THE HOPE OF THE NETHERLANDS:
MENASSEH BEN ISRAEL AND
THE DUTCH IDEA OF AMERICA

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I

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW WORLD combined in a number of curious ways in the culture of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. The mixture of the two, if sometimes improbable and somewhat infrequent, can be revealing nevertheless of the setting of religious history and the shape of geographic imagination in the early modern Netherlands. Consider, among the more exotic blends, the tropical Sacrifice of Manoah (1648) by Frans Post, a biblical landscape that stages the old in the new with remarkable effect (Fig. 4.1). Against a broad and gently mountainous background, an episode of dramatic devotion takes place. A man and a woman—Manoah and his wife, as described in Judges 13—kneel before a stone altar on which a kid has just been sacrificed. Suspended within the pillar of gray smoke billowing up from their offering, an angel glances knowingly at the performance below while gesturing grandly toward the heavens above. The angel’s baroque movement is mirrored by the theatrical reaction of Manoah, who gazes up in stylized awe. His wife, who wears an antique cloak of blue and a red blouse (costume and colors otherwise associated with the Virgin Mary) hides her head in her hands, less from shame than humility. For she, like her husband, has just learned that she will bear a child, as announced by the miraculously revealed messenger of God.

The themes of the painting are spectacular—literally a spectacle of sacred theater—though Post’s version goes beyond even the usual drama of Baroque art. The story of the Sacrifice of Manoah—of the annunciation of a child to a barren woman of Israel and of her husband’s elaborate thanksgiving—was not in fact a common theme in the visual arts; although a few precedents did exist, none even remotely resembles Post’s composition. A late sixteenth-century engraved version by Hendri Goltzius more typically neglects the actual sacrifice to underscore the scene of “annunciation” and the typological relevance the story had the (New Testament) Annunciation. In the middle of the seventeenth century, the theme received attention from Rembrandt and his circle, who tended to isolate the dramatic process in a way that emphasized t
quiet moment of prayer shared by the expectant parents rather than the
sacrifice and its setting. Willem Drost’s circa 1650 rendition presents a
model of Protestant piety. The painting that comes closest to the expan-
sive grandeur of Post’s arrangement was executed, about the same time,
by Claes Cornelisz. Moeyaert (Fig. 4.2). In this case, the central elements
of the compositions do match—the ascending angel, the astonished
Manoah, the sacrificial vessels—but the scenery places the action, liter-
ally, in a different world. Moeyaert situates his biblical narrative in an
Italianate landscape, amidst what are meant to pass for Classical ruins.
The dramatic staging of the scene, like the historical context from which
it derives, is meant to look old. Post, by contrast, locates the Old Testa-
ment story in what can clearly be recognized as the New World: the
Israelites sacrifice along the coast of Brazil near Olinda, identified by the
stout watch towers (whose stone form echoes that of the altar) typical of
the region. Other Americana abound. The repoussoir framing the fore-
ground swarms with South American flora, including a giant cactus on
the left, ripe papaya and banana trees, and the thick tropical foliage
that darkens the anterior. An iguana scavenge near a calabash in the center
foreground, facing an armadillo peering curiously out from the left.
Indigenous birds hover over and perch upon the lush vegetation while
others glide below, where a pair of natives appear busy with their work.

Why would Manoah have journeyed to America? Partly because
Frans Post did, between 1636 and 1644, as part of the entourage of Johan
Maurits of Nassau, the governor of Dutch Brazil and a generous patron
of the arts. Post (ca. 1612–1680) served as court artist for Johan Maurits,
preparing for the prince both landscape paintings and topographical
drawings of the region. Upon his return to the Netherlands, Post discov-
ered a great interest in—and a strong market for—his tropical vistas and
went into what might be called the Brazilian landscape business. His
Varzea Landscape with Plantation, done eight years after his return, and his
River Landscape, finished two years later, share with the Manoah composi-
tion a meticulous concern for native flora and fauna, which Post arranged
in the Varzea landscape in a manner remarkably similar to that of his bib-
lical painting (Fig. 4.3). Both of these later paintings and the scores more
like them that followed, however, came well after Post had established his
workshop and reputation. The Sacrifice of Manoah represents one of the
first canvases produced by the artist since his New World voyage and the
only one, before or after, with an Old Testament subject. Later tastes and
painterly habits explain only partially why Post (or his patrons) decided,
precisely at that moment, to stage the Bible in America.

Dutch colonial circumstances in 1648 and the political lessons insinu-
ated by Manoah’s sacrifice suggest more particularly why the painting
may have taken the form it did. The child who was born to Manoah and
blessed by the Lord, Samson, grew up to be the champion of the Israelites
and scourge of the Philistines, who had tyrannized God’s Chosen for forty
years. A mere three years had elapsed since the Portuguese planters of
Dutch Brazil had revolted against their governors, yet the latter-day Israelites—as the seventeenth-century Dutch liked to fashion themselves—desperately needed deliverance from the soaring costs, fiscal and political, of their overseas crisis. Salvation, in other words, was projected onto Post's Brazilian landscape, in the hope that some new Samson might deliver the Netherlands from their latest antagonists. The Old Testament in this instance provided the allegorical as well as historical framework for Post's colonial narrative, while the New World provided—or so the Dutch, like Maimonides, prayed—the site and the prospect of redemption.

