

## **Politics and Eschatology: Reassessing the Appeal of the “Jewish Indian” Theory in England and New England in the 1650s**

For Europeans exploring the New World the task of understanding the precise identity of the natives they discovered there was a pressing one. Their existence seemed to challenge accepted theories of humanity’s geographical origins, presenting the spectre of a people whose origins appeared to undermine scriptural history.<sup>1</sup> In trying to find an explanation for Indian origins, European writers turned to scripture and ancient history, modifying existing histories of humanity’s dissemination after the flood, or viewing the Indians as the progeny of existing Eurasian people groups. Some suggested that the Indians were the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. What made this theory unique was the way in which it linked to the Christian eschatological imagination. In locating the lost tribes, writers believed that they had found the missing piece of the prophetic puzzle, preparing the way for the prophesied Jewish conversion that would usher in the millennium. It is no surprise, then, that this “Jewish Indian” theory came to prominence in England during the 1650s. Yet while the Jewish Indian theory found some support from the godly in England, in the same period it failed to have any significant impact among their co-religionists in New England. Paradoxically, the same form of millennialism which led New Englanders to hope in a widespread Jewish conversion also served to undermine the possibility of viewing the Indians as Jews. The political and eschatological logic of the prophesied Jewish restoration meant that New England eyes looked for the lost tribes to emerge in Europe or Asia at the same time as English writers saw

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<sup>1</sup> See Z. Ben-Dor Benite, *The Ten Lost Tribes: A World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); T. Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: The History of a Myth* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2002) and L.E. Huddlestone, *Origins of the American Indians: European Concepts, 1492-1729* (Austin,: University of Texas Press, 1967), 3-13.

the theory as a way of understanding why the New England experiment remained important even after the downfall of Laudianism.

The reception of the “Jewish Indian” theory offers a case study of the way in which eschatologically motivated images of the other in the early modern world could be challenged by political reality. Yet this challenge did not lead to the abandonment of the eschatology in question. Rather, it led to projections of eschatological hope on to new, more distant people groups. This article analyses this phenomenon by examining the practical problems created by the “Jewish Indian” theory. Doing so serves not only to emphasise the importance of viewing eschatological movements, throughout Christian history, within their political and geographical contexts, but also their flexibility in the face of the political challenges they faced. The logic of the form of eschatology that made the theory useful as a promotional tool for New England in the old world, paradoxically undermined its applicability in New England itself. Biblical prophecy, used as a tool by Christians striving to understand exotic others, cracked under the weight of *realpolitik*. Yet this did not break the belief. On the contrary, it proved flexible, as its focus shifted from one group of exotic others to another with relative ease.

### **Early Modern Judeo-Centrism**

Judaism held a peculiar interest for English writers. On the one hand rabbinic writings and contemporary Jewish customs recalled the historical heroics of Moses, David and Solomon, figures often read as archetypes for the individual or nation in their fight against sin

and antichrist.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the Jews could be seen as Pharisees and Christ killers; those who clung to abrogated ceremonies instead of embracing their long-awaited Messiah. Books on Jewish history, customs, and rabbinic thought – such as Thomas Godwin’s *Moses and Aaron* or John Weemes’s *Christian Synagogue* – were consistently best sellers.<sup>3</sup> This interest in Judaism was partially motivated by the fact that England had no established Jewish community. The Jewish population of England had been expelled in 1290, with a settled Jewish presence not a reality until the later 1650s.<sup>4</sup> Of course, writers such as Godwin would have come across Jewish contemporaries in the course of their travels, and many ministers and scholars were in correspondence with rabbis and Jews on the continent.<sup>5</sup> Yet the lack of a settled Jewish community in England nonetheless allowed Jews to become the focus of a number of eschatological fantasies. These developed into a particularly strong form from the early seventeenth century onwards.<sup>6</sup>

While a belief in a general end time conversion of the Jews was common, a number of writers such as Thomas Brightman (1562-1607), Henry Finch (1558-1625) and Joseph Mede (1586-1638) focused on the special role that they would play in the downfall of Antichrist. At their conversion, Jews would destroy the Ottoman Empire (“the Turk”) and occasionally papal forces as well. After this victory they would form a separate nation in Palestine, in

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<sup>2</sup> See A. Guibbory, *Christian Identity, Jews and Israel in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, OUP, 2010); T. H. Luxon, *Literal Figures: Puritan Allegory and the Reformation Crisis in Representation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Godwin’s work was especially popular. See Guibbory, *Christian Identity*, 1-26. On early modern English attitudes to Jews see also: T. M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); D. S. Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England 1603-1655* (Oxford: OUP, 1982); D. S. Katz, *The Jews in the History of England* (Oxford: OUP, 1994); J. Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> There were small settlements of Jews, mostly Spanish or Portuguese merchants, living in London and Bristol in the early seventeenth century. See below for discussions of readmission in the 1650s.

<sup>5</sup> See for example, E. Glaser, *Judaism without Jews: Philosemitism and Christian Polemic in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 30-63.

<sup>6</sup> For a general summary of this history see Katz, *Jews in the History of England*, 1-145.

fulfilment of Old Testament promises of their return.<sup>7</sup> This was often seen to constitute a visible reigning over Gentile nations, and sometimes mixed with the hope for a millennial era on earth, although this was not always the case. As this form of eschatology focused on the Jews to such a great extent, it can be labelled, in Richard Cogley's term, "Judeo-centric".<sup>8</sup>

As well as being popular in England by the 1640s, many key figures in New England held to a form of Judeo-centric eschatology. John Cotton, who was heavily influenced by the man he termed "holy Brightman", held that the Jews "shall have great power, and place, when God shall bring them in".<sup>9</sup> Both Richard Mather and his son Increase were also Judeo-centrists, with Increase writing two works on the subject.<sup>10</sup> Peter Bulkeley's classic exposition of covenant theology, *The Gospel Covenant* (1646) spent its opening twenty-two pages arguing that a physical restoration of the Jews to Palestine was a guaranteed part of God's eschatological plan.<sup>11</sup> Although this should not be taken to suggest that Judeo-centrism was *the* orthodox eschatology in either England or New England (due to the wide array of eschatological options in the period), the range of figures that held the position serves as a reminder of the complex variety of prophetic beliefs in the seventeenth century.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> On the popularity of the concept of Jewish conversion see C. Hill, "Till the Conversion of the Jews," in *Millenarianism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought 1650 -1800* ed. R. H. Popkin (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 37-64. For the idea of a Jewish restoration to the Holy Land, see R. W. Cogley, "The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Restoration of Israel in the 'Judeo-Centric' Strand of Puritan Millenarianism," *Church History* 72:2 (2003), 304-322 and A. Crome, "'The Proper and Naturall Meaning of the Prophets': The Hermeneutic Roots of Judeo-centrism in Puritan Eschatology," *Renaissance Studies* 24:5 (2010), 725-741.

<sup>8</sup> Cogley, "Fall of the Ottoman Empire," 304.

<sup>9</sup> John Cotton, "The sixth vial," in *The Powring Out of the Seven Vials: or an exposition, of the 16. chapter of the Revelation* (London, 1642), 21. The pagination in this work is reset irregularly after each vial, although the pagination for the fifth and sixth vials continues unbroken.

<sup>10</sup> *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation, Explained and Applied* (1669) and *A Dissertation Concerning the Future Conversion of the Jewish Nation* (1709).

<sup>11</sup> Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel Covenant, or The Covenant of Grace Opened* (London, 1646), 1-22.

<sup>12</sup> As Cogley notes, it is impossible to talk about "orthodox" eschatology; we should rather discuss a range of "orthodoxies". Cogley, "Fall of the Ottoman Empire," 305.

