Abstract: In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as Jewish-Christian relations were being evaluated throughout Europe, a number of scholarly works important enough to be included in the catalogue of the regal library in Paris were published on the subject of the polity of the ancient Hebrews. These works sought to form an understanding of the political structures and ideas of Jewish antiquity, considering them as relevant models for contemporary politics. Each of the thinkers who took part in this scholarly effort had a different agenda and came to different conclusions, and this article demonstrates the unique approaches of three central figures: Cornelius Bertram, Carlo Sigonio, and Petrus Cunaeus. However varied the motives and findings of the thinkers themselves, they showed a desire to recover the political wisdom of the ancient Hebrews and of Hebrew texts.

The first volume of the 1739 Catalogue des livres imprimez de la Bibliothèque du Roy (“Catalogue of Published Books of the King’s Library”) is subtitled Theology and lists twelve works under the subdivision “Traitez de la République et de la Police des Juifs” (“Tracts on the Republic and on the Polity of the Jews”). These twelve works amount to nine if reprints are disregarded, and they date from 1546 to 1710. They constitute a major effort undertaken by early modern European scholars, at the same time that the relationship between Jews and Christians was being re-evaluated, to understand the political structures and ideas of Jewish antiquity. The culmination of scholarship in this area can be found in the pages of the...
34 folio volumes of the *Thesaurus Antiquitatum sacrarum* (“Thesaurus of Sacred Antiquity” [Venice, 1644–1769]) published by the Venetian monk Blasio Ugolini.

This paper will focus on the three most significant works “on the Republic and Polity of the Jews” published before 1670: Carlo Sigonio’s *De Republica Hebraeorum libri VII* (Bologna, 1582), Bonaventure Corneille Bertram’s *De politia Judaïca* (Geneva, 1574, entitled *De Republica Hebraeorum in seventeenth-century editions*), and Petrus Cunaeus’ *De republica Hebraeorum libri tres* (Leiden, 1617).

These three works were all well received in their own time, as attested both by the number of reprints and translations each enjoyed, and by the fact that both Catholics (Mabillon) and Protestants (Gaussen) in the late seventeenth century noted them as recommended reading in theological-studies syllabi. The three works are written from remarkably different standpoints: Sigonio’s is a work of humanist historiography written by a leading expert in ancient and medieval Italian history. Bertram’s is the work of a Genevan theologian with a very precise theological and political agenda. Cunaeus, a classical philologist, jurist, and Hebraist, set out to inform the reader about the laws of the Hebrews and at the same time to provide the magistrates of the United Provinces with food for political thought. Aside from these three authors, the paper will also consider a small number of others who wrote *De rebus judaïcis* (Of the Kingdom of the Jews) and whose works, even though they deal with kingdom rather than republic, should be seen as part of the same general scholarly effort to understand the politics of the ancient Hebrews. Noted in particular will be the Reformed theologian of Saumur, Moses Amyraut, and the Jesuit, Giovanni Stefano Menochio, both of whom played significant roles in developing the genre of scholarship under discussion. Menochio

---


authored both *Hieropoliticon* (Köln, 1626), a work that prefigures Bossuet’s *Politique*, and a voluminous “Hebrew Republic” entitled *De Republica Hebraeorum libri VIII* (Paris, 1648).

1. A Humanist Hebrew Republic: Carlo Sigonio’s ‘De Republica Hebraeorum’

Carlo Sigonio (1523–1584) was a professor in Venice and Padua before settling in Bologna. A well-established historian of ancient Rome and medieval Italy, Sigonio was appreciated for his precision as well as his extensive and pedantic documentation. He meticulously verified the writings of ancient historians, and in his work on the Middle Ages, he amassed so many charters and imperial and papal edicts that his sources, published in the eighteenth century under the title *Rerum Italicarum scriptores*, are still useful to historians today.

The sixteenth century saw a transformation in the way historical study was conceived and conducted. For example, the histories of Italian city-states that had thrived during the Quattrocento gave way to “collections of antiquities.” The search for these antiquities was underpinned by two convictions characterizing the new historiography.