The themes of Divine history and heroic salvation shape the arguments of another Dutch work, produced around the same time and within many of the same contexts as Post's biblical landscape. Menasseh ben Israel's highly influential *Hope of Israel*—published originally in Amsterdam in 1650 and a dozen more times, in half a dozen languages, into the early eighteenth century—offered a timely reflection on Jews, America, and redemption by the leading Sephardi voice of the Netherlands. In confident and learned prose, the author considers the tantalizing prospect of Old Testament Israelites residing in the New World: a remnant of the Ten Lost Tribes (this time Reubenites, Manoah having belonged to the tribe of Dan) holding out in the Cordillera mountains of New Granada, not far from present-day Medellin. Once again, the image of Jews in the tropics is presented as a propitious sign—the diaspora of the Jews to all corners of the world implied to Menasseh's readers the imminence of messianic redemption—and the work conveyed a heady message of religious salvation. More prosaically, it focused attention on the near disastrous state of Dutch Brazil and the plight of the Sephardi community living there, which faced the calamitous prospect of an ascendant Portuguese (meaning hostile) regime. Like Post's biblical landscape, Menasseh's literary evocation of Jews in America delivered a sermon of hope and deliverance against the backdrop of Dutch, and in this case Sephardi, aspirations in the New World.

This distinctive cultural geography shared by both the painter and the rabbis grew out of a larger context of Dutch politics and culture in the seventeenth century, and it is the purpose of this essay to explore further the Dutch background of Menasseh's American landscape. For a variety of reasons and purposes, the New World served as a site of salvation for the Dutch Republic, a place of promise, potential, and, most importantly, strategic support. This applied for Jews no less than gentiles, and Menasseh's case demonstrates nicely how Jews in the early modern Netherlands could partake equally, if also distinctively, of broader Dutch strategies of rhetoric and representation. Menasseh, who moved relatively easily between Jewish and Christian circles, constructed the New World in ways that reflected a traditional geographic discourse in the Republic that looked to America for redemption. Those Reubenites and Indians who suggested "the hope of Israel" resembled, in other ways, representations—or better, projections—of the New World and its natives.
as "the hope of the Netherlands." Menasseh's world, in this sense, featured a recognizably Dutch America.

It also featured a good deal more besides exotic Israelites, and this essay's focus on Menasseh's—and by extension Sephardi—geography represents something of a historiographic departure, both in terms of text and author. The Hope of Israel has traditionally been studied (and sensibly so) as a crucial chapter in the religious history of early modern Europe. Menasseh's work ranks among the most influential documents of seventeenth-century Jewish history and certainly among the most widely read pieces of early Jewish Americana. In its day, it ignited a frenzy of messianic and millenarian speculation across the whole of Europe. This European, devotional context, however, has distracted attention from the Hope's Amsterdam origins and the text's Dutch, no less than Dutch-Jewish, cultural context. Such a local reading of the text reveals, moreover, a somewhat more nuanced view of Menasseh himself and, by extension, of the Sephardi community in Amsterdam. Recent research has succeeded admirably in identifying, isolating, and analyzing the Sephardic of northwest Europe and particularly the "Portuguese Nation" of Amsterdam: the New Jewish immigrants of Iberian and converso origin who settled in Holland from the early seventeenth century.

To this lately improved understanding of converso identity, social history, and economic activity, this study seeks to add a further dimension to the Sephardi profile, a Dutch Republican dimension, by exploring the cultural and ideological contexts of Menasseh's geography. Tracking down Menasseh's Old Testament relations in the New World should lead back, in this way, to New Jewish culture in the Old.

II

The geography of the Netherlands broadened conspicuously beyond Europe during the late sixteenth century, a direct result of the Dutch Revolt against Spain (1568–1648) and the ferocious war of words waged by the rebel party. Already from the earliest years of the revolt, a distinctly Dutch idea of the New World developed when polemicians working for the Prince of Orange promoted the theme of "Spanish tyranny in America" as a means of blackening the reputation of their opponents. Spain's tenure in America had proven disastrous, it was argued, and much the same could now be expected from Philip II's regime in the Low Countries. "The Spanish seek nothing but to oppress and plunder as they have done in the New Indies," asserted a prominent group of nobles in 1568, in defiance of the government in Brussels. "America," within this context, represented an ominous and foreboding future that awaited the Netherlands should the tyranny of Spain go unchallenged. The Habsburg "conquest" of the Low Countries, as the pamphleteers perceived it, threatened to bring the same miserable consequences to the Netherlands as the conquistadors had wrought in America. In his widely circulated Apologia (1581), Willem of Orange codified the image of parallel Spanish tyrannies when he detailed how the Habsburgs had "adjudged all [Netherlands] to death, making no more account of you than of beasts ... as they do in the Indies, where they have miserably put to death more than twenty millions of people, and have made desolate and waste thirty times as much land as they do."