Judeo-centrism was not an aberration, or a belief stirred up in the millenarian tumult of the interregnum – it remained popular on both sides of the Atlantic well after the Restoration.<sup>13</sup>

One of the questions raised by Judeo-centric writers focused on the location of the “lost tribes” of Israel. The ten tribes that made up the northern kingdom of Israel (in contrast to the southern kingdom of Judah) were led into exile by the Assyrians in c. 722 BCE, and subsequently vanished from the historical record. The debate on their current location was not new in the seventeenth century, as the historical mystery of the tribes had intrigued Christian writers from the Church Fathers onwards.<sup>14</sup> In the mid-seventeenth century, many writers saw the return of the tribes as a vital eschatological event, as Old Testament prophecies of a return to Palestine indicated that there would be a reunion between the tribes of Judah and the tribes of Israel (e.g. Ezk. 37). Given the lateness of the apocalyptic timetable, it was believed that they would soon reveal themselves.<sup>15</sup>

The present location of the tribes, however, was uncertain. One position, as in Brightman, found the tribes located somewhere in Asia, without any detailed speculation on their location. They would return to march across the Euphrates on their way to battle the Turk, a scenario influenced by both Rev. 16 and the apocryphal book II Esdras. A second position, famously articulated by Elizabeth’s ambassador to Russia Giles Fletcher, associated

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<sup>13</sup> See W. Johnston, *Revelation Restored: The Apocalypse in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011) and A. Shear, “William Whiston’s Judeo-Christianity: Millenarianism and Christian Zionism in Early Enlightenment England,” in *Philosemitism in History*, ed. Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 93-110.

<sup>14</sup> See Ben-Dor Benite, *The Ten Lost Tribes*, 58-84 and Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel*, 1-25.

<sup>15</sup> A hope excited by the works of Thomas Brightman and Joseph Mede and encouraged by ministers. See for example the statement on the coming conversion of the Jews and discovery of the tribes in the New England Company’s tract *Strength out of Weakness* (London, 1652), affirmed by William Gouge, Edmund Calamy, Phillip Nye, William Strong and Sidrach Simpson amongst others.

the tribes with the notoriously savage Tartars. The Jews had either degenerated into the Tartars as punishment for their sins, or a number of Jews were present as a stream within the Tartars themselves.<sup>16</sup> A third view, promoted in a number of publications in England in the 1640s and 50s, was that the tribes were now present among the Native Americans.<sup>17</sup> These positions were not necessarily exclusive and usually held as “probabilities” rather than firm certainties. It was quite possible to argue that there were Jews amongst the Tartars *and* amongst Native Americans.

Neither was this third position an English novelty. It had been discussed by continental writers such as Joannes Fredericus Lumnius, Peter Martyr d’Angheira and Gilbert Genebrard and dismissed in Spain by José de Acosta and Gregorio Garcia.<sup>18</sup> Despite occasional mentions of the theory prior to the English civil wars (notably in Edward Brerewood’s 1614 *Enquiries Touching the Diversity of Languages and Religions*),<sup>19</sup> debates on the tribes in England became prominent in the mid-1640s. Discussions of the subject were aided by a series of publications of letters from New England starting in 1643 and published from 1649 under the authority of the newly formed Corporation for the Propagation of the

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<sup>16</sup> As the lost tribes were originally from the northern kingdom of Israel, they could more accurately be described as “Israelites” rather than “Jews”. Puritan writers referred to the tribes as “Jews” almost without exception. I have followed seventeenth-century convention in terming the tribes “Jewish”.

<sup>17</sup> For discussions of this idea see R. W. Cogley, “‘Some other kinde of being and condition’: The Controversy in Mid-Seventeenth-Century England over the peopling of ancient America,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 68:1 (2007), 35-56 and “The Ancestry of the American Indians: Thomas Thorowgood’s *Jewes in America* (1650) and *Jews in America* (1660),” *English Literary Renaissance* 35:2 (2005), 304-330; A. Sturgis, “Prophesies and Politics: Millenarians, Rabbis, and the Jewish Indian Theory,” *Seventeenth Century* 14 (1999), 15-23; C. Jowitt, “Radical Identities? Native Americans, Jews and the English Commonwealth,” *Seventeenth Century* 10:1 (1995) 101-119; Katz, *Philo-semitism*, 158-181; R. H. Popkin, “The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Indian Theory,” in *Menasseh ben Israel and His World*, ed. Y. Kaplan, H. Méchoulan and R. H. Popkin (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 63-82.

<sup>18</sup> Acosta felt that if the Indians were Jews, then they had degenerated in forgetting their ceremonies and law. Garcia was more open to the possibility of a Jewish-Indian link. He did not espouse one particular opinion above others. See Huddleston, *Origins*, 48-76.

<sup>19</sup> Brerewood discusses the present locations of the tribes, with a focus on the Tartar origin, and a brief discussion of the Jewish Indian theory. See Edward Brerewood, *Enquiries Touching the Diversity of Languages and Religions Through the Chiefe Parts of the World* (London, 1614), 92-112.

Gospel in New England (or New England Company).<sup>20</sup> These publications tended to follow a standard pattern. An introductory letter, written by either a prominent minister or the Company's board members collectively, would provide an English gloss on the New English news they contained. The letters themselves were from a range of clergymen. John Eliot, the Roxbury minister and "apostle to the Indians" was featured most frequently, along with Thomas Mayhew Jr. on Martha's Vineyard and Thomas Shepard. Edward Winslow's *The Glorious Progress of the Gospel Amongst the Indians in New England* (1649) was the first of these publications to explicitly address the question of the possible Jewish heritage of the tribes. Winslow, former governor of Plymouth colony, dedicated his text to parliament and urged further action in the evangelisation of the Native Americans. *Glorious Progress* also purported to answer what Winslow claimed were "two great questions": the location of the ten tribes and the identity of the natives of America.<sup>21</sup> As an eye witness of these natives in Plymouth, Winslow claimed to have "observed in the Indians there... some things enjoined in the ceremonial law of Moses". These included the separation of menstruating women, a belief in a single God, stories of a universal flood and the cultural memory of the loss of great religious knowledge once held by their ancestors.<sup>22</sup> These claims were further supported by Scottish minister John Dury's postscript to the letters. A "serious consideration" of their content had led him "to think, that there *may be at least* a remnant of the generation of Jacob in America: peradventure some of the 10 tribes dispertions [*sic*] and that these sometimes poor, now precious *Indians*... may be as the first fruits of the glorious harvest of *Israels redemption*".<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Although often described as "The Eliot Tracts", he was not the only minister to contribute. The tracts have been edited and published together – see John Eliot, *The Eliot Tracts* ed. M. P. Clark (London: Praeger, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Edward Winslow, *The Glorious Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England* (London, 1649), sig. A2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Winslow, *Glorious Progress*, sigs. A2<sup>v</sup>-A2<sup>ii</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> John Dury, "Appendix," in Winslow, *Glorious Progress*, 22-23.

Like Winslow, Dury based his hopes for a Jewish background for the Indians upon cultural similarities, expanding on Winslow's earlier list by noting that like the Jews the Native Americans held days of fasting and humiliation, tried to preserve the memory of their family lines, and made regular use of parabolic speech.<sup>24</sup> Dury detected the hand of providence in Thomas Shepard's 1647 collection of letters, *The Clear Sunshine of the Gospel Breaking Forth upon the Indians in New England*. Shepard recorded that the first scripture that Eliot had preached upon when he addressed the natives was Ezekiel 37:9-10, a text that predicted the revivifying of the "dry bones" of Israel and Judah by the breath of the Spirit.<sup>25</sup> The text was central in Judeo-centric works as it appeared to predict a literal restoration of all twelve tribes to the Holy Land. For Shepard, this was treated as an aside: "somewhat observable (though the observation bee more cheerful than deepe)".<sup>26</sup> Dury, however, viewed the story as providential: "Why may we not at least *conjecture*, that God by a special finger pointed out that text to be first opened, which immediately concerned the persons to whom it was preached?"<sup>27</sup>

Dury was involved in the publication of the most important work to examine the "Jewish Indian" theory, Norfolk minister and Westminster Assembly member Thomas Thorowgood's 1650 *Iewes in America*. Begun in the late 1630s and worked on throughout the following decade, Thorowgood's work was a detailed defence of the Jewish Indian theory. *Iewes in America* was a thorough examination of the supposed resemblances between the Native Americans and the Jews. These were combined with a focus on linguistic similarities

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<sup>24</sup> Dury, "Appendix," in Winslow, *Glorious Progress*, 22-25.

