

JEWISH-CHRISTIAN
RELATIONS IN
THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
Studies and Documents

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The Amsterdam Millenarian Petrus Serrarius (1600–1669) and the Anglo-Dutch Circle of Philo-Judaists*

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Among those seventeenth-century Christians who showed a great open-mindedness towards Jews and Judaism the Anglo-Dutch millenarian Petrus Serrarius takes a special place. Serrarius belonged to the small group of the so-called philo-Judaists whose attitude towards the Jews was marked by deep sympathy. The writings of these philo-Judaists, the tone in which they spoke about the Jews, the activities they organised to support poor members of the Jewish nation, bespeak a sympathy which at that time was uncommon. Admittedly, thanks to several factors like the influence of the Reformation with its emphasis on the study of the Old Testament, the seventeenth century was an age in which there was an increasing open-mindedness towards Jews and Judaism. There reigned an atmosphere in which pro-Jewish views could flourish.¹

When looking at the circle of seventeenth-century philo-Judaists one gets the impression that there was one important source of inspiration for their pro-Jewish attitude: millenarianism. It is well-known that the Jews played an important role in the belief in a future millennial kingdom, their conversion to Christianity being regarded by the millenarians as the prelude to Christ's reign on earth. It is no wonder, then, that millenarians looked out anxiously for signs of this conversion. Though they believed it to be God's work to effect this great work, some millenarians thought one had to use those opportunities which God did offer to help the advancement of His counsel. So philo-Judaism has to be seen in a conversionist light, which at once indicates the limits of their pro-Jewishness: their philo-Judaism was a conditional sympathy.

Only at a fairly late stage in his life did Petrus Serrarius come to the fore as a staunch defender of millenarian and philo-Judaistic ideas.² Having been born in 1600 into a well-to-do Walloon merchant family by name of Serrurier in London, Serrarius studied at Oxford (Christ Church) from 1617 till the end of 1619. In 1620 he left England in order to study theology in Leiden as a student of the Walloon College. After a short ecclesiastical career, which came to an end in 1628 by his deposition from the ministry by the Walloon Synod – presumably because of his leaning towards mystical theology –, he devoted his studies for some time to medicine and alchemy. From 1630 onwards he lived in Amsterdam, the beloved city of mystic spiritualists and millenarians. Over the years Serrarius developed a great interest in mystical authors such as Johannes Tauler (ca. 1300–1361), the Lutheran pastor Valentin Weigel (1533–1588) and the Silesian mystic Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), being one of the early admirers of the *philosophus teutonicus* in the Dutch Republic. Leaving the path of calvinistic orthodoxy on which he had set foot during the first part of his life, Serrarius went over to the world of those who adhered to a non-confessional, personal, practical Christianity. Throughout his life mystical and theosophical thinking exerted a deep influence on him. This influence also made itself felt in his millenarian and philo-Judaistic views. These were pronounced by him for the first time in his *Assertion du règne de mille ans*, published in 1657 in answer to an anti-millenarian tract by the French theologian Moïse Amyraut. In the 1660s a fierce controversy arose between Serrarius and the Groningen Professor of Theology, Samuel Maresius, concerning the general conversion of the Jews and their return to Palestine.³ Until his death in 1669 Serrarius defended his 'holy' philo-Judaistic millenarianism with great fervour.

Enjoying great repute as a learned and devout man, Serrarius was praised highly in his own time because of his sympathetic attitude towards the Jews. According to the well-known French millenarian and pietist Jean de Labadie, who became acquainted with Serrarius in the 1660s, it was known all over Europe that Serrarius cared a great deal both for the spiritual and physical well-being of the Jews. De Labadie went so far as to compare Serrarius' sympathy for the Jews with the love of the Apostle Paul towards

them: if one felt shocked by Serrarius' religious as well as civil conversation with Jews, one only needed to remember that Saint Paul had acted in a like manner towards the Jews.⁴ Apart from De Labadie's praising words about Serrarius' pro-Jewish attitude there was also some mockery about it on the part of Samuel Maresius, by whom Serrarius was called a 'semi-Judaeus'.

Both praise and abuse are proof of the fact that Serrarius showed a more than usual openness towards the Jews of his own time. His personal contacts with prominent Jews such as Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, Rabbi Nathan Shapira, the physician Isaac de Rocamora, Spinoza, as well as with other Jews, whose names unfortunately are unknown to us, bear witness to his involvement with Jewish contemporaries. Undoubtedly these friendly relations will have exerted influence on his thinking about the Jews. This may be inferred from his writings, which are a clear expression of his millenarian philo-Judaism. From the tone in which he speaks about the Jews one senses his personal involvement with them. In moving passages he gives vent to his hope that all blessings, which are promised by the Lord to His chosen people, will become reality in the near future. He advocates the glorious return of the Jews to their ancient homeland, the restoration of the Jerusalem temple and of Levitical worship. His sympathy for the Jews goes hand in hand with fierce criticism of his fellow-Christians for persecuting and killing the Jews. Instead of showing mercy to them, the Christians have done quite the contrary, justifying their ill-treatment as the proper punishment for the Jewish rejection of Christ. But, as Serrarius points out, there will come a time in which those Christians will be treated in the same harsh way as they have treated the Jews, or maybe even worse. Here one meets with two important aspects of Serrarius' philo-Judaism: sympathy for the Jews on the one hand, criticism of his co-religionists on the other.⁵