From this assumption of mutual suffering evolved a more ambitious notion of a tactical alliance between those two "nations" that most intimately knew the misrule of Spain. Orange's assertion of shared anguish contained in it a considerable degree of sympathy for the Indians, who had experienced worse abuses, reportedly, than even the Dutch. It also implied a unique affinity between the rebels and the "Americans"—the Dutch typically lumped all the natives together—who were linked by their common hostility toward the Habsburgs. To the polemically agile mind, this suggested the further possibility of an "alliance": if the natives could be construed as cousins-in-suffering, might they not plausibly be represented as brothers-in-arms as well, or perhaps even partners in trade? This was the tack taken by Willem Usselincx (1567–1647) and a group of like-minded colonialists who insisted, by the early seventeenth century, that the Indians would welcome the Dutch as confederates and join with them in a campaign against the "universal monarchy" of Spain. Most of these authors, to be sure, advertised, too, the obvious religious and economic advantages of their program: God and gold. But they and Usselincx also asserted the moral duty of their readers to aid these American "allies," whose experience had bonded them to the Republic. "The pitiless slaughter of over twenty million innocent Indians who did [Spain] no harm," quoted Usselincx directly from the rebel’s propaganda, "[demanded] God’s righteous judgment." The creation of a Dutch West India Company was not just an opportunity, in this view, but an obligation born of the pledges of fidelity made by the rebels to their American brethren. "Our friends and allies will lose all faith in us," wrote Usselincx in the wake of truce negotiations (1606–09), "if they see that we, but for the sake of a specious title, abandon our own inhabitants and the allied Indians who have been so faithful and done us such good service."

For a variety of reasons, Usselincx’s vision turned out not to be the one adopted by the Dutch West India Company (WIC), founded upon the expiration of the Twelve Year Truce in 1621. But his rhetoric and the image of America on which it was predicated did linger nonetheless in the minds of armchair travelers and colonial schemers, who persevered in their promotion of a singularly Dutch notion of the New World. Well into the 1630s and 1640s, America was featured as a site of peculiar attachment for the Republic. As late as the middle of the seventeenth century, the Indians continued to constitute the possibility of a special "alliance" with the Netherlands.
Two Dutch initiatives well illustrate the lasting power of this idea of America. The first involved an official treaty designed to join the States General of the Republic with the “Serene Lords of Peru” (living, as was supposed, in Buenos Aires) in a bond of strategic assistance. Joan Aventroot, author of the document and a zealous warrior for the Reformed faith, proposed that the “Peruvians” held the key to Dutch salvation and that a cataclysmic uprising in America, triggered by the Dutch-Indian confederation, would displace the hegemony of the Habsburgs and the primacy of the Catholic Church. Aventroot’s apocalyptic musings, remarkably, received the full backing of the States, which were not only committed to the treaty but even funded the printing of eight thousand copies, an unusually large run by early modern standards. The second initiative came in 1643, when the Prince of Orange, in cooperation with the WIC, backed a plan to unite with the “Chileans” against Spain. Once again, official documents were drafted and this time delivered, reaching the western coast of South America with a fleet under the command of Hendrick Brouwer. In this instance, the Dutch in fact commenced negotiations and laid out to the bemused Araucanians the advantages of the proposed alliance. Yet, despite getting the natives to kiss the prince’s letters of credentials, the Dutch could not ultimately get them to sign on, and the expedition ended with the desired alliance still elusive.

Hope, nonetheless, remained high. Whatever the setbacks in America, the Dutch conceit of the New World remained notably viable back in the Old, rhetoric triumphing easily over reality. If by the middle of the seventeenth century the image of the New World had undergone certain adjustments—appeals to Chile and Peru had pushed the forefront of the alliance to the farthest shores of the Western Hemisphere—it still retained considerable currency, especially among the many who wrote about, but never visited, America. This applied in particular to a circle of humanists and relatively broad-minded men of letters, including Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), the noted jurist and diplomat who, though exiled from the Republic, participated actively in its world of letters, argued in a pair of Latin treatises published in the early 1640s that the native Americans had descended from “Norwegian” or Germanic tribes. This made them distant kinsmen to the Dutch, whom Grotius had elsewhere described as members of another Germanic tribe, the Batavians. This patriotic argument resonated with Caspar Barlaeus (1584–1648), the humanist poet and author of a massive Rerum per octeniam in Brasilia (1647) commemorating the colonial regime of Johan Maurits. In Barlaeus’s rendition of events, the “progeny of Bato” (as he referred to the prince of Nassau) had successfully “civilized” and allied with the natives who, if not kinsmen per se, had shown themselves to be the stalwart supporters of the Batavians abroad. The prince’s Brazilian triumph, in the context of Barlaeus’s broader celebration of the Dutch Golden Age, represented yet another sign of the Republic’s providential ascendance.

By 1650, the year in which the Hope of Israel first appeared, the New World had become a familiar enough site on the horizons of the Netherlands. It had become, moreover, a site specific to the Dutch geographic imagination. “America” represented, firstly, a place of “Spanish tyranny,” a topos that runs throughout Dutch Americanica, from the rebels’ polemics and the reports of Brouwer’s expedition published in the middle of the seventeenth century. Consequently—and secondly—it also represented a place of anticipated succor. The notion that the Indians, as enemies of the Republic’s enemy, would therefore be their friends is implicit in the colonialist pitch of Willem Usselinx and explicitly argued by the likes of Joan Aventroot. Aventroot’s hope for a religious no less than military revolt in America suggests, thirdly, the theme of religious salvation in, or perhaps from, the New World. Notwithstanding the Portuguese crisis in Brazil, Barlaeus’s paeon to Johan Maurits fashioned Dutch triumphs in America as indicative of a redemption already in progress. In all events, Grotius, in construing the Americans as fellow Germanii, made their fate of direct concern to latter-day “Batavians.”

