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WHO AND WHAT WAS A JEW? SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE HISTORICAL STUDY OF NEW CHRISTIANS

by
DAVID GRAIZBORD*

Questions of identity have been at the center of the history, phenomenology, and historiography of New Christians since the Middle Ages. We can trace these questions back through the fateful period 1391-1415, when the conversion of a third to two-thirds of the Jewish population of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon suscitated what David Nirenberg has aptly characterized as a profound social and cultural "crisis of classification".[1] In 1497, with the vertiginous creation of an entire class of *cristãos-novos*, a similar crisis would visit Portugal as well. There and in the lands of the overseas Lusitanian empire, the crisis would acquire unique contours, consistent with the particular conditions that shaped Europe's westernmost kingdom during the early modern centuries.

The present essay takes as its point of departure the premise that the crisis of classification was never fully resolved. To be specific, while early modern Iberian societies generated various competing conceptions of New Christians' supposed Jewishness, and implemented various strategies for eliminating it, anxieties about that real and/or chimerical form of alterity never abated because in actuality there was no certainty as to what and who was a Jew. One recent poll may suggest the possibility that such anxieties continue to inform popular beliefs and attitudes in Spain.[2] More important

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[1] David NIRENBERG, "Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth-Century Spain", *Past and Present*, Vol. 174, 2002, pp. 3-41; here 10-11.

[2] ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE, *Attitudes Toward Jews In Ten European Countries, March 2012*. Available from http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/israel-international/adl_anti-semitism_presentation_february_2012.pdf

for my purposes, however, is how historical analyses have approached New Christians and their Jewishness or lack thereof. In my view, studies of early modern Iberian societies have by and large failed to grapple in a sufficiently informed, fully historicized manner with one of the most pressing questions that bedeviled Iberian societies from the very genesis of the *judeoconverso* problem: What (and therefore, who) is a Jew? Here I intend to apply my dual perspective as a historian of Jewish culture(s), and of the history of New Christians, to explore this deceptively simple question.[3] In the process, I hope to render a constructive critique of "*converso* studies" as a field or sub-field of historical inquiry.

The argument will proceed as follows: In the first section, I will provide a brief illustration of the sheer confusion concerning Jews and Jewish culture that marked the "crisis of classification" in the late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period. Then I will identify ways in which modern academic studies of New Christians have echoed and compounded that confusion. In the second section, I will discuss several aspects of Israelite and Jewish history and culture(s) that early modern Iberians, as well as modern scholars who are not grounded in the study of Judaica frequently ignore or misconstrue, principally when they use terms such as "Jew," "Jewish", and "Judaism" as if their meanings were self-evident and universally agreed upon. Thus I hope to contribute to a nuanced and accurate understanding of New Christians as objects of study.

Fear, loathing and confusion: Ibero-Christian societies invent "New Christians"

The mass conversion of Iberian Jews to Christianity from the late Middle Ages to the beginning of the Early Modern Period was accompanied by the formulation of the construct, "New Christians," as a Jewishly-identified cultural (social, political, and religious) category. This was not a category of Jewish origin. Rather, it was one formulated by Christians of non-Jewish ancestry to refer to baptized individuals of Jewish provenance. Interestingly, *conversos* often adopted the term "New Christian" to refer to themselves.

To be sure, other places and periods in the history of Christianity had yielded their own crises of classification, and hence their own innovative ideological frameworks and attendant taxonomies for defining the Christian and the non-Christian. A cyclical pattern of cultural disorientation followed by re-categorization was a logical part of early Christian history. After all, many if not most of the people who were at least nominal adherents of the Christian Church(es) from late antiquity to the Middle Ages had been

[3] As regards an understanding of pre-modern Jewish culture, I find that what is often missing from historiography on *conversos* is, regrettably, quite basic, so my exposition relies on a few synthetic works on Judaica, some of which are introductory.

absorbed into the Christian community by way of conversion. Concepts such as *neophiti*, as well as other terms that denoted and still denote the newly incorporated with the Church, the newly catechized, and so on, grew out of this pattern. These terms served to address dilemmas of the growth and evolution of Christianity as a religious civilization. Christian canonical works preserve multiple ways in which early followers of Jesus of Nazareth distinguished and/or sought to efface distinctions between those among them who were, like Jesus himself, Judeans (=Jews), and those who were not Judeans (=Gentiles). Pauline notions such as "the Carnal Israel" and "the [New] Israel of the Spirit" were central products of early Jesus-centered, messianic discourse, and remain significant in Christian cultures to this day. Closer to our subject, in early medieval Iberia, Visigothic documents speak of "converted Jews" as if baptism, despite Christian dogma on the subject, failed to effectuate the transformation of Jews into Christians.[4]

From this it follows that the late medieval ideation that resulted in the category of "New Christian" (*cristiano nuevo, cristão-novo*) and related terms, such as *judeoconverso*, *confeso*, and the like, did not gestate in a kind historical vacuum, but may be understood as part and parcel of the on-going, centuries-old formulation and reformulation of Christian identities in particular times and places. Still, to my knowledge there was no precedent in the history of Western Christianity (I know much less about Eastern Christianity) for distinguishing newly baptized individuals *as an entire social class* and *across the generations* in order to underscore their supposedly essential difference, as was the case in Iberia with *judeoconversos* and *moriscos*. This categorical and trans-generational quality is one reason that the study of these groups and of the animus that targeted them remains fascinating centuries after 1492-1497. What interests me here is what the unprecedented sociological and historical reach of the conceptual category designated by words such as *judeoconverso*, *cristiano nuevo*, and the like, may tell us of the abysmal depth of the *anomie* that sparked that category's formulation in the first place.

Nirenberg explains with characteristic lucidity that the emergence of the category "New Christian" in the fourteenth century was a specific response to the blurring of old cultural and social boundaries that resulted from the conversionist riots of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Whether during or in the wake of the violence of that period, many of Castile and Aragon's Jews had become Christians officially, yet remained visibly bonded to surviving Jewish communities by ties of kinship, as well as by social habits, occupational and other economic relationships and duties, spatial arrangements (converts often lived in their old neighborhoods among

[4] See for instance Samuel P. Scott (ed. and trans.), *The Visigothic Code (Forum judicum)*, n.p., 1910, Book XII, Title II, Item XVI (pp. 375-376), "Memorial of the Jews Presented to the King" – it is in fact a forced statement by baptized Christians of Jewish origin – and Item XVII (pp. 377-378). Available from http://libro.uca.edu/vcode/visigoths.htm.

Jews), and so on.[5] One suspects that even if structural and sentimental ties between Jews and former Jews had not survived the mass conversions, it would still have been difficult, at least at an emotional level, for the *conversos*' neighbors to accept that subjects hastily baptized in the context of acute coercion had been transformed into genuine, much less knowledgeable Christians. What is clear is that the emerging situation was culturally confusing. Repeated efforts by the Castilian and Aragonese crowns to physically segregate Jews from the newly baptized and to prohibit carnal relations between Jews and Christians may be viewed as symptoms of a creeping sense that previously clear cultural categories had broken down and would no longer serve to maintain adequate socio-political and economic boundaries.[6] Indeed, the consensus of ruling authorities seemed to be that these boundaries needed to be reinstated and radically accentuated.

Among Jewish jurists, a vexing question arose in the aftermath of the mass conversions: Should the new converts be approached as *anusim* – a legal term meaning "coerced [or violated] ones" – or as *meshummadim*, namely, as renegades (lit., "destroyed ones," usually connoting "apostates")? Castilian and Aragonese halakhists (experts in Jewish law, called *halakhah* – roughly translatable as "the path," or "the way to proceed") typically preferred the first, exculpatory label in the years immediately following the conversions. In time, however, Iberian and Mughrabi rabbis increasingly opted for the second, disapproving term in various *responsa*.[7] By doing so, some of these jurists may have revealed a growing perception that the descendants of the original converts were earnest Christians in what we would perhaps call an anthropological sense.

For their part, Christians of non-Jewish ancestry began to refer to themselves as "Old Christians," "clean ones," and "Complete [or perfect] Christians" (*cristianos lindos*) in order to distinguish themselves from people whom they perceived as little more than shoddily disguised Jews. The bewilderment aroused by the advent of the *converso* problem was evident in several other ways, which Nirenberg has sufficiently illustrated. To illuminate their convolution, suffice it here to dissect but one telling case from the learned classes. I am referring to the Castilian chronicler and parish priest, Andrés Bernáldez (1450-1513). Here is what he asserted regarding the new cohort of converts and their Jewish community of origin in his *Memorias del reinado de los Reyes Católicos* (1497):

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[5] See the discussion in D. NIRENBERG, "Mass Conversion", art. cit., pp. 10-14.

[6] On efforts at segregation, see D. NIRENBERG, "Mass Conversion", art. cit. On the phobia against carnal relations between Christians and non-Christians, see for instance D. NIRENBERG, "Conversion, Sex, and Segregation: Jews and Christians in Medieval Spain", *American Historical Review,* Vol. 107, Oct. 2002, pp. 1065-1093.

