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Allison P. Coudert, Jeffrey S. Shoulson, eds. *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. 328 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-3761-0.

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This eclectic, but well-designed, collection of papers approaches the theme of Christian Hebraists by focusing on how the encounter between Christian Hebraists and their Jewish contemporaries impacted both sides, especially through exchange and interaction. The volume includes twelve essays, divided into two broad categories: "negotiating dialogue" and "imagining differences." Rather than examine each of the excellent contributions to the volume, I would like to focus on a few recurring themes.

While the volume frames the theme within the context of increasing interest in Hebraica and Judaica in Renaissance Humanism and the Reformation, it purposefully, and I think very productively, does not dwell on any one particular set of patterns of Jewish and Christian relations, especially anti-Judaism. Censorship, for example, is presented as a complex and systematic mechanism which shaped modern structures of control, but which also reshaped Jewish literacy and self-definition; polemic, both Jewish and Christian, is portrayed as at times engaging with and understanding, not simply rejecting, the opposing religion. As one contributor notes, no single thread ran through the works of the Christian Hebraists; their responses to Jews and Judaism could be as varied as their own backgrounds, perspectives, and professions.

Many essays demonstrate the basic ambivalence of Christian attitudes toward Jews. While some Christians developed new perspectives, perhaps sympathizing with or projecting from their own sense of persecution or diaspora, real attempts were made to further bifurcate contemporary Judaism from its biblical roots. Reverence for Judaism and the Old Testament, therefore, could and did often coexist with disdain for actual Jews, who had been removed from their own history.

One common theme throughout the volume is the discussion among Christian Hebraists of the value of Jewish scholarship for biblical translation and exegesis. But the volume also highlights the rather intriguing and equally complex intellectual and cultural context–including, for example, the diffusion of Neoplatonism or the growing interest in antiquities or the sciences–that could affect both Christian and Jewish thinkers, and impact upon Jewish and Christian relations. Many of the essays make the point that Hebrew was moving to a more standard place among the family of languages, and even the Talmud, in the process of being censored, was brought more directly into a European Christian consciousness. Part of wider growth in ethnographic and intellectual curiosity, broader interest in all facets of Judaism–while still at times focused on elements perceived as anti-Christian–could allow for the possibility of

improving relations with Jews.

The essays certainly provide examples of close Jewish and Christian interaction, particularly in a number of scholarly circles and friendships that are described in the volume. In addition, Jews and Christians might share general intellectual approaches, as both groups could mine the Bible and the history of antiquity for wisdom as well as models of political organization. At times, however, the discussion or use of particular Jewish figures or topics, such as Sabbatai Zevi and Jewish messianism, served primarily inner-Christian debates, even if they were also accompanied by anti-Jewish overtones and emphases as well.

The volume argues that the engagement by Christian Hebraists could also influence internal Jewish practices–as in the later process of abandoning customs considered by some as superstitious–thought, and identity. The volume asserts that there is evidence to suggest that early modern Jews were active, not simply passive onlookers, in the religious debates of the period.

One important result of the broad and flexible approach of the volume is that the resilience of early modern Jewish communities and the complexity and changeability of identity and perceptions of alterity are stressed throughout. This perspective will contribute to the ongoing appreciation of the multivalent nature of the early modern Jewish experience.

As a whole, the volume offers a number of new areas for study and welcome new approaches to more trodden themes within both Jewish history and the burgeoning field of early modern studies more generally. While the primary focus of the volume is on intellectual exchange, the ground has been prepared for some reevaluation of social relations between Jews and Christians as well. In the end, this volume should be highly recommended both for the individual contributions as well as for the overall picture that it offers.

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