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The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela, Lost Israelites, and Vanishing Indians: Trans-Atlantic English Reception of the Medieval Past in the Seventeenth Century

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Abstract

This essay is an investigation of the history of books on Jewish identity and the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, in terms of their reception in an early modern Anglophone world of trans-Atlantic colonial expansion. It examines three texts, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* (Benjamin of Tudela, 1173/1983), *The Hope of Israel* (Menasseh ben Israel, 1650/1987), and *Jews in America* (Thorowgood, 1650). *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* (hereafter referred to as *The Itinerary*) is an account of a medieval European Jew's travels eastward to the border regions of China between 1159 and 1172. In the seventeenth-century trans-Atlantic Anglophone world, *The Itinerary* began to be read in connection with *The Hope of Israel* and *Jews in America*, works that promoted the idea that native Americans were the Lost Tribes, written respectively by a Jewish and a Protestant author. The essay asks why *The Itinerary*, a twelfth-century Jewish travel account largely unread by and unknown to

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medieval Christian Europeans, began to be read by the English on both sides of the Atlantic in the early modern era and to be associated with writings locating the Lost Tribes in the Americas. It argues that the English debate and dialogue on the historical understanding of the ethnic other as *difference* and the role of *difference* in projects of colonization and expansion underlie the connection between these three discourses and their reception in the seventeenth century.

Key Words: colonization, Jews, Americas, Lost Tribes, Indians

This essay is an investigation of the history of books on Jewish identity and the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, in terms of their reception in an early modern Anglophone world of trans-Atlantic colonial expansion. In particular, it examines three texts, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* (hereafter referred to as *The Itinerary*) by a twelfth-century Jewish traveler to the east (Benjamin of Tudela, 1983), *The Hope of Israel* by rabbi Menasseh ben Israel (1987), and *Jews in America* (1650) by Thomas Thorowgood. The essay asks why *The Itinerary*, a twelfth-century Jewish travel account largely unread by and unknown to medieval Christian Europeans, began to be read by the English on both sides of the Atlantic in the early modern era and to be associated with writings locating the Lost Tribes in the Americas, specifically, *The Hope of Israel* and *Jews in America*. It argues that the English debate and dialogue on the historical understanding of the ethnic other as *difference* and the role of *difference* in projects of colonization and expansion underlie the connection between these three discourses and their reception in the seventeenth century.

The Itinerary is a fascinating account of a European Jew's travels eastward throughout the Mediterranean to India and the border regions of China between 1159 and early 1172. As is often the case with medieval European writers, we know virtually nothing about Benjamin of Tudela, or Benjamin ben Jonah (that is, Benjamin son of Jonah), other than the fact that he was from a town on the Ebro River, northwest of Saragossa, Spain. He is commonly referred to as "rabbi" in commentaries, but he was probably a merchant rather than a rabbi in the modern sense. For medieval Jews the title "rabbi" was one of respect for a man learned in Jewish law (S. Benjamin, 1995: 10). The historical context in which Benjamin wrote his *Itinerary*, first composed circa 1173, in medieval Hebrew with Arabic forms, is significant, especially with respect to his views on Christians and Arab peoples—and "Arab peoples" because Benjamin does not portray them always as Muslims or as conforming to an established religious institution such as Islam. A little more than a generation

before Benjamin's time, Saragossa had witnessed a Christian takeover from Moorish Muslim Spain from 1115 to 1118. Benjamin therefore lived at a time when the memory of recent Muslim rule was still fresh and the religious wars of Christians against the Muslim Middle East were gaining strength, feeding on the success of the Reconquista of the Iberian peninsula. The First Crusade at the end of the eleventh century had stirred up hatred and violence against Muslims as well as Jews, resulting in massacres of Jews in Europe. The Second Crusade took place from 1147 to 1149, a decade before Benjamin departed on his journey east. And the Third Crusade took place after Benjamin's return from the east, from 1189 to 1192.¹

Like other works of travel literature from the European Middle Ages, *The Itinerary* featured wild and savage peoples, peoples who lived east beyond European civilization that the author encountered or heard of in his travels. But Benjamin of Tudela had a very different perspective on savagery than medieval Christian travel writers like Marco Polo or the Franciscans William of Rubruck and John of Plano Carpini. Where European travel writers like Marco Polo saw aliens as unnatural and inferior to European civilization, Benjamin suggested paradoxically that, even barbaric people shared kinship with his people, the Jews. The Wallachians, primitives who "sweep down from the mountains to despoil and ravage the land of Greece," may be Jewish, and "they call the Jews their brethren" (68). The savages who were not related to Jews were friendly to them. Even the Assassins, a group of Ismaili Muslims who were the bane of medieval Muslim and Christian potentates alike in the Middle East, were allies of neighboring Jewish communities (Benjamin of Tudela, 1983:

¹ See Signer and Adler, introductions to Benjamin (Benjamin of Tudela, 1983: 1-49); S. Benjamin (1995: 1-15). For information on the historical context of relations between Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities in the period of the Crusade and the Reconquista, see Chazan (1987, 2000); Cohen (2000); Glick (1999); Simon (1999); Wasserstrom (1999).

