

'Ancient Rabbis Inspired by God': Robert Sheringham's Surprising Edition of Mishnah Tractate Yoma (1648)

Thomas Roebuck, University of East Anglia

In 1648, Robert Sheringham (c.1604-1678), fellow of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, published what was, in many ways, a surprising volume. It was an edition of Mishnah tractate, Yoma, 'in which is described', as the book's title page explains, 'the Sacrifices and other Ministries on the Day of Expiation'.¹ Tractate Yoma offers prescriptions for Temple ritual on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), and it develops regulations for that day which can be found in Leviticus 16. Sheringham's edition offered an unvocalized Hebrew text together with his own Latin translation and extensive commentary, a format which found its precedents in Dutch editions of individual Mishnaic tractates, most obviously the work of two theologians and Hebraists, Constantijn L'Empereur (1591-1648) and Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669). In an English context, however, his work was truly pioneering: it was printed at least twenty years before the heyday of English Mishnaic studies, which would emerge in Restoration Oxford. Sheringham himself certainly had a reputation as a Hebraist in the local confines of Caius College, where he had matriculated in 1618/19 at the age of 16, after leaving Norwich School.² He became a fellow of the College in 1626, acting as lecturer in Greek in 1630 and in Hebrew in

¹ Robert Sheringham, *Joma. Codex Talmudicus, In quo agitur De Sacrificiis, caeterisque Ministeriis Diei Expiationis* (London, 1648). This paper is indebted throughout to the many conversations and seminars which took place during my time as a visiting fellow in the Oxford Seminar in Advanced Jewish Studies. I am particularly grateful for all the feedback I received on the paper I presented on Sheringham's Mishnaic studies as part of this project, especially for the comments of Kirsten Macfarlane, Noel Malcolm, and Scott Mandelbrote. The comments of the three editors of this volume have improved the chapter a great deal.

² On Sheringham's biography see Alastair Hamilton, 'Sheringham, Robert (c.1604-1678)', *ODNB*, online edn.

1633. Caius was a College which had already cultivated the study of Hebrew: William Branthwaite (1563-1619), member of the Second Cambridge Company of Translators of the King James Bible, had been master of the College from 1607 to 1619, bequeathing his Hebrew books to the College's library.³ Within Caius, Sheringham's mastery of Hebrew earned him the half-admiring, half-mocking honorific, 'Rabbi Sheringham'.⁴

However, Sheringham himself remains a surprising figure to have produced such a pioneering work of English Mishnaic studies. The lack of almost any surviving correspondence suggests that Sheringham had no ambitions to cut a figure in the international Republic of Letters, and even within the networks of mid-seventeenth-century British Hebrew scholars he seems not to have been particularly well connected. There is no immediate evidence, for instance, of a close relationship with his fellow Cambridge scholar, John Lightfoot (1602-1675), who from 1643 was master of Catharine Hall, a mere five-minute walk away from Caius College. His dedication of *Joma* to Sir John Heydon (bap. 1588, d. 1653), the Norfolk mathematician and Royalist army officer, is suggestive more of local affiliations and private debts than of future scholarly ambitions: 'I have presented this to you especially,' he writes, 'to whom I acknowledge privately that I owe many things, and now I witness it publicly'.⁵ Heydon's own book collection suggests a man of general humanist reading who dabbled in scholarship, rather than someone who could engage with Mishnaic studies in any depth.⁶ Soon after publishing *Joma*, Sheringham fled the new Parliamentary regime and went to the Netherlands,

³ On Branthwaite's library see David Norton, *The King James Bible: A Short History from Tyndale to Today* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), ch. 3.

⁴ John Venn, *Biographical History of Gonville and Caius College, 1349-1897*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: CUP, 1897), 243.

⁵ Sheringham, *Joma*, sig. A2v: 'haec tibi praecipuè obtuli, cui me debere plurimum semper privatim agnoscam, & nunc testor publicè'.

⁶ The National Archives, Kew, State Papers 20/7 (Priced list of delinquents' books sold 1643-1645), 64-65: 'The Inventory of Sir Iohn Haydens Bookes'.

where he taught oriental languages and defended absolutism.⁷ Previously understood to be a fervent Laudian, Edward Vallance has painted a convincing picture of Sheringham in the 1640s as a rather less religiously ardent and more hawing figure.⁸ His later work concentrated not on Hebrew texts, but on Northern languages, including Icelandic.⁹ Sheringham therefore seems to lack the obvious networks of patronage, scholarship, politics or religion, which would have made his remarkable Mishnah edition readily comprehensible.

