

**David J. Wertheim, Ed.**  
***The Jew as Legitimation:  
Jewish-Gentile Relations Beyond  
Antisemitism and Philosemitism***  
(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), hardcover, xv + 304 pp.

**RICHARD S. LEVY**

rslevy@uic.edu

University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois 60607

More than most anthologies born of scholarly symposiums, this one displays unmistakable birthmarks. The conference, bearing the same title as this book, took place four years ago in Amsterdam. Seven of the book's fifteen contributors have affiliations with Dutch research institutions and universities. Nearly half of the sixteen essays deal with examples drawn from or closely related to the history of the Netherlands, beginning in the sixteenth century and ranging up to the present or very recent past. This geographic concentration is one of the strengths of the collection. Treatments of Jewish-Gentile relations, especially in the modern period, often pay scant attention to this area of Europe. The uniformly high-quality essays gathered here argue for closer scrutiny of this particular realm of interaction. They are wide ranging, as this list of titles illustrates: "The Maccabean Martyrs as Models in Early Christian Writings" (Jan Willem Henten), "Alterity and Self-Legitimation: The Jew as Other in Classical and Medieval Christianity" (Jeremy Cohen), "The Theological Dialectics of Christian Hebraism and Kabbalah in Early Modernity" (Andreas B. Kilcher), "Christian Readings of Menasseh ben Israel: Translation and Retranslation in the Early Modern World" (Sina Rauschenbach), "Ideology and Social Change: Jewish Emancipation in European Revolutionary Consciousness (1780–1800)" (Jonathan Israel), "Post-Biblical Jewish History Through Christian Eyes: Josephus and the Miracle of Jewish History in English Protestantism" (Jonathan Elukin), "Alien, Everyman, Jew: The Dialectics of Dutch 'Philosemitism' on the Eve of World War II (Irene Zwiep), "The British Empire's Jewish Question and the Post-Ottoman Future" (James Renton), "The Action Portuguesa: Legitimizing National-Socialist Racial Ideology as a Dutch Sephardic Strategy for Safety, 1941–1944" (Jap Cohen), "Disowning Responsibility: The Stereotype of the Passive Jew as a Legitimizing Factor in Dutch Remembrance of the Shoah" (Evelien Gans), "A Source of Legitimacy: Evangelical Christians and Jews" (Yaakov Ariel), "Settlers in a Strange

Land: Dutch, Swiss, American, and German Protestants in Nes Ammim (Israel), 1952–1964” (Gert Klinken), “How the Turn to the Jews After the Shoah Helped Open Catholics to Religious Pluralism” (John Connelly), “The Battle for Jewish Sympathy: The House of Orange, the Dutch Jews, and Postwar Morality” (Bart Wallet), and “Geert Wilders and the Nationalist-Populist Turn Toward the Jews in Europe” (David J. Wertheim).

More of a problem is the choice of the word “Legitimation,” employed for the sake of thematic continuity. The term is vague. It seems to refer to non-Jews’ using Jews and Judaism, for whatever purpose, though even this usage does not apply to some of the chapters. What emerges from the individual discussions is not so much legitimation as rank exploitation, utilization, and / or instrumentalization of Jews. The authors are quite clear that the positive benefits of legitimation are hard to find, either as a goal or even as an unintended consequence of those who essentialized Jews or Judaism for their own convenience. The idea of seeking to explore the ground between antisemitism and philosemitism, the avowed purpose of the anthology, is laudable. However, the instances discussed and carefully analyzed seem much closer to the antisemitic end of the spectrum than the philosemitic end, even in cases when Gentiles did not intend to harm Jews.