Serrarius belonged to the small circle of philo-Judaists, whose members were mainly to be found in England and the Dutch Republic. Among its prominent representatives were John Durie, Henry Jessey, Nathaniel Homes, Samuel Hartlib, Benjamin Worsley, and John Sadler. They knew each other well and kept in close contact with each other, cooperating if necessary. John Durie, whom he had known since the early 1620s when both

studied theology at the Walloon College at Leiden, was one of Serrarius' intimate friends. Whether Serrarius and Hartlib ever met personally is not known, but they knew of each others existence since the 1630s. In later years Serrarius was one of the regular correspondents of the 'Great Intelligencer'.⁶

With Henry Jessey he was in regular correspondence. Jessey, a Saturday-Sabbatarian and an accomplished Hebrew and rabbinic scholar, was one of the most active philo-Judaistic millenarians of his day.⁷ In 1650 he published a work entitled *The Glory and Salvation of Jehuda and Israel*, tending, according to the title-page, 'towards the reconciliation of *Jews and Christians*, discovering the agreement of them both in Fundamental Grounds of Religion, especially concerning the *Messiah*, whose proper person though they deny to this day, yet, as appears by their own most antient, and most approved Authors, by evident Reduction they concenter in'.⁸ Apparently Jessey here expresses a fundamental line of thinking among the Anglo-Dutch philo-Judaists. A year before, similar thoughts had been brought forward by Durie, who maintained 'that the Christian Religion doth teach nothing, but that Truth nakedly, which of old was darkly spoken of, and believed by the chief Doctors of the Jews themselves, and from the beginning by *Moses and the Prophets*'.⁹ One also encounters such ideas in the writings of Serrarius, which may not be surprising: *The Glory and Salvation* was translated by him into Dutch. Jessey's treatise seems also to have been translated into Hebrew. That would make it one of the few works of current Christian literature to have been translated into that language during the seventeenth century.¹⁰ In the preface to his work Jessey wrote about his great admiration for Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, with whom he had begun corresponding.

Most of the members of the Anglo-Dutch philo-Judaists were in personal contact with 'the father of Judeo-Christian friendship', the Amsterdam Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel.¹¹ Jessey, Durie, Hartlib, Homes, Sadler, Worsley, Serrarius: they all were acquainted with the Rabbi, by letter or by face. When in 1655 Menasseh went over to England to plead the readmission of the Jews he met several of his English Christian pro-Jewish friends in person. Jessey was the man behind the scenes of the Whitehall Conference on the readmission of the Jews to England, held in

London in December 1655. He wrote an eye-witness report about the Conference.¹² It was as a result from Menasseh's correspondence with Durie in 1649 on the lost ten tribes of Israel that arose the Rabbi's famous *Spes Israelis* (1650), which soon was translated into English and other languages.¹³ Menasseh and Serrarius knew each other quite well. Serrarius had a great admiration for his Jewish friend of whom he spoke in terms of the highest esteem. Of course he found it greatly to be deplored that Menasseh would not believe that the Messiah had already come. On the other hand, he rejoiced at the fact that Menasseh knew of the coming kingdom of the Messiah upon earth, a fact of which, to Serrarius' deep regret, most Christians were ignorant. During the discussions between Serrarius and Menasseh, held in December 1654 at Serrarius' home, in the company of the Bohemian chiliast and philo-Judaist Paul Felgenhauer, Menasseh's views regarding the coming Fifth Monarchy came to the fore. Shortly afterwards these messianic ideas were published by him in his *Piedra Gloriosa* (1655).¹⁴

The conversion of the Jews being regarded as one of the most important events to happen before the coming of the millennium, it was only to be expected that the Anglo-Dutch philo-Judaists looked for the best means to get this conversion under way. They felt some urgency since, as they believed, this conversion would happen in the near future. Some of them dared to mention specific dates: Durie said that it would happen in 1650, or else in 1655; Jessey thought the Jews would probably be converted before 1658; Serrarius believed it would happen in the 1660s. In 1662 he informed Hartlib that he was sure the redemption of the Jews would take place soon, summing up several reasons, one of them being

That in general they [the Jews] are now fitter for mercy than ever, because they are now in an very suffering condition for wars not caused by themselves but by others.¹⁵

Moreover, he told Hartlib that lately he had heard from a Polish Jew of Cracovia,

that there they have much fasting, prayings, and humiliations of themselves for mercy and restoration from the hand of God; at which hearing I was much rejoiced and conceived a hope their redemption must be nigh.¹⁶

Whether Hartlib rejoiced, too, at reading this news is not known. This passage from Serrarius' letter was quoted by him in a letter to his friend, the Cambridge Platonist John Worthington, the editor of Joseph Mede's works, without any commentary.

Throughout the years plans were made and projects started to aid in the conversion of the Jews, in which there continued to be a close cooperation between the philo-Judaists in England and the Dutch Republic. One of their fundamental ideas was that the knowledge of Christians about Judaism had to be increased, while likewise the Jews should get to know true, that is, Protestant Christianity. For the Christians the study of the Oriental languages would be a great help to make Jewish learning available to them. It would also facilitate their communication with contemporary Jews. The Christian interest in the Oriental languages was seen by Durie as a sign of the approaching redemption of the Jews. The calling of the Jews was near, he wrote to Hartlib in 1646, 'and the many ways which are now intended for the facilitating of the studie of the Orientall languages amongs Christians is another token of the same purpose of divine Providence'.¹⁷