[7] On the varied positions in the *responsa*, see for example Benzion NETANYAHU, *The Marranos of Spain*, 3rd ed., Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1999.

> La heretica pravidad Mosayca reinó gran tiempo escondida y andando por rincones […]. Ovo su comienzo […] en el año 1390 […] que fue el robo de la Judería por la predicación de Fray Vicente [Ferrer] […] que quisiera en aquel tiempo convertir todos los Judíos de España, e dar cavo a la imbeterada e hedionda Sinagoga. [...] empero embocados en con aquella glosa del Talmud que hicieron los rabíes […] después del Nacimiento de Nuestro Redemptor cuatrocientos años […]. E en dicha glosa habian muy grandes mentiras […]. [Por lo tanto] niegan la verdad, e están ignorantes della […]. Así no pudo Fray Vicente convertir sino muy pocos; y las gentes con despecho metiéronlos en Castilla a espada y mataron muchos […], entonce venían a las Iglesias ellos mesmos a bautizar. […] e quedaron los que se bautizaron christianos, y llamaron los conversos; de aqui ovo comienzo este nombre converso convertidos a la santa fee, la cual ellos guardaron muy mal que de aquellos y los que de ella vinieron por la mayor parte fueron y eran judíos secretos, y no eran judíos ni christianos, pues eran bautizados mas eran herejes y sin ley, y esta heregia ovo de allí su nacimiento […]. [T]anto empinada estaba en la heregia que los letrados estaban en punto de la predicar la ley de Moysen, e los simples no lo podían encubrir ser judíos […].
>
> Podeis saber que según lo vimos en cualquiera tiempo que esta fiera pésima es la heregía, y como en aquel tiempo los hereges judíos malaventurados huian de la Doctrina Eclesiástica así huyan de las costumbres de los cristianos.[8]

To grapple with the full meaning of Bernáldez's messages and gauge the sheer confusion and fear that undergirded them, let us break his depiction of Jews and *conversos* down into a few of its key components:

> 1. Heretical Mosaic depravity reigned […] . [The Jews] were deceived and misled by that gloss called the Talmud […]. There were very great lies […] in that Talmud. […] [Therefore] the Jews deny the truth and are ignorant of it.[9]

Here it is not entirely clear whether by "heretical Mosaic depravity" Bernáldez's means "Judaizing" specifically – namely, the adoption by baptized Christians of beliefs and practices the Church rightly or wrongly identified with Jews – or whether he is referring to Jewish culture as a whole.[10] This is not totally surprising, for late medieval scholastic thought on "Jews," "Judaism" and religious deviance was often imprecise, and oscillated between several contradictory definitions.

To be sure, the medieval Latin Church did not officially classify Judaism as a "heresy" but as a form of infidelity, meaning unbelief.[11] In this view,

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[8] Andrés Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos D. Fernando y Da. Isabel, crónica inédita del siglo XV*, Vol. I, Granada, D. José María Zamora, 1856, pp. 97-99.

[9] The translations of Bernáldez I provide above are by Lu Ann Homza. They are found in L. A. Homza (ed. and trans.), *The Spanish Inquisition, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Sources,* Indianapolis, Hackett, 2006, pp. 1-3.

[10] On the origins and use of the concept of Judaizing in late antiquity, see Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, Berkeley, The University of California Press, 1999, pp. 175-197.

[11] See for instance "Infidels". *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* 2008. *Encyclopedia.com.* [Last Consulted on May 21, 2013] Available from http://www.encyclopedia.com/

Jews were reprehensible – indeed, damned – because they did not believe in Christian tenets and hence allegedly followed "Old Testament" (specifically, Pentateuchal) law, "The Law of Moses," literally.[12] By contrast, Church theologians defined "heresy" not as the culture of a non-Christian, but as any deviation by a Christian from the Church's interpretation of divinely revealed truths. Thus, for example, a Christian who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was God and Messiah (etc.), yet thought it consistent with Scripture to observe the Sabbath on Saturday rather than on Sunday, was considered a "heretic" – specifically, a "Judaizer" – for thinking and acting *like* a "Jew," yet was not necessarily considered an "apostate," namely a person who has consciously renounced Christianity *in toto* and embraced a form of unbelief that the Church categorized as "Judaism," including the "superseded" Law of Moses. Nonetheless, the notion that Jewish culture was "heretical" was very common among educated Christians in Bernáldez's day. According to this latter canard, medieval Jews' way of life flagrantly misconstrued and strayed from Pentateuchal law. In other words, rabbinic *halakhah*, as distinct from the biblical "Law of Moses," was a violation of "Judaism" in the sense of being a departure from proper (if "blind") Jewish belief and practice as the Church understood them. To put it starkly, Jews of flesh and blood were "heretics" because they did not conform to the Biblicist caricature that the Church had long painted of them. While in Iberia the Visigothic code had already conflated unbelief and heresy in referring to "Judaism,"[13] we can trace some of the historical roots of this "hereticization" of Jewishness to what some modern historians have characterized as the Christian "discovery" of the Talmud during the High Middle Ages, and to concomitant encroachments by the Church and the European crowns on Jewish communal and cultural autonomy. These phenomena, for their part, are understandable in the broader context of other developments, such as the growth of urban centers and ecclesiastical power in the Latin West; the institutionalization of Christian heresiology in and beyond the twelfth century; and the rise of specialists in conversionist propaganda (notably, the Order of Preachers) in the thirteenth.[14]

To point out the lack of conceptual precision in Bernáldez's discourse may seem like quibbling. In fact, it is not hairsplitting, for it allows us to

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doc/1G2-3045301127.html. An important treatment of the late medieval reconceptualization of Jewish unbelief among Christian thinkers is Jeremy COHEN, *Living Letters of The Law: Ideas of The Jew in Medieval Christianity*, Berkeley, The University of California Press, 1999; see especially Part III.

[12] In fact, Jews did not and do not recognize any "Old Testament." They followed the *TaNaKh*, namely the Hebrew Bible, which is not identical to the Christian Old Testament.

[13] See the material from the Visigothic code cited in S. P. SCOTT, op. cit.

[14] Classic works dealing with the phenomenon of hardening Christian attitudes toward Jews in the late Middle Ages include Gavin LANGMUIR, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990; J. COHEN, op. cit.; and R. I. MOORE, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*, 2nd ed., Oxford, Blackwell, 2007.

see how the vagueness of his definitions permitted a fateful cognitive slippage whereby an archetypal "*converso*" becomes indistinguishable from an archetypal "Jew" – that is, someone who is by definition an unbeliever and hence thoroughly alien to the way of life of Christians. From this conflation there is but a short step to glibly writing, as historians of the Inquisition often do, that this or that *converso*, or New Christians as a group, were "secretly Jewish" (or something to that effect). Even phrases that are merely descriptive, such as "accused of Judaism" or (depending on the case) "convicted of Judaism" are problematic if we scholars do not carefully qualify them, for if we present them without comment they leave the impression that indeed, inquisitorial trials of *conversos* uncovered Jews and Judaism, when the reality is much more complex. As I will explain, all such locutions – "accused of Judaism", "crypto-Jewish practices", and so on – reproduce medieval Christian categories and obfuscate the culture(s) of the premodern subjects in question.

A second point to be underscored regarding Bernáldez's rhetoric is its initial implication that the main difference between Jews and genuine Christians is one of theological conviction. It is not a difference of national identity or ethnicity writ large, that is, of shared culture, including but not limited to beliefs about divinity and their ritual practice.[15] Also noteworthy is the fact that Bernáldez does not describe the difference as one of inborn and immutable character, but of "Mosaic" acculturation under rabbinical auspices. In Bernáldez's typically medieval rendering, being "Jewish" means above all being in error, and therefore professing a form of spiritual corruption. According to this view, Jewish error is rooted in a learned "blindness" to the Christian truth, and is expressed in the denial of that truth in accordance with rabbinic teachings. From this highly invidious definition it follows that a Jew who converts to Christianity ceases to be a Jew.

Bernáldez's characterization of Jews and Jewish culture as a matter of erroneous belief collapses almost immediately after he provides it, however. Taking its place is an utter bewilderment concerning the very nature of Jewish, and by extension Christian, identities, and a deep anxiety concerning the actual difficulty in differentiating them in daily life. We witness the collapse in Bernáldez's depiction of the New Christians:

> 1. The *conversos* observed the faith very badly […] for the most part they were secret Jews. In fact, they were neither Jews nor Christians, since they were baptized, but were heretics, and [yet] without the Law [of Moses].

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[15] A useful definition and discussion of ethnicity is found in John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (ed.), "Introduction", in *Ethnicity,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 3-16. In pp. 6-7, the authors list the following characteristic features of ethnic groups: A common proper name for the group; a myth of common ancestry; shared historical memories; a common culture, possibly including religion, customs, and language; a link with a homeland; a sense of solidarity on the part of at least some sections of the group.

> […] simple [*conversos*] could not disguise the fact that they were Jews.
> […] the ill-fated, heretical Jews fled from ecclesiastical doctrine and Christian customs.