<sup>25</sup> For Kristina Bross this text also serves as the "governing metaphor" of missionary activity, particularly for John Eliot (K. Bross, *Dry Bones and Indian Sermons: Praying Indians in Colonial America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004)41).

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Shepard, *The Clear Sunshine of the Gospel Breaking Forth Upon the Indians in New England* (London, 1647), 33.

<sup>27</sup> Dury, "Appendix," in Winslow, *Glorious Progress*, 23.



between native languages and Hebrew, an extended examination of the use of circumcision, and the admitted “paradox” that instances of cannibalism were in line with the curses threatened to the Jews in Deuteronomy 28:53.<sup>28</sup> The book was prefaced by Dury, who had been sent a copy in manuscript. Although admitting that the work initially appeared “incredible, ridiculous and extravagant, strang [*sic*] and unlikely” after reading the relevant scriptures Dury was convinced of the probability of Thorowgood’s theory and urged him to publish it.<sup>29</sup> The text was reissued unchanged in 1652 as *Digitus Dei: New Discoveryes*, which may attest either to the work’s popularity or to slow sales.<sup>30</sup>

Thorowgood’s next publication, a 1660 text also entitled *Jews in America* (despite being an entirely new work), attempted to defend his earlier book from the censure it received, most notably in Hamon l’Estrange’s 1651 *Americans no Iewes*. l’Estrange’s criticism was based on what he felt was Thorowgood’s faulty methodology in looking for cultural similarities between Native Americans and Jews. Some of the claims in *Jewes in America* were thus simply incorrect – Native Americans commonly worshipped many gods, circumcision was not common among them, and so on.<sup>31</sup> In rebutting l’Estrange’s claims Thorowgood returned again to the grounds of cultural resemblances to prove the connection between Native Americans and Jews.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Thorowgood, *Jewes in America* (London, 1650), 1-44.

<sup>29</sup> John Dury, “An Epistolicall Discourse Of Mr. *JOHN DURY*, TO Mr. *THOROWGOOD*,” in Thorowgood, *Jewes in America* (1650), sigs. D3v-D3<sup>1</sup>r.

<sup>30</sup> Sturgis claims a wide popularity for the work; Cogley, however, believes *Digitus Dei* to be the remainder of the 1650 print run with a new title page to generate interest and sell unsold stock.

<sup>31</sup> Hamon l’Estrange, *Americans no Iewes, or Improbabilities that the Americans are of that Race* (London, 1651), 66.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Thorowgood, *Jews in America, or Probabilities, that those Indians are Judaical, Made More Probable by Some Additional to the Former Conjectures* (London, 1660), 4.

Thorowgood's work is also notable for featuring the first English publication of a work by Portuguese-Dutch rabbi Menasseh ben Israel. Dury and fellow minister Nathaniel Homes had written to the rabbi seeking answers on the question of the location of the tribes. Ben Israel supported the idea that, as well as being hidden in Asia, Jews were present in South America, although he argued that they had kept themselves separate from the natives there and continued to follow the Mosaic laws.<sup>33</sup> Winslow had first mentioned Ben Israel in *The Glorious Progress*, "a great Dr. of the Jewes" in correspondence with "a Godly minister of this city" (either Homes or Dury). When asked about the location of the tribes, he had replied "that they were certainly transported into America, and that they had infallible tokens of their being there".<sup>34</sup> The rabbi confirmed these views through writing a pamphlet, *Spes Israelis*, and by sending Dury a French translation of the remarkable story of Antonio Montezinos which was translated into English and attached to the end of Thorowgood's *Iewes in America* (1650).<sup>35</sup> Montezinos was a Portuguese *converso* who claimed that natives had introduced him to a tribe who spoke Hebrew and recited the *shema*. They kept themselves completely separate from the natives, and expected a time when "these sonnes of *Israel* shall goe out of their habitations, and shall become Lords of all the earth as it was theirs before".<sup>36</sup> The account was reprinted in Moses Wall's translation of *Spes Israelis*, *The Hope of Israel* published in 1650 and subsequent editions of 1651 and 1652. Along with the account of Montezinos's encounter, Ben Israel argued for links between Jews and Indians in terms similar to those used by Winslow, Dury and Thorowgood: "for he that will compare the lawes and customs of the Indians and the Hebrews together, shall find them agree in many

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<sup>33</sup> Popkin makes this point forcefully (Popkin, "Jewish Indian Theory", 68-71).

<sup>34</sup> Winslow, *Glorious Progress*, sig. A2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> John Dury, "Discourse" in Thorowgood, *Iewes in America* (1650), sig. e2r. Thorowgood's work was the first to print a translation of Montezinos's report, taken from Menasseh's French copy and translated by Dury. See "The Relation of Master Antonie Monterinos, translated out of the French copie sent by MANASSEH BEN ISRAEL," in Thorowgood, *Iewes in America* (1650), 129-139.

<sup>36</sup> Menasseh ben Israel, "The Relation of Master Antonie Monterinos," in Thorowgood, *Iewes in America* (1650), 136.

things”.<sup>37</sup> As Richard Cogley points out, for Ben Israel there was no sense in which the natives were holding on to barely remembered Jewish rituals.<sup>38</sup> Instead, “the *Indians* borrowed those of the *Hebrews* (who lived among them) before, or after, they went to the unknown mountains”.<sup>39</sup> To these proofs, Ben Israel added the familiar categories of etymology, ancient ruins which resembled synagogues, and the prevalence of circumcision.<sup>40</sup>

As Amy Sturgis has noted, the Jewish Indian theory could be put to practical political uses. Dury, Ben Israel and Thorowgood were all working together to create a political platform through which the readmission of the Jews to England might be possible, despite clear differences between them.<sup>41</sup> The works on the tribes were also used as a way to critique or support Cromwell’s foreign policy or to justify (or undermine) the New England plantation in the eyes of English readers.<sup>42</sup> Yet while the theory was flexible in England, it suffered what Michael Hoberman has referred to as a “remarkable” rejection in New England.<sup>43</sup> It is here that the influence of Judeo-centric eschatology combined with the political challenges faced by New England settlers to lead to very different reactions to the theory, even amongst those who held to the same eschatological positions. Ironically, it was the logic of Judeo-centric millennialism which led to this contrasting reception.

### **Contrasting Receptions**

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<sup>37</sup> Menasseh ben Israel, *The Hope of Israel* (London, 1650), 25.

<sup>38</sup> Cogley, “Controversy”, 38.

<sup>39</sup> ben Israel, *Hope*, 25.

<sup>40</sup> ben Israel, *Hope*, 1-36. It is worth noting that several elements of Montezinos’s story were certainly true: there are records of his imprisonment by the Inquisition in South America, and he did explore the Andes.

<sup>41</sup> Ben Israel was driven by both messianic hopes and the economic concerns of merchants in the Amsterdam community. The Christian writers hoped that the Jews would convert to Christianity. See Sturgis, “Prophecies and Politics,” 17-18.

<sup>42</sup> Jowitt, “Radical Identities,” 15-23.

<sup>43</sup> M. Hoberman, *New England/New Israel: Jews and Puritans in Early America* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 16.