They looked for qualified people who could translate Hebrew books on the Jewish religion. At first the German Orientalist Johann Stephan Rittangel was thought to be a suitable person for this project. Rittangel knew both the English and Dutch philo-Judaists from his visit to England and the Dutch Republic in 1641-1642.¹⁸ Although he was an able Orientalist, Rittangel was after all discarded because of his difficult character, and they turned to the Dutch Hebraist Adam Boreel. Boreel was esteemed highly by Durie, who wrote to Hartlib that God certainly had ordained Boreel 'for some peculiar great worke in this or the future age wherin hee is to be instrumentall'.¹⁹ Boreel received help in his Hebrew studies from two Rabbis, Menasseh ben Israel and Jacob Jehuda Leon (Templo), both of them being engaged in his first edition of the Mishna (1646). Throughout the years Boreel, Durie and Hartlib kept in contact about Boreel's translations of

the Mishna. Although Boreel himself did not openly profess millenarian beliefs, so that it is to be doubted whether he was a millenarian, his work was regarded by Hartlib and Durie in a millennial, conversionist light. His translation of the Mishnayot served 'to the End that both the Common sort of Jewes might know, what the Constitution of their Religion is, and also that the learned sort of Christians upon the same discoverie, might bee able to know, how to deale with them for their Conviction'.²⁰

In 1649 Durie put forward another plan to promote the study of Oriental languages: he proposed to establish a college of Jewish studies, which would deal with Oriental languages and the mysteries of Jewish learning. One of the points of his programme was 'to advance the printing of the New Testament into those languages at easie rates, to be made common amongst the Orientals and chiefly the Jewes'.²¹ Both English and Dutch philo-Judaists were occupied with the realisation of this proposal. It was thought that the knowledge of the Jews about Christianity ought to be increased first of all by making the New Testament available to them. A good and complete Hebrew translation was needed. Several times in the seventeenth century – the age in which so many Bible translations were published – plans were made to have the New Testament translated into Hebrew, but most of them fell through. This was also the case with the plans of the Anglo-Dutch philo-Judaists. According to them there could be no greater preparation for their conversion than when the Jews could read the New Testament 'as a true History in their own Hebrew Dialect'.²² Thus there was a plan to have an improved, scriptural version of Sebastian Munster's sixteenth-century translation to be made by Palestinian Jews. In this plan Serrarius was engaged. Without doubt he was the one who in 1657 or 1658 informed Jessey 'that the New Testament in Hebrew of the translation of *Munster*, being far different from the Hebrew phrase, which is used in Scripture, is taken along to be brought to *Judea*, that it may be put in Scripture phrase, and so sent back again to *Amsterdam* to be printed'.²³ It seems, however, that no Hebrew translation was ever sent back from Jerusalem to the Amsterdam philo-Judaists.

A few years later, in 1660, Serrarius was involved in another project of the kind, for which he asked support from Durie and Hartlib. A well learned Rabbi – of unknown identity – had

presented himself to Serrarius to translate the Dutch New Testament into Hebrew 'to make it legible and intelligible unto his Nation'.²⁴ The Rabbi had heard some sermons by the Lutheran minister Justus Brau at Kampen and he had had some conversation with Brau and others, such as the Hebraist Matthias Drudius, by which he had found himself very much convinced. Brau was deeply interested in Jewish matters, being well versed in the Hebrew language.²⁵ The translation by the Rabbi had to be 'wrought out secretly in our Houses, under the Inspection of some of our Christians', Serrarius wrote to Durie.²⁶ He told him that he and his friends were about to procure a stock for that work in order to relieve the Rabbi from his poverty and to allow him an honest salary, all the while he would be at work. Furthermore, money was needed, presumably even from Jews, to have his translation printed or written out several times. Serrarius asked for financial support from Durie and his English friends: 'we shall see it well bestowed, and endeavour by it to provoke others also . . .'. It seems however, that their secret project was not successful, since no such translation was published in these years.

Besides these projects the philo-Judaists were deeply attached to another means to reach the Jewish hearts: to practise charity. One of the best means to convert the Jews was, they believed, 'to gain them through kindness'.²⁷ Regarding themselves as instruments to further the conversion of the Jews, they hoped to be instrumental by showing them love, charity, relieving them in their distress, in other words, to endeavour 'by works of Mercy to make way for better Communication in due time'.²⁸ Then the Jews would open their ears to the Gospel and they would recognize the love of Jesus in these charitable works. Thus, like their other projects, the charitable activities of the philo-Judaists were also inspired by conversionist aims.

An example of the cooperation between the English and Dutch philo-Judaists in the field of charity is the collection organized in the 1656 for the poor Jews in Palestine, in which Serrarius, Jessey, Durie and Hartlib were all actively engaged. In the 1650s Rabbi Nathan Shapira, one of the leaders of the Ashkenazi congregation in Jerusalem and a famous kabbalist, travelled through Europe to raise money for his poor congregation.²⁹ Presumably at the end

of 1656 he arrived in Amsterdam. He had been in contact with Menasseh about the situation in Palestine before, Menasseh showing Shapira's letter in London to Cromwell to strengthen the argument that the Jews needed a new place to live in.³⁰ The report about Shapira's visit is to be found in a pamphlet, edited by Jessey and/or Durie, entitled *An Information Concerning the Present State of the Jewish Nation in Europe and Judea*, consisting largely of a letter from Serrarius to Durie, written in April 1657. Obviously Serrarius and Shapira had met soon after the latter's arrival in Amsterdam and his story about the plight of the Jerusalem Jews made such an impression on Serrarius that he decided to organize a collection for Shapira's Jews. He did not limit his activities to Amsterdam but also turned to England where he engaged Jessey to raise money for the same purpose. Their attempts were successful, so that in 1656 a sum of money could be transferred to the Jerusalem Jews. The following year a letter arrived from Jerusalem, dated 22 April 1657, to thank the Christians for their gift.³¹