This segment of Bernáldez's narrative is a conceptual swamp. First, the writer conveys that *conversos* were bad Christians because they were secretly "Jews." The assertion makes no sense. According to the official definitions to which Bernáldez at least theoretically subscribed as a priest, a bad Christian (in this case meaning a "heretic") who has not apostatized cannot possibly be a "Jew" (namely, an infidel who does not belong to the Christian community and does not owe it his or her allegiance). Conversely, if most *conversos* were indeed "Jews" despite receiving baptism, then Jewishness is something close to innate and immutable – a matter of *essential character* rather than of conversion rites, learned belief, and faith: "For the most part," a Jew who converts to Christianity does not, after all, cease to be a Jew.[16]

To make matters more confusing, Bernáldez then changes course and asserts that *conversos* are in fact neither Jews nor Christians, but rather, heretics. This too makes no sense, as by the Church's own standards a person could only be a "heretic" who belonged to a particular faith-community, yet moved away from that community's normative understanding of truth without repudiating the faith *in toto*. At any rate, if *conversos* were indeed heretics, then identity is a matter of changeable belief and behavior, not innate character.

Bernáldez goes on to complicate matters by adding that the heretical *conversos* did not "have [a] law" – probably meaning that they did not know and observe the Law of Moses. The logical difficulty here is that if *conversos* did not "have" the Law of Moses, this disqualifies them as both "Judaizing" heretics (i.e., bad Christians), and as infidel "Jews" (i.e., non-Christians) according to normative Christian definitions. Then the chronicler vacillates for a third time, and accuses ordinary *conversos* of not being able to hide the fact that they are "Jews". This equates the distinct categories, "New Christian" and "Jew", and essentializes the latter, yet again. But then another shift occurs: The cleric refers to *conversos* as "heretical Jews." As I explain above, normative Christian thought did not categorically equate a "heretic" with an "infidel", except perhaps if we assume that Bernáldez had in mind

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[16] Here Bernáldez inadvertently hints of a larger and fateful phenomenon in the historical development of the relationship between "Old Christians" and their "Others", including *judeoconversos*. I am referring to the racialization of anti-Jewish (hence, anti-*judeoconverso*) and anti-Muslim (hence, anti-*morisco*) discourse in Iberian lands and the Iberian empires. Here I limit my treatment of this phenomenon, which is not my main focus, to a few comments. Far more extensive and quite nuanced recent treatments include D. Nirenberg, "Conversion, Sex", art. cit., and María Elena Martinez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2008. Despite its title, this latter work discusses the background and application of the ideology of purity of blood well beyond colonial Mexico. I would be remiss to forget the classic treatment, Albert A. Sicroff, *Los estatutos de limpieza de sangre: controversias entre los siglos XV y XVII*, Madrid, Taurus, 1985.

the convoluted argument that as infidel "Jews", *conversos* were violating "The Law of Moses" by following the Talmud, not violating Christianity by following the "Law of Moses."

From the foregoing it should be clear that Bernáldez cannot make up his mind regarding the identity of the objects of his opprobrium. Specifically, he fails to articulate clear and consistent definitions of the terms "*converso*" and "Jew." He misconstrues, conflates, disassociates, and invalidates them repeatedly in the space of a few sentences. In the process he betrays a deep fear of *conversos* and/or Jews and their supposed power. Witness how he paints them as both a hidden and an open menace – another of his contradictions: "Mosaic depravity," he writes, "reigned," though it was "*hidden away* in corners." At the same time, it was a frightful "beast" whose learned men almost preached Judaism from Christian pulpits and whose simple adherents "*could not disguise* the fact that they were Jews" (emphasis added).

To summarize, Bernáldez's thinking about *conversos* was so muddled that he depicted them incongruously as errant Christians, as Jews, and as neither Christians nor Jews; as culturally mutable and virtually immutable; and as surreptitiously and conspicuously seditious. Such inconsistency was an early symptom of the "crisis of classification." For its part, modern historiography provides us with examples of the continuation of that crisis.

Several modern scholars of Iberian history derogated, essentialized, disassociated, and equated Jewish and *converso* identities well into the twentieth century, much as Bernáldez and other anti-Jewish propagandists did in the fifteenth. Notable in this regard is Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, whose pejorative view is darker than that of Bernáldez in some respects. Sánchez-Albornoz claimed, for instance, that Jews in medieval Christian Spain were "all of one accord" and "tightly united" in their clannishness, materialism, and calculating will to control the lives of non-Jews. Thus, for example, they engaged in the "zealous rational study of medicine and the sciences" as a means of "attaining dominion over [the Christians] […]." In this view, it was typical of Hispano-Jews that they "succumbed to invincible desires for material goods and for control" – not passionately, but "through […] cunning." Had Spanish Jews worked "peacefully" alongside their Christian neighbors, the historian adds, they would not have caused the Christians' murderous violence against them. Yet, "The Hebrews intended to dominate and succeeded at least to exploit the [Christian] people that gave them asylum" by perpetrating fiscal fraud, collecting heavy taxes for the Iberian crowns, and lending sums to the Christian masses. "Only people without any scruples […] could undertake the ignoble task of […] [tax farming]. And only a Jew, commanding an army of spies of his brothers in race, could be confident of obtaining […] proof of all the debts owed [by Christian individuals to the royal treasury]." Not surprisingly, therefore, it was these selfsame evil "Jews" who in the guise of Christians had "invented" the diabolical Spanish Inquisition: *conversos*, the historian asserts, both generated the very idea of

a vindictive and opportunistic religious tribunal, and were responsible for its implementation.[17] And so, presumably, just as the Jews deserved to be robbed and killed, so too *conversos* as a group, who were *essentially* indistinct from Jews, deserved the hatred and persecution to which the Spanish faithful subjected them. To Sánchez-Albornoz, then, Jews and *conversos* were spiritually identical: Both groups were characterized by a scheming spite, greed, treachery, and thirst for power.

Though Sánchez-Albornoz's blatant embrace of medieval anti-Jewish motifs is not especially unusual even today in Spanish and Portuguese societies, neither has it totally compromised the modern scholarly analysis of medieval and early modern Iberian Jews and New Christians. And yet, a conceptual slippage persists. Some excellent scholars still associate or even conflate the terms "Jewish" and "New Christian," as if the basic Jewishness of *conversos* were a given, and the meaning of that Jewishness were another given. Examples of this discursive connection are found in otherwise admirable works, such as María José Pimenta Ferro Tavares's *Los judíos en Portugal* (1992). Large portions of the book are devoted to a discussion of alleged Judaizers. The author presents them as essentially the same as Jews, reasoning that the Inquisition possessed "very concrete" data acquired from supportive "descendants of Jews" regarding the genuine religious practices of the New Christians.[18] Why one should expect that the descendants possessed accurate and disinterested knowledge of Jewish culture is not clear, but the analytical linkage of Jews and *conversos* as parts of a single social body is unmistakable. And so, for example, when addressing the phenomenon of "crypto-Judaism" Ferro Tavares writes simply that "the Jews were fixed towards […] religious duplicity"[19] – not "the *conversos* who (allegedly) tried to perform Jewish rituals," but "the Jews." In other words, here "crypto-Jews" and "Jews" function as interchangeable designations.[20]

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[17] All quotations found in the present article of Sánchez-Albornoz's work come from the first edition of his *España, un enigma histórico*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1956, 2 vols., as cited in B. Netanyahu, "Sánchez-Albornoz's View of Jewish History in Spain", in *Toward the Inquisition,* Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1997, pp. 126-155. Here I follow Netanyahu's exposition of Sánchez-Albornoz's most invidious claims. Netanyahu brings to light and provides a devastating corrective to an egregious example of the problem I am trying to address here, namely, writing about Iberian Jews and *conversos* that is not grounded in the study of Jewish culture. Netanyahu's article was published earlier in Spanish in Angel Alcalá (ed.), *Judios, Sefarditas, Conversos: La expulsión de 1492 y sus consequencias,* Valladolid, Ambito, 1995, pp. 89-121.

[18] María José Pimenta Ferro Tavares, *Los judíos en Portugal*, Madrid, MAPFRE, 1992, p. 188.

[19] M. J. P. F. Tavares, op. cit., p. 187.