Thus Dutch geography. What about Dutch-Jewish geography or at least “Menassean” geography? Menasseh ben Israel (ca. 1604–57) imagined the New World in a variety of forms. In a certain sense, America was a very real place for the Amsterdam rabbi, who, like many Dutch Sephardim, had material and even familial interests in colonization projects. Using as an intermediary his brother Ephraim, who left for the West Indies in 1639, Menasseh invested in America in the late 1630s, after a consolidation of the Amsterdam synagogues brought a substantial cut in his pay. A few years later, he dedicated the second installment of his four-part Conciliator (1641) to “the most noble, most prudent and fortunate seers of the Council of the West Indies”—the directors of the WIC—and declared his intention to immigrate to Recife in Dutch Brazil. Menasseh only just missed the honor of becoming the “first American rabbi” as Cecil Roth once put it, though not without a fair degree of relief. The privilege, as it turned out, went to his rival, Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, whose vacated position in the Amsterdam congregation Talmud Torah now fell to Menasseh. This meant a rise in salary, and it obviated the need to look westward for work. Yet Menasseh, it would seem, had never felt any great desire to go in the first place. “At present, in complete disregard of my personal dignity, I am engaged in trade,” he wrote with resignation in 1639. “What else is there for me to do? I have neither the wealth of Croesus, nor the nature of a Thersites”—and apparently not the heart to forsake “this flourishing land of Batavia [Holland] for the distant parts of Brazil.”

From 1642, Menasseh’s prospects of actually going to Brazil rapidly diminished. Yet, although America ceased to function for him as a “real” place to live, it continued to serve as a viable idea—as a geographic topos or construct—that was nonetheless compelling. This cultural sense of the
New World had, in part, been inherited from decades of Dutch Republican geography. Menasseh, whose family immigrated from Madeira to Holland when he was a boy, considered himself "Portuguese by birth but Batavian in spirit" and would have acquired by this time what might be called a Batavian world-view. In part, too, this sense had further developed over the years from Menasseh's own involvement and interaction with the world of geography, which, apparently, interested him considerably. He took great pleasure, for example, in hearing of distant lands. Though personally not much of a traveler, he availed himself, as a rabbi and community leader, of the opportunity to interview others passing through Amsterdam and reportedly delighted in such vicarious voyaging.

Menasseh also had notable contacts, both collegial and professional, with some of the leading intellectual figures of the Netherlands, including many who had written on matters American. Grotius, if not quite a friend, corresponded with Menasseh on questions of history and Scripture, as did the Amsterdam humanist Gerardus Vossius, whose children the rabbi tutored. When Menasseh contemplated moving to Brazil, these two humanists exchanged letters on the news, Grotius wishing for Menasseh good fortune in Brazil "from the bottom of my soul." With Barlaeus, Menasseh enjoyed an exceptionally warm friendship, each scholar admiring the other's work. The esteemed Latinist composed a sonnet celebrating their extraordinary, interfaith relationship; and, after Barlaeus's untimely death in 1648 (just after completing his opus on Brazil), Menasseh wrote movingly on the bond he had felt with "the Virgil of our time." As a printer, Menasseh came into contact professionally with those responsible for Amsterdam's voluminous production of maps, atlases, and travel narratives describing the New World. Johannes Janssonius, among the leading publishers of Dutch (and indeed European) Americana, printed an edition of Menasseh's De Creatione Universae in 1636 and then engaged the rabbi, around 1650, to prepare a Spanish translation of the geographer's massive Atlas Novus. The work ultimately appeared in 1653, though Menasseh had completed his translation a few years earlier—more or less at the same time, that is, he was otherwise contemplating Jews in America.

Most relevant perhaps were Menasseh's connections with literary Americana: with the actual descriptions of the New World, which he read, studied, and incorporated into his own writing. Evidence of his geographic expertise comes from the text of the Hope itself, which includes an impressive list of authors consulted whose work related to Europe's westward expansion. This list includes, naturally, a range of non-Dutch writers—many of whom, however, were popular in the Republic precisely for their unflattering accounts of the Spanish Conquest. More to the point, it catalogues Menasseh's extensive familiarity with the leading Dutch authorities on America: the geographers Abraham Ortelius, Petrus Plancius, and Willem Blaeu (who was Janssonius's chief competitor in the business of cartographic publishing); Menasseh's colleague, Hugo Grotius, and the latter's opponent in the debate on Indian etiology, Joannes de Laet (who also wrote the standard seventeenth-century history of the New World); and, not least, Jan Huygen van Linschoten, whose turn of the century Itinerario provided the literary foundation for the Dutch overseas enterprise. To be sure, dozens of other authorities—Dutch, Classical, and rabbinical—round off Menasseh's bibliography, and it makes little sense to read the Hope merely as a reflection of Dutch Americana. On the other hand, though, many more works read by Menasseh would hardly have merited mention—the polemical literature and anti-Spanish propaganda so ubiquitous in the Republic—so that the least one can say is that Menasseh knew of and appreciated the Dutch vision of the New World.

IV

What difference would it have made that Menasseh's geography had a Dutch imprint? How would a Dutch idea of America have influenced Menasseh's hopes for his co-religionists? And why, most importantly, would America have featured in Menasseh's messianic musings in the first place?