Many writers had speculated that the period 1650-1660 would be a crucial time for the calling of the Jews. Brightman had suggested 1650 as the key year, leading Thomas Shepard to frame missionary activity in America in eschatological terms. “If Mr *Brightmans* interpretation of *Daniels* prophesie be true, that anno 1650 Europe will hear some of the best tidings that ever came into world *viz.* rumors from the Easterne Jews...I shall hope that these Westernne *Indians* will soon come in”.<sup>44</sup> Alternative calculations of the numbers in Daniel and Revelation, as well as popular apocalyptic (and kabbalistic) speculation, pointed towards 1656.<sup>45</sup> In 1653, Eliot reaffirmed his belief that the calling of the Jews was near as a result of recent political changes in England and religious progress in New England. He now hoped that “the Jewes (yea all Israel) and of the Gentiles also over all the world” would soon convert.<sup>46</sup> Joseph Caryl’s introduction to Eliot’s 1655 report reminded readers that they “may now see and test the fruit of those prophecies which ye have been helping to the birth: the wilderness and solitary places are glad, the desert rejoyceth and blossometh”.<sup>47</sup> The majority of writers did not believe that the Jews would be converted through a period of slow evangelisation. Instead, they tended to accept Joseph Mede’s conviction that the conversion of the Jews would follow the model of St. Paul’s awakening on the Damascus Road. This was to be a sudden and miraculous conversion: in William Strong’s words an “appearance of Christ in the clouds for the conversion of the Iewes”.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Shepard, *Clear Sun-Shine*, 30.

<sup>45</sup> The flood had occurred 1656 years after creation; similar events were expected 1656 years after Christ’s birth. See for example John Archer, *The Personall Reign of Christ upon Earth* (London, 1642), 52-53; John Tillinghast, *Generation-work* (London, 1654), 51; Samuel Hartlib, *Clavis Apocalyptica, or, The Revelation Revealed* (London, 1651). See also Katz, *Philo-semitism*, 89-126.

<sup>46</sup> John Eliot, *Teares of Repentance, or a Further Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel Amongst the Indians in New England* (London, 1653), sig. Bv.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Caryl in John Eliot, *A Late and Further Manifestation of the Progress of the Gospel Amongst the Indians in New England* (London, 1655), sig. Av.

<sup>48</sup> William Strong, *XXXI Select Sermons* (London, 1656), 279. For more on the idea of a sudden conversion see Katz, *Philo-Semitism*, 93-100.

On the surface this sort of language appears to fit well with the pervading atmosphere of eschatological expectation that surrounded the political events of the mid-1650s. The end of the civil wars, execution of Charles, and millenarian hopes of the Barebones parliament led to an apocalyptic milieu which encompassed both more sober figures such as Dury and “radicals” such as Winstanley’s Diggers and the Fifth Monarchists.<sup>49</sup> In this atmosphere the Whitehall Conference was called in 1655 to discuss Jewish readmission into England. An event intimately bound up with Ben Israel and his friendships with Christian writers, it appeared to offer the potential of a wide ranging calling of the Jews.<sup>50</sup> While admitting Jews to England might appear a strange way of ensuring their restoration to Palestine, as the Bible predicted that Jews would be called for all corners of the earth to the Holy Land, only by readmitting them to England would their scattering be complete, and their restoration possible.<sup>51</sup>

Yet while Judeo-centrists in England and New England agreed on the centrality of a Jewish calling, the Jewish Indian theory was only promoted in England, and largely rejected in the plantation. In looking at tracts issued by the New England Company it becomes clear that the theory was not being promoted in the letters of New England divines that were (in

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<sup>49</sup> For more on this milieu see C. Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550-1682* Revised Edition (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008) and A. Hessayon, *‘Gold Tried in Fire’: The Prophet Theaurau John Tany and the English Revolution* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>50</sup> See A. Crome, “Friendship and Enmity to God and Nation: The Complexities of Jewish-Gentile Relations in the Whitehall Conference of 1655,” in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age* ed. A. Classen and M. Sandidge (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 749-777.

<sup>51</sup> Menasseh ben Israel, *To his Highness the Lord Protector* (London, 1655), sig. A3<sup>r</sup>. This should not be taken as suggesting that the case rested solely on eschatology – *To his Highness* also made a serious economic argument, including the productivity and profit Jewish communities would bring to England, and the loyalty of Jews due to their current lack of a homeland. See particularly 1-9. At the same time, Christian writers also emphasised both the eschatological and economic advantages of readmission at the Whitehall Conference called to discuss the issue in December 1655. See, for example, H. Jessey, *A narrative of the late proceedings at White-Hall concerning the Jews*, pp.8-9, These claims led to significant objections to readmission from merchants at the Conference.

theory at least) the chief selling point of these pamphlets.<sup>52</sup> The theory found its supporters in prefaces to the work, often in the face of opposition or indifference from the other side of the Atlantic. These prefaces were both resolutely devotional, but also commercial. One purpose of these tracts was to publicise American missionary efforts, a central justification for the planation (the seal of the New England Company portrayed an Indian imploring Christians, in words taken from the Macedonians in Acts 16:9, to “Come over and help us”).<sup>53</sup> But the primary reason for printing the letters was to attract donations for the Company’s evangelisation in New England.<sup>54</sup> This acts as evidence for the perceived popularity of the Jewish Indian theory – the Company clearly felt that claims that Indian evangelisation speeded the calling of the Jews would be an impetus to giving. But the theory’s absence from the letters themselves speaks of New England ambivalence. As Kristina Bross has noted, New England divines were willing to allow such publications to “feed the religious fantasies of metropolitan supporters” even when “openly skeptical about the Christian Indians’ Jewish origins”.<sup>55</sup> Where English writers imagined a conversion of the Jews beginning in New England, as Jeffrey K. Jue has pointed out, Massachusetts writers looked for key apocalyptic events to occur in Europe or Asia.<sup>56</sup>

For English writers, the Jewish Indian theory offered an opportunity to solve some of the pressing problems of settler-native relations. While Joseph Mede’s theory that Native

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<sup>52</sup> See Bross, *Dry Bones*, 28-51. Those taking a contrary position include Popkin, “Jewish Indian Theory,” 68-72 and Parfitt, *Lost Tribes*, 77-80.

<sup>53</sup> Bross, *Dry Bones*, 1-27.

<sup>54</sup> L. Gregerson, “The Commonwealth of the Word: New England, Old England, and the Praying Indians” in *Empires of God: Religious Encounters in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) ed. S. Juster and L. Gregerson, 73-75.

<sup>55</sup> K. Bross, “From London to Nonantum: Mission Literature in the Transatlantic World” in *Empires of God: Religious Encounters in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) ed. S. Juster and L. Gregerson, 136. The example Bross uses is Thomas Shepard. On his opinion see above,

<sup>56</sup> J. K. Jue, *Heaven Upon Earth: Joseph Mede (1586-1638) and the Legacy of Millenarianism* (Dordrecht, 2006); “Puritan millenarianism in Old and New England,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. J. Coffey and P. C. H. Lim (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 270-1. See also N. Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1876* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 24-30.

Americans were a people led into America by Satan to constitute the hordes of Gog and Magog (adopted from Spanish thinkers such as Juan de Torquemada) was not widely accepted in England,<sup>57</sup> writers were nonetheless aware of the difficulties presented by evangelising the Indians. As Thorowgood noted, an important need “if wee meane the Indians shall be Gospellized,” was that “they must first be civilized... weaned from idlenesse, and hunting, and nakednesse, they must be persuaded to labour, planting, learning, arts, and manufacture”.<sup>58</sup> The theory suggested that the long process of “civilizing” the Indians could be significantly speeded up when their Jewish roots were recognised. This would have tangible benefits. Among English commentators, the natives were infamous for their aversion to “labour”, a term that connoted settled agricultural or handicraft production, in opposition to native practices of migration and hunting.<sup>59</sup> Here, the “Jewish Indian” theory offered two advantages. On one level, as the Jews were famed for their trading abilities, the theory allowed its English proponents to imagine that the natives might quickly become models of economic productivity. Paradoxically, however, it also allowed English writers to project an image of idealised Judaism onto the Native Americans. As Adam Sutcliffe has recently argued, Jewish success in trading was greeted with disquiet by a number of republican writers who imagined the Jews as a primarily agrarian people whose true calling was to work the land, as they had done in ancient Palestine. By imagining that the Americans were in fact Jewish, their conversion would lead to both “civilized” productivity and to their claiming the true Jewish agrarian calling.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> J. Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 104-110.