[20] Julio Caro Baroja is one of many Iberian scholars who does the same, for example, in *Los judíos en la España Moderna y Contemporanea*, 3 vols., Madrid, Istmo, 1986, pp. 1: 276, where he lumps together Judaizers in Belgium and openly-professing Jews of Holland under the heading: "The Jews in the Low Countries". Of course, as the work's title indicates, all three volumes are premised on the same equation between Jews and baptized Christians of Jewish origin (of which several but by no means all were accused of "crypto-Judaism"). In actuality, the book's main subject is not "*los judíos*," but *los conversos*. The publisher of the third edition

In the nineteenth century, some liberal Hispanists began to disentangle essentialist notions of identity from empirically sturdier conceptions of difference as a function of culture. In some cases this historiographical move was a way of disavowing antisemitism, a pseudo-scientific ideology with strong affinities to early modern Iberian notions of "blood purity," and "race." Thus, for instance, Joaquim Mendes dos Remédios (1867-1932), following the more general view of Ernest Renan (1823-1892) that Jews' difference was religious and not biological, is adamant that the Jews of medieval Portugal were distinct from their neighbors only in terms of faith and religious practice. "Today," Mendes dos Remédios argued in 1895, "there is no Judaic race; however, Jews are indeed bound by a certain belief, tradition, customs, etc."[21] Regarding *conversos*, he comments,

> Quando rebentam as preseguições, em Hespanha e Portugal, milhares e milhares de judeus recebem o baptismo e […] ficam aptos para contrahir uniões com os christãos. Mudavam de religião, pelo menos aparentemente, e estavam habilitados para tudo. Quem acreditará egualmente na pureza do sangue Semita?[22]

This Renanian position agrees perfectly with and, I suspect, is probably indebted to the European Enlightenment's view of Jews as conditionally tolerable. Proponents of the Enlightenment from the eighteenth century onward did not inquire how Jews regarded themselves, and for the most part had no intention of condoning their traditional way of life, which these enlightened men viewed as backward and obscurantist; rather, they prescribed that Jews compartmentalize, privatize, and spiritualize their all-encompassing culture into a "religion" as a (pre)condition for enjoying political equality. The price of toleration, then, was the Jews' traditional group identity. The count of Clermont-Tonnerre (1757-1798) articulated this formula most famously during the French constituent assembly's debates on Jewish emancipation:

> [The opponents of Jewish emancipation] say to me, ["]the Jews have their own judges and laws.["] I respond that is your fault and you should not allow it. We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals. We must withdraw recognition from their judges; they should only have our judges. We must refuse legal protection to the

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of the work has gotten the message: Instead of featuring Jews on the cover of the volumes, the publisher provides pictures of *conversos* as penitents in an *auto-de-fé*.

[21] "When persecutions exploded in Spain and Portugal, thousands and thousands of Jews received baptism […] and were left empowered to contract [matrimonial] unions with the Christians. They changed their religion, at least apparently, and were [thus] entitled to everything. Who could give credit to [the idea] of the purity of Semitic blood?" Joaquim Mendes dos Remédios, *Os Judeus em Portugal*, 2 vols., Coimbra, F. França Amado, 1895, vol. 1, p. 27. (Nonetheless, in the same page, the author asserts that Jews do fit a "moral type" marked by astuteness. His rejection of stereotypes is thus questionable.)

[22] J. M. Remédios, op. cit., p. 20.

> maintenance of the so-called laws of their Judaic organization; they should not be allowed to form in the state either a political body or an order. They must be citizens individually. But, some will say to me, ["]they do not want to be citizens.["] Well then! If they do not want to be citizens, they should say so, and then, we should banish them. It is repugnant to have in the state an association of non-citizens, and a nation within the nation [...]. In short, Sirs, the presumed status of every man resident in a country is to be a citizen.[23]

Hispanists of the "postmodern" era have sometimes echoed the Renanian line of interpretation. For instance, in a work originally published in 1993, Joseph Pérez asserts that the Jews of Al-Andalus were Jews "from the religious point of view; but *in every other way*, they adopted the dominant cultural models" (emphasis added).[24] A few paragraphs later he goes so far as to opine, "Can Maimonides be considered a representative of Jewish culture in Al-Andalus? No. *In every way*, he remains an eminent representative of Arabic culture" (emphasis added).[25] The assertion is startling in light of the fact that Pérez is referring to the same Maimonides who wrote a *magnum opus* entitled *Mishnei Torah,* in Hebrew, was the leader of the Egyptian Jewish community, and gained fame as the leading Jewish intellectual authority of his time. If a scholar of Pérez's caliber can easily dismiss Maimonides' rootedness in Jewish culture, it seems to me that something is amiss in the understanding of that culture.

A far more complex example of the problem before us is that of the sterling work, *In the Shadow of the Virgin: Inquisitors, Friars and Conversos in Guadalupe, Spain* (2003). In my view, its author, Gretchen Starr-Lebeau, is absolutely correct that the beliefs and behaviors of *conversos* were "not nearly as transparent as many [of their] contemporaries desired."[26] Welcome too is her book's emphasis on the fluidity of Old and New Christians' ethnic and religious identities and the relative artificiality of historiographical distinctions between the two groups. As Starr-Lebeau shows, identities in late medieval Castile were subject to constant negotiation under the pressure of historical change. Hence, "New Christians were not a community apart from other Guadalupenses, nor were they uncomplicated devout Christians or unreconstructed Judaizers."[27] The trouble, then, arises in the crucible of details, where lexical constraints do not fully capture the complexity of the cultural phenomena under examination. For example, when discussing a

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[23] Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre's remarks are excerpted in Lynn HUNT (ed. and trans.), *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, Boston, Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996, pp. 86-88.

[24] Joseph PÉREZ, *History of a Tragedy: The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain*, trans. Lisa Hochroth, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2007, p. 11.

[25] J. PÉREZ, op. cit., p. 12.

[26] Gretchen STARR-LEBEAU, *In the Shadow of the Virgin: Inquisitors, Friars and Conversos in Guadalupe, Spain*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 5.

[27] G. STARR-LEBEAU, op. cit., p. 9.

certain innkeeper, the New Christian Manuel González, Starr-Lebeau notes that he used his position to write down "remembered prayers" he had heard from Jewish travelers. All of the prayers, however, were in Spanish except for the word *Adonai* (Heb., "my Lord"). They "seem to be prayers of penitence and petitions for aid or variations on the psalms," and "not exact copies of Jewish prayers." After characterizing the material as "quasi-Jewish or crypto-Jewish," however, the author explains that González's case illustrates *conversos*' use of their connections with Jews to "help [*conversos*] maintain their [own] practice of Judaism."[28] Here the question the prose raises is where, if at all, does "quasi-Judaism" end and "Judaism" begin? More importantly, given the vagueness of that boundary as the author presents it, what *was or is* Castilian Judaism in the first place? (Furthermore, did Sephardic *siddurim and makhzorim* – the standard daily and high holiday prayerbooks – contain any of the prayers at issue? If not, in what sense is the recitation of Psalms "Jewish"? For instance, did Christians refrain from praying these or any other psalms? In what sense were the Israelites who wrote the Psalms "Jewish"? – etc., etc.)

The idea that the basis of Jews' difference and hence the key to their distinctive identity was a discrete "religious" sphere of their experience is not only present in liberal historiography on Iberian Jews and *conversos*. It is also fully consonant with a late medieval Christian conception of Jews as a community of faith and ritual practice parallel to that of the Christians, and serving primarily as the latter's theological foil. Here, for example, is how the *Siete Partidas*, the thirteenth-century legal code of Alphonse X of Castile, defines Jews: "Someone is called a Jew who believes in and adheres to the Law of Moses as it is stated literally, and is circumcised and does the other things that law of theirs commands."[29] In pursuing real and/or imagined Judaizers among *conversos*, the Holy Office followed suit by drawing an analogy between a true and efficacious faith in Christianity on one hand, and an erroneous, futile faith in "Judaism" on the other. Inquisitorial dossiers are replete with formulaic accusations and self-condemnations that parrot the key notion that "Judaism" was like an inverted mirror image of Christianity. In this rendering, two rival "laws" or "religions" offer their adherents paths to personal salvation through faith, but only one of them is "true." One of the most didactic forms of this claim appears in inquisitorial edicts of faith. What follows is a version from Valencia in the late sixteenth century:

> A todos los Cristianos fieles, asi hombres como mujeres […]; cuya atención a esto dara por resultado la salvación en Nuestro Señor Jesucristo, la verdadera salvación; […] se les ordenó comparecer ante [los reverendos inquisidores]

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[28] G. Starr-Lebeau, op. cit., p. 61.

[29] Excerpted in John Edwards (ed. and trans.), *The Jews in Western Europe, 1400-1600*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1994, p. 34.

> […] dentro de un período dado, y declarar […] cosas que habían visto, sabido y oído decir de cualquier persona o personas, ya estuvieran vivas o muertas, que hubieran dicho o hecho algo contra la Santa Fe Católica; cultivado y observado la ley de Moisés, […] o los ritos y ceremonias de [la misma]; […] que digan que la Ley de Moisés es buena y puede darles la salvación; […] que digan que Nuestro Señor Jesucristo no era el verdadero Mesías que prometen las Escrituras, ni el verdadero Dios ni el hijo de Dios; que niegan que murió para salvar la raza humana; […] y que digan y afirman muchos otros errores […].[30]

Having identified this centuries-old understanding of Judaism as the evil twin of Christianity, so to speak, may perhaps offer a clue as to why some modern scholars, especially but not necessarily ones who specialize in the study of Ibero-Catholicism and know comparatively little of Jewish history and culture, conceive of the conflict between Ibero-Christians and Ibero-Jews before 1492 as the Inquisition did, namely, as an encounter, in the words of Julio Valdeón Baruque, "between members of two religious creeds."[31] But is the characterization of Jews as a creedal faith-community focused on spiritual salvation accurate? If so, does the construct "Judaism" illuminate the identities of *conversos* in some significant way?