Even so, there is no doubt that his book was read, admired, and challenged in the seventeenth century and beyond. Almost exactly fifty years after it was published, Sheringham's commentary on Yoma would be one of the four English works Guilielmus Surenhusius reproduced in the first volumes of his complete edition of the Mishnah. The other three all emerge from a closely interrelated Oxford context: Edward Bernard's prefatory letter to William Guise's edition of tractate Zera'im, Edward Pococke's translation of Maimonides's prefaces to his Mishnah commentary, and Guise's own commentary on Zera'im.¹⁰ Sheringham's is the outlier. Surenhusius is particularly impressed by what Sheringham has done to trace 'not only the affairs of the Hebrews from other Jewish writers, but also from the Greeks and Latins', which has

⁷ Robert Sheringham, *The Kings Supremacy Asserted* (London, 1660), but a version of the book was clearly circulating earlier: see letter of Sir Edward Nicholas to Edward Hyde, 19/29 May 1653, in *The Nicholas Papers: Correspondence of Sir Edward Nicholas, Secretary of State*, edited by George F. Warner, vol. 2 (London: Camden Society, 1886-1920), 13-14. On Sheringham's teaching in Rotterdam see Alastair Hamilton, "'An Unlikely Friendship': Robert Sheringham and the Cawton Family", in *Living in Posterity: Essays in Honour of Bart Westerweel*, ed. Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen et al. (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), 133-137.

⁸ Edward Vallance, 'Royalist Absolutism in the 1650s: The Case of Robert Sheringham', in *Monarchism and Absolutism in Renaissance Europe*, ed. Cesare Cuttica and Glenn Burgess (London: Routledge, 2012), 33-46, 220-224, esp. 35.

⁹ Robert Sheringham, *De Anglorum Gentis Origine Disceptatio* (Cambridge, 1670). On this work see, briefly, Heather O'Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 42-43.

¹⁰ Guilielmus Surenhusius, *Mischna sive totius Hebraeorum juris, rituum, antiquitatum, ac legum oralium systema*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam, 1698), sig. ar-v (Bernard's prefatory letter), sig. a2r-d4v (Pococke's translation), sig. A1r-F2v (Guise's commentary on Zeraim).

shown 'that many Sacred things of the people and their mythology spread from the Hebrews, from where the antiquity of Jewish ceremonies is not a little confirmed'. Surenhusius reads Sheringham's commentary as a kind of implicit defence of Hebraic traditions by demonstrating pagan culture's debt to them. He does note, however, that Sheringham 'attacked learned men a little too sharply'.¹¹ Sheringham rarely cited his contemporary Hebraists except to criticise them: in the preface, he signalled out Johannes Buxtorf as one who had 'stumbled almost everywhere' in his Talmudic Lexicon; elsewhere, even the lawyer, antiquary, and England's foremost Hebrew scholar, John Selden (1584-1654), came in for criticism, to which he offered a mammoth rebuttal in print.¹²

While Surenhusius admired Sheringham's commentary, others at the end of the seventeenth century were still shocked by an extraordinary passage in Sheringham's prefatory defence of the Mishnah, from which the title of my essay is taken and which no discussion of Sheringham can ignore. 'This also I am not able to pass by', Sheringham writes, 'that many allegorical and pious sayings which ancient Rabbis inspired by God and taken up by his divinity have brought forth, are contained in the Talmudic writings'.¹³ This was too much for the nonjuring clergyman, Thomas Baker (1656-1740), who in his *Reflections Upon Learning* saw

¹¹ Guilielmus Surenhusius, *Seder Mo'ed sive legum mischnicarum liber qui inscribitur ordo festorum*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam, 1699), sig. ***2v: 'Tractatum de Die Expiationis tibi exhibemus ex versione Roberti Sheringamii Cantabrigiensis, cum ejusdem notis integris, in quibus non solum res Hebraicae ex aliis scriptoribus Hebraicis, sed & e Graecis atque Latinis satis ingeniose pertractantur, & ostenditur plurima gentium Sacra & mythologiam ab Hebraeis promanasse, unde Hebraicarum cerimoniarum antiquitas non parum confirmatur. Tandem hoc etiam in Sheringamio laudandum est, quod, etiamsi in viros doctos nimis acriter invehatur, genuinum antiquitatis sensum pro modulo suo expiscari conatur'.