Some time afterwards, in March 1658, two other Rabbis from Jerusalem arrived in Amsterdam, bringing a receipt for the collection of 1656 and a letter by Shapira. On 22 March 1658 Serrarius wrote a long letter to Jessey about this visit.³² He was very much impressed by their stories about the miserable situation in Palestine. 'The Commission of these Messengers unto their fellow-Jews I saw and heard, and were much mooved by it', he told Jessey, while relating the sad events which had occurred after Rabbi Shapira's return to Jerusalem. The Rabbis said that the money Shapira had collected had just been enough to pay the interest of their capital debts and to give donations to the Turkish authorities. However, the situation in Jerusalem had not improved:

30. of their chiefe Rabins were cast in prison, the others were continually vexed, beaten and put in great distresse, all crying for monye where none was, and noe hope what way ever to get any, to satisfie these cruell exactors, who would have these remnants of Jews to pay the whole summe of all, whatever their Brethren that long since starved and dyed, remained in debt to any Turk for. Till at length it pleased God to moove the heart of the Great Turke to send to Jerusalem a new Bassa unto whom these poore distressed Jews opened their case, and humbly craved for protection against their cruell Creditors.³³

This Turk, pitying the distress of the poor Jews, sent for all the creditors and resolved to take upon himself the total sum of the debts owed by the Jews. He then made a favourable agreement with the Jews that they should pay him half of the amount they owed their creditors, without any interest. He also released the thirty prisoners; the eldest of the two Rabbis, now visiting Amsterdam, was one of them. The errand of these two messengers was to collect the amount of money to pay the Turk and so to be once free from all debts, 'henceforth never to trouble any man more but still to waite in prayers, in fasting and pious Exercises for ye Redemption of Israel'. 'I hope', Serrarius added,

that God that mooved that Turke to pittie them, will much moove the hearts of us Christians to a mercifull compassion towards this poore and once holy, now distressed people of Israel. As for mee, I will endeavour to doe my best towards my Frinds, and soe I hope you will doe.³⁴

Serrarius promised to send Shapira's writing, which at that moment was being translated, to Jessey soon. Furthermore, he would like to know whether his English friend thought it convenient to send these messengers over to England; if not, they would journey further to Hamburg. Finally, he asked him to inform Durie about this news, which Jessey did, sending Serrarius' letter on to Durie and Hartlib with a brief note:

You are desired having read this Letter to further the bountifull charity of all such as you may speak with and whose hearts the Lord shall touch to pittie the great distresse of these poore blind Jews, whom a great Turke hath soe pittied and begun to make way for their reliefe. And what you or others shall doe for the Lord's sake hereein . . . that it may be withall convenient speede, that word may be sent to Mr. P. Serarius accordingly.³⁵

Thus in 1658 a second collection was organized by the Anglo-Dutch philo-Judaists, who obviously did not like to stay behind now that the Turks showed some leniency towards the Jews. The change in the Turkish attitude was seen by these Christian mille-

narians as yet another sign of the approaching redemption of the Jews. This was one of God's extraordinary providences,

in moving both Christians and Turks to have compassion upon them, and by this means opening a dore of hope unto them to find relief, and to us an occasion to impart through love unto them the mysteries of the Gospel.³⁶

These collections for the Jews in Palestine may serve as a good illustration of the philo-Judaism of Serrarius and his friends. Time and again they pointed to the extraordinarily miserable state of contemporary Jewry; the acceptance by the Jews of support offered to them by Christians; their intention to wait in prayers and fasting for their redemption. All this was interpreted by them as signs of the imminent conversion of the Jews; their utterly miserable condition was considered to be an act of divine providence in order to soften their minds and hearts, to humble them so that they might at last embrace the Gospel:

For all these tryals in the way of providence and mercy, tend to nothing else but to bring them to a sense of their sins, that they may be cleansed from the same by repentance, and brought to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, to receive by faith the pardon thereof for his sake; whereunto we Christians should set our selves to become instrumental towards them; for now being thus humbled, and finding our love and compassion not shut up against them in their misery, their ear may be open to us to hearken without prejudice unto the Truth of our Faith and Hope.³⁷

Rabbi Shapira's views also demonstrated to the Anglo-Dutch philo-Judaists the providential way in which God was preparing the Jews to deliver them from their spiritual captivity. During conversations by Serrarius and some friends with Shapira it became apparent that his understanding of the Messiah, in which according to Shapira other Rabbis at Jerusalem concurred, was 'not so far distant from the Principles of Christianity' as Serrarius and his friends had imagined.³⁸ This was illustrated by Shapira's interpretation of Isaiah 53, the famous chapter about the suffering ser-

vant of God that was always brought up for discussion in Christian – Jewish disputes. When asked by Serrarius and his friends of whom the prophet was speaking here, Shapira had answered plainly that Isaiah spoke of the Messiah. The Rabbi developed an interesting theory about the Spirit of the Messiah, which with Adam's fall had come down from heaven to take the weight of Adam's condemnation upon himself, bearing mankind's sickness during the time of repentance granted by God, carrying our sorrows and so forth, in short, being the one described by the prophet in Isaiah 53, 4, 5.³⁹

When Serrarius had expressed his surprise about this very unusual interpretation, which differed greatly from the common Jewish non- or anti-Christian interpretations of this text (as for example by the contemporary Amsterdam Rabbi Saul Levi Mor-teira), Shapira had replied that according to the Cabbala it was most evident that this text could not be understood in any other way. Serrarius observed that to Christians cabbalistic notions were no basis of interpretation of Scripture, but that there would be no cause to object against the Jews using such notions if to them these brought forth 'true Gospel conclusions'⁴⁰; an observation which did not hinder Serrarius from using some of Shapira's cabbalistic notions in his own writings.