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Moreover, in this Hebrew work, the Diaspora thematically framed the entire work, and Benjamin's detailed account of Jewish communities in the Mediterranean and eastward was rhetorically in the tradition of Consolation to his people in a time of suffering. The travel writer visited and returned with information about Jewish communities abroad, including some of the Lost Tribes of Israel (the Ten Tribes that were enslaved and exiled when the Assyrians destroyed the kingdom of Israel, in the 17th chapter of Second Kings in the Hebrew bible), to re-affirm their connectedness and the identity of the Jewish people even in geographical separation. As the great scholar of medieval Jewry Michael Signer has suggested, such a work of Consolation does not only chronicle Jews past and present, but implicitly it also looks to the future, to God's promise to his chosen people, and to the time when Jews will be restored to their land (Benjamin of Tudela, 1983: 25-26).

Evidence of textual reception shows that although *The Itinerary* was largely ignored by Christian European readers in the Middle Ages, it became popular reading for Europeans in the early modern world. As a rule, in the European Middle Ages most Christians did not read Hebrew. Those who did were theologians and scholars interested in religious and philosophical writings in Hebrew (Sirat, 2002: 16, 210-222), and so secular writing like *The Itinerary* would have remained largely unknown to medieval Christians. We know Europeans began to take an interest in this Jewish text in the later sixteenth century, and this interest continued through the seventeenth century. Appendix A is a list of early modern versions of *The Itinerary* in several major research libraries in the U.S. (all derived from the first translation of Hebrew into Latin by Arias Montanus).

² Unless otherwise indicated, references to the Benjamin of Tudela's *The Itinerary* are to page numbers in the 1983 modern edition and will appear in the text proper.

Early modern editions of *The Itinerary* survive in major European languages and Westerners of different nationalities and religious beliefs read it on both sides of the Atlantic—in Europe and in the colonies. The reasons why Europeans from different countries, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish, took an interest in this work in the early modern era are historically diverse and complex, and it is beyond the scope of this essay to investigate them all. My focus in this essay is on the Protestant reception of *The Itinerary* in England and its American colonies. Why did the early modern English on both sides of the Atlantic begin to take an interest in and read Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish travel writer who wrote in Arabic-influenced medieval Hebrew? The interest that the English took in this text is particularly notable, for no Jews lived in England since the last decade of the thirteenth century, when Edward I expelled them all from the island. The English case of why early modern Europeans took an interest in *The Itinerary* is meaningful because it leads to an investigation about historical change and about difference: about changing Christian attitudes towards Jewish people and their culture, and about how early modern Anglophones dealt with people different than they were, Jews from the Old World and native Americans in the New. This paper examines a series of clues that connect this medieval travel account to the English expansion in the Americas in the seventeenth century: the identity of the Lost Tribes of Israel and where they might be in the world; the popular millenarian belief among early modern Europeans (Jews and Christians alike) that Jews, scattered the world over, must all be found, restored as a people and to their homeland, and for many Christians converted to Christianity, in order for the Messianic Age to take place; and native Americans in the recently discovered continent for the English, as objects of new encounter, colonization, and as targets of Christian proselytizing. The story of the early modern reception of *The Itinerary* bespeaks Benjamin of Tudela's protest against the civilizing influence of Christianity as much as it does the way such

an influence operated in seventeenth-century trans-Atlantic relations between England and North America.

I. The Textual Evidence

Several early modern editions and translations of *The Itinerary* connect this medieval Jewish travel account to exploration and discovery in the Americas. The 1575 Latin version at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California is bound together as one big volume with Peter Martyr's *Decades*, a work chronicling Spanish discovery in the Americas published in 1574 in Cologne (d'Anghiera, 1574). The rare early modern books of Benjamin of Tudela at the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, Rhode Island further show that the Jewish identity of this text was important for readers. In his 1625 edition of *Purchas His Pilgrims*, a popular early modern anthology of travel and exploration literature, Samuel Purchas promises stories about the Jewish Diaspora from Benjamin of Tudela:

for so many haue giuen them terrible expulsions, the rest vsing cruell and vnkind hospitalitie, so that they are strangers where they dwell, and Trauellers where they reside, still continuing in the throwes of trauell both of misery and mischief . . . both *Beniamin Tudelensis* a Trauelling Iew, and other Trauellers in the following relations, will giue you strange trauels of theirs thorow *Asia, Africa, and Europe*; in all their dispersions to this day retaining their bloud, name, rites, as disposed by a higher and most mercifull prouidence which in his time will shew mercy on them, to see him by the eye of Faith, whom by the hand of Cruelty they had crucified, and all *Israel* shall be saued, and returned to the Church by a more generall conuersion then hath yet beene seene; and *as their reiection hath proued the reconciling of the World, so receiuing of them shall be life from the dead.* (Purchas,