Scholarship on the New Christians has offered a number of answers to these questions. However, my impression is that an affirmative consensus – "yes" to both questions – has predominated. To the extent that the responses have varied somewhat, this has depended on the degree to which authors judge *conversos* to have exhibited some degree of "Jewishness." That judgment, for its part, depends largely on three factors: First, how much credence each scholar gives to inquisitorial testimony on alleged Judaizing among New Christians; second, the degree to which each scholar, like learned Christians of the Middle Ages, adheres to the notion that Jews and therefore "crypto-Jewish" *conversos* formed communities defined by a specific creedal "faith," and that this "faith" is "Judaism"; third, and correspondingly, how the scholar defines "religion" and applies that category to Jews and New Christians.

Jews and "Judaism": toward a fully historicized perspective

I have addressed the matter of the reliability of inquisitorial sources in various articles and book-chapters. Now I wish to address the matter of "Jewish religion," which I consider to be basic to the accurate description and assessment of the identities of *conversos*.

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[30] A transcript of the original text seems to form part of an anonymous private collection. The transcript is found at http://www.pachami.com/Inquisicion/Edicto1.htm. Based on the document's content, which resembles that of other Edicts of Faith, I conclude that the text is authentic.

[31] Julio Valdeón Baruque, "Motivaciones socioeconómicas de las fricciones entre viejocristianos, judíos y conversos", in A. Alcalá, (ed.), op. cit., p. 70.

Medieval Jews did not profess a "religion," at least not as the Church understood the term. What characterized Jews was a comprehensive culture, articulated in and through an all-encompassing way of life. The latter was grounded on the assumption of the existence of an *ethnos* whose members would realize that way of life in their collective experiences as a community.

Medieval Jewish culture may be characterized as "rabbinic" inasmuch as its pillars were rabbinic law, lore, and custom, as expanded and elaborated over the course of several centuries. The primary purpose of rabbinic legal teachings was to specify how to sanctify all of existence – not only the world of humanity, nature, space, and time, but according to Jewish mysticism, the Godhead as well.[32] Despite the emphasis on sanctification, however, discrete spheres of "religious" and "secular" experience (as distinct from the holy and the profane) were largely if not utterly alien to the traditional universe of pre-modern Jews. Hebrew biblical and rabbinic law, in fact, covers all realms of experience, and thus can be categorized neither as "religious" nor as "secular" without serious qualification. Suffice it to note that the tension and radical separation between the polarities of God and Caesar, spirit and flesh, the world and heaven, were not (and are not) central in rabbinic culture as they were (and are) in Christian theology. For instance, rabbinic thought anticipated the resurrection of the soul *with* the body. So too, "[God] brings the soul and injects it into the body, and judges both as one."[33] In that respect, Jewish culture must have been largely incomprehensible even – or perhaps especially – to medieval Christian scholars, heirs to a dualistic epistemology, whose outlooks assumed such a distinction and who endeavored to organize their lives accordingly. (The same, however, might not be said of ordinary Christians, including rank-and-file clerics, and, according to Jérôme Baschet, including even a few influential theologians. As Baschet has argued, their lives as "the People of Christ" did not radically separate religious belief from intimate social experience, or for that matter, the body from the soul, until the Enlightenment.)[34]

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[32] On classical rabbinic culture as a system of sanctification, see for instance the introductory works, Jacob NEUSNER, *From Testament to Torah: An Introduction to Judaism in its Formative Age*, Englewood Cliffs, PrenticeHall, 1988, especially pp. 41-65; J. NEUSNER, *There We Sat Down: Talmudic Judaism in the Making*, Hoboken, Ktav, 1978; Lawrence C. SCHIFFMAN, *From Text to Tradition: A History of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism*, Hoboken, Ktav, 1991, especially pp. 240-265. On Jewish mysticism, see for instance the introductory work, Laurence FINE, "Kabbalistic Texts", in Barry W. Holtz (ed.), *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts,* New York, Simon & Schuster, 1984, pp. 305-359.

[33] Leviticus Rabbah IV: 5, quoted in Robert SELTZER, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, New York, McMillan, 1980, p. 291.

[34] For Baschet's views on the subject, see for example, Jérome BASCHET, *Les Justices de l'au-delà. Les représentations de l'enfer en France et en Italie, XII^e^-XV^e^ siècles*, Rome, École Française de Rome, 1993. Baschet explains his basic approach to the question of dualism in Medieval Latin Christian cultures as follows: "Pour expliquer les conceptions de la personne au Moyen Âge, faite d'un corps et d'une âme, je parle de dualité non-dualiste. J'essaie de transformer l'image que l'on se fait en général des conceptions chrétiennes, et qui réduisent celles-ci

It is not by accident that Jews did not call their culture and normative way of life "Judaism." Indeed, "Judaism" and the notion of "religion" that usually undergirds it are at base non-Jewish constructs that have been adapted and adopted by Jews only in modern times.[35] *Judaism* is a translation of the ancient Greek word *Ioudaïsmos*. Pagan Hellenes coined the term to designate the Judeans' laws and customs.[36] Judeans (namely, Jews) did not commonly apply the word "Judaism" to refer to their culture until the late eighteenth century at the earliest, and then mostly for purposes of communicating with non-Jews.[37] Because of that, to speak of a Judaic "religion" that Iberian Jews professed openly and that at least some *conversos* harbored secretly is misleading.[38]

"Religion" is also deceptive, if by that term we mean what the medieval Church understood by it – to wit, a body of concise theological propositions

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à un simple dualisme (le corps, mauvais, serait une prison pour l'âme, qui n'aspire qu'à s'en échapper). En réalité, les conceptions médiévales sont beaucoup plus complexes. Certes, la personne humaine est faite d'un corps et d'une âme, qui sont deux entités complètement différentes, mais plutôt que de poser la nécessaire séparation de ces deux éléments, les théologiens et les clercs médiévaux cherchent à les articuler. Ils conçoivent la personne humaine comme une association positive de l'âme et du corps, dont l'union est nécessaire au salut et même à la pleine béatitude paradisiaque (du fait de la résurrection finale des corps). Pour Thomas d'Aquin, la séparation de l'âme et du corps est contre-nature ; ce qui est normal, c'est l'unité du corporel et du spirituel dans la personne."

"C'est un modèle qui permet aussi de penser la société dans son ensemble, car la société médiévale est fondée sur une dualité entre les clercs, qui en forment la partie spirituelle, et les laïcs, qui en sont la partie corporelle. C'est l'enjeu de ce qu'on appelle habituellement la réforme grégorienne, aux XI^e^-XII^e^ siècles : il s'agit à la fois de distinguer aussi fortement que possible clercs et laïcs, mais en même temps de les lier au sein d'une unité positive, le corps ecclesial" ("Pour l'iconographie: entretien avec Jérôme Baschet". Available from http://www.nonfiction.fr/article-1248-pour_liconographie__entretien_avec_jerome_baschet.htm). Baschet's point that "En réalité, les conceptions médiévales sont beaucoup plus complexes" is well taken. In any event, I am not in a position to counter his contention with regard to the role of clerics, including Aquinas. Yet it seems patently clear to me that a principal difference between Jewish and Christian medieval cultures was the non-dualism of the one and the dualism of the other. That Christian thinkers faced the challenge of "articulating" (to use Baschet's term) body and soul, heaven and human society, and so on, and rabbis did not, only emphasizes that difference, other complexities notwithstanding.

[35] Leora Batnitzky shows that this is the case in *How Judaism Became a Religion*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011. Her contribution is pivotal.

[36] See S. D. Cohen, op. cit., pp. 7-8, and 106; more generally, pp. 69-106.

[37] On the modern conception of "Judaism", see L. Batnitzky, op. cit.

[38] Of course, none of this is to say that Christians and Jews did not influence each other's cultures in Medieval Iberia and in the rest of Europe. A provocative case for mutual influence – and tragic mutual misconception – through religious polemics is Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006. As regards the medieval centuries, Yuval's main focus is on Ashkenaz, not Sepharad. If I am reading Yuval's main thrust correctly, Christians and Jews shaped their ideas and behaviors in reaction to one another *despite* the basic mutual alienation that grossly distorted images of the other. In that sense, Yuval's thesis supports mine concerning Christian views of "Judaism".

and attendant rites of worship without which there was (in theory at least) no possibility of forging and maintaining a faith-community. Such a concept of "religion" describes Christianity, a creedal system whose adherents need not perceive (but often do) that they share ethno-national traits such as a familial kinship, a common homeland, a national language, a common and unitary way of life beyond the local or regional level (significant local variations notwithstanding), a class of leaders who are experts in that way of life, and a common history. We need, then, different conceptual tools than "Judaism" and "religion" to evaluate medieval Iberian Jews and their identities, not to mention the relative "Jewishness" of their *converso* cousins and descendants. The study of Jewish history provides us with these tools. Much of what I will relate concerning that history is well known, but I suspect that its implications for the study of New Christians have yet to be fully internalized.