At any rate, he was most impressed by Shapira's pro-Christian views:

When I heard these things my bowels were inwardly stirred within me, and it seemed to me, that I did not hear a Jew, but a Christian, and a Christian of no mean understanding, who did relish the things of the Spirit, and was admitted to the inward mysteries of our Religion.⁴¹

Other examples were presented by Serrarius (e.g. Shapira's interpretation of the Sermon upon the Mount, of Malachy 3,1, and Genesis 15, 19, 20) to demonstrate the pro-Christian frame of mind of his Jewish friend. 'What do you think', he asked Durie,

Is it to be believed that Christ is far distant from a soul thus constituted? or that any such thing can be formed without Christ in a man? for my own part, I confess I think I see Christ

in his Spirit; and I cannot but love him, and those that are like him, of which he saith many are at Jerusalem: for I esteem them the true brethren of him, that is, our *Christ*, and their *Joseph* . . .⁴²

These passages are of great interest to our understanding of the underlying concepts of Serrarius' philo-Judaism. Both Shapira's theory about the Spirit of the Messiah and his own appreciation of Shapira as a man who understands the things of the Spirit and knows his way into the inward mysteries of the Christian religion are evidence of the close connection between Serrarius' mystic spiritualism and his philo-Judaism. Mystic spiritualism offered the common ground on which the reconciliation between Christians and Jews might be achieved. It served as the way by which they could meet one another. Because mystic spiritualism did not care about dogmas, ceremonies, but was wholly devoted to 'the things of the Spirit', it is not difficult to understand that its adherents could go a long way towards a meeting-ground with Judaism.

However, one obstacle remained, even to these Christians, without which no reconciliation could be accomplished: the acceptance by the Jews of Jesus Christ as the true Messiah. No wonder that they tried to do everything to remove this obstacle. The conversionist background of the philo-Judaism of the Anglo-Dutch circle was further highlighted in some letters written by Durie and Serrarius. In a long letter to Hartlib, probably written about 1661, Durie expatiated on the Jews and the means of their conversion.⁴³ The letter deals mainly with the role of the Christians in the preparation of the conversion of the Jews. Stating that he was still of the same mind as he had been long ago concerning the conversion of the Jews, namely that God would certainly bring it to pass, he emphasized that the riches of grace which the gentiles received would be one of the means to convert the Jews. Through this mercy the gentiles knew of the fundamental truth that Jesus is the Messias, a truth which they had to convey to the Jews:

it is very likely yt although some great & extraordinarie Worke will bee done by God towards them for the hastening of their Conversion at its owne time; yet yt the Gentiles who have the

knowledge of this Truth, but hitherto have obscured it, partly by Superstitions, partly by Divisions and Singularities, will be enabled by the blessing of God to hold it forth so, in the Evidence and Demonstration of the Spirit, & in the unities of the profession towards them, that they shall fully be convicted thereof.⁴⁴

He repeated what attempts should be made at converting the Jews: 'The means then to further the Jewes Conversion is to endeavour to improve this Mercy wch wee have received so, as that ye light thereof may shine unto them as well as unto the Remnant of the Gentiles who are yet in darkness'.⁴⁵

From this letter it becomes clear that Durie's lifework, the attempt to reunite the Protestant churches, was closely connected with his conversionist ideas:

I conceive then yt the Unity of the profession of this Truth amongst Protestants will be a speciall Means to helpe towards their Conversion, & yt without it God will not accomplish the same. For the Divisions & Scandals which proceed from thence, about by-matters of strife amongst Protestants, are the main Cause why this light is not manifestly held forth unto all the world, & as long as the Testimony of Jesus is not unblameably and without all occasion of rebuke made knowne unto the world, & more particularly to them, they are not like to be wrought upon by or through any mercy shewed unto us.

His irenic task was seen by him in this light:

it is cleer to mee, yt their Conversion shall be brought about by some of the Gentiles whom God wille make Instrumentall therein. And His way to make them thus Instrumentall amongst many others which shall concur, will certainly be this mercy, to make them all of One Mind in the knowledge of Christ; to speake one thing & not to be at such Divisions amongst themselves as now they are at: wch is the only advantage Satan & Antichrist hath against the Reformed Churches.⁴⁶

In the same vein Serrarius wrote to Durie in May 1660. Presumably referring to the state of the Jews in Jerusalem, Serrarius said

to consider the condition of the poor Jewish nation in their extreme poverty and distress, 'laying at our Doors and desiring our Help', a very lamentable one.⁴⁷ On the other hand, the present condition of the Christian Church 'in her extreamest Divisions and Distractions', was not much better. Therefore Serrarius found himself bound in conscience, as he told Durie, to stir up himself and others of his Christian acquaintance to take to heart this time of visitation of Christians and Jews alike:

Our Visitation, lest we, as unworthy of that noble Olive Tree, wherein by the Gospel we were ingrafted, be cut off, and cast into the Fire of God's approaching Judgment if no Fruits worthy of Christ, and of his Love towards the poor Remnant of this his long chastised People be found in us. Their Visitation, seeing the Time is drawing near, that the Lord will reduce the Captivity of his People, and revivify again the Dead, and dry Bones of the House of Jacob.⁴⁸