1625: vol. 1, 67)³

As is apparent here, Purchas subscribed to an early modern European idea, increasingly popular from the middle of the seventeenth century on, that Jews were to be restored as a people and converted to Christianity, and in this way to facilitate Christ's Second Coming to judge humankind and effect the salvation of the world. Such an eschatological idea underlined Purchas' interest in Benjamin as a "Trauelling *Iew*" who had information about the Diaspora. *The Itinerary*, therefore, served as a source of information on the whereabouts of Jewish people, to Purchas and an early modern English audience anxious to locate them for the sake of the Final Judgment. At the same time that Purchas wanted to portray Benjamin as an authority on the condition of Jews, his hatred of Jews came through in his marginal reference to Benjamin's claim that the Lost Israelite Tribes of Dan, Zebulun, Asser, and Nephthali lived somewhere in the mountains in Persia. Writing in the early seventeenth century, Purchas derided such a claim with an anti-Semitic remark: "Marke this, they say, a tale deuised by a *Iewish* Fablers [*sic*]. Four Tribes" (1625, vol. 2: 1457).

The 1666 Dutch translation of Benjamin of Tudela at the John Carter Brown Library provides firm evidence of a specific historical situation in which *The Itinerary* was read. It was bound and published together in 1666 in Amsterdam with a tract entitled *The Hope of Israel*, or *Mikveigh Israel*, by rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, a Sephardic Jew based in Amsterdam. Rabbi Menasseh argued in *The Hope of Israel* that the central role that Jews were to play in the coming of the Messiah meant that their welfare as a people mattered to Jews and Christians alike. The author's agenda was to underline the fundamental importance of his people to all, call attention to their present plight, and to lobby for their lawful re-admission into and safe re-settlement in England, a country that

³ References to Samuel Purchas' 1625 edition of *Purchas His Pilgrims* are to volume and page numbers and will appear in the text proper.

had expelled them in 1290. The rabbi focused on the myth of the Lost Tribes and promoted discussion of their whereabouts, suggesting that at least some of them could be found in the Americas, as a way to advance the cause of the Jewish people.

The tract appeared in England at a time of revolutionary change, shortly after the execution of Charles I in 1649 and as the interregnum, republican government headed by Oliver Cromwell, was underway. Dedicated to the English parliament and the Council of State, *The Hope of Israel* rhetorically targeted Protestants, particularly the English. Jews had been driven out of England in 1290. Now in the seventeenth century, English Protestants showed a notable interest in the idea that the Ten Tribes of Israel, which had vanished from history with the fall of the Kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17), would have to be found and restored to their people and homeland, and for many converted to Christianity, in order for Christ's Second Coming to take place on earth.

As I have mentioned before, both Jews and Christians believed in the vital role that Jews as a people would play ushering in the Messianic Age. Such a religious belief about ending the Diaspora and restoring the Jewish nation was bound up with a complex of ideas about political liberation, emancipation, historical responsibility, and destiny as well. For the Jews, they were to be restored as a people, and the end of time, the Age of the Messiah, was effectively the attainment of freedom from political oppression, and as such eternal emancipation. For the Christians, they were to be located and converted to Christianity. English Protestants in particular felt a sense of national responsibility to Jewish people, and this was the reason why rabbi Menasseh chose the English as the primary audience of his treatise in 1650. His campaign to re-admit the Jews into England was one that aimed to make the country a safe haven for Jews trying to avoid the Inquisition, which could still take place from time to time in

Catholic countries. King Edward I had expelled Jews from England at the end of the thirteenth century.⁴ Despite the horrendous past of persecution in the Middle Ages, the legacy of the hatred of Jews, and the lack of knowledge about Jews as actual individuals and historical communities (they had, after all, been absent from England since 1290), efforts were underway in England, under a coalition of Jewish activists abroad and reform-minded philo-Semitic Protestants at home, to allow Jews to return to England legally (Katz, 1982: 171-234).

Many English believed that redressing such a past wrong would bring them the greatest national benefit, in eschatological terms. Where their Catholic ancestors had expelled Jews, they as Protestants in the seventeenth century could secure salvation as a nation by facilitating the Second Coming, in helping and settling Jews, who would play a central role in the Apocalyptic experience for England. In short, many English believed that, given the key role of the Jews in Christian eschatology, they as a nation had to get their own Jews to secure England's place in the scheme of salvation. By campaigning for the re-admission of Jews into England, many English proponents of the cause also believed that they were playing their part in propelling forward their national history. For many English, they as a devout Protestant nation had a role to play in the Messianic Age, and salvation was theirs. If Christ was coming soon and the Lost Tribes of Israel needed to be found and restored to the Jewish people, many English in the seventeenth century felt that they needed to locate and re-settle Jews in their territory, for the sake of the salvation of the English nation (Katz, 1982: 6, 89-126; Matar, 1985: 115-148). Moreover, the debates in England between proponents and opponents of the re-admission promoted the English awareness of tolerance towards Jews and other minorities as the inevitable national destiny. Even Royalist opponents of the re-admission assumed that persecution

⁴ For discussions and accounts of the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290, see Menache (1985); Ovrut (1977); Singer (1964).

belonged to the feudal past and was practiced only by benighted, backward-looking Catholic countries on the continent. By rejecting such a past, England represented the way of the future—that is, fair treatment of Jews and the tolerance of religious and ethnic difference (Katz, 1982: 169-183).