First, historical sources need not be limited to narratives from the past. On the contrary, not only do monuments, inscriptions, medals, and coins constitute fragments of other possible texts, but the texts themselves need to be questioned. Even poetry and, above all, legal corpora can provide more information about the language and institutions of the time than official histories can.

Second, history should aim to be comprehensive, covering all aspects of the society it seeks to understand. Beyond battles and conquests, we find that the constitution, the calendar, language, civil and sacred legislation, the economy, architecture, and relations between social groups all came to be understood as part of the substance of history. The idea of a “perfect” or “universal” history and the fruitful conjunction of history and law have been thoroughly studied as they appeared in France by George Huppert and Donald R. Kelley (whose work has been picked up and developed by Blandine Barret-Kriegel). But one must not forget that it was the Italians who first awakened all aspects of the scientific spirit in Europe.³

The first edition of Sigonio’s *De Republica Hebraeorum* is made up of 323 small pages divided into seven books, framed by a dedicatory epistle to Pope Gregory XIII and a concluding text. The structure reveals the ambitious nature of humanist historiography, for the seven books successively examine the form of the Hebrew republic, sacred sites, festivals and the calendar, sacred rites, sacred persons, assemblies and courts, and magistrates. This structure mirrors that employed by Sigonio in his book on the Athenian republic (1564).

Indeed, leaving aside a few sentences at the beginning and end of the work about the theological benefit that studying the Hebrew republic would afford Christians, Sigonio’s study is historical and ignores the distinction between profane and sacred history. Jean Bodin, in contrast, distinguished between the religion of the Hebrews as the subject of sacred history and their political organization as the subject of human history.4

The “profane” character of Sigonio’s historiography is apparent from his statements in the dedicatory epistle and the conclusion. In the dedication, Sigonio frees himself of the apologetic theme that had been stated and restated from the writings of Philo and Josephus to the work of Pierre-Daniel Huet, the imaginative seventeenth-century bishop of Avranches. The apologetic argument runs as follows: the laws of Moses were the inspiration for ancient legislation, the Hebrews being a much more ancient people than the Greeks. Sigonio dismisses this thesis, and, as a renowned expert on Greek and Roman legislation, he asserts without hesitation that “neither Solon, nor Lycurgus, nor Charondas, nor Plato, nor any other of those who instructed the people in the matter of institutions and laws, knew the Hebrew republic: this fact is evidenced by the monuments they left.”5 In his conclusion, Sigonio justifies his use of the Septuagint (and not only the Vulgate) as well as the non-canonical scriptures—the third book of Esdras, Philo, and Josephus—saying that “we were not contesting any dogma, but only the antiquity.” It is worth recalling here that Sigonio was writing in the suspicious atmosphere of post-Tridentine Christianity,

---

4 “We will then study [that is to say, after the history of ancient people] the History of the Hebrew people, but in a way that we can first grasp the principle of their political organization rather than that of their religion. The latter in fact belongs to the third kind of History and requires a deeper examination.” Jean Bodin, *La méthode de l’histoire*, in Mesnard de Pierre, ed., *Corpus general des philosophes Français*, in *Oeuvres philosophiques de Jean Bodin*, vol. 3 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951), p. 284 B, 1.31–37.

but the literature of antiquity was not subject to the censorship of the “Sacred Congregation of the Index.” 6 The historical character of Sigonio’s work is exemplified by how he deals with his material. I will focus on four indicating factors:

1. Sigonio is not interested in the theological specifics of the history of the Hebrews. Consider, for example, his treatment of prophecy. Usually, Christians approach biblical prophecy in terms of its messianic content. Sigonio is interested only in its forms. Indeed, he does not speak of prophecy at all except insofar as it is one of a variety of ways in which men question the oracle or converse with God. There are three forms in which men speak and God answers in the Bible:

   a. God answered first through prophets but not always through men of great inspiration: according to Numbers 11:25–26, the spirit of God descended from Moses to the elders. In Judges 4 and 6, we find that Deborah, a woman, also prophesied. Finally, Samuel instituted colleges of prophets that functioned until the end of the First Temple.

   b. God answers the priests who question him through the Urim ve’Tummim.

   c. Finally, God sends visions in dreams and appears in “free manifestations” either directly or through an angel, when man is awake or asleep. Sigonio was clearly influenced by what he knew of the history of ancient oracles, and we could say, looking forward, that his point of view was already that of the “science of religions.”