What is now generally recognized as "Judaism" is in its ideal conception an all-encompassing culture, not a "religion" as defined above. The foundations of the Judean cultural system that prevailed among Jews in the Middle Ages were established from the Bronze Age to late antiquity, evolving most dramatically in the aftermath of three disasters: The razing of the First Temple by Babylonian armies and the exile of Judean elites to Babylonia between 586-c. 500 BCE; the destruction of the Second Temple and of Jerusalem by Roman legions under Titus in 70 CE; and the concomitant subjugation of the Judean state as a whole from that year to the defeat of the Bar-Kochba revolt in 135 CE. A cohort of legal experts drawn from various ranks of Judean society and known as "Sages" (*hakhamim*) spearheaded the reconstruction of Judean life following the last two of these three clusters of calamities.

It bears mentioning that while the Sages were certainly *yehudim* (Judeans or Judahites), they called themselves and the rest of the Judean people "Israel," and the land in which the Judean state (as well as the defunct northern kingdom of Israel or kingdom of Samaria) had stood as "The Land of Israel."[39] Both designations had their origin in the Hebrew Bible, which preserves many of the traditions of the Israelite ethnic group. Notably, ancient Hebrew, the language of the Hebrew Bible, does not have a word denoting "religion." By contrast, the Bible refers to the Israelites repeatedly as a people or nation (*'am*, *goy*), namely as an extended kin-group with a distinct political and cultural identity, laws, and historical fate, all theoretically deriving from its unique relationship with a national deity. The Hebrew Bible (which Jews know by its Hebrew acronym, TaNaKH) describes the latter as the people's true sovereign. Several names and phrases denote Israelite nationhood in the TaNaKH, including "The Children of Israel"

[39] This is evident to anyone who has read the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic texts (including the *Siddur*) regularly, where "Israel" is ubiquitous and "*Yehudi(m)*" is not.

(e.g., Ex. 1:7) "The House of Jacob" (e.g., Ex. 19:3) "A Holy Nation" (Ex. 19:6) "Treasured nation" (Ex. 19:5) "A Kingdom of Priests" (Ex. 19:6), and the like. Taken as parts of a whole, the stories of the Israelites and their kingdoms are at base the narratives of an ethnic group or nation in relation to a national God, not of a "Church" or of an exalted individual whose message is intended for the world as a whole; of a multilayered culture and not a set of theological propositions *per se*. These narratives give voice to a wide-ranging historical memory concerning the life of a people. They certainly include, but do not amount to a set of ritual laws and ethical guidelines.

That is precisely how the Sages, also known as the *rabbanim* ("Masters," or rabbis), viewed their people, Israel, and its holy scriptures. These experts saw themselves as intellectual heirs of an earlier cohort of Judean commentators from the Hasmonean Period, the *perushim* ("Separators" – presumably those whose specialty was to separate the holy from the profane). Unlike their predecessors, the *hakhamim* who lived after the disasters of the period spanning the destruction of the Second Temple and the defeat of Bar-Kochba had to contend with catastrophic cultural loss and disorientation. This meant grappling not only with the end of the political framework that had shaped Judean culture and history since biblical times, but with the increasing dispersion of the Judean people across the Near East and the Mediterranean as a result of deportation, the economic devastation of Judea, and other causes. The Sages' primary challenge, therefore, was to translate (not replace) what had been a national-theocratic culture – a culture anchored in a specific natural environment and in local agrarian patterns; centered in Jerusalem, led by priests who administered a cyclical system of sacrifices at the Holy Temple; and founded upon the demographic unity and geographic rootedness of an entire people. The rabbis' challenge was to transform surviving Israelite traditions, including their main textual repository, the Hebrew Bible, into the bases of a decentralized and de-territorialized cultural system – a portable culture that would preserve the ethnic community, Israel, as well as its attachment to its homeland, its Temple, and its ideal rulers – in other words, its political identity. Facing the Sages of this formative period (70 CE-c. 450 CE) was a momentous question: What did it mean to be "Israel" in the absence of a Temple, a ruling class of priests, collective political sovereignty, and in dispersion? This question implied several related puzzles, for instance: How would communication with the divine ruler of the people take place without the Holy Temple in a post-prophetic era? (Synagogues already existed but possessed little of the sheer cultural weight of the Jerusalem *beit ha-mikdash*.) Where would God' Divine Presence (*shekhinah*) reside on Earth if not in the Holy of Holies of that edifice? How would biblical laws designed to regulate the life of an independent people settled in its land be preserved and practiced in dispersion? Who would take the reins of political leadership of the nation? Of what would that leadership consist? From where or what would its authority derive? By creatively extrapolating

from the texts that make up the Hebrew Bible, the rabbis provided a response principally through what they called the "Oral Torah." This latter "teaching" developed as an open, ever-expanding corpus of creative exegesis. Rabbinic lore has it the Oral Torah in its entirety was revealed to Moses at Mt. Sinai, to serve as the means by which to properly interpret the Written Torah, namely the Hebrew Bible, and thus reveal, in the collective and accretive effort of authoritative hermeneutics, an ever greater and deeper understanding of divine creation, as well as of God's inner life.[40]

By the Middle Ages, rabbinic biblical glosses, legal commentaries, homiletical narratives, liturgical poems, a considerable body of case law (*responsa*), a standard order of prayer, as well as a body of traditional customs with quasi-legal force had given shape to an all-encompassing system of sanctification, sometimes called "The Life of Torah."[41] The rabbinic reformulation of Judean culture after 70 CE resulted, in a sense, in its popularization: As Jacob Neusner has observed, now the behavior of the entire people itself, not the ritual performances of priests acting on behalf of the people at the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, was to be the principal purveyor of holiness in the world. So too, the people, not the Temple, would become the mundane repository of the sacred.[42] Not individual movements of faith, or salvation of the spirit alone, but the collective, active path of sanctification or "repair" of the World – that is, the performance of rabbinic commandments and "Acts of Loving kindness," ranging from the seemingly quotidian, to formal rituals of worship, to martyrdom, all intended to isolate and exalt the holy – would be the means to sanctification. Accruing merit in the eyes of God by living the Life of Torah would eventually bring "This Era" (*ha-zeman ha-zeh*) to its conclusion, and inaugurate the liberation of the Jewish people from its dispersed and subjugated condition.[43] Literal repatriation of Judean exiles to the Land of Israel, and the earthly reconstitution of Judean sovereignty under a restored Davidic dynasty and a renewed cycle of sacrifices at the altar of the rebuilt (Third) Temple, would mark the ensuing Messianic Era (*yemey ha-mashiach* – literally, "The Days of the Messiah"). This final redemption or liberation (*ge'ulah*) would be collective, and take place

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[40] On the subjects covered in this paragraph, see J. Neusner, *From Testament to Torah*, cit., especially pp. 41-65.

[41] On this historical development, see L. C. Schiffman. The *Mishnah* ("Recapitulation", completed c. 250 CE), the *Gemara* ("Completion" – including The Talmud of the Land of Israel, c. 450 CE, and the Babylonian Talmud, c. 600 CE), and the *Tosefta* ("Supplement") served as a core curriculum for Torah scholars. Comprising extensive legal discourse (*halakhah*) and non-legal or homiletical discourse (*Aggadah*), this corpus was the matrix of many if not all medieval rabbinic works.

[42] J. Neusner, *From Testament to Torah*, cit., pp. 43-49. See especially p. 44.

[43] For a discussion of this historiosophy, see for instance Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Early Modern Times,* New York, Schocken, 1961, pp. 16-17; J. Neusner, *From Testament to Torah*, cit., pp. 66-120, and J. Neusner, *Judaism and Christianity in the Age of Constantine,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987.

in this world.[44] Dominant rabbinic views understood redemption "first and foremost as an event in the life of nations and only secondarily in individuals; it occurs on the plane of history more than in the depths of the soul."[45]

But the question of the *ge'ulah* and how to bring it about was not to become a dominant national focus. Especially after Bar-Kochba's demise, a rabbinic stigma attached to speculation regarding "The End." Calculations of the timing of the messianic redemption were common in the Middle Ages, but this was in plain contravention of earlier and theoretically greater authorities who had criticized Bar-Kochba and his followers. So too, speculation concerning the personality and other attributes of the Messiah did not become particularly pronounced among European Jews until (arguably) the Kabbalistic upsurge of the sixteenth century and the brief Sabbatean explosion of the second half of the seventeenth.