II. Lost Tribes of Israel and Indigenous People

Early modern millenarian ideas about Jews' major role in bringing about the Second Coming drove the search for the Ten Tribes of Israel. Moreover, in the middle of the seventeenth century, locating these lost Israelites took on a sense of urgency in connection with Messianic expectations, which with varying calculations pointed to different years and periods from the 1640's to 1666 (Katz, 1982: 141-142). In *The Hope of Israel*, Menasseh ben Israel pursued the agenda of the re-admission of Jews into England by giving credence to a claim that some lost Israelites had been found and they now lived in the Americas. In particular, he promoted the story of Antonio Montezinos, who claimed that he had met Israelites living as Indians in the remote Andes in the early 1640's.

The idea that indigenous people in the Americas may be Jews goes back to Columbus. Because he thought that he was eventually going to reach countries east of Europe, Columbus believed that he might encounter Jews on the way. So he took with him a *converso*, a "New Christian," that is, a man of Jewish descent who now professed the Christian faith, who knew Hebrew in case the natives in some places were Jewish (Uchmany, 2001: 187). From the time of the European discovery of the Americas, the origins of the Indians were a topic of fascination to Europeans, Christians and Jews alike, and writers and scholars discussed and debated the ethnic and cultural origins of these indigenous people. The Dutch jurist and theologian, Hugo Grotius, for instance, believed that the indigenous people in the Americas were of German and Chinese

descent (Lepore, 1998: 111). The possibility that these indigenous people might be descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel became a topic of debate and speculation. In England, however, the fad of such a fantastic discourse was fading fast by the late 1640's, until it was revived by Montezinos' story about meeting wild woodsmen in South America in the 1650 edition of *The Hope of Israel* (Katz, 1982: 140-141).

Antonio Montezinos was a New Christian from Portugal who arrived in the Jewish community in Amsterdam in September 1644, where Menasseh ben Israel was based, and claimed that he had encountered, in early 1642, Israelites who lived as natives somewhere in the Andes. Montezinos had traveled to South America and met some Indians who railed against the Spanish empire and its evils. He subsequently fell victim to persecution; for eighteen months he was jailed by the Inquisition in Cartagena. While in prison, he came to the conviction that certain natives living in the woods, introduced to him by his Indian friends, were his people, the Hebrews (Menasseh, 1987: 69-75). He then returned to his Indian friends and asked them to take him to the "Israelite Indians," who according to Montezinos looked like white people—that is, Europeans—and who promised Montezinos revenge against the Spanish empire for all its oppressive deeds (1987: 105-111).

Like the story of Benjamin of Tudela, Montezinos' is one that locates lost Israelites in order to confirm the oneness of the Hebrew people and the eventual promise of their restoration as a nation. As the historian David Katz has pointed out, Montezinos' story resembles the stories of Benjamin of Tudela and another ninth-century writer named Eldad the Danite, who also claimed to have found some of the Lost Tribes (Adler, 1987). All three accounts purport to find lost Israelites in remote, wild areas of the world. Even as enthusiasts promoted Montezinos' story, seventeenth-century readers would have recognized its similarity to that of Benjamin of Tudela (Katz, 1982: 145). The medieval traveler claims that

there are men of Israel in the land of Persia who say that in the mountains of Naisabur four of the tribes of Israel dwell, namely, the tribe of Dan, the tribe of Zebulun, the tribe of Asher, and the tribe of Naphtali, who were included in the first captivity of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria. (Benjamin of Tudela, 1983: 114-115)

Both Benjamin of Tudela and Antonio Montezinos portray lost Israelites as tough people independent of oppressive forces. Where Montezinos promises that these South American Hebrews will vanquish the empire of Spain, the medieval Jewish writer reports that the Israelite tribes of Dan, Zebulun, Asser, and Nephtali live near and are allies with a “lawless” and “unclean” people called the Kofar-al-Turak in the wildest parts of Persia. Together with the Kofar-al-Turk, these Lost Tribes drive back Persian hegemony in the country (115-118).