2. The uniqueness of the Hebrews is linguistic or institutional (rather than emphasizing a religious notion of chosenness). For example, Sigonio describes how the Hebrews calculated time (in lunar months) and observes that they usually called the week “Sabbath” (Luke 18:2: nēsteuô dis toû sabbatou).

3. Sigonio honestly and critically acknowledges the difficulties presented by the texts that serve as his primary sources. Were the scribes simply “notaries,” or were they already interpreting the Bible in ancient times (under the kings)? How can the date of the Last Supper according to the synoptic gospels be reconciled with its timing as narrated by John?

4. Finally, Sigonio pays attention to discontinuities in the history of the Hebrews, already present in the names they bore. (He observes that they were called Hebrews until David’s time, Israelites from then until the return from the exile, and then Jews.) He notes that the centralization of

6 Cochrane, Historians and Historiography, p. 428.
the cult was not imposed before the construction of the First Temple, that
the Second Temple did not benefit from the divine gifts granted to the
first (not only did it lack such sacred objects as the Ark of the Covenant,
the holy fire, and the *Urim ve'Tummim*, but the divine presence and the
spirit of prophecy did not dwell within it). Second Temple Judaism, then,
did not resemble the Yahwehism of the period of the kings, and subse-
quently a new institution appeared, the synagogue, which could not have
predated the exile.

In the seventeenth century, Sigonio's work seems to have sunk into ob-
livion. Cunaeus and Menochio were certainly familiar with it, but it was
not reprinted until 1670, when Cunaeus' publisher and translator from
Middelburg took on the task. It is appropriate to speculate on why this
early work on *De Republica Hebraeorum* might have been ignored despite
the innovations it represented and its contribution to knowledge:

1. It suffered from its author's ignorance of Hebrew language and lit-
erature. Sigonio does not quote a single word of Hebrew. He seems to
have been unable to read the Bible in this language, *a fortiori* the talmud-
ic texts and their commentaries. Besides, as late as 1648, in his preface to
*De Republica Hebraeorum*, Menochio, the Jesuit professor at the Roman
College, wrote that the "heterodox" (Protestant) taste for the rabbis was
odd and surprising, for one could hardly glean any authentic, solid in-
formation from their writings, since they devote so much of their time
to spinning tales.\(^7\) That Sigonio wrote in Italy, then, would have affected
his reception.

2. The fact that the movement launched by atheological historiogra-
phy in the sixteenth century led nowhere was not only because the new
research was still being used—as in the case of the history of Greece
and Rome—to criticize ancient historical narratives, without producing
an autonomous account.\(^8\) There was another difficulty in the case of the
history of Israel: the Old Testament was at the heart of the theological
and political debates between Protestants and Catholics and between ri-
val factions within the same faith. It was still too current to become an
object of history.

3. Preference was given to less engaged history, such as the study of
post-biblical Judaism, using the books of the Maccabees and of Flavius

---

\(^7\) Menochio, *De Republica Hebraeorum*, *ad lectorem* (Paris, 1648).

\(^8\) On this subject, see Arnaldo Momigliano's historiographical works. Those pub-
lished in English include *Studies in Historiography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson,
1966); *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1992); and *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Middletown,
Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1982).
Josephus. This practice began in the sixteenth century with the work of the Lutheran Paul Eber (1511–1569) in his *Contracta populi historia* and with Sebastian Castellio, in the history of the Jews in the last centuries before our era until the destruction of the Second Temple. It was later pursued by Louis Cappel in the appendix of the *Historia apostolica illustrata* (Geneva, 1634), a text reprinted by George Hornius in his *Historia ecclesiastica illustrata* (Leiden, 1687).