The Hope of Israel, if not entirely about the New World, takes as its point of departure the arrival from America in the Netherlands of the worldly traveler, Antonio de Montezinos, his tale of New World encounter providing the basis for Menasseh's own meditation on messianic redemption. The work begins, in this sense, with a characteristically American story. The "Relation of Antonio Montezinos" narrates a marvelous adventure of high-altitude exploration, exotic intrigue, and apocalyptic implication. It describes how Montezinos—alias Abaron Levi, a New Christian merchant from the Portuguese town of Vilaflor—encountered in the New World a series of encounters: with the Inquisition, with a native tribe of Quito, and with a Lost Tribe of Israel. Following these wondrous episodes, an excited Montezinos returned to Europe, where he reached Amsterdam in September of 1644 with news of his "extraordinary" journey. He delivered his testimony under oath to Menasseh (in his capacity as community rabbi); and, by all accounts, Montezinos sought neither profit nor material advantage for his sensational report. The story electrified all the same, both the Amsterdam Jewish kehillah and the Protestant millenarian community. From Amsterdam the news spread rapidly across the rest of the Netherlands and Europe, so that by 1650, when Menasseh finally published it as part of his text, Montezinos's "Relation" had already achieved far-flung renown.

It is by all means an extraordinary narrative, which begins with a journey across the Cordilleras in Spanish New Granada, not far from the port of Honda and the present-day capital of Colombia, Bogotá. There, among his porters and guides, Montezinos meets a native cacique.
Francisco, who makes a seemingly offhand comment about the ill-treatment of a “holy people ... most innocent,” who would one day rise up and avenge the cruelty of their tormentors. Though this strange allusion stirs the marrano’s imagination, he lets the comment pass. Upon his return to Cartagena on the Caribbean, however, a bout with the Inquisition and the solitude of his imprisonment jog Montezinos’s memory and allow him to reflect on the Indian’s curious remark. Released from the Inquisitor’s jail, he tracks down Francisco in Honda, confesses to him his secret Jewish identity (and common antipathy toward the Spanish), and convinces the Indian to reveal the meaning of his earlier allusion. This entails a week’s trek into the mountains that brings the pair to a “broad river” (the Rio Cauca) and face to face with two “brethren,” who greet the weary travelers with a recitation, in Hebrew, of the Jewish profession of faith: “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One” (Deut. 6:4). These mysterious men, soon joined by others from the opposite bank of the river, deliver a fantastic oration in the ritualized form of nine propositions repeated by three hundred “brethren” over the course of three days. They proclaim themselves to be of the tribe of Reuben, and they request that Montezinos send twelve bearded emissaries, “skillful in writing,” to join them for an event (undisclosed) of apocalyptic proportions. Later, Francisco explains that these men, among the earliest settlers of America, were descendants of the Children of Israel, miraculously delivered to that land by God. The twelve (Hebrew) scribes whom they sought were needed to help them and their Indian confederates rise up against the mutual Spanish enemy.

Montezinos’s testimony, remarkable in and of itself, seems all the more so for the way its themes fit so well—made to fit so well—into the broader Dutch discourse of America. The geography of the itinerant marrano, as shaped by the Amsterdam rabbi, made perfect sense in the context of the Netherlands. Alliances forged in the New World, once again, presume to resolve problems emanating from the Old—or so it was hoped. Indians are enlisted by God’s Chosen to overthrow the tyranny of Spain. In the case of Montezinos, an alliance between the Reubenites and the natives of Quito requires the added participation of twelve scribes (Amsterdam hakhamonim?), which makes for a somewhat more triangular connection between the Old World, the New World, and the Old Testament wayfarers harbored in America. The effect, though, is much the same. The Indians will consent to join forces with the Jews/Dutch to wage war against that which by now rings familiarly as “the notorious cruelty [of] the Spaniards.” The purpose of this alliance also bears a striking resemblance to the central motif of Dutch Americana: salvation. In the case of the Israelites, the theme of redemption carries an emphatically messianic message. The Indians “shall be happy if [they] make league with [the Israelites],” since the Jews, freed from their bondage, “shall be lords of the world.” The Dutch alliance with the Indians is similarly intended to free the Netherlands from its particular “bondage” (a word used repeatedly in Dutch literature), though for purposes perhaps more pragmatic—political and economic—than apocalyptic.

In a number of ways, of course, the Hope of Israel had some plainly pragmatic purposes of its own that had nothing to do with the Netherlands. The treatise has traditionally been studied in the context of English religious politics and the author’s subsequent efforts to win readmission of the Jews into the Commonwealth. In the dedication to the original Spanish edition, Menasseh refers to inquiries from Protestant divines, including “a man of letters and of quality in England” (the theologian John Dury) who had pressed him on the question of American Jews and thus induced the rabbi to publish. Menasseh dedicated the Latin and English editions of 1650 to the new English government, appealing to their “charitable affection,” “that I may gain your favor and good will to our Nation, now scattered almost all over the earth.” The enthusiastic response of millenarians from the rest of Europe encouraged Menasseh to respond in print in such a way that cleverly harnessed (Christian) chilicastic energies to (Jewish) messianic ends. The Hope of Israel makes the strenuous argument that the presence of Reubenites in America boded best for Jews, not Christians; and the work certainly played a significant part in the expansion of Sephardi spiritualism in the middle of the seventeenth century. Finally, and perhaps most practically, the presence of allies in America would have heartened the embattled Jewish community of Recife, mired for half a decade in a life and death struggle with the Portuguese. The Hope of Israel may not quite have announced the arrival of a Jewish-Indian cavalry, but it did offer solace and impart optimism to Jews, in Europe and America, by suggesting that an age of miracles might soon be upon them.