<sup>58</sup> Thorowgood, *Jewes in America* (1650), 94.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, L. M. Stevens, *The Poor Indians: British Missionaries, Native Americans, and Colonial Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 34-61; Kupperman, *Indians & English*, 142-173.

<sup>60</sup> A. Sutcliffe, “The Philosemitic Moment? Judaism and Republicanism in Seventeenth-Century European Thought,” in *Philosemitism*, ed. Karp and Sutcliffe, 67-89. He argues, for example, that James Harrington’s plan to settle Jews in Ireland in his *Oceana* (1656) was based upon a desire to see them reclaim their true agricultural background.

Yet while the “Jewish Indian” theory might have appeared to have solved some of the problems of settlement, New English writers generally rejected it. Partly this was down to their greater knowledge of Indian customs. With the exception of Winslow, who presented evidence for the theory from his own “observations”, supporters of the theory were entirely reliant on the academic works and correspondence networks they used for information. Thorowgood had never been to America, allowing him to imagine the Indians as a single, homogenous people rather than a diverse collection of tribes. This was a fact l’Estrange pointed out in his criticism of the theory: “What is used in some parts of *America*, must not be said to be the use of *America*, no more than the custome of *Gavelkind* in *Kent* may be said to be the custome of England.”<sup>61</sup> Like Thorowgood, Dury had never been to New England. Neither had Ben Israel, nor the majority involved with the publications of the New England Company. Their theories were based on the potentially dubious tales of people like Montezinos,<sup>62</sup> or speculations based on printed sources. This left them open to criticism from New Englanders. It is true that Eliot was excited when he first heard of Ben Israel’s claim to have proof of the tribes’ presence in America. Yet while the news heartened him, he was inherently sceptical. While Eliot was certainly a millenarian, Cotton Mather’s later assertion that he was an enthusiastic supporter of the “Jewish Indian” theory is not entirely correct.<sup>63</sup> In a letter of 8 July 1649, Eliot made it clear that he believed the Americans to be of Semitic,

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<sup>61</sup> l’Estrange, *Americans no Jews*, 51.

<sup>62</sup> This is not to suggest that Montezinos was unreliable or did not genuinely believe his story. His story is part of a tradition of encounters with representatives of the Ten Tribes in Jewish History (see Ben-dor Benite, *Ten Lost Tribes*, 135-138). Ronnie Perelis has linked the “hiddenness” of the Tribes with Montezinos’ attempts to come to terms with his own hidden Jewishness as a Converso in South America. See R. Perelis, ““These Indians are Jews!”: Lost Tribes, Crypto-Jews, and Jewish Self-Fashioning in Antonio de Montezinos’s *Relación* of 1644” in *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism 1500-1800* ed. R.L. Kagan and P.D. Morgan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 195-212.

<sup>63</sup> See Cotton Mather, *Life and Death of the Reverend Mr. John Eliot* (London, 1694), 89-90 and Bross, *Dry Bones*, 48-51. The same assertion is made in Huddleston, *Origins*, 134. On Eliot’s millennialism see R. W. Cogley, *John Eliot’s Mission to the Indians before King Philip’s War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999) and “John Eliot and the Origins of the American Indians”, *Early American Literature* 21:3 (1986), 210-225.



though not necessarily Jewish, origin: “these are the children of Shem as we of Japhet”.<sup>64</sup> This did not discount ben Israel’s claim that the tribes were living in hiding and separation from the Indians, an idea he was later prepared to support, but Eliot was not willing to suggest that the Indians he was then preaching to might be the Jews. In a letter of 29 December of the same year, Eliot made a reference to Ezekiel 37 “not because I have any light to persuade me these are that people there mentioned, only they be dry and scattered bones if any be in the world”.<sup>65</sup> This was a direct rejoinder to Dury’s claim that the text “immediately concerned the persons to whom it was preached”.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, Eliot allowed himself to hope that Montezinos’s tribes might still be found, recounting the tale of the recently deceased Captain Cromwell who “saw many Indians to the Southward circumcised and...was oft conversent among them and saw it with his eyes”.<sup>67</sup>

In 1660, Thorowgood published a further letter from Eliot, featuring his “Learned Conjectures... touching the Americans”, probably composed in 1653-4.<sup>68</sup> Eliot had read *Jewes in America* and was even willing to find some evidences of the tribes in America. But this had to be tempered: the most that might be said is that after the flood the sons of Joktan were sent into the East (Gen. 10). As these were grandchildren of Eber, it might be possible to claim that “fruitful *India* are *Hebrewes*, that famous civil (though idolatrous) nation of *China* are *Hebrewes*, so *Japonia* and these naked *Americans* are *Hebrewes*.”<sup>69</sup> This was merely to claim common Semitic ancestry, rather than see the Indians as Jews. Nonetheless, in the initial excitement of receiving Thorowgood’s text, Eliot was willing to suggest that

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<sup>64</sup> Eliot in Henry Whitfield, *The Light Appearing More and More Towards the Perfect Day, or a Further Discovery of the Present State of the Indians in New England* (London, 1650), 14.

<sup>65</sup> Eliot in Whitfield, *Light Appearing*, 23.

<sup>66</sup> Dury, “Appendix”, in Winslow, *Glorious Progress*, 23.

<sup>67</sup> Eliot in Whitfield, *Light Appearing*, 24.

<sup>68</sup> Clark, *Eliot Tracts*, p.34.

<sup>69</sup> Eliot, “Conjectures” in Thorowgood, *Jewes in America* (1660), 17.

while the mass of Native Americans were of “Hebrew” origins, a still-distinct group of Jews (as in Montezinos’s tribes) also existed somewhere in America. This distinct group and the Native Americans shared some linguistic similarities which might be traced to Hebrew roots.<sup>70</sup> Eliot was unique in maintaining some hope in the possible link between Indians and Jews, although even here he was measured: “being a subject not yet capable of a judgement to be passed in this case”.<sup>71</sup> By the time he wrote to Thorowgood on 16 August 1656, however, he was retracting his previous support. Although the Lord was doubtless blessing Thorowgood’s work, “your labours and letters have drawn me forth further that way, than otherwise I should have gone... give me leave to hear and observe in silence, what the Lord will teach others to say in this matter”.<sup>72</sup> As Cogley has noted, this was his final statement on the theory.<sup>73</sup>

Other New England works which addressed both the conversion of the natives and the restoration of the Jews rejected the theory. Shepard, always sceptical of the theory, had discussed the coming of the “easterne Jews”, but this was explicitly to move the location of God’s eschatological action back to the old world.<sup>74</sup> When Wilson spoke about a “seale” on the hearts of the Indians until the Jews’ conversion, he was seeing the two events as linked, but not as the same thing. This was a reference back to the inter-connected nature of the conversion referred to in Romans 11:11-22 – the “fullness of the Jews” and the “fullness of

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<sup>70</sup> Eliot, “Conjectures” in Thorowgood, *Jews in America* (1660), 19-20.

<sup>71</sup> Eliot, “Conjectures” in Thorowgood, *Jews in America* (1660), 20.

<sup>72</sup> Eliot, quoted in Thorowgood, *Jews in America* (1660), 34.

<sup>73</sup> Cogley, “John Eliot”, 220-222. Although he notes some possible allusions to the Jewish-Indian theory in late work, these are not clear.