In the age of English philo-Semitism and the missionary effort to native Americans, reports of wild savage peoples in Benjamin lent credibility to early modern writers’ identification of native Americans as lost Israelites. Benjamin served not just as an authority on the Lost Tribes, but furthermore, his accounts of people living in harsh and remote terrains of the world deliberately emphasized the intimate connection between Jewish identity and indigenous identity. As a Jewish writer caught between Christians and Muslims in twelfth-century Spain, Benjamin saw the Lost Tribes of Israel paradoxically as at once the other and akin to his Jewish identity. The alterity, or the otherness of wild savage people beyond European civilization also reflected the condition of the lost Israelites. One account of a savage people in *The Itinerary*, that of the Vlachs or the Wallachians, characterizes them as a rapacious people whom no one can defeat. Yet they regard Jews as their kin, even though they are entirely faithless and lawless:

The nation called Wallachians live in those mountains. They are as swift as hinds, and they sweep down from the mountains to despoil and ravage the land of Greece. No man can go up and do battle against them, and no

king can rule over them. They do not hold fast to the faith of the Nazarenes, but give themselves Jewish names. Some people say that they are Jews and, in fact, they call the Jews their brethren, and when they meet with them, though they rob them, they refrain from killing them as they kill the Greeks. They are altogether lawless. (68)

Purhcas' 1625 version of *The Itinerary* also confirms this idea that the savage people claim kinship to the Jews, even when they themselves adhere to no institutional religion or faith:

many among them are called by Iewish names; and boast that they were sometime *Iewes*, and call the *Iewes* their Brethren, whom when they finde, they vse surely to spoyle them, but kill them not, as they doe the *Graecians*; Lastly, I obserued no forme of *Religion* among them. (vol. 2, 1441)

There are other accounts as well in *The Itinerary*, where rapacious lawless people are particular friends to local Jews. If they are not Jews themselves, such people are portrayed as friends and allies of the Jewish people. While the Druze and the Assassins were historically heterodox sects of Islam, Benjamin describes them as wild peoples who subscribe to no institutional religion. The Druze practice incest, mass sexual orgy, and believe in the reincarnation of the soul (78). The Assassins “do not believe in the religion of Islam, but follow one of their own folk, whom they regard as their prophet, and all that he tells them to do they carry out, whether for death or life” (76). Wild peoples such as these in *The Itinerary* are consistently described as friendly to Jews. And together with Jews east of Europe, these peoples challenge the hegemony of an empire such as Persia. Besides their not subscribing to institutional religion, these peoples' remote distance from civilization and geographical isolation in the wildest parts of the earth are a powerful sign, in *The Itinerary*, of their freedom from hegemonic powers such as Persia and Greece.

For Benjamin, the Lost Tribes represented his own people, and yet these were people who were totally unknown and alien to him. They lived in remote areas of the world, and their alleged existence depended, discursively, on the idea that they were beyond the reach of civilization. Because the Lost Tribes of Israel had not been living among any part of the known civilized world and yet Europeans believed in their survival and existence, their conditions were beyond the reach of the civilized order and, therefore, were unknown, except through reportage. In *The Itinerary*, rabbi Benjamin tacitly admitted that the Ten Tribes were an unknown to civilization and therefore, would, plausibly, challenge the European sense of order, hierarchy, and power relations. For the medieval traveler and writer, the condition of being “lost,” then, easily correlated with the condition of savagery. In *The Itinerary* there was always a potential confusion between and conflation of—a lost Hebrew and a wild savage. Benjamin suggests that wild people are not altogether bad, for they are fiercely independent, free, and friendly to Jews. Implicitly, Benjamin also suggests, civilized people are not altogether good, for they represent the hegemonic powers and oppressive forces that always threaten these savages and their Jewish allies.

The stories of savage peoples in *The Itinerary* pointed to parallels between their condition and that of lost Israelites, and Menasseh ben Israel’s focus on the story of Antonio Montezinos, modeled after that of the twelfth-century account, was to call attention to the world Jewry in the seventeenth century. English enthusiasts for Montezinos’ identification of Indians as lost Hebrews, however, led the discussion of his story in the direction of native Americans. Thomas Thorowgood’s *Jews in America*, first published in 1650, is a major example of the philo-Semitic effort to use Montezinos’ story as the basis for missionary outreach to native Americans in New England in the middle of the seventeenth century. Where Menasseh ben Israel focused on Montezinos’ story in order to call attention to Jewish identity and the situation of the Jewish people in different parts of the world, Thorowgood’s

pamphlet identified native Americans as Jews as a way to promote interest in indigenous people, their culture, and their condition. First published in London in 1650, *Jews in America* provided a major, philo-Semitic basis for the conversion of Indians. Citing Bartolomé Las Casas, a sixteenth-century Dominican priest from Spain who documented, exposed, and condemned Spanish colonists' atrocities in the Americas, Thorowgood in *Jews in America* argued that the English should counter the "Black Legend" of Spanish imperial oppression and reach out to Indians in the spirit of tolerance and fairness and should persuade rather than force Indians to convert to Christianity. By identifying Indians as Jews, moreover, Thorowgood emphasized that their conversion to Christianity was an urgent matter, as the Second Coming drew near (1650: 20-26).