It is the last of these purposes that may have been foremost on Menasseh’s mind when he went to press in 1650—six full years after Montezinos’s testimony—and that may suggest why he resorted, in all cases, to a distinctly Dutch idiom for his text. The directors of the Dutch West India Company had the capacity to offer Jewish colonists in Brazil something more concrete than solace and “hope”; and Menasseh, wisely recognizing this, resorted accordingly to a rhetorical style that made sense to a Dutch audience. The themes of the Hope of Israel, that is to say, are enunciated in the vocabulary of Dutch geography—in language, topoi, and motifs that derive, to a significant degree, from a Dutch polemical model—and in a manner that effectively linked the “hope of Israel” with a literary tradition of the Netherlands. Such a rhetorical strategy allied the Sephardi cause to that of the WIC. More generally, it affiliated the sacred history of the Jews and their hope for redemption with the patriotic historiography of the United Provinces and its well-established tropes of suffering, “alliances,” and redemption. The hope of Israel, Menasseh asserted, resembled the hope of the Netherlands. And the New World, in this sense, promised salvation to Sephardi and Babylonian alike.
In the end, what is so striking about the *Hope of Israel* is the many types of readers it could accommodate and the multiple layers of rhetoric and argument on which it rested. This is testimony to the skill of its author as a “conciliator”: someone who moved easily between texts and sacred literatures (as Menasseh famously did) and someone who sought to reconcile ostensibly different goals and religious traditions (though with the Sephardi good always in mind). Menasseh’s list of consulted “authors of other nations” demonstrates a catholicity of learning that stands out even in the relatively tolerant intellectual environment of the Dutch Republic. It also demonstrates a remarkable rhetorical flexibility on the part of the author, as a Sephardi rabbi, to participate in and to exploit what might otherwise be considered alien idioms. Menasseh knew well how to use the language and toponyms of others, and this allowed him to compose an outstandingly effective treatise—as the public success of the *Hope* well attests.

That Menasseh did move so easily within an otherwise distinctively Dutch discourse suggests, moreover, that the Sephardi “Nation” of Amsterdam need not be quite so isolated from its secular surroundings. Menasseh, it is true, was something of an exception within the Amsterdam Jewish community precisely for its connections to the Christian world of scholarship and even politics. Yet he was not entirely alone in this regard. In the case of Uriel da Costa, whose heterodoxies sent convulsions through the community at about the time Menasseh came of age intellectually, influences came from far afield than simply the Netherlands. The Holland-born Baruch Spinoza (who in all likelihood received his earliest schooling from Menasseh), though, participated from a very early age in the Dutch republic of letters. Like Menasseh, Spinoza showed himself able to move easily amongst the diverse philosophical and religious circles of Amsterdam. All of which is to say that the communal use of learning (for orthodox ends) by Menasseh with the intellectual curiosity (for “impious” goals) of Spinoza. Rather, Menasseh’s case and others show how the community of Amsterdam Sephardim, if forged by the unique *verso* experience, could be shaped all the same by the experiences, cultures, and (in Menasseh’s case) geographies of those around them.

In the final analysis, the geographic sensibilities expressed by the *Hope of Israel* say as much about the author and his world as they do about that distinctive New World he was describing. America, as imagined by Menasseh and his Dutch contemporaries, represented a hopeful and optimistic landscape that functioned perhaps better as an idea than a reality. The Amsterdam Sephardim, in the end, never sent twelve bearded scribes to the Cordilleras, just as the Dutch, despite their ongoing rhetoric, never finalized an alliance with their American Indian brethren. But over a period that extended from the late sixteenth through the mid-seventeenth centuries, the New World continued to offer the hope of redemption to Jew and Christian alike. Sephardi rabbi no less than colonial promoter appropriated the geography of America and the ever plastic image of its natives for their own ideological ends. The *Hope of Israel*, like so many other Dutch descriptions of the New World, provides evidence ultimately of both the rhetorical dexterity of its author and the singular malleability of his subject, America. By the remarkable combination of the two, the Old Testament had ended up in the New World.

**Notes**

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2. Judges 13:20: “And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar while Manoah and his wife looked on, and they fell on their faces to the ground.” The drama of the story includes both the announcement of the child to the couple and the climactic revelation of the angel to Manoah, who, while never quite doubting his wife, desired nonetheless confirmation of the Divinity of the message.

3. The image—signed “H.Goltzius—and dated ca. 1586—was one in a series of six penannulations, half from the Old Testament and half from the New. See Walter Strauss, ed., *Hendrick Goltzius 1558–1617: The Complete Engravings and Woodcuts* (New York, 1977), esp. 373. There is an earlier engraving, also in the Manoah style, by Maarten van Heemskerk (1498–1574), who worked in Haarlem just before Goltzius’s arrival there ca. 1576–77.


6. Moevaert, who had a successful career as an Amsterdam portraitist, has in fact been credited with the figures in the Boijmans painting. Other candidates include Finck and Ferdinand Bol, though their high reputations at this time (especially Finck’s) may have precluded their contributing to a relatively minor composition. See Albert Blankert et al., *Gods, Saints, and Heroes: Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt* (Washington, 1980), 166.

7. The region, more generally, was described as “the Paradise of Brazil” by the leading chronicler of Dutch America, Johannes de Laet, who happened also to be a prominent (director) of the Dutch West India Company. See Johannes de Laet, *Historia oft Nederlantck eeuw van de verrichtingen der Gezegende West-Indische Compagnie* (Leiden, 1644), cf. 192, on the captancy of Pernambuco, in which Olinda was centrally situated.
8. From Post, Verzoo Landscape with Plantation (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) and River Landscape (Scheepvaart Museum, Amsterdam). Both paintings are signed and dated, 1652 and 1654 respectively. The 1652 landscape was very likely commissioned by Peter Hagen, a former councilor in Brazil (De Steuselaar, Poet, 69).