¹² Sheringham, *Joma*, sig. c1r: 'Pauca quidem ex his notavit Buxtorfius in suo Lexico Talmudico, sed ubique ferè lapsus, ut in commentariis nostris ostensum est'. On this see G. J. Toomer, *John Selden: A Life in Scholarship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 771-772. More recently on John Selden see Jason Rosenblatt, *John Selden: Scholar, Statesman, Advocate for Milton's Muse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

¹³ Sheringham, *Joma*, sig. a3v: 'Illud etiam nequeo praeterire, quòd multa allegorica & pia dicta quae antiqui Rabbini à Deo exagitati ejusque numine abrepti protulerunt, in scriptis Talmudicis continentur'.

Sheringham as the apogee of those who 'have studied the *Talmud* so long as to draw Contagion from thence, and almost become Rabbins themselves'. Of this passage in Sheringham's preface, Baker comments specifically: 'Could any *Jew* have said more? Or could it be imagin'd, if a Christian would have said so much? If these be the Fruits of Rabbinical Enquiries, surely they were better let alone'.¹⁴ Sheringham's capacity to provoke outrage among seventeenth-century Christians has today become a source of admiration. Alastair Hamilton concludes, in the only previous essay on Sheringham's Hebrew scholarship, that 'of all the scholars engaged in the study of Jewish texts in the seventeenth century, "Rabbi" Sheringham, as he was known, could claim to be a true philo-Semite'. Hamilton argues that, in contrast to those contemporaries whose interests in Hebrew or the Mishnah were motivated by millenarian enthusiasms and a desire to convert the Jews to Christianity, Sheringham evinced a genuine 'appreciation of the importance of Jewish sources', even going so far as to argue (in a later book) that 'the English themselves were of Jewish descent'.¹⁵ Sheringham, therefore, has held a special place among the seventeenth-century Christian scholars who studied Jewish texts. What, ultimately, did Sheringham believe the Mishnah had to teach Christian scholars? And how best ought they to unlock its many difficulties? In answering these questions, we shall find that the surprising nature of Sheringham's achievement -- producing such a landmark edition largely in isolation from the obvious contemporary networks of Hebrew scholars -- is etched into almost every aspect of the book, an achievement that is simultaneously belated and proleptic.

The Oral Law and the Written Law: Sheringham Defends Mishnaic Study

¹⁴ Quoted in Mordechai Feingold, 'Oriental Studies', in *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume IV: Seventeenth-Century Oxford*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 452.

¹⁵ Hamilton, 'An Unlikely Friendship', 134. On interest in the Mishnah among millenarians, see Yosef Kaplan, 'Jews and Judaism in the Hartlib Circle', *Studia Rosenthaliana* 38/39 (2005/2006): 186-215.

Why should Christian scholars study the Mishnah? At the heart of the answers Sheringham offers to this question in his book's 'Preface to the Reader' is the conviction that the Mishnah (and the Talmud) represent some version of the ancient Jewish oral law given by God to Moses, as described in 2 Esdras 14:4-6. 'Many traditions', Sheringham explained, 'given by divine inspiration to Moses on Mount Sinai and transmitted thence orally to posterity, which Moses was by no means permitted to set down in writing, are found in the Talmudic writings'.¹⁶ The Mishnah, for Sheringham, preserves elements of the Oral Torah delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai. 'Mishnah, which is a special part of the Talmud', Sheringham outlined, 'was compiled by the distinguished Rabbi Jehuda, who was called *Holy* on account of his sincere and irreproachable morals'. Jehuda 'flourished especially under Marcus Antonius, and was a Jew by religion, but also an incomparable man'. Sheringham does not conceive the Mishnah to be the oldest non-biblical Jewish writings: he specifically imagines Rabbi Jehuda as the first one who 'brought together into corpus the laws of the Jews, not all of them, but those which from various *writings* [emphasis added] here and there he was able to collect'. 'The Rabbis following', he goes on, 'added the Gemaras, in which they have explained difficult and doubtful things, and adjoined many traditions omitted by Rabbi Jehuda'. Thus, he concludes, 'these two, Mishnah and Gemara, constituted a whole corpus of sacred and civil law', but one which ultimately contains vestiges (however attenuated) of the oral law revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai.¹⁷

¹⁶ Sheringham, *Joma*, sig. b2v: 'traditiones multae Mosi in monte Sinai divinitus datae, & per os inde posteris transmissae, in scriptis Talmudicis referuntur, quas Scriptis tradere & divulgare Mosi nequaquam licuit'.