Although the Jews themselves thought little on such an undeserved and unexpected Grace which God was reserving for them, Serrarius proceeded, yet we Christians, knowing for certain that this would happen, ought to behave in such a way towards them, 'that they might not only hear of us, but also see in us the unmoveable Constancy of our Saviour's Love towards them, even unto this Day'. It was Serrarius' firm conviction that the Jews would not accept Christ as the true Messiah, saying 'Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord', if they had not indeed first had 'some lively and most sensible Experience of some Soul-quicking Excellency in those, that came from the Lord; which make them long for any that came in his Name'.⁴⁹

The wrongs done to the Jews by the Christians had increased the Jewish aversion to Christ. However, when they might perceive in some Christians like Serrarius and his friends the long forbearance, kindness and love of Christ towards them, surely this would make their hearts melt: 'they are not so stiff-necked but this would at length make them yield and submit'. And, Serrarius exclaimed,

What a Joy, yea, what a Glory would it be for us! what an acceptable Offering unto our Lord, to have brought down unto him his *Benjamin*, and by the Cords of his Love in us to have drawn up unto him, these his long expected and longed for, Brethren?⁵⁰

He was very happy to see the concurrence of the understanding and mind of Durie and himself in this cause. Once again it can be noted that it was these philo-Judaists' hope and conviction to provoke the Jews to love and good works by constant well-doing on the Christian side, so that 'their Evil through God's Blessing will be overcome by our Good'.⁵¹

In their expectation of the imminent conversion of the Jews they looked to national leaders who might play a role in aiding this conversion. Thus, to mention only one example, they put their hopes on king Charles II. They expected the restoration of Charles II to the English throne to be of great importance to the cause of the Jews. Serrarius told Durie that he hoped that this restoration bore 'some Shadow and Type of that Great Restitution of the Kingdom in *Israel*'.⁵² In this connection Serrarius related the story of a young student of Divinity in Amsterdam by name of Nicolaes Van Rensselaer, who in 1657 had a kind of revelation whereby he was taught that in the year 1660 King Charles would be restored to his father's throne and that under his government great things would be wrought, such as the conversion of the Jews.⁵³

In the following years, however, attention shifted from England to North Africa and the Near East, whence in September 1665 the first rumours reached Europe about the return of the lost ten tribes of *Israel* and, simultaneously, about a 'king of the Jews', Sabbatai Sevi, and his 'prophet' Nathan. These messianic tidings arrived at a time of great expectation, in Jewish and Christian circles alike, concerning the year 1666, which was generally believed to be the year in which great changes would occur. When, in 1648 (another meaningful date), had started those bloody massacres in Poland and parts of contemporary Russia, during which thousands of Jews were killed, these horrible events were seen as the birth pangs of the messianic era, which would begin in 1666. The reports about the discovery of a remnant of the ten tribes as well as about the appearance of the messianic king Sabbatai Sevi,

though at first greeted with some hesitation by European Jewish congregations, were soon to give occasion to an unbridled messianic enthusiasm among the Jews. Menasseh's *Spes Israelis* became popular again: thus the Dutch translation of this tract was reprinted twice in 1666. The Sabbatian movement, unlike any other previous Jewish messianic movement, 'shook the House of Israel to its very foundations', according to the historian of this movement, Gershom Scholem, in his voluminous book on Sabbatai Sevi.⁵⁴

The man who was more active than anyone else in spreading the first news both of the lost tribes and of Sabbatai Sevi among his fellow-Christians was Serrarius. Thanks to his good contacts with Amsterdam Jews (he surely was 'the good Christian friend, who lives here in Amsterdam in friendship with the rabbis', mentioned by a Polish correspondent⁵⁵), every rumour concerning the Jews was sure to find its way to him. He passed the news on to his friends. Durie was in Switzerland during this period and he was kept informed by Serrarius on the latest developments. In his turn Durie sent the news to his Swiss friends in Zürich, Johann Heinrich Hottinger, Professor of Oriental Languages and Church History, and Johann Jakob Ulrich, Professor of Theology.⁵⁶ Serrarius' reports were most influential in spreading the news to England. Henry Oldenburg, Robert Boyle, Nathaniel Homes, a certain Lady whose identity is unknown to us, James Fitton (a Fifth Monarchist and Jessey's successor in London), Anthony Grey (a Baptist preacher and a friend of Jessey's), Thomas Chappell (a Fifth Monarchist), a certain Mr. Bruce, and others were anxiously awaiting the news sent to them from Amsterdam by Serrarius. Some letters by Serrarius were collected and published in London as pamphlets. *The Restauration of the Jewes*, *The Last Letters to the London Merchants*, and *The Jewes Message to their Brethren in Holland*, published at the end of 1665, contain mainly the same material. In 1666 more pamphlets with reports by Serrarius came from the press: *Several New Letters Concerning the Jews*, *A New Letter, Gods Love to His People Israel*, and *The Wonder of All Christendom*.⁵⁷

The friendly relations between Serrarius and Henry Oldenburg probably came into being through common friends such as Durie – who in 1668 became the latter's father-in-law – and Boreel.

Maybe they met when in 1661 Oldenburg travelled through the Netherlands, visiting Boreel and Spinoza. Oldenburg was secretary to Robert Boyle and since 1662 he had this same function at the Royal Society. He had met Menasseh ben Israel during the latter's stay in London at the house of Boreel; one of his letters to the Rabbi concerning a French messianic treatise has been preserved. During the 1660s Serrarius was one of Oldenburg's Dutch informants and, moreover, the intermediary between him and Spinoza. Though our information about the friendship between Spinoza and Serrarius is scarce, one may infer from the correspondence between Oldenburg and Spinoza that Serrarius met the latter regularly during the 1660s. Oldenburg, who corresponded with Serrarius also about other matters such as the Turkish Bible translation and the transcription of Boreel's manuscripts, told Spinoza that whenever opportunity arose he asked Serrarius about Spinoza and his health. Oldenburg followed the 'Meccha-news' in 1665/1666 with great interest, awaiting Serrarius' letters on the subject.