The best example of the ambiguity of “legitimation” is to be found in the key contribution by Jeremy Cohen of Tel Aviv University. Although much has been written about the Augustinian doctrine of Jewish witness, the reader will have to look far and wide to find a more succinct, balanced, and illuminating account than this brief essay. Augustine, writing early in the fifth century, formulated a rationale for the continued existence of Jews and Judaism in a Christian world. “Though worthy of extinction” (in Augustine’s words), they had been preserved by God to bear witness to the truth of Christianity and to unknowingly testify through their possession of the Bible—which they did not correctly understand—the ancient lineage and legitimacy of the Christian faith. Thus, Augustine proclaimed to his fellow Christians, “slay them not.” This doctrine, neither wholly recognized by later Christians nor uncontested, nevertheless achieved wide acceptance, and, it could be argued, retained influence long after its theological basis and Christianity’s influence had lost ground to secularizing forces. It may well have had something to do with the survival of the Jews. They did not go the way of the thirteenth century Albigensians, the victims of the Teutonic Knights, or the native peoples of the western hemisphere who were either forcibly converted or put to the sword. However, “slay them not” was only one part of Augustine’s formula. The other was the command to “bring them down.” While Jews’ lives were to be protected and they were to be permitted to live as Jews, they should be degraded, subjugated, and dispersed. To Christians, their degraded status served as visible evidence of the punishment they faced for their refusal to believe in Christ and as proof of Christian supersession of Judaism. Cohen writes, “Eliminating (or converting) them would impede the realization of God’s plan for mankind’s salvation” (p. 35).

A thousand years later, at another critical juncture in the history of Christianity, Jews and Judaism were again used to serve the purposes of others. During the Reformation era, both Protestant and Catholic theologians, seeking a return to the purity and holiness of the early Church, took up the study of the Hebrew Bible. Andreas Kilcher, a Zurich-based professor of Literature and Cultural Studies, pursues the subject of "Christian Hebraism," which also came to include the study of post-biblical rabbinic and kabbalistic literature. He argues guardedly that at least in some cases and with limited effect, the objective was to include Judaism in the Christian plan of salvation, or at least to engage in a serious study of Jewish thought. This marked a significant departure from previous centuries, when Christians often burned Jewish writings. Jewish scholars and rabbis were sought out as important guides and teachers of the necessary languages, though the Christian theologians were seemingly uninterested in these Jews' own views. Sina Rauschenbach, at Potsdam University, continues the theme, fixing upon the famous seventeenth-century figure of Menasseh ben Israel, best known for his efforts to gain the readmission of Jews to Cromwellian England. He was unique in the history of Christian Hebraism, for he was more than a passive Jewish figure, enlisted in Christian discourse. He tried, in Rauschenbach's phrase, to present "Judaism for Christians," tailoring his vigorous publishing program at least in part for Christian readers. This was risky business. The writings of Menasseh ben Israel and other Jews involved in Christian Hebraism were valued by Christian theologians, but often Christians used them to show other Jews the error of their ways (p. 76).

About half the essays in this collection deal with one aspect or another of Christian-Jewish relations. Unlike the theological topics discussed above, most remaining essays focus on secular matters. Among the most interesting of these is by Evelien Gans of the University of Amsterdam. Her firmly centered discussion describes the egregious attempt in certain Dutch circles, with at least some support from academic historians, to relieve Christians' consciences in the aftermath of the Holocaust in the Netherlands. Alleged Jewish passivity in the face of the Nazi threat, they argued, justified their own. Gans applies the apt German term to this endeavor: *Erinnerungsabwehrantisemitismus* (antisemitism to fend off [guilty] memory). Perhaps even more shameful was the failed attempt, described by Jaap Cohen, a researcher at the NIOD in Amsterdam, of long-settled and established Sephardic Jews in the Netherlands to escape being classified as Jews during the Nazi occupation. In this "Action Portuguesia," as the effort was labeled, these Jews enlisted anthropologists, judges, ethnographers, and historians to demonstrate that the Sephardic Jews were distinct from, and distinctly superior to, Ashkenazi Jews in every significant way, including their racial makeup. Trying desperately to save themselves, they at least indirectly justified Nazi antisemitism as practiced against Ashkenazim. Ultimately, the Germans made no distinctions in which Jews they sent to their deaths in the East. As one Jewish historian of Dutch Jewry later asked rhetorically: "did they lose everything, including their honor?" (p. 169).

This is a well-edited, worthwhile, and important book.