The myth of Indian Hebrews found a full-fledged discursive elaboration in Thorowgood's *Jews in America*, a work from an English Protestant perspective. Even while identifying lost Israelites as indigenous people, Jewish writers from Benjamin of Tudela to Menasseh ben Israel avoided specifying in concrete terms, the link between "Jewishness" and "Indianness," or "Jewishness" and "native identity." They hesitated to pin the meaning of Jewish identity and savageness down to a certain set of characteristics or a certain cultural discourse. While they asked readers to take claims about the existence and whereabouts of the Lost Tribes of Israel seriously, they suggested *reportage*—claim and hearsay, and drew the line at empirical certainty and systematic verification. They probably understood that doing so would encourage a simple-minded—and in this sense stereotypical—understanding of what it meant to be Jewish. Ironically, a Protestant writer such as Thorowgood saw no problem locating the meaning of Jewishness in a concrete set of cultural characteristics and practices, even though he undoubtedly knew very few Jews, if any. He compensated for such ignorance by accepting the Hebrew bible as *the* authoritative source of all things Jewish.

The English Protestant writer provided numerous examples of how native Americans' everyday life confirmed their Jewish identity. Native Americans anointed their heads, as did Jews. They liked to bathe and did so frequently, as did Jews. The books of Exodus and 1 Samuel mentioned Jews dancing, and therefore the Indians' fondness for dancing was a sign of their Jewishness. Thorowgood observed that abstaining from eating pork was a practice that both Indians and Jews shared: "In America they eate no swine's flesh its hatefull to them, as it was among the *Jews*. (1650: 7)" Hospitable behavior, including the washing of strangers' feet, was another trait that both groups had in common. A rather peculiar observation in *Jews in America* was that Jews and Indians, especially women, liked to weep (1650: 10).

According to Thorowgood, the delivery of babies seemed a smooth, easy task for Indian mothers, as it was for Jewish mothers in Exodus. Like Jewish mothers, Indian mothers washed their newborn. Moreover, both Jews and native American women were such attentive mothers: "They nurse their owne children, even the Queenes in Peru, and so did the mothers in Israel." Thorowgood observed that Jews and Indians circumcised their males and isolated menstruating women. Similarly, Jews and Indians practiced endogamous and levirate marriages. To suggest that Jews and Indians were ready for conversion to Christianity, Thorowgood emphasized that both peoples believed in the immortality of the soul and that Indians were ready for the monotheistic worship practiced by Jews (1650: 8, 10).

In order to promote missionary outreach to native Americans in New England, however, Thorowgood engaged in spectacular feats of logic-twisting. For instance, he claimed that cannibalism was common among native Americans and Jews. Indeed, he suggested that Indians were Jews *precisely* because they practiced cannibalism, even though cannibalism was strictly forbidden in the Hebrew bible. The fact that cannibalism was a curse for Jews did not bother him at all:

Among the curses threatened to Israel upon their disobedience, wee read, *Levit. 26.29. Yee shall eat the flesh of your sonnes and of your Daughters, etc. . . .* the Prophet *Ezekiel*, that lived about the same time, speaks in the future tense of some new, and till then unheard-of calamity, but such as should bee common afterward; *I will doe in thee that I never did before, for in the midst of thee the Fathers shall eat their sons, and the Sons their Fathers, etc. Ezek. 5.9, 10.* (1650: 17)

Eagerly, Thorowgood seized upon an historical event when a Jew might have committed cannibalism (but not for that purpose). He referred to Jewish historian Josephus' account of the siege of Masada, a first-century historical event in which Jewish rebels who took the fortress of Masada subsequently committed suicide within when besieged by Roman soldiers without. In particular, Thorowgood called attention to a Jewish woman:

Before indeed, and at the Romans beleaguering *Ierusalem*, Women did eat their Children, but there is no relation of Fathers and Sonnes devouring one another, though this be foretold, and as a thing easily to bee taken notice of, *Iosephus* in that last siege tells but of one Woman eating her childe, and 'tis like there was no other, because the whole City was astonish'd at the newes, and the seditious themselves did abhorre it; yea and when the Romans heard thereof in their Campe, it exceeded credit at first, and their Generall comforted himselfe against that most inhumane and hideous fact, by remembering he had often proffered them peace, and they had as often refused it. (1650: 17-18)

Even while acknowledging that Masada was an historical exception, Thorowgood saw cannibalism as a means of marking Jews.

The ironic point about Thorowgood's discussion of Masada is that the Roman perspective, that of the colonial aggressors, ended up exemplifying civilization. By calling attention to the Roman general's offer of a peaceful surrender, Thorowgood suggested that Jews were indeed "inhumane" to such an extent that they practiced

cannibalism at the expense of “peace.” For Thorowgood, native Americans were living proof of the curse upon the Jews: “we shall soone find the accomplishment of that Prophecie from Heaven, for there be Canniballs and Man-eaters in great multitudes; some whose trade in *Homo cupium*, & *Homo capium*, hungring and hunting after Mans flesh, and devouring it, whose greedy bellies have buried Millions of them, these Carybes are scattered all the Country over” (1650: 18).