As regards the 'king of the Jews', Sabbatai Sevi, Serrarius believed that he was a precursor of the true Messiah, preparing the way for the advent of Christ. Sabbatai himself was said to have asserted not to be the Messiah, but to teach the Jews 'to know the Messiah to come, which hitherto they have not known'. News of this kind was welcome to Christian circles. Thus Oldenburg wrote to Boyle that 'the pretended king . . . is said not to assume the dignity and office of the Messiah . . .'.⁵⁸ Serrarius was most impressed by the great movement of fasting and penitance among the Jews caused by the appearance of Sabbatai and his prophet. Penitance was interpreted by him as a sure sign of their conversion. He wished that his fellow-Christians might follow the example of those penitent Jews, instead of fighting with one another. In this connection he referred to the war between England and the Dutch Republic, which had started in 1665, expressing his utter indignation about it while simultaneously interpreting this war as a sign of the coming judgement on Babylon and the calling of the Jews.⁵⁹

After Sabbatai Sevi had apostatized and went over to the Islam, Serrarius belonged to those few whose sympathies were with the small Sabbatian party of whom there was a group in Amsterdam. These followers of Sabbatai believed that his apostasy was only

the fulfilment of a prophecy about the Messiah. They were sure that it was a temporary affair and that Sabbatai would return to Palestine as the king of the Jews. Serrarius supported these Sabbatians and he helped to spread news of this kind. In July 1667 he informed Oldenburg that the hope of the Jews revived more and more. They had received a report that Sabbatai was found to be 'not turned Turck, but a Jew as ever in the same hope and expectation as before'. Also tidings had arrived that the Jews of Constantinople had returned to their fasting and praying as before. Serrarius ended his letter thus:

It appears both in regard of Christians and of Jews, that Gods Worcks ever were a riddle to flesh and blood, and a stombling-block to worldly minds . . . Many will allow him [Christ] a kingdom in heaven, but not on Earth. This, they conceive, is and will remain their fashion: but other was the Expectation of the saints at all times, since they saw th'Iniquity prevailing here; and therefore they prepared themselves for an other Day in wch Justice shal prevaile. So I pray God we may doe likewise

...⁶⁰

Thus we have seen that the Anglo-Dutch philo-Judaists were in close contact with each other. The collection for the poor Jews in Jerusalem, the plans to have the New Testament translated into Hebrew, the project to erect a college for Jewish studies, the lively interest in the Sabbatian movement, all bear witness to their shared philo-Judaistic concern: the conversion of the Jews. It is well-known that in various cultural and religious fields there were many contacts between England and the Low Countries in the seventeenth century. The example of the philo-Judaistic Amsterdam millenarian Serrarius and his friends in England shows that in the philo-Judaistic movement too, however small it may have been, there were close Anglo-Dutch relations.

NOTES

- * I thank Dr. C.W. Schoneveld (Leiden) for the correction of the English text.
1. See R.H. Popkin, 'Some Aspects of Jewish-Christian Theological Interchanges in Holland and England, 1640-1700', in this volume pp. 3-32.

- For philo-Judaism and some of its most important adherents, see H.-J. Schoeps, *Philosemitismus im Barock*, Tübingen 1952.
2. For Petrus Serrarius, see E.G.E. van der Wall, *De mystieke chiliast Petrus Serrarius (1600–1669) en zijn wereld*, Leiden 1987 (diss.).
 3. See Van der Wall, *De mystieke chiliast Petrus Serrarius*, ch. 9.
 4. See De Labadie's Preface to his *Oordeel der liefde en gerechticheyt over den tegenwoordigen toestandt der joden*, 1667. On De Labadie's request this originally French treatise was translated by Serrarius into Dutch.
 5. See e.g. his *Brevis dissertatio de fatali et admiranda illa omnium planetarum conjunctione*, Amsterdam 1662, which was translated into English under the title *An Awakening Warning to the Wofull World*.
 6. See Van der Wall, *De mystieke chiliast Petrus Serrarius*, ch. 7.
 7. For Henry Jessey, see D.S. Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England 1603–1655*, Oxford 1982, *passim*; D.S. Katz, 'Philo-Semitism in the Radical Tradition: Henry Jessey, Morgan Llwyd, and Jacob Boehme', in the present volume pp. 195–200; D.S. Katz, 'Menasseh ben Israel's Christian Connection: Henry Jessey and the Jews' (forthcoming); Van der Wall, *De mystieke chiliast Petrus Serrarius*, 161–65 and *passim*.
 8. No copy of the English original version of *The Glory and Salvation of Jehudah and Israel* has been preserved. Up till now only one copy of the Dutch translation, made by Serrarius, has been found (in the Herzog August Bibliothek at Wolfenbüttel). Professor D.S. Katz and the author of the present article are preparing a publication of this treatise.
 9. See R.H. Popkin, 'The First College for Jewish Studies', *REJ* CXLIII (1984), 351–64, esp. 361.
 10. Cf. Popkin, 'The First College', 360.
 11. For Menasseh ben Israel, see C. Roth, *A Life of Menasseh ben Israel. Rabbi, Printer and Diplomat*, Philadelphia 1954; H. Méchoulan & G. Nahon, *Menasseh ben Israel. Espérance d'Israel*, Paris 1979.
 12. For the Whitehall Conference, see Katz, *Philo-Semitism*, ch. 6.
 13. See e.g. E.G.E. van der Wall, 'Three Letters by Menasseh ben Israel to John Durie. English Philo-Judaism and the *Spes Israelis*', *NAKG* 65 (1985), 46–63.
 14. On the friendly relations between Menasseh and Serrarius, see E.G.E. van der Wall, 'Petrus Serrarius (1600–1669): an Amsterdam Millenarian Friend of Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel' (forthcoming).
 15. See J. Crossley (ed.), *The Diary and Correspondence of Dr. John Worthington* II/1, 108.
 16. *Ibid.*
 17. John Durie to Samuel Hartlib, HP 3/3/32 (Sheffield University Library). I thank Lord Delamere and the Librarian of Sheffield University Library for the use of the Hartlib Papers.
 18. For Johann Stephan Rittangel, see e.g. Popkin, 'Some Aspects of Jewish-Christian Theological Interchanges', in this volume pp. 3–32; J. van den Berg, 'Proto-Protestants? The Image of the Karaites as a Mirror of the Catholic-Protestant Controversy in the 17th century', in this volume