9. This issue has been left largely unexplored in the literature—both on Post and on the Dutch in Brazil. See, for example, C. R. Roxbor, The Dutch in Brazil, 1624-54 (Oxford, 1957); C. M. Schulten, Nederlandse expeditie in Latijn Amerika: Brazil 1624-1654 (Bussum, 1960); and the art historical literature cited above (note 1). Post's biblical exotica, as such, has gone unremarked, until notably in two recent studies of Dutch biblical painting in the mid-seventeenth century. Christian Timpel et al., Het Oude Testament in de schilderkunst van de Gouden Eeuw (Amsterdam, 1991), and Timpel, In Lichte Reibemants.

10. This political reading of the painting was first suggested in A. B. de Vries, ed., Mannetjes van Plaat en Dagstraal (The Hague, 1983), 11, no. 17.

11. De Laet seemed also to have recognized some of the spiritual qualities of Post's Brazilian site by prominently noting, in his description of Olinda, "the beautiful and well-built Jesuit monastery," the Capuchin and Dominican monasteries, the Carmelite nunnery, and diverse other churches—all of which graced the contested settlement (De Laet, hoefdijk cyclus, 191).

12. The work was published simultaneously in Spanish and Latin as Mujeres de Israel: Histoire et Espoir de Israel. Histoire et Espoir de Israel (both Amsterdam, 1650), thus assuring a wide audience both within and without the Spanish community of Amsterdam. All told, at least thirteen editions appeared through 1723 in Latin, Spanish, English, Dutch, Yiddish, and Hebrew. For a complete bibliography, see J. H. Cottenhagen, Menasseh ben Israel: Manuel Dias Sorno, 1604-1657: A Bibliography (Leiden, 1987).


16. Apologie of Prince William of Orange against the Pracclusion of the King of Spaine, ed. H. Wansink (Leiden, 1669), 53-59 (with slight changes in the punctuation). Like many of the pamphlets, Willem targeted a broadly international audience and had the Apologie, originally published in French, translated immediately into Dutch, German, Latin, and English. Willem's point was reiterated a few months later by the States General in their official abjuration of Philip II, which similarly accused the Spanish monarch of seeking "to abolish all the privileges of the country and have it tyrannically governed."

17. Levenlych discours van gheenwoorci Landt vaeftuist, voor desen oost, ende nu de West-Indische generale compagnie aengeleguist (1622), sig. [C4] v; Memoire van oorlogheleyden die van den heeren Staten General behoeue te bewercken, om ghesrots te wijchen ende andere hotte affen van het Indern (1668), sig. freely; and cf. de Hejler's deneghe ende landen [1668], sig. A4r, which speaks of an "alliance" with the Indians.


20. Joan Avnet, Sinds brief aan de van Peru, met een alliance van de... Heeren Staten, der Verenigde Pacifische Nederlandsen (Amsterdam, 1683). Avnet had attempted to forge an American alliance a few years earlier, when he provided the Nassau Fleet (middle-1628) with special directives for negotiating a federation with the natives. See the "Instrustiche voor u.... Jacques Hermite, vanwegen de Ho. Mo. Heeren, der Staaten-Generaal" and the "Instruxtiche voor den Generael" in De reis en de weder van de Nassause
Barlaeus’s bequest appears in the prelatory materials to Menasseh’s De Creatio
Protectora XXX (Amsterdam, 1635). More generally, see F. E. Blok, “Caspar Barlaeus in
de Joden: 1x geschiedenis van een epigram,” Nederlandsch Archief voor Kreogeschiedenis 63
(1929) 77:85 106 and 179-209; and Roth, Menasseh, 152-54.

The Spanish Jesuissimo—Nuevo Atlas a Teatro de toda Espana de Juan Foussiez (Amster-
dam, 1653)—is discussed by L. Werner, “Universiteitsbibliothek van Amsterdam ontving
een Spanse Jansenisme,” Grotio-Thor Equinox 4 (1985) 10-11; and A. K. Offenberg,
“Some Remarks Regarding Six Autograph Letters by Menasseh ben Israel in the Amster-
dam University Library,” in Kaptein et al., Menasseh, 191-98. Joan Blaeu, the Nether-
lands’ other leading geographer/publisher, also had dealings with Menasseh, in his case
regarding an edition of the Consilior (Roth, Menasseh, 171).

It is perhaps worth noting one further cultural contact, which collaborated with
Menasseh on matters related both to scholarship and printing (he produced images for
the Picher glosario [Amsterdam, 1655]), namely, Rembrandt van Rijn. For a recent study
doing his personal and professional relationship, see Michael Zeit. ‘Imagery and
Jewish Apologies: Rembrandt’s Encounter with Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel’
(Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1994).

Notably: “Alonous de Ezroli [Ezroli y Zuñiga],” whose epic La Araucana describes the
heroic resistance of the native Chileans against the Habsburgs (Spanish ed. pub.
Antwerp, 1586 and 1597; Dutch trans. pub. Rotterdam, 1619) and “Garcilaso de la Vega [Icaza],”
whose highly ambivalent account of the Conquista (the author was half-native) was widely
cited in the United Provinces.

Menasseh, Hope, 103-4.