¹⁷ Sheringham, *Joma*, sig. A4v: 'Mischna, quae est praecipua pars Talmudis à R. Jehuda principe, qui propter sinceros integrosque mores *Sanctus* vocabatur, compilata fuit: floruit praecipuè sub Marco Antonino [...]. Is primus leges Hebraeorum, non omnes, sed quas ex variis scriptis hinc inde colligere potuit, in unum corpus concinnavit, cui sequentes Rabbini Gemaras attexuerunt, quibus difficilia & dubia

That is why, Sheringham argued, 'the Talmudic writings bring not a little to the understanding of the sacred Scriptures'. 'For the Rabbis do not say in vain: *The written law cannot be explained except through the oral law*', quoting this saying in Hebrew. 'Certainly', Sheringham writes, 'it behoves the translator of Scriptures to know the Laws, Ceremonies and rites of the Jews most accurately. If someone who lacks this understanding arrogates to himself the burden of the Translator, having stumbled most horribly into error, he may lead others too headlong the same way'.¹⁸ He puts this argument into practice in his commentary on Yoma 5:3, which describes the High priest sprinkling sacrificial animal blood onto the ground, *not* onto the tabernacle itself (at least as Bertinoro explains the passage). 'If this is true', Sheringham argues, 'the English translation of Leviticus 16:14 is flawed, in which it is asserted that God commanded that the High Priest touch the place of atonement itself with the blood'. The Dutch translation has erred similarly too. 'The practice of the Jews is repugnant to both translations', he concludes, 'if indeed the Talmudists tell things truly'.¹⁹ The Mishnah gives glimpses (at the very least) of the Mosaic oral law, and as such can become an invaluable interpretive gloss on the written law, the Pentateuch. Sheringham was not alone in making these arguments. In particular, his preface echoes in miniature the history of the evolution of the Talmud as a corpus of Jewish law Selden

explicârunt, & traditiones adjunxerunt: ita ut haec duo, Mischna & Gemara, integrum corpus juris sacri & civilis constituent'.

¹⁸ Sheringham, *Joma*, sig. a1r-v: 'Sed, quod nostra magis interest, scripta Talmduica non parùm ad sacrae Scripturae intelligentiam conferunt. Frustra non est quod aiunt Rabbini אין תורה שבכתב יכולה להתבאר כי אם *Non potest lex scripta nisi per legem oralem explicari*. Certè Interpretem sacrum Leges, Cerimonias, ritúsque Iudaeorum accuratissimè scire oportet.'

¹⁹ Sheringham, *Joma*, 110: 'Si haec vera sunt, vitiosa est versio Anglicana, Levit.16.14. qua asseritur jussisse Deum ut Sacerdos magnus ipsum propitiatorium sanguine tingeret. *And he shall take of the blood of the bullock and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy-seat East-ward*. Et nova etiam versio Belgica, *Ende hy sal van den bloede des varren nemen, ende sal met sijnen vingher op het versoendecksel oostwaert sprengen*. Utrique versioni repugnabat praxis Iudaeorum si quidem Talmudici vera narrant.'. The English translation Sheringham quotes is found in the Geneva Bible, Bishops' Bible, and the King James Bible, and the Dutch is that of the *Statenvertaling*, Dutch authorised version of 1637.

had offered in the 'Prolegomena' to his account of Jewish laws of inheritance, a book that Sheringham certainly knew and discussed.²⁰ It is perhaps possible, though, to detect a subtle difference in emphasis between the two scholars. Whereas Sheringham quotes unequivocally the idea that 'the written law cannot be explained without the oral law', Selden more cautiously allows Nicholas of Lyra and the scholastic philosopher John Baconthorpe to make these arguments for him.²¹