- pp. 33–50. On his visit to Amsterdam, see P.T. van Rooden & J.W. Wesselius, 'J.S. Rittangel in Amsterdam', *NAKG* 65 (1985), 131–152; Ernestine G.E. van der Wall, 'Johann Stephan Rittangel's Stay in the Dutch Republic (1641–1642)', see below pp. 119–34.
19. E.G.E. van der Wall, "'Without Partialitie Towards All Men': John Durie on the Dutch Hebraist Adam Boreel (1646)", in this volume pp. 145–49.
 20. John Durie to Samuel Hartlib, HP 1/6/13 (University Library of Sheffield).
 21. See Popkin, 'The First College for Jewish Studies', 356.
 22. See *An Information Concerning the Present State of the Jewish Nation in Europe and Judea*, London 1658, 18.
 23. *An Information Concerning the Present State*, 17.
 24. Serrarius to John Durie, 20.V.1660, in: W. Kennett, *A Register and Chronicle Ecclesiastical and Civil I*, London 1728, 139. See also Van der Wall, *De mystieke chiliast Petrus Serrarius*, 276–77.
 25. For Justus Brau (Braw/Brauw), see C.C.G. Visser, 'Die mystisch-pietistische Strömung in der Niederländisch-Lutherischen Kirche in der zweiten Hälfte des 17ten Jahrhunderts', in: J. van den Berg & J.P. van Dooren (Hrsg.), *Pietismus und Reveil*, Leiden 1978, 169–81, esp. 174–75. The Hebraist Matthias Drudius was befriended by Hartlib's friend, the Silesian iatrochemist Joachim Polemann.
 26. See Kennett, *A Register and Chronicle*, 139.
 27. *An Information Concerning the Present State*, 2.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. See R.H. Popkin, 'Rabbi Nathan Shapira's Visit to Amsterdam in 1657', in: J. Michman & T. Levie (eds.), *Dutch Jewish History*, Jerusalem 1984, 185–205; R.H. Popkin, 'Spinoza and the Conversion of the Jews', in: C. de Deugd (ed.), *Spinoza's Political and Theological Thought*, Amsterdam etc. 1984, 171–83, esp. 175–76; Van der Wall, *De mystieke chiliast Petrus Serrarius*, 176–84.
 30. See Popkin, 'Rabbi Nathan Shapira's Visit', 185; Popkin, 'Spinoza and the Conversion of the Jews', 175, 181 n. 41.
 31. *An Information Concerning the Present State*, 5.
 32. Serrarius to Henry Jessey, MS Lansdowne 754, f. 372 (British Library London).
 33. *Ibid.*
 34. *Ibid.*
 35. *Ibid.*
 36. *An Information Concerning the Present State*, 2.
 37. *An Information Concerning the Present State*, 7.
 38. *An Information Concerning the Present State*, 11.
 39. *An Information Concerning the Present State*, 11–13.
 40. *An Information Concerning the Present State*, 12.
 41. *An Information Concerning the Present State*, 13.
 42. *An Information Concerning the Present State*, 16.
 43. John Durie to Samuel Hartlib, HP 4/1/15 (Sheffield University Library).
 44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. Kennett, *A Register and Chronicle*, 138.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*
52. *Ibid.*
53. On this story, see E.G.E van der Wall, 'Prophecy and Profit: Nicolaes Van Rensselaer, Charles II and the Conversion of the Jews', in: C. Augustijn e.a. (red.), *Kerkhistorische opstellen aangeboden aan Prof. dr. J. van den Berg*, Kampen 1987, 75-87.
54. Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi. The Mystical Messiah 1626-1676*, London 1973, xii.
55. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 334 n. 12.
56. On Serrarius' correspondence, see Van der Wall, *De mystieke chiliaat Petrus Serrarius*, ch. X.
57. On Serrarius' role in spreading the news to England, see also M. McKeon, 'Sabbatai Sevi in England', *Newsletter Association for Jewish Studies Review* 1 (1976), 131-69.
58. Oldenburg to Boyle, 13.III.1666, in: A.R. Hall & M.B. Hall, *The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg III*, 59.
59. Serrarius to Durie, 23.VII.1666, Thes. Hott. 30F65, f. 139 r/v (ZBZürich).
60. Serrarius to Oldenburg, 5.VII.1667, in: Hall & Hall, *The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg III*, 447.