Please note that the "Law of Moses" that the Holy Office posited in its public edicts, ceremonies, and formal accusations, bears only a superficial resemblance to the wide-ranging Judaic system I have sketched above. The latter always retained a distinctive ethnic component despite the rabbis' invention of a path of ritual conversion for non-Judeans.[46] By contrast, the inquisitorial version of Judaism consists merely of expressing faith in a few "Jewish" theological tenets and in performing rituals supposed to "save" the soul of the performer. True, rabbinic morality had it that "the observance of the commandments (*mitzvot*) leads to reward or to punishment, both in this life and the next."[47] Yet that was not the only, or even the main concern. Rather, it was the achievement of holiness for all of Israel, in this world, in expectation of the collective, political reward of messianic redemption. Louis E. Newman observes that, given its communal orientation, Jewish tradition,

> attaches little importance to the notion that God has some unique moral demand for particular individuals […]. The path of righteous living [is thought to have] been revealed in Torah to the entire community [at Sinai] […]. Traditional Jews, then, would be unlikely to pray for special guidance about "what God wants from *me* in this situation," for divine guidance is assumed to public and communal, not private and individual.[48]

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[44] On this subject, see for instance the classic essays by Gershom Scholem, "Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism", and "The Messianic Idea in Kabbalism", in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, New York, Schocken, 1995, pp. 1-36 and pp. 37-48, respectively. Also useful is R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Messianism in Jewish History", in Haim H. Ben-Sasson and Shmuel Ettinger (ed.), *Jewish Society Through the Ages*, New York, Schocken, 1969, pp. 30-45.

[45] Louis E. Newman, *An Introduction to Jewish Ethics*, Upper Saddle River, Pearson-Prentice Hall, 2005, p. 51.

[46] S. D. Cohen, op. cit., p. 133.

[47] L. C. Schiffman, op. cit., p. 243.

[48] L. E. Newman, op. cit., p. 46.

Typical medieval clergymen and inquisitors were scarcely familiar with this and other aspects of the Life of Torah. To the extent that they had learned anything about it from formerly Jewish *protégés* of the Church, these leaders rejected it as a blasphemous threat to Christendom. In the process, they invented a "Judaism" that drastically narrowed the scope of traditional Jewishness. Christian scholars essentially proposed that the point of living Jewishly was private, internal, and almost exclusively spiritual. They also occluded the collective and political basis of the communal "ethno-religion"[49] that the Jews lived, and proceeded to project their narrow notion of "religion" to Jews and to baptized people whom they perceived as *"perros judíos"* – "Jewish dogs," to use a phrase popular in medieval and early modern Spain. In that sense, the "Judaism" to which the Holy Office pointed an accusing finger was but a domesticated, Christian form as flat as the hermeneutic "Jew" of patristic literature. This image was the matrix of the "Judaizer," a zealous observer of "obsolete" biblical laws, and another chimerical image that the Inquisition propagated in Spain and Portugal. It is no wonder that Old Christian "Judaizers" in the Ibero-Catholic world, including some "martyrs" who went to willingly to the *quemadero* declaiming their embrace of the Law of Moses, had wittingly or unwittingly internalized that very inquisitorial paradigm. These "martyrs" were but avid biblicists who realized inquisitorial fears exactly. Far from participating in the communal rhythms of *halakhah*, they were highly idiosyncratic if not totally isolated individuals with a very limited (if any) knowledge of the lives that Jews actually led, or what Jewish rituals and customs meant to Jews in the context of *kehillot kedoshot* –"Holy Communities." To cite but one example, the Old Christian martyr and scholar of Hebrew, Lope de Vera y Alarcón (1619-1644), who called himself "Judah the Believer," echoed inquisitorial formulae when he explained to his interrogators that he wanted "to live and die in the Law of the Lord that Scripture calls *el pentateuco torat Adonay*."[50]

By the same token, latter-generation *conversos* who had no memory of Jewish life found it difficult to comprehend the nature and purpose of Jewish observance once they had learned it outside of the Iberian domains. Witness, for example, the common yet erroneous view expressed by several New Christian *emigrés* that circumcision had the power to save and was analogous to Christian baptism in conveying a Jewish identity to those who underwent the ritual surgery.[51]

To be sure, "faith" (in rabbinic parlance, *emunah*) is hardly insignificant to the "Life of Torah," yet is still secondary to the reality of Jewish identity and Jewish collectivity, for two reasons: First, classic, rabbinic culture is

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[49] S. D. Cohen, op. cit., pp. 109-139.

[50] Lope de Vera is quoted in Miriam Bodian, *Dying in the Law of Moses*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2007, p. 167.

[51] See for instance Yosef Kaplan, "Wayward new Christians and Stubborn New Jews", *Jewish History*, Vol. 8, ns.1-2, 1994, pp. 27-41; here p. 32.

anchored in (the assumption) of peoplehood, not in theology *per se*. One may even say that if by theology we mean a carefully formulated system directed to people outside the in-group, rabbinic culture has scarcely yielded anything properly fitting that description.[52] Even the affirmation that is widely regarded as the most important liturgical statement of "the Jewish faith," the *shema*, assumes the existence of the national collective to which it is addressed: "Hear, Israel, YHWH our God, YHWH is one [or YHWH alone]" (Deut. 6:4). Rabbinic tales concerning the revelation at Sinai stress the point that God chose to reveal the Torah at Sinai to the entire people, Israel, whose members thereby acquired a political identity and pledged themselves to their divine suzerain.[53] But the people as a kin-group itself already existed. What the Children of Israel acquired – if we read the stories anthropologically – was an ethno-religion, the optimal practice of which Jews, from the Mishnah to the French Revolution, understood as the natural extension of a basic collective autonomy. Another way of putting this is to say that according to the rabbinic cultural system, the presumptive locus of the fulfillment of individual Jewish lives, was an internally autonomous political corpus known as a *kehillah*, that is, a normatively configured and publicly acknowledged Jewish community. By the same token, the rabbinic notion of Exile (*galut*) as a physical and existential condition, and of redemption as a political end feasible in this world, typically precluded cultural assimilation (as distinct from selective acculturation) into the Gentile communities.[54] Haim Beinart observes,

> In [pre-expulsion] Spain, as in all the Diaspora, the community was the basic unit of organized Jewish life. The style of life of the Jews was set within the communal bounds, as were the institutions of which every son of Israel stood in need […]. It is enough to mention Jewish education and welfare to show that everything that grew and expanded *in* the Jewish community was rooted in a living organism.[55]

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[52] R. Seltzer, op. cit., p. 281.

[53] See for instance the *aggadot* in Mekhlita 4, 2:227 on Ex. 20:2 and 20:21. The aggadic commentaries here focus on God's suzerainty, and on the publicity and collectivity of the Sinai covenant, e.g.: "'I am the Lord Your God' (Ex. 20:2). This [statement] informs us of how praiseworthy Israel was, for when they all stood before Mt. Sinai all of them were united as one to accept the kingship of God with joy. Not only that, but they stood surety for each other." Another commentary stresses, "Therefore [the Torah] was given in the wilderness, openly, in public, in a place belonging to no one." The translations I provide here are found in Reuven Hammer (ed. and trans.), *The Classic Midrash: Tannaitic Commentaries on the Bible,* Mahwah, Paulist Press, 1995, pp. 145 and 147.

[54] On the implications of the rabbinic concept of *Galut*, see for instance J. Katz, op. cit., pp. 13-23. See also Ivan Marcus's discussion of "inward acculturation" in *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996. Though Katz and Marcus focus mostly on Ashkenazic communities, I believe their insights apply generally to medieval Ibero-Jewish communities under Christian rule as well.

[55] Haim Beinart, "Hispano-Jewish Society", in H. H. Ben-Sasson and S. Ettinger (ed.), op. cit., pp. 226-227.

Indeed, without the Jewish collective, its personnel and institutions – a halakhic expert and legal court, a house of study, a ritual bath, a burial society, a *shokhet* (ritual butcher and hence supplier of *kasher* meat), *mohel* (ritual circumciser), a Jewish cemetery, as well as a host of additional experts and welfare services, a Jew was not merely bereft in an immediate, material sense; he or she was unable to live the Life of Torah and hence to fulfill the purpose of his or her existence as an individual and as a member of a collective devoted to the sanctification of life through action. Disconnected from the overarching autonomy of the *kehillah*, such a person could *be* "Israel" only in a technical and utterly passive sense. It follows, for instance, that the harshest form of rabbinic excommunication was arguably a kind of death sentence as regarded the cultural identity of individual Jews, for conversion to Christianity (or Islam) was probably the only viable option left to an unrepentant excommunicate if he or she wished to die with a modicum of social dignity, and be buried at all.

Iberian Jewish communities were subject to the vicissitudes of life under various rulers in the peninsular kingdoms. In the High Middle Ages, *kehillot* often restructured their internal governments in response to royal mandates.[56] But the fundamental autonomy of the Jews as a corporation under both non-Jewish and Jewish laws remained until the expulsions of 1492-1498. So did the coextensive nature of that political autonomy with Jewishness itself. It is only in modern times that the delineation of Jewish identity as a matter of private conviction and the collapse of Jewish communal governments in the Western Diaspora have posed a mortal threat to Jewish continuity and inspired movements, such as various forms of "diaspora nationalism," Zionism, and religious "Orthodoxy" (a concept foreign to pre-modern Jews) that strive to stem the tide of assimilation and rebuild Jewish identity by grounding it in older (if reinterpreted) patterns of Jewish collectivity and national autonomy.