<sup>74</sup> K. Bross, “From London to Nonantum: Mission Literature in the Transatlantic World” in *Empires of God*, 136.

the Gentiles”. For his part, Wilson believed that while it was not certain where the Americans had originated, “his reasons are most probable who thinke they are Tartars”.<sup>75</sup>

This reticence is borne out in the work of other New England writers. When Increase Mather dealt with the question of the tribes in *Israel’s Salvation*, for example, he provided a long list of possible locations. Descendants of the tribes were located in Spain, France and Africa, “while concerning Asia, that most numerous multitudes of Israelites are there... Tartaria doth abound with Israelites”.<sup>76</sup> Mather managed to give an overview of the history of both Jewish and Christian thinking on the location of the Tribes, but left one theory undiscussed – that the Tribes might now be in America. Instead, Mather made the conversion of the Tribes the precondition for the conversion of Native Americans: “when all Israel shall be saved, and then will converting work go on gloriously all the world over, even amongst Indians and Infidels”.<sup>77</sup>

Similarly, Edward Johnson’s *History of New England* (1653), penned in the plantations, constructed an idealistic image of the Jews in contradistinction to the Native Americans. While in other parts of the world Satan used “craft” to deceive the people, amongst the Indians he was able to openly exercise his power in keeping them “in a continuall slavish fear of fear”.<sup>78</sup> Eliot, Wilson and Mayhew were praised for their evangelisation of the Native Americans, but the conversions they experienced were not linked to the Jews. Instead, Johnson saw an eschatological scenario in which New England would act for Christ as “the right Wing of his Army [*sic*]” against Antichrist, while the ten tribes moved against the Ottoman Empire in the East: “Then you that brood of Mahumets shall win/ Destroy his seed ‘mongst Persians, Turkes and Moores/ And for poor Christians

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<sup>75</sup> Thomas Shepard, *The Day-Breaking if not the Sun-Rising of the Gospell with the Indians in New-England* (London, 1647), 15.

<sup>76</sup> Mather, *Israel’s Salvation*, 55-56.

<sup>77</sup> Mather, *Israel’s Salvation*, 62.

<sup>78</sup> Edward Johnson, *A History of New England: From the English Planting in the Yeere 1628 until the Yeere 1652* (London, 1653), 226.

ope the Prison doors”.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, when Shepard recorded his frustration at the paucity of Native American conversions in a letter of 11 November 1646 he wondered whether his limited success might be because “it is not yet time for God to worke”. Along with the lack of “civility” among potential converts, he argued that “till the Jewes come in, there is a seale set upon the hearts of those people”, again recognising a division between Native Americans and Jews.<sup>80</sup>

The theory was therefore used as a promotional tool in the prefaces to letters appealing for English donations, but not in the plantation itself. Why was this? It might be presumed that the opportunity to identify the natives as Jews would appeal to New Englanders, for it made New England the locus of one of the key eschatological events of the age. The reality of the situation on the ground, however, precluded this possibility. Firstly, familiarity with the Native Americans and everyday dealings with them played an important part in tempering beliefs that they may be members of the tribes. Eliot’s increasing reticence over the theory in later years, and Johnson’s comments on the “very barbarous and uncivilized” nature of the Native Americans point to some sense of these difficulties.<sup>81</sup> As Kristina Bross notes, Winslow’s cautious suggestion of the Jewish origin of the Native Americans contrasts markedly to the “breathless tone” employed by John Dury.<sup>82</sup> This was obviously a major cause for doubting the theory and should not be understated. However, the logic of Judeo-centric millenarianism, which enabled the theory to act as a promotional tool in England, also raised eschatological difficulties in New England when applied to the Native Americans. Seen in a Judeo-centric context, the idea that the Native Americans might be the

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<sup>79</sup> Johnson, *History of New England*, 235.

<sup>80</sup> Shepard, *The day-breaking*, 16.

<sup>81</sup> Johnson, *History of New England*, 224.

<sup>82</sup> Bross, “From London to Nonantum: Mission Literature in the Transatlantic World”, 128-131.

lost tribes was potentially politically disturbing. Judeo-centric writers suggested that the Jews would one day hold a mastery over the nations. “The truth is”, claimed John Cotton, “God doth by covenant, account the whole nation [of the Jews], to be a Royall nation, and promiseth the Kindomes of the world to be their dominion, and that all enemies God will sweepe them off from the face of the earth”.<sup>83</sup> Were this true of the Native Americans, then the implications were serious for life in New England, particularly in the political context of the 1640s and 50s. The claims of military might and total dominance for the tribes made the “Jewish Indian” theory potentially disturbing. The Pequot War had vividly emphasised the threat of Indian “dominion” over the English, and this danger did not pass with the end of the conflict. In 1641, for example, the Narragansett Sachem Miantonomi was attempting (unsuccessfully) to raise a pan-tribal alliance against the settlers. Tensions between tribes who increasingly felt deprived of their land and the growing numbers of settlers continued to bubble over the next thirty years, before erupting in King Philip’s War in 1676. If the natives were, in fact, the ten lost tribes, then there were two troubling conclusions for Judeo-centric New Englanders to draw. Firstly, that the fight to avoid destruction or dominance by the Indians was fruitless. If their enemies were secret Jews, then they were destined to rule over New England when they converted and reclaimed their full identity. The present polity would be reversed: the question of rightful land claims and use of resources would be settled entirely in the Indians’/Jews’ favour.

The second implication of identifying the Native Americans as the lost tribes was even more disturbing. As Cotton had noted, God would sweep the tribes’ enemies off the face of the earth, judging those who had mistreated them. Particularly in the aftermath of the Pequot war, New Englanders were unquestionably in the position of the enemies of a number

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<sup>83</sup> Cotton, “The sixth vial,” in *Powring Out*, 21.

of native tribes. That war had been marked by violence that, while not excessive by the brutal standards of seventeenth-century European warfare, served to undermine the code of combat adhered to by Native Americans, who tended to avoid attacking non-combatants.<sup>84</sup> This is not to argue that the New Englanders necessarily felt great guilt over employing the same principles of extreme warfare seen in Ireland, Germany and England itself during the civil wars.<sup>85</sup> It is, however, to suggest that if God were to punish the enemies of the Native Americans as the rediscovered tribes of Israel, then the New England plantations found themselves in an ambivalent position. To imagine the punishment that the restored tribes would pour out was to envisage the violence that had been expended in the Pequot war on a much grander scale, recalling the sometimes ghoulish descriptions of the destruction of the Turk popular in the English apocalyptic tradition.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, if John Corrigan is right in arguing that settlers justified extreme violence towards Indians by characterising them as apostates and traitors to a shared religious heritage, the “Jewish Indian” theory threatened to radically reverse this picture.<sup>87</sup> This was to imagine that New England, in finding its enemies reclassified as God’s friends, might be on the wrong side of this eschatological violence. This threatened typological representations of the plantation. When Cotton Mather recalled Miantonomi’s attempts to raise an alliance against the English, he described the Narragansett as “Amorites” assaulting the “New English Israel”.<sup>88</sup> While this kind of typology was not the dominant mode of understanding Native Americans, it remained a useful symbolic tool to resort to in times when the settlers felt threatened or were under attack. If the Native Americans were the lost tribes, however, the typology was reversed. As Judeo-centrists believed that Old Israel would rise and take power, if the Native Americans were equated

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<sup>84</sup> Kupperman, *Indians & English*, 230-235.

<sup>85</sup> For examples of this violence see John Underhill, *Newes from America* (London, 1638), 38-40.

<sup>86</sup> See N. Matar, *Islam in Britain 1558-1685* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 154-182.

<sup>87</sup> J. Corrigan, “Cosmology,” in *Religion in American History*, ed. A. Porterfield and J. Corrigan (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 43.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Kupperman, *Indians & English*, 238.

with the Jews then this had alarming implications. No longer could New Englanders view themselves as the righteous driving the Canaanites and Amorites from the land. Rather, they became the occupiers and enemies of God's true Israel. The practical political implications of the "Jewish Indian" theory were therefore deeply problematic. By placing the lost tribes safely in the East, and focusing on the Holy Land as the promised theatre of conversion, New Englanders could avoid the anxiety that identifying Native Americans with the lost tribes would cause.