2. Bonaventure Corneille Bertram’s ‘De Politia Judaïca’ and the Political Theology of the Reformed

Bonaventure Cornelius Bertram (1531–1594) was a Frenchman who escaped to Geneva at the onset of the first wars of religion (1562). He joined the Genevan group that was working on publishing translations of the Bible more faithful to the original than the Vulgate and incorporating valuable commentaries such as those of Calvin and Jean Mercier, professor of Hebrew at the Collège Royal. The Genevan interest in the Bible was not only theological and philological, but of immediate political concern: Geneva was truly organized around the book (certainly for the seventeenth century), as Roger Stauffenegger has magnificently demonstrated. Bertram’s *De politia Judaïca* contributed to the numerous theological-political debates throughout the history of Geneva. In this case, it was the debate pitting Theodore Beza against the French Morely and Ramus, who did not want Geneva’s ecclesiastical discipline penetrating the Reformed congregations in France. Léonard, a Congregationalist himself, was delighted to tell this story in his *Histoire générale du protestantisme* (vol. 2, pp. 119–123).

Bertram’s aim was to justify the prerogatives of the Geneva consistory, which he presented as a model to the French consistories. He did so by underscoring the Old Testament’s irreducible distinction between *civil police* and *ecclesiastical police*. His goal was to suggest that consistories had the right to censor, excommunicate, recruit, and control ministers. The problem of discipline remained on the Dutch political agenda in the seventeenth century, and therefore the person in charge of reprinting Bertram’s book in Leiden in 1641, Constantijn L’Empereur (renowned translator of non-biblical Jewish literature), asserted that differences in

---

9 I want to thank Bernard Roussel, head of study of the Sciences Religieuses Department of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, for his help concerning the ecclesiastical context in which Bertram wrote.


11 About this author, see P.T. van Rooden, “Constantijn L’Empereur’s Contacts with the Amsterdam Jews and His Confutation of Judaïsme,” in J. van den Berg and Ernestine
time and place did not exempt Christians from imitating Israel’s police as much as possible.

The 1641 Leiden edition of Bertram’s work is a small, sextodecimo volume of 452 pages, and I would like to offer three observations emerging from this text:

1. In the first chapter, Bertram asserts that the law, whether it institutes civil police or ecclesiastical police, exists only because of sin. It is a fundamental theme of Reformed theology that Adam lived in a state of nature before the fall of man; otherwise, he could not have sinned, since grace, according to Scripture, is almighty. All human institutions, then—except the family, which is natural—come from the sin. It is logical, then, that Protestant theologians seeking a political model looked to the Hebrew republic. They did not regard the polity as necessary for sociability or to satisfy an essential attribute of human nature. Mankind has been caught up in politics only because of sin, and Scripture (which appeared only because of sin) offers the political models most worthy of imitation. Menochio, in his *Hieropoliticon*, provides a diametrically opposed origin of politics. For Menochio, man was endowed with reason, but he attained humanity only through the *institutio alterius*. In the beginning, men were inferior to animals and needed society to express their reasonable nature (1.I, c. II, pp. 21–22). Here, in the tension between Bertram and Menochio, we find the opposition between Rousseau and Bonald’s social philosophies anticipated as early as the turn of the seventeenth century.

2. Bertram, who liked to call the Hebrew people the *Ecclesia Judaïca* (Jewish Church), insists on historical continuity, from creation to the Christian Church. In this respect, too, he proves himself a good Calvinist theologian: for Calvin no radical innovation occurred in the passage from the Old Testament to the New, only a change in the *modus significandi*. Bertram underscores the continuity, sometimes at the expense of historical accuracy, as, for example, when he maintains that the synagogues corresponded to the assemblies organized by Joshua and Samuel outside Jerusalem and that the legislation at Sinai was anticipated from the time of the patriarchs, with laws such as the Sabbath, the sacrifices, and the destruction of the idols in the possession of Jacob’s clan already being in effect. Such assimilations suggest that the *politia Judaïca* existed from time immemorial and is timeless.

