentioning an obscure, but striking, coincidence that emerges from Ruderman’s use of Christian Hebraism as an index of the coherence of early modern Jewish culture.

Many of the Christian Hebraists mentioned in Ruderman’s text and/or in this essay were antiquarians as well as philologists, as interested in the study of ancient inscriptions, coins, architectural ruins, dress, rituals, customs, law codes, and cartography as they were in the finer points of the Hebrew language. Inveterate explorers of the material world of the

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*Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, Wash., 1982). Cf. Robert Chazan, “The Timebound and the Timeless: Medieval Jewish Narration of Events,” *History and Memory* 6 (1994): 5–34.

19. Zur Shalev, “Benjamin of Tudela, Spanish Explorer,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 25 (2010): 17–33.

20. Grafton and Weinberg, “*I Have Always Loved*,” 94–95.

ancient Near East, these scholars introduced Western Christendom to a much fuller vision of biblical Judaism than any text might have offered. In the process, they pioneered ways of comparing objects, tracing patterns, and reading silences not unlike our own methods of historical reconstruction. Taking up the seeds planted by Arnaldo Momigliano's seminal study "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," a generation of distinguished scholars has spent the better part of the last four decades attempting to rehabilitate "mere" antiquarianism and to explain the importance of its legacy for the modern canons of historical, art historical, and anthropological scholarship. It is from the antiquarians, we have learned, that we have found the value of "material culture," of citing and reproducing our prooftexts thoroughly and accurately, and of reconstructing the systems and structures of past societies rather than just the memorable deeds of their most visible members. As recent work by Guy Stroumsa makes clear, we have also learned from antiquarians how to write the comparative history of religions, and—as another recent volume edited by Peter Miller also suggests—it is to the antiquarians that we owe notions of the cultural sciences, and of cultural history.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps, then, it is possible to say that the admixture of profound erudition and synthetic method that hovers just behind *Early Modern Jewry: A Cultural History* is one of the hidden rewards of the Christian-Jewish encounter Ruderman so compellingly chronicles.

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21. Guy G. Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010); Peter N. Miller, ed., *Momigliano and Antiquarianism: Foundations of the Modern Cultural Sciences* (Toronto, 2007).