III. Absent Jews and Vanishing Indians in the English Trans-Atlantic

Accounts of lost Israelites and savages beyond known civilization in *The Itinerary* fascinated Anglophone readers in an early modern Western world of philo-Semitism and colonial expansion. What *The Itinerary* offered to readers was a paradoxical idea: the unknown can be known; people who represent pure alterity to us, that is, the other, can be part of us. In the case of Protestant England, such an idea applied powerfully to Jews, absent since 1290, and Indians, newly encountered since the discovery of the Americas. Most English people in the seventeenth century had little acquaintance of Jews as real people, actual individuals. Knowing little about Jews in the first place, early modern English Protestants’ identification of Indians as Jews, as can be seen in Thorowgood’s *Jews in America*, enhanced hyped up fantasy as a means of getting to know alien peoples and communities. Fiction, not material reality, powerfully advanced the progressive ideas of Jewish re-admission, peaceful outreach to native Americans, and above all, toleration of people different than English Protestants.

The idea that people absolutely alien to you can be part of you and can play a favorable role or function in your life is all very nice when you don’t live near them nor do you interact much with them. It is a much tougher challenge to feel favorable towards the

other, towards people perceived as fundamentally different than you are, when you live near them and cannot avoid interacting with them. The case of Jews, long gone from England, and that of the native Americans, living in the distant North American colonies overseas, belonged to the former scenario for the English in the seventeenth century. The English trans-Atlantic in the seventeenth century facilitated a “virtual” exchange of discussions about Jews and Indians traversing distances in time and space. Seventeenth-century philo-Semitic English writers advanced the cause of Jewish re-admission when few Jews lived in England and they did not know Jews as living cultures and historical communities in Europe. Rather, they projected onto Jewish identity ideas that had favorable implications for their own Protestant faith. Such writers wanted to redress the wrong of the expulsion of 1290 and distinguish themselves from Catholics, particularly the Spaniards, because of their association with the “Black Legend,” the stereotype, promoted by Protestants citing Las Casas, of Spain as the perpetrator of atrocities against natives in the Americas. In the seventeenth century, the bulk of the support for missionary outreach to the native Americans came from overseas in England. The romantic fiction of Indian as Hebrew sustained English interest in Indians and their condition in the North American colonies. For Puritan missionaries in North America, the dissemination of such a fiction in writing meant continued material support from England for their work with the indigenous people.

The endeavor of John Eliot, the English Puritan minister and emigrant to the Massachusetts Bay Colony who proselytized to the Indians while also working to preserve their native culture and maintain a peaceful English co-existence with them, is a case in point. As the New England Company, or the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England, founded in 1649 upon an act of the English parliament, sought to raise funds in Old England for missionary undertaking in New England, Eliot and his supporters encouraged the fiction of Indians as lost Israelites to

hype up more enthusiasm for their cause. Eliot did so by showing open support for the 1660 edition of Thorowgood's *Jews in America*. In his letter to the author in the pamphlet, he directly pointed to the financial connection between his outreach project to Indians and Thorowgood's identification of native Americans as Jews:

Your singular love in promoting my encouragement in this *Indian* work by that liberal contribution of those Noble and Religious Knights, Ladies, and Gentlemen, doth much engage me in such an opportune season, so that I cannot but see and acknowledge a Divine hand in it, and in my prayers to the Lord about these matters, my thanksgiving for that mercy hath a chief room and remembrance, especially by reason of that divine finger of Gods providence which appeared in it: I do earnestly request that my service and humble thanks may be presented to all those Honorable, Christian, and worthy Persons contributors unto this bountiful gift and love. (1660: 3)

Eliot acknowledged Thorowgood's active support for his missionary effort in Indian communities in New England, and he was profuse in his gratitude for the economic resources that came from England for his religious project in the colony. The trans-Atlantic exchange of economic resources and the fiction of *reportage* between England and its North American colony formed the basis of the missionary enterprise. Material support solicited from England drove the active outreach, and reportage on Indians and their condition as Jewish and ideal potential converts sent from North America prompted even more support in return. The overall trans-Atlantic enterprise fed on the popularization of a myth of Jewish Indians.

Thorowgood's conclusion that Jews and Indians shared a common "inhumanity" and "savagery" as cursed cannibals was an English Protestant's inversion of the medieval travel writer's views, however. Rhetorically, Benjamin of Tudela's favorable accounts of wild peoples in the east who refused to submit to hegemonic

powers such as Persia and challenged institutional religion such as Islam celebrated savagery as a form of liberation and suggested that major civilizations were oppressive. Where the medieval Jewish traveler romanticized “savagery” as a reflection of freedom from the hegemony of dominant cultures, an English Protestant such as Thorowgood built up the fiction of Jewish indigenous identity in order to legitimate the assimilation of the other into Western Christendom.