3. The key chapter of Bertram’s work is the seventh, his study of the *politica ecclesiastica* (ecclesiastical polity) after the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. We learn that the Levitical priesthood has four functions: teaching, praying, offering, and adorning the Temple. Teaching contained within it a certain jurisdiction, by virtue of which the priesthood had the right to bar people from service, to excommunicate, and to anathematize. Bertram’s point is clearly to provide Old Testament support for consistory discipline. Later, Saul always took advice from Samuel. David appointed officers, but the priestly successions did not depend on him (II Samuel 8:17 and I Samuel 18:16). When David, on the point of passing his kingdom on to Solomon, took a census and appointed Levites, he established 6,000 of them as “judges and executive officers.” Wasn’t he overstepping his bounds? No, for in II Chronicles 19, King Jehoshaphat, restorer of the kingdom of Judah, designated certain priests and Levites “to judge according to the Lord and to plead in favor of the people of Jerusalem,” which, Bertram comments, indicates participation in two different policies. The ecclesiastical police was in place from Sinai up to and including the times of Roman domination. Proof of its importance is that nothing was more pressing for the schismatic kingdom of the north than rebuilding a sacerdotal organization. In short, demonstrating the autonomy of the Levitical priesthood is crucial for Bertram and guides his exegesis. He draws on Jewish exegetes (Ibn Ezra), “talmudists,” and Josephus to clarify the obscure points in the biblical text. He differs from Sigonio both in his Hebrew erudition and in his overtly theological-political stance.

Exploring Bertram’s thinking, which Dutch Calvinists still found relevant in the mid-seventeenth century, leads almost inevitably to a comparison with another reading of Calvin and Scripture: that of the monarchist Huguenots, expressed in the political theology of Parisian pastors and professors at the Protestant Academy of Saumur. I will therefore say a few words about the interpretation of the New Testament by Moses Amyraut (1596–1664). Instead of insisting on the distinction between the two forms of police in the Hebrew republic, Amyraut highlights God’s sovereignty. An overlap between the two forms of police can then be found in the way God, as a spiritual power, ordered corporal punishments for religious offenses or, conversely, promised temporal rewards only to faithful observers of the law. The overlapping of the two orders—the temporal and the spiritual—makes the Old Testament extremely difficult to understand, but for the theologian from Saumur, this obscurity served an important end. It proved once and for all that the kingdom of God is not of this world, and it brought good tidings for the salutary Christian theology of prophecy. Indeed, the French Protestants feared nothing more than the legitimization of violence for religious
purposes. Catholic violence had threatened their physical existence in the sixteenth century and could become dangerous again if the Dévot Party, heir to the Catholic League, had its way. When the violence came from the Protestant side, as was the case in England in the lead-up to the January 1649 regicide, it fueled Catholic suspicions that Protestants were, at bottom, nothing but republicans and enemies of the king.

Parisian and Saumurois theology remained faithful to the Genevan tradition insofar as it emphasized the necessary independence of spiritual power. Even in a predominantly Protestant country, Amyraut explained, it should not be the magistrate’s role to impose a confession of faith, to control the recruitment of pastors, or even to organize collections of funds for the church. This position is original in that it claims civil tolerance for religions while rejecting the *jus in sacra* of a Protestant prince over subjects of the same faith. Finally, if we refer to Bohatec’s major writings on Calvin and the law, we can note that Calvin harmonized the orders of nature and grace more than Amyraut, because the latter saw the possible injustice of public force and thus tended to radically distinguish between spiritual and temporal.

3. **ISRAEL AS A POLITICAL MODEL IN CUNAEUS’ “DE REPUBLICA HEBRAEORUM”**

Cunaeus (1586–1638) was a professor of Latin and law at Leiden University. He had learned Hebrew and Aramaic at Leiden and at Franecker, where he studied with Drusius, a Christian Hebraist well versed in literal Jewish exegesis and suspected by the orthodox party of having pro-Arminian sympathies. Cunaeus’ strong contempt for theologians may have come from Drusius, in line with Flemish humanism. Cunaeus criticized the way theologians unnecessarily complicated and jealously guarded the biblical text. At the Synod of Dordrecht, Cunaeus was denounced for commenting to this effect and had to promise to restrain his language in the future. Cunaeus also shared his teacher’s esteem for the straightforward Jewish exegesis, which he distinguished from the talmudists’ midrashic one. Speaking of the rabbis, he wrote: “I stop at their literal explanations, at which they succeed so well that we have to concede, like it or not, that they are second to none.”