Ibid., 109-11. See also Méhouen and Nahon, Introduction, 68-76 (citing the Gemeen-
talarchief of Amsterdam on Montezuma’s notable absence from the forthcoming recipi-
ents); and, for biographical details, the fascinating account of Elizabeth Levi de
Seafarers, 7-8 (1975) 63-83. Antonio, who claimed to be forty years old at the time of
his Amsterdam visit (1644), actually returned the following year to Dutch Brazil,
where he lived for two more years, dying before the Jewish community there began
its own register.

In order fully to gain Francis’s confidence, however, Montezinos must first “go
natural”: abandon his Spanish cloak and sword, wear instead the native “alpargatas”
(loom-suede), and swear to eat only roasted maize. See the version of the story (based
on a transcript; copy sent by Menasseh) in Thomas Thorowgood, ed. in America, or,
Probabilities: That the Americans Are of that Race (London, 1650), 127-136.

Records of the Holy Office of Cartagena de las Indias confirm at least part of Montezo-
nos’s tale: See Montezinos, “Narrative,” which traces Inquisition documents concern-
ing “Antonio Montezinos, born at Villahor” and discusses family traditions related to
the affair.

Menasseh, Hope, 105 and passim. Menasseh’s dark vision of “Spanish tyranny” re-
appears in numerous of his other writings. See, for example, the “Epistola dedicatoria”
of the Consilior (pt. 2), in which he acknowledges the Dutch role in protecting the Jews
from the Inquisition: “We were protected from Spanish tyranny, and for that neither I nor my co-religionists will ever be able to thank you [the United Provinces] enough.”

Menasseh, Hope, 110. On the metaphor of bondage (or slavery) as used in contempo-
rary narratives of the Dutch Revolt, see Simon Schama, The Embarrassment of Riches: An
Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age (New York, 1987), 81-93.

See the “Epistola dedicatoria,” in Menasseh, Esperienza di Israele; and the “Epistola
dedicatoria” in Menasseh, Hope, 99-100. Important studies that place work in this English
context include Roth, Menasseh (ch. 182-202); and Hexter, “The Settlement of the Jews in
3-25; Wolff, Menasseh ben Israel’s Mission; and Katz, Philo-Semitism. Menasseh later
attempted to play the Swedish card as well; see David Katz, “Menasseh ben Israel’s
40. This is the central theme of Mechoulam and Nahon (Introduction), who correctly point out that Menasseh made the case not (as has traditionally been argued) that Indians were Jews, but rather that Jews lived among the Indians. The Israelite's miraculous dispersal to the farthest corners of the world, New and Old, was a sign of the imminent messianic redemption.


42. Compare, in this regard, the case of Barneaus, whose open-minded sonnet dedicated to Menasseh (which suggested that Jews and Christians might coexist as “friends before God”) brought in a fact a hail of accusations upon the embattled Latin—and, nota bene, Remonstrant—scholar.

43. It was Menasseh who received the stadholder Frederick Henry (accompanied by Queen Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I) in the Amsterdam synagogue in 1642. He communicated also with Christina of Sweden (see note 39 above) and, of course, with Oliver Cromwell.

44. See the recent edition of Uriel da Costa, Examination of Pharisian Traditions, trans. H. P. Salomon and J. S. D. Sasson (Leiden, 1993); as well as Carl Gebhardt, Die Schriften des Uriel da Costa (Amsterdam, 1932).

45. Bodian (Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation), while making a convincing case for the distinctiveness of the Amsterdam “Men of the Nation,” also acknowledges a number of significant points of cultural contact between the “Portuguese” Sephardic and the Dutch. Among these was a shared ideology of antipathy directed at Iberian Catholicism and even a certain overlap in the construction of “foundation” histories (see especially her third chapter, “The Dutch Context,” in ibid., 53-75). Bodian also indicates the possible channel for this interaction—literature—and notes that Menasseh’s rival, the rabbi Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, likewise read widely in Renaissance literature, both secular and sacred.

Chapter 5

ISRAEL IN AMERICA: THE WANDERINGS OF THE LOST TEN TRIBES FROM MIKEVEIH YISRAEL TO TIMOTHY McVEIGH

David S. Katz

ROYAL FAMILY TREES in the early modern period often began with Adam and Eve, and carried on without shame to the most contemporary representatives of that illustrious lineage. In principle, this was easily accomplished. Everyone knew that Noah had divided the world among his three sons, each of whom was given divine title either to Europe (Japheth), Asia (Shem) or Africa (Ham). The discovery of the American Indians, however, demanded a bit of creativity, since there was no apparent mention of the New World in Genesis, so distant as it was from the scene of biblical events. Columbus himself had no difficulty with their discovery. He died in the belief that he had landed on the east coast of Asia: the Indians were Asiaties, and their presence was interesting but unremarkable. Columbus reported in his journal that when he sent a reconnaissance party into the interior, he included one Luis de Torres, a converse who “understood Hebrew and Chaldean and even some Arabic.” Torres was meant to be the interpreter should the expedition encounter any Hebrew-speaking Indians. It was entirely possible, Columbus reasoned, that these strange people might be the barbarized descendants of the Ten Tribes of Israel whose fate was described in the biblical canon itself.

Although some proto-anthropologists, such as Isaac de Peyrère in seventeenth-century France, suggested that the American Indians might be entirely outside the Scripture story, virtually all those who wrote about the origin of the American Indians agreed that they must in some way be