These political concerns mingled with the ecclesiological implications of the "Jewish Indian" theory. The idea of a sudden, miraculous conversion of Native Americans (if they were indeed the lost tribes) was something that was difficult to reconcile with the in-depth requirements of the New England way. Firstly, this was based on a simple distrust of natives. While there was a genuine interest in Indians as trading partners and potential military allies, the relationship between planters and natives was often governed by suspicion of their true intentions. Converts, or those who chose to dwell with the English, were viewed as potentially dangerous – Indian treachery was to be expected.<sup>89</sup> If individual conversions were met with distrust, then a conversion *en masse* would be even more suspect.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, as Bross notes, the Jewish Indian theory threatened to undermine the claim that God had providentially cleared the land of its occupants through disease and natural disaster as the English arrived.<sup>91</sup> Opposition to the evangelistic work conducted by Eliot, despite the fact that it was officially supported both by the Bay colony and by parliament, was common. Criticisms included the slowness of the work, as well as a general sense that the whole

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<sup>89</sup> Kupperman, *Indians & English*, 220-228.

<sup>90</sup> For general hostility towards the missions see N. Salisbury, "Red Puritans: The 'Praying Indians' of Massachusetts Bay and John Eliot," *William and Mary Quarterly* 31:1 (1974), 27-54.

<sup>91</sup> Bross, *Dry Bones*, 30-39.

scheme was both unnecessary and a security risk. This was often coupled with a reluctance to provide funding.<sup>92</sup>

The idea of a sudden Jewish conversion also undermined the method of conversion promoted by New England churches. To fully demonstrate their salvation, a convert needed to be able to show that they had moved through distinct stages of awareness of sin and their depravity, struggles for assurance, the use of means (sermons, the word, devotional literature) to gain this assurance, and finally a sense of the reality of their union with Christ.<sup>93</sup> Eliot's missionary model was based around this understanding of salvation. It was therefore vital that the process of conversion took several logical (and often slow) steps. The Indians had first to be "civilised", settled in towns, taught to abandon their sinful cultural practices, and educated. While preaching was occurring throughout this process, native progress towards church membership and access to the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper was slow, as Eliot discovered. As early as 12 November 1648 he was already hinting at tensions over the issue: "were they but in a settled way of civility and government cohabiting together, and I caled [*sic*] to live among them, I durst freely joyne into church-fellowship amongst them".<sup>94</sup> A letter of 2 March 1649 admitted "they began to enquire after baptisme and church ordinances", at which Eliot again emphasised the importance of their settlement in "civilised" communities.<sup>95</sup> When the "praying town" of Natick was finally instituted in 1651, there was still no gathered church. A meeting at which converts had to present their conversion experiences in 1652 (both written and spoken before an assembly of elders and magistrates)

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<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Wilson, *Day-Breaking*, 15-16 and Winslow, *Glorious Progress*, sigs.A2r-v.

<sup>93</sup> S. Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 138-174.

<sup>94</sup> Eliot in Winslow, *Glorious Progress*, 12.

<sup>95</sup> Eliot in Winslow, *Glorious Progress*, 18.



proved inconclusive due to a lack of time and interpreters to verify Eliot's translation.<sup>96</sup> A church covenant was finally granted in 1660.<sup>97</sup>

The missionary methods employed by Eliot were therefore by their very nature, slow, deliberate, and focused on verifying the reality of Christ's work in an individual's life. A sudden conversion of a whole people may have been a possibility for Judeo-centrists imagining the coming of the lost tribes, now hidden in Asia, to Christ. If, however, those tribes were relocated to New England and to experience a sudden and miraculous conversion there, then the entire basis of New England ecclesiology would be undermined. The prospect of such a sudden conversion had unfortunate undertones of both antinomianism and Quakerism. As Reiner Smolinski has shown, ministers such as Eliot, John Cotton, and Increase Mather viewed the careful trying of new church members as crucial in moving the church towards an ever increasing state of millennial purity.<sup>98</sup> Ironically, if the Native Americans *were* revealed to be the lost tribes their sudden conversion would undermine the emphasis New England's ministers placed upon the gradual process trying of individual conversions in preparation for entrance into church covenant. In other words, the discovery of the tribes in New England would destabilise the very millennial system which had necessitated that they be found in the first place.

The lack of enthusiasm for the "Jewish Indian" theory in New England is mirrored in some responses to the Whitehall Conference on Jewish readmission held in London in

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<sup>96</sup> Eliot, *Tears of Repentance*, 25.

<sup>97</sup> Salisbury, "Red puritans", 51-2.

<sup>98</sup> R. Smolinski, "Caveat Emptor: Pre- and Postmillennialism in the Late Reformation Period," in *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture Vol. III: The Millenarian Turn: Millenarian Contexts of Science, Politics, and Everyday Anglo-American Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* ed. J. E. Force and R. H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Springer, 2001), 163-165.

December 1655. Amy Sturgis has correctly pointed out the political importance of the correspondence between Dury and Ben Israel as an important precursor to appealing for Jewish resettlement.<sup>99</sup> Thorowgood also broached the subject of readmission in his work, although his endorsement amounted to little more than calling for an end to the worst excesses of antisemitism.<sup>100</sup> Yet there has not been an appreciation of the way in which negative responses towards readmission, and practical attempts to imagine an England with Jewish resettlement, could take their cue from New England responses to the same questions in regards to dealing with the Native Americans. The Whitehall Conference served to shatter the image of the Jews held by many of those who had believed that a quick conversion to Christianity was inevitable once Jews were allowed to see faith practiced with as much purity as it was in England in the mid-1650s. Ben Israel's presence, in which he showed no desire to convert despite firm friendships with a number of high-profile Christians, combined with the danger of English men and women converting to Judaism, led a number of writers and participants at Whitehall to revise their positions negatively.<sup>101</sup> Among those who did so was Dury. Writing from the continent after the failure of the conference to reach any firm conclusion in early 1656,<sup>102</sup> and having seen the reality of Jewish-Gentile relations in Europe, his ideas shifted. Dury now believed that the Jews could present a threat to the nation: "they imagine themselves the only noble people in the world, and they therefore aspire to have, not onley libertie to live by themselves, but riches and power over others." This led him to consider the practicalities of readmission and missionary activities among the Jews. Firstly, it would "be expedient that they live by themselves."<sup>103</sup> Otherwise, Jews should conform to

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<sup>99</sup> Sturgis, "Prophecies and Politics", 18-20.

<sup>100</sup> "I say nothing for such their reintroduction [to England]...but when will Christians in earnest endeavour their conversion, if the name of *Jew* must be odious everlastingly?" Thorowgood, *Jewes in America* (1650), sig. A3v.

<sup>101</sup> Katz, *Philosemitism*, 190-231; Crome, "Friendship and Enmity", 749-777.

<sup>102</sup> No official decision was made. In the months following the Conference, Cromwell privately acquiesced to a request for a small synagogue and cemetery.

<sup>103</sup> John Dury, *A Case of Conscience, Whether it be Lawful to Admit Jews into a Christian Common-wealth* (London, 1656), 4-8.

English norms in cases of clothing, external practices and be compelled to attend religious instruction. MP Edward Spencer likewise suggested that one of the conditions of Jewish readmission should be mandatory religious instruction.<sup>104</sup> Those who were pushing for a more generalised readmission wrote incredulously of those who wished the Jews well “as it were by way of *Parenthesis*... excluding them [from] their companies and congregations, they seem to wish them some good, but they plainly manifest it that they would not have them enjoy it, or not amongst us.”<sup>105</sup>

The practical programme that Dury and other newly uncertain Judeo-centrists were advocating was strikingly similar to that used by Eliot in his missionary activities among the Native Americans. While the idea of a miraculous conversion of the Jews was not abandoned, England was no longer seen as its likely site.<sup>106</sup> The reality of an unconverted Jewish population in England led to writers adopting increasingly practical schemes for introducing them to Christianity. Evangelisation could only proceed through separation: the merging of cultural identities was a constant fear in both England and New England.<sup>107</sup> Both Indians and Jews were thus to be kept separate from the dominant Christian population, to receive regular Christian instruction, and have their dangerous cultural practices suppressed. Other proponents of readmission, such as the Royalist Edmund Hall, based their image of Jewish conversion on Eliot’s practice of opening a space for discussion by allowing questions after each of his native sermons. Despite disapproval of Eliot’s ecclesiology, Hall was convinced that while God was punishing England in denying preachers conversions, in New England:

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<sup>104</sup> Edward Spencer, *A Brief Epistle to the Learned Manasseh ben Israel* (London, 1652), 13-19.