The spatial distance between Old England and New, and the temporal distance between England in 1650 and England in 1290 sustained fiction that shaped English people’s sense of their past and future. When it came to dealing with Jews and Indians in practice, however, the English did not always pass the standard of toleration that they had set for themselves in discourse, and in some cases they failed miserably. The campaign to re-admit Jews ended inconclusively in 1655, and after that Jewish immigration began to trickle into England slowly, without any official promise of protection to Jews and their way of life in the country (Katz, 1982: 229, 233-234). From then on the English government practiced an early modern equivalent of the don’t-ask-don’t-tell policy towards Jews who moved to their country. Discursively, philo-Semitic toleration, friendliness towards Indians developed, and the missionary campaigns in the colonies fed on English finance and established themselves as organizations. On the ground, however, the presence of Jews in England remained sparse after 1655, and Indians were increasingly becoming an endangered species in the colonies despite the well-meaning efforts of a minister like John Eliot.

While Eliot remained steadfast in his outreach to native Americans, the history of English encounter and interaction with the indigenous communities in New England, as is historically well-known, was marked by a series of violent conflicts, beginning with the Pequot War in the 1630’s and culminating in King Philip’s

War in the 1670's.⁵ The English in London might think of the Indian as an exotic romantic figure who should be fairly treated and converted peacefully to their religion, but the Puritans in New England, living in close proximity to the other was a condition of constant insecurity and threat. As historian Jill Lepore has suggested, it was precisely the civilizing influence of Christianity on the indigenous population that triggered a reactionary hatred against Indians. Where in the twelfth century Benjamin of Tudela had celebrated the breakdown of the boundary between the Jewish self and the savage other, the breakdown of the boundary between English Christian and savage Indian in the gradual assimilation of native American into Protestant Christianity threatened the English colonists. Colonists expressed scorn for assimilated Indians, who were vulnerable to assaults and pressures from both the unassimilated natives and Christian colonists. As Indians rose up in King Philip's War of 1675 against the colonists in the conclusion that exclusion rather than accommodation was the name of the game in Indian-English relations, Puritans began to pun on "praying Indians," that is, Christianized Indians, as "preying Indians," revealing their deep suspicion of and sense of threat from converted Indians, precisely because of their closeness to Puritans (Lepore, 1998: 25-28, 140).

The history of books, as seen in the case of the seventeenth-century reception of *The Itinerary*, *The Hope of Israel*, and *Jews in America* in the Anglophone world, is thus a reflection of political and cultural history. Early modern English expansion in the Americas made uses of discussions about Jews and their historical situation in a way that stimulated popular interest in difference—ethnic identity and the agenda of tolerance associated with it. At the same time that it promoted the discourse of open encounter and tolerant treatment of ethnic groups such as Jews and

⁵ For accounts and analyses of seventeenth-century "Indian wars" in North American colonies such as the Pequot War and King Philip's War, see Cave (1996); Lepore (1998).

Indians, such an undertaking also based much of its project on fiction—the fiction of Indian Jews—and therefore fell prey to the colonizing logic of the civilizing influence, and a Christian one at that. In this way, the reception of *The Itinerary* in the seventeenth century is a fascinating one of the developing discourse about civilization, what it meant, and its relation to the indigenous other.

Appendix A: Early Modern Rare Books of *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*

Language(s) of the edition	Place of publication	Date of publication	Libraries where the edition is found
Latin	Antwerp	1575	Huntington, Harvard, Yale, New York Public, Newberry
Latin and Hebrew	Leiden	1633	Huntington, Harvard, Yale, New York Public
English, anthologized in the 1625 edition of Samuel Purchas' <i>Purchas His Pilgrims</i>	London	1625	John Carter Brown, Newberry
Dutch, published and bound together with <i>The Hope of Israel</i> by rabbi Menasseh ben Israel	Amsterdam	1666	John Carter Brown

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《圖德拉的班傑明之旅》，
失落的以色列人和消失的印地安人：
十七世紀跨大西洋英語世界對中古往昔之接受史

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摘 要

本篇論文探究關於猶太身分認同和以色列十個失落支派之書的歷史，在現代早期跨大西洋殖民擴張的英語世界中之接受史。其中檢視三篇文本：《圖德拉的班傑明之旅》(1173)，《以色列的希望》(1650)，以及《猶太人在美洲》(1650)。《圖德拉》是部關於一位歐洲猶太人在一一五九年到一一七二年間，向東旅遊到中國邊境地區的紀錄。在十七世紀跨大西洋的英語世界中，《圖德拉》開始被認為和《以色列的希望》及《猶太人在美洲》有關；而後兩篇作品分別為以色列人和新教作者所著，共同宣揚在地美國原住民為失落支派的想法。本論文探究為何《圖德拉》作為一部十二世紀猶太人旅遊紀錄，原本在中古基督教歐洲人中不被知悉也不被閱讀，卻在早期現代開始藉由英語被大西洋兩岸所閱讀，且被視為和講述美洲失落支派的作品有關。本論文認為，對於將種族他者視為「不同」，以及對於這種「不同」在殖民和擴張計畫中所扮演角色的歷史性理解，存在許多英文辯論和對話；而這些辯論和對話支撐了這三個論述和其在十七世紀接受度之間的連結。

關鍵詞：殖民、猶太人、美洲、失落支派、印地安人