Christian scholars of the seventeenth century continued to describe midrashic exegesis as “fables” and “reveries.” These terms may sound harsh, but it is true that midrashic exegesis unabashedly disregards the constraints of space and time essential to the establishment of historical truth such as Western culture was starting to understand it. Nevertheless, Cunaeus showed great respect for Maimonides, who commented on the Talmud “and left out its trifles.” The expression “trifle” comes up again in a text concerning the Jewish tradition, which is said to have nothing serious to teach Christians, since the only allegorical explanation of the Old Testament worthy of attention is the one given by the authors of the New Testament. To these Jewish Kabbalists, Cunaeus opposes the Karaites: “Nonetheless, the Jews do have among them a more intelligent group. I mean the Karaites, who reject the teachings of men, regard the principles of the Talmud as worthless, and accept nothing but the text of the Holy Book.”

Cunaeus’ precision and his fair-mindedness toward Jews testify to the existence of relations between Christian scholars and the Jewish communities of Amsterdam, from which they bought books and received lessons in Hebrew language and literature.

Turning our attention to the message Cunaeus is trying to transmit in his text, we can see a dual movement: he seeks to subtly belittle the Old Testament while politically exalting the Hebrew republic.

To disparage the Old Testament, Cunaeus argues that the patriarchs adhered purely and strictly to the messianic faith (Christianity), going so far as to maintain that it was Christ himself who appeared in the guise of Melchizedek to Abraham. The Jewish people, however, whom Paul the Apostle maintained as his children, believed in the messiah only vaguely. If they could be saved by this rudimentary faith, it was in the same manner that children are saved when they die young: through the imputation of their parents’ faith. These original viewpoints displeased Calvinist orthodoxy, which attached great importance to the continuity between the two testaments. Cunaeus was rebuked.

Cunaeus heralds Amyraut’s insistence that a twofold covenant was present in the earlier testament: a legal covenant and a covenant of grace.

---

14 For more on this difference, see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor. Histoire juive et mémoire juive* (Paris: La Decouverte, 1984), pp. 69–93, originally published as *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982).


17 Unfortunately, I was unable to consult Aaron L. Katten’s *Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), since this book is unobtainable in Paris.
That said, in the system developed by the theologian from Saumur, this theological operation had a completely negative aim: to disparage the Old Testament as a model for Christian magistrates. In Cunaeus’ work, on the contrary, the historical study of the Hebrew republic led to its political glorification, as if Israel had shifted from exemplifying a religious model to exemplifying a political one and had been secularized as a result.

What did Cunaeus retain from the Israelite model? First, that it was a theocracy, as Flavius Josephus had acknowledged long before. The error of the Greeks was to regard monotheism as inaccessible to the people. The Hebrews had no such fears. Their irrepresentable God sees everything and ensures respect for the law among men. The Greeks were mistaken in trying to conceal the one and only God within a multiplicity of symbols. “Nothing held Moses’ republic together more than his religious teachings.” Moreover, the kingship of God presupposed and maintained a tribal equality: Israel declined when jealousies led to rebellion. On the strength of this historical reminder, Cunaeus calls upon the states of the United Provinces to maintain calm within by silencing the factions—that is to say, the religious factions, of course. Cunaeus was among those in favor of the magistrates’ *jus in sacra*. But his letter to Grotius reveals that after having laboriously written a chapter on the subject, he cut it out of the final work, for he wanted to take a middle road between two extremes and probably feared he would be misunderstood and misused if he spoke too clearly. His tendencies are evident, nonetheless, in the chapter of the *Hebrew Republic* on the biblical kings (I.I, c. XIV), which can be broken down into the following main claims:

1. The monarch in Israel led the service and could reform it.
2. The prophets and pontiffs honored the king and not the other way around: only the king could sit in the forecourt of the priests.
3. David himself donned the ephod to consult the oracle, a fact that the “new interpreters” tried to dissimulate. In fact, I Samuel 30:7 was mistranslated as “And Abiathar wore the ephod during David’s prayer,” and the 1588 Geneva Bible effectively translates it as: “And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, I pray thee, wear the ephod for me.” Literally, the Hebrew text says, “I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod,” which current versions translate as “Please bring me the ephod.”
4. Finally, the king was anointed, just like the high priest. This is also indicated in Grotius’ *Annotationes in Vetus Testamentum* (1644). However, Cunaeus highlights (as did Menochio) that the monarch did

---

not perform acts of worship (such as offering sacrifices), which were reserved for the priests.

What delighted Cunaeus most about the Hebrew republic was the humanity and equity of its agrarian laws. The Jubilee made it impossible for the rich to dispossess the poor, preventing inequalities and the creation of the latifundia. With no commercial relations with the rest of the world, the Jews preserved pastoral virtues, for it is well known that traders and artisans are more corrupt than farmers (1.L, c. II–IV). These remarks reflect the influence of Maimonides.19

In the period we have covered, Christian theologians observed that cross-referencing between the two testaments, to which over ten centuries of exegesis had accustomed them, had slipped out of control. They no longer considered themselves the exclusive owners of what they called the Old Testament, and therefore a more diligent, more patient reading was called for that did not rely on the facility of omnipresent symbolic correspondences. The massive text stood before them with the twofold obscurity of its language and the unknown habits it evokes. However, what they understood of the Hebrew republic through the Jewish commentaries appeared majestic to them. Not only did the laws of Moses withstand comparison with those of Greece and Rome, but they were more equitable and less severe. Most of all, the Jewish theocracy seemed to be endowed with modern virtues. It gave the monarch the right to regulate religion, which is all the more admissible insofar as rites held a major role in it. The monotheistic exigency reinforced the social authority of the law. This new reading deciphered the Old Testament less in terms of prophecy than of law, and less in terms of theology than of politics. Would Judaism thus interpreted have served as a paradigm for the religion of the Enlightenment? Before this question can be addressed, one must consider that Giovanni Stefano Menochio’s understanding of the Hebrew republic supports a position contrary to that presented here. In book 1, chapter 11, of his De Republica Hebraeorum, he explains that the priests’ exemption from royal jurisdiction was necessitated by natural right and imposed itself when one reads the texts. For example, he

19 Another of Maimonides’ works that inspired Christian scholars was his Guide of the Perplexed, particularly because of the thesis he develops in the third part, that the strange rites of the Hebrew service were pagan in origin, and God allowed Israel to practice them out of tolerance for its weakness. Grotius, in hisAnnotationes in Vetus Testamentum, and then the Englishmen John Marsham in Chronicus Canon (London, 1672) and John Spencer in De legibus Hebraeorum ritualibus, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1686), took this hypothesis further, provoking a great scandal and giving rise to numerous refutations (presentation of the question by dom Calmet, Dissertations qui peuvent servir de prolégomènes de l’Écriture Sainte, vol. 2 [Paris, 1720], pp. 27–39.)
refers to the punishment of King Ozias (II Chronicles 26:18–20), who was stricken by leprosy because he usurped the priestly power of offering incense on the incense altar.\(^\text{20}\)

And so, through the intermediary of the Hebrews, we find ourselves not with a single alternative approach to the question of church and state, but right in the midst of debates raised by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy during the French Revolution, with the same sources’ supporting both positions. I will be pleased, then, if this quick survey of a few “Hebrew republics” can intervene in philosophical discourse that approaches and interprets Spinoza and Enlightenment thinkers.

CNRS, Paris

\(^{20}\) For Menochio, the repression of idolatry by the kings of Judah did not contradict the thesis. In fact, the power of the sword to serve true religion resulted from natural right in two ways: the right of truth and the common good of society; cf. Sigonio, *De Republica Hebraeorum*, col. 78. Also see Menochio, *Hieropoliticon* (Lyon, 1625), book 2, ch. 3; and Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l’Écriture Sainte* (Paris, 1709), book 2, art. 5, 10th proposition.