<sup>105</sup> D.L., *Israels Condition and Cause Pleaded* (London, 1656), f.2v.

<sup>106</sup> J.A. de Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions 1640-1810* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1970), 20-26. The decline was not total. Whitehall delegates such as Thomas Goodwin and John Owen were also involved in the drafting of the Savoy Confession in 1658 which included references to the sudden calling of the Jews. Belief in a miraculous conversion increased after the Restoration.

<sup>107</sup> Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 13-42.

“the harvest begins to increase upon those few labourers hands”.<sup>108</sup> When the Jews came in, Hall argued, they must be given leave: “to bring in their scruples they have against Christ, and [the king] should appoint men to satisfie their doubts, give them leave... to read the New Testament, and compare Christian principles with their principles”.<sup>109</sup> Hall was also a supporter of the Jewish Indian theory, using both Ben Israel’s work and “learned Travellers [who] rationally conjectured, that those Natives in *New-England* are some of the Ten Tribes”.<sup>110</sup> The Jews, in having the advantage of literacy and “civilization”, might prove easier to convert than the Native Americans according to these writers, but fundamentally both were to be converted in the same way. These discussions provide an interesting example of the way in which ideas and practices from the plantations could be applied in the homeland – something implied in the flow of ideas, people, and correspondence in both directions across the ocean, but often difficult to illustrate with concrete examples.<sup>111</sup>

England and New England therefore shared crucial aspects of both their experiences with “outsider” groups and their attitude to eschatology in the 1650s. In New England it became impossible to imagine the Native Americans as Jews when faced with their reluctance to convert, the threat of attack, and their real (rather than imagined) cultural background. Hopes for the conversion of the Jews and the downfall of Antichrist were therefore directed back across the Atlantic. Bulkeley wrote of his conviction that the scriptures promised all twelve tribes “inhabiting againe their owne land, and their building

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<sup>108</sup> [Edmund Hall], *Manus Testium Movens* ([London], 1651), 85 misl. 89. See also K. N. Gray, “How may wee come to serve God?”: Spaces of Religious Utterances in John Eliot’s *Indian Tracts*,” *Seventeenth Century* 24:1 (2009), 74-96; Bross, *Dry Bones*, 84-111.

<sup>109</sup> [Hall], *Manus*, 99-100.

<sup>110</sup> [Edmund Hall], *Lingua Testium* (London, 1651), 8-9.

<sup>111</sup> On this see S. Hardman Moore, *Pilgrims: New World Settles and the Call of Home* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007) and C. Rahn Phillips, “Europe and the Atlantic” in, *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), ed. J.B. Greene and P. D. Morgan 249-275.

and dwelling in their owne cities".<sup>112</sup> For Cotton, the tribes were probably somewhere in China waiting to convert and pull down the Ottoman Empire.<sup>113</sup> In England, however, the idea that the tribes might be resident in America could still be held by those for whom the Native Americans remained a distant and exotic homogenous grouping. For the promoters of the New England Company, this claim was repeatedly used to solicit donations for their work. Meanwhile, the failure of the Whitehall conference caused those who had hoped that England would bring about a rapid Jewish conversion to re-evaluate their position. In doing so, some looked to New England for methods that might aid both the subjection of a non-Christian religious group, and their evangelisation. Both old and New England had to come to terms with the reality of dealing with the other in their midst. Exotic and romanticised images of this figure faded away. Yet the continued fantasy of the exotic figure, filled with eschatological hope remained – for many New Englanders, the foreign Jew; for many Englishmen, the mysterious Native Americans.

## **Conclusion**

The "Jewish Indian" theory might appear as a bizarre footnote to European interactions with native groups in America. Yet the way in which the theory developed and was employed is suggestive when examining the history both of Christian encounters with indigenous peoples and Christian relations with Jews on a wider scale. In recent work on philosemitism, Adam Shear has suggested that a focus on the restoration of the Jews to Palestine and their conversion to Christ in early modern eschatology should be seen as an

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<sup>112</sup> Bulkeley, *Gospel Covenant*, 18.

<sup>113</sup> Cotton, "The Sixth Vial" in *Powring Out*, 21.

inversion and modification of a Gavin Langmuir's "chimerical" antisemitism.<sup>114</sup> As Langmuir defines it, antisemitism projects certain negative attributes upon the Jews as an imaginary group who can then be blamed for any number of demonic actions (crucifying children, poisoning wells etc.).<sup>115</sup> In philosemitism this image shifts one hundred and eighty degrees. The Jews are imagined as future converts; as those who will exterminate the Ottoman threat and construct a godly state in Palestine. Both positions construct the Jews as an imagined group; a blank slate onto which Christian conceptions can be projected. The "Jewish Indian" theory, and its reception in New England, shows what happens when this chimerical philosemitism is complicated further by the addition of a third group – Native Americans – who have their identity erased and an imagined Jewish identity projected onto them. For English writers, this placed the natives within their sphere of understanding, serving to normalise them in terms which could be more easily comprehended. At the same time, however, it helped maintain a sense of the Native Americans as exotic and even liminal; placed on the boundary between this age and the next. For writers in New England, however, the reality of encounters with Indians and the political and ecclesiological implications of the "Jewish Indian" theory meant that it became difficult to imagine the Indians as the tribes who would eventually reign over the world. Ironically, New England writers maintained their chimerical philosemitism, imagining Jews crossing the Euphrates to destroy the Turk, at the same time that English writers were modifying their positions in response to increasing contact with Jews. Both Englishmen and New Englanders thus moved to place their hopes on distant groups that were marked by both similarity and difference; groups that were distinguished by an exotic nature but had the potential to convert and perhaps even rule over Christians.

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<sup>114</sup> Shear, "William Whiston's Judeo-Christianity", 107-110.

<sup>115</sup> G. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 311-352.

The reactions that marked the controversy over the "Jewish Indian" theory are suggestive of the challenges that continued to face Christians when encountering new people groups across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the difficulty of placing them within existing knowledge systems and the way in which eschatology could break down when faced with the reality of developing colonial life. Yet it is vital to note that this eschatological breakdown did not lead to the abandonment of prophetic belief. Rather, a form of cognitive dissonance set in, and the eschatological focus was transferred to a different people group or geographical location. Thus if the Jews who came to England in 1655 didn't fit the required eschatological template, other, more "real" Jews could be imagined in America or hidden in Tartary. Christian eschatological fantasies of Jewish conversion and restoration were flexible, and not dependent on any particular political reality. These expectations could easily be supported by (and act as supports for) favourable political circumstances, or conversely, be reworked to become a powerful hope for change in less propitious situations. As often in the history of apocalyptic speculation, as beliefs appeared to be disconfirmed, new interpretations of scripture and changing political events allowed the belief to be maintained with minor modifications.<sup>116</sup> As the chaos of the 1650s gave way to a new set of challenges in the next decades, writers across the English Atlantic maintained their eschatological hope, continuing to watch for "God's ancient people to come in, that there may be no more wrath upon the face of the earth".<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> There is a rich literature on the failure and re-interpretation of prophecy in apocalyptic movements. A good overview of the debate can be found in D. G. Tumminia and W.H. Swatos Jr (eds), *How Prophecy Lives* (Leiden: Brill, 2011),

<sup>117</sup> Cotton, "Sixth Vial," in *Powring Out*, 22.