It is noteworthy that the very rabbinic definition of Jewishness that developed and became normative in and around the second century is not dependent on acceptance of any particular *credo*. Though Maimonides configured a list of principles resembling one in the twelfth century, and it was much later incorporated with the standard Ashkenazic version of the rabbinic liturgy, embracing the list was never a condition of membership.[57] Halakhically, being Jewish has been a matter of matrilineal descent or rabbinic conversion since the days of the (pagan) Roman Empire.[58] A Jew

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[56] On this phenomenon, see for instance H. Beinart, "Hispano-Jewish Society", art. cit., p. 231.

[57] Maimonides was one of a number of rabbis (including Philo of Alexandria and several Iberians such as Nachmanides and Shimon ben Tzemach Duran) who rendered such lists. None of the lists were or have ever been adopted as normative by all Jews.

[58] On this, see S. D. Cohen, op. cit., pp. 198-238 (on rabbinic conversion rites), and pp. 263-307 and pp. 308-340 (on the matrilineal principle and its interpretations into the Middle Ages).

who sins grievously – even to the point of conversion – is just that; he or she does not cease to be a Jew according to rabbinic law.[59] Jewish identity is not understood as a matter of "race," however, but of the covenantal relationship between a people and its sovereign. Likewise, as I have mentioned, dogma, as well a systematic theology intended for an audience beyond the *ethnos*, is practically nonexistent in classical "Judaism." Let us also consider that the *Mishnah*, the foundational work of rabbinic culture,

> not only tolerates legal disputes, it relishes them. Legal dispute is the core of Mishnaic discourse. And the disputes are open-ended: The Mishnah does not contain any explicit rules by which the winning position can be determined. Whether these disputes are entirely rhetorical (in other words, the Mishnah is the record of a debating society) or whether they mirror real diversity in practice is not clear; if the latter, the social mechanisms that held this disputatious and fractious group together must have been remarkable.[60]

The social mechanisms to which the historian Shaye Cohen refers above may be understood as one aspect of the underlying group solidarity on which medieval Jewish life was based, and which *conversos* could only maintain if the thick content and public, collective autonomy of their ancestors' ethnicity could be preserved, or some new ethnicity constructed. I suspect that in most cases this was impossible in Spain after the inquisitorial purges that began in 1482 and dwindled around 1530.[61] The sheer diversity of the socio-political, economic, and ideological profile of Castilian and Aragonese New Christians suggests as much.[62] Early on, some Castilian *conversos* implicitly acknowledged their growing differentiation from Jews and from rabbinic culture. Religious trends among these same *conversos* also reflected a concomitant spiritualization of their identity along vaguely Christian lines. For instance, in 1502 a follower of the teenaged *conversa* "prophetess" Inés of Herrera related a vision of heaven in which *conversos* who followed "the Law of Moses" were heaven's beloved because of their suffering service to God at the hands of inquisitors, and hence merited a seat

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[59] On this principle, see for instance J. Katz, "'Af 'al pi she-hata', Yisra'el hu'", *Tarbiz,* Vol. 27, 1958, pp. 203-217 (in Hebrew).

[60] S. D. Cohen, "Judaism to the Mishnah: 135-220 CE", in Hershel Shanks (ed.), *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: a Parallel History of their Origins and Early Development*, Washington, DC, Biblical Archaeology Society, 1993, pp. 73-74.

[61] On the sharp decline in the number of prosecutions of alleged Spanish Judaizers in the 1530s, see for instance Jean Pierre dedieu, "The Archives of the Holy Office of Toledo as a Source for Historical Anthropology", in Gustav Henningsen and John Tedeschi (ed. in association with Charles Amiel), *The Inquisition in Early Modern Europe: Studies on Sources and Methods*, DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 1986, p. 181.

[62] I suspect Jaime Contreras is right that *conversos* at the time of the expulsion of 1492 did not comprise a socio-economically homogeneous group, but rather one in which the majority belonged to a highly diverse artisanal class. Jaime Contreras, "Judíos, judaizantes y conversos en la Peninsula Ibérica en los tiempos de la expulsión", in A. Alcalá (ed.), op. cit., p. 458.

in His supernal court distinct and higher than that accorded to Jews.[63] In Portugal, by contrast, several factors, including strong patterns of endogamy and homogamy among segments of the *converso* population account for the formation, survival and dynamic functioning of the *"nação"* as a distinct political and economic group. But where ethnicity and a traditional way of life were united in the Judaic cultural system that the Sages built, the life of the *nação* divorced ethnicity from "faith" along the lines that the Church, following Paul of Tarsus, had done centuries earlier. The bottom line is that, depending on local circumstances, one could form a dignified part of the *nação* with or without embracing "The Law of Moses."[64] And while for centuries Ibero-Christian hostility kept all *conversos* apart to some degree, it would be precipitous to accept the inquisitorial position that a "Jewish" identity survived among them, not to mention the paranoid image of a massive, centuries-long "crypto-Jewish" conspiracy. All accusations of "Judaism" among New Christians require careful qualification, even if it can be proven, which it often cannot, that a person or persons indeed practiced rites and affirmed beliefs that the Church categorized as "Judaizing."[65]

To fail to understand the ethno-political and communal foundations of traditional Jewish life is to believe, as the Inquisition did, that *conversos* could, in fact, be half-baked or full-fledged "Jews" in their hearts and behind closed doors without meaningfully participating in an openly-practicing community structured and run according to *halakhah* – in other words, it is to believe that a "crypto-Judaism" worthy of the name could exist. Given the national and public quality of normative Jewish culture from its formative age to the eve of modern times, I doubt that the inquisitorial construct of "Judaism" had much to do with medieval and early modern realities. The question is not one of the reliability of inquisitorial sources *per se*. Defendants may well have harbored and practiced some heterodox ideas. Rather, it is a question of the accuracy and incisiveness of our historical understanding of Jews. To speak of *conversos* as "Judaizing" or being "crypto-Jews," or even as being suspected of "Judaism" without digging into the historical meanings of our terms merely replicates a rather confused inquisitorial gaze, and

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[63] On the case see for instance H. Beinart, "Inés of Herrera del Duque: The Prophetess of Extremadura", in Mary E. Giles (ed.), *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999, pp. 42-52.

[64] On the cultural dynamics of the *nação*, see for instance Jaime Contreras, Bernardo García García, and Juan Ignacio Pulido Serrano (ed.), *Familia, religión y negocio: el sefardismo en las relaciones entre el mundo ibérico y los Países Bajos en la Edad Moderna*, Madrid, Fundación Carlos de Amberes, 2002; and David Graizbord and Claude B. Stuczynski (ed.), *Jewish History*, Vol. 25, n. 2, Apr. 2011 (a special issue devoted to the topic of "Portuguese New Christian Identities, 1516-1700").

[65] An example of a nuanced, but contrasting approach to this question is Natalia Muchnik, *De paroles et de gestes: Constructions marranes en terre d'Inquisition,* Paris, EHESS, 2014. Muchnik's reading of *conversos'* collective (counter-)identity, in my view, sometimes relies too heavily on information found in and through inquisitorial sources whose creditability is suspect – too suspect to form the basis of a sweeping interpretation.

obfuscates the phenomenon of *conversos'* subjectivity. If we may speak of a specifically "*converso* religion" at all, and we judge it to consist of belief in a certain salvific path for the soul, then we must view that "religion" as an offshoot of Ibero-Christianity, and only superficially of Jewish culture. This is not to say that the "Judaizing" beliefs and behaviors of *conversos* were "residual," "moribund" or merely "ethnographic" traces of Jewish culture; it is to say that the very notion of a pre-modern, secret, privatized "Judaism" of the spirit, one practically divorced from the political autonomy of the national group that gave shape to it, is highly questionable. To be sure, *converso* heterodoxy may have had an associational aspect – witness numerous non-formulaic testimonies concerning familial networks of Judaizers, "secret synagogues," and the like. But even if we were to take the testimonies at face value, we should at least consider that such activities as joint worship or Bible study, and such proclivities as a shared aversion to pork, do not a "Jewish" community make, any more than frequenting Irish pubs makes one an Irishman – not if the element of acculturation into the public culture of the *ethnos* is missing.

To the foregoing analysis, one may pose the objection that it essentializes Jewishness, and thus commits the same intellectual error as those who have judged New Christians' "Judaism" (or lack thereof) according to some sort of ideal, absolute, and static standard totally extrinsic to the human subject. What I have proposed is not that we adhere to such a standard. Behavior, not abstractions alone, should still be a primary measure of historical reality. What I am proposing is that we pause to question facile conceptual categories on which so much of our work has tended to rely, and ground them in historicized generalizations rather on heuristic and unexamined shortcuts such as "Jew," "Judaism," "Judaizing" that were originally configured by hostile theologians and canon lawyers, and were then enlisted by enlightened intellectuals to apply a condescending pressure upon Jewish communities. These men knew little about traditional Jewish culture. Often, they were hostile to it. It behooves us not to summon the figural "Jew" of their imagination.

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