If the Mishnah (and the Talmud as a whole) embodies, even to some extent, the oral law given to Moses, one might imagine that Sheringham would be concerned to underline the Mishnah's remoteness, its origins in utter antiquity. On the contrary, however, Sheringham is concerned to *familiarise* the Mishnah -- even to domesticate it. His arguments here stem from the notion that the Mishnah was a legal corpus, one that may even be useful to contemporary law makers. Given 'how pleasing' the study of civil and canon law has been to 'learned and famous men', 'how much more so ought the laws of the Jews to be pleasing, who have God himself as their legislator?'²² 'But how (someone may say)', Sheringham writes, invoking the arguments of a straw man, 'is anything of certainty about the Laws and Rites of the Jews able to be discerned, when many things other than Laws are often asserted by the Talmudists?' Jewish magistrates dispute so much amongst one another, that it is inevitable some go against the truth. Sheringham answers with an appeal to English legal precedent. Is this kind of disagreement not familiar to

²⁰ On Selden's arguments see Toomer, *Selden*, 451-452; on the genealogy of these arguments see Anthony Grafton, "'Pandects of the Jews': A French, Swiss and Italian Prelude to John Selden", in *Jewish Books and their Readers: Aspects of the Intellectual Life of Christians and Jews in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Scott Mandelbrote and Joanna Weinberg (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 169-188. Sheringham, *Joma*, 55, discusses the second edition of Selden's book (pub. 1636), which has as its second volume Selden's account of the succession of the Jewish High Priesthood.

²¹ John Selden, *De Successionibus in Bona Defuncti, Ad Leges Ebraeorum, Liber Singularis* (London, 1636), XVII.

²² Sheringham, *Joma*, sig. a1r: 'Si haec claris & illustribus viris placeant, quantò magis placere debeant jura Hebraeorum, qui Deum ipsum legislatorem habuerunt.'

juris-consults? 'For they use almost the same way of speaking in our judicial books (which we call *Annales*, or in the vulgar tongue, *Year Books*), which have collected together relations of cases and judgments. For just as in the *Mishnah*, and what *Shammai*, what *R. Gamaliel*, and what *R. Joshua* said, thus it is told in these books of ours what *Babington*, and what *Paston*, what *Yelverton*, and what *Fortescue* said'.²³ *Sheringham* puts this kind of thinking into practice in his commentary itself, when he draws from tractates *Keritot* and *Makkot* to show that men could be banished or flogged for breaking their fast on the day of Atonement. While 'among us today it is not usual to be whipped because of this fault', *Sheringham* says, 'once, however, among our ancestors this punishment had been used, as can be seen from the ancient laws'. The eleventh-century *Laws of Edward the Confessor* and the ninth-century treaty of *King Alfred and Guthrum*, the Viking ruler of East Anglia, each show that whipping and fines were prescribed for fast breaking.²⁴ *Sheringham* is careful not to say that 'among us today' we have practices in common with the ancient Jews, but his ancestors did. Points of cultural commonalty between Jewish and English traditions are safely displaced to the late middle ages (common law tradition) or even further back, to the Anglo-Saxon period. But such commonalties are there to be found. This kind of assimilation of *Mishnah* to English history might point to its pedagogic purpose: the book offers a kind of Jewish acculturation for the novice. *Sheringham* hints as much at the end of the preface, when he writes that his commentaries may help those 'to make further progress who do

²³ *Sheringham, Joma*, sig. a2v-a3r: 'At quomodo (inquiet quispiam) possit quicquam certi de Legibus Ritibusque Iudaicis decerni, cum multa saepe à Talmudicis praeter Leges afferuntur? [...] Sit ita: an non hoc juris-consultis familiare est? Eodem fere loquendi modo in libris nostris juridicis, quos *Annales*, Linguâ vulgari *Year-Books*, appellamus, utuntur ii qui relationes istas casuum & judiciorum congesserint. Sicut enim in *Mischna*, quid *Hillel*, & quid *Schmaeus*, quid *R. Gamaliel*, & quid *R. Iosua*, ita in libris istis narratur quid *Babingtonus*, & quid *Pastonus*, quid *Yelvertonus*, & quid *Fortescutius* dixerit'.

²⁴ *Sheringham, Joma*, 191: 'Apud nos hodie inusitatum est ob delictum hoc flagris caedi [...] olim tamen inter majores nostros poena haec in usu fuit, ut ex antiquis legibus constat'.

not yet perfectly understand the locutions of the Talmudists'.²⁵ Sheringham certainly does seem to have taught tractate Yoma to a receptive pupil in Rotterdam, the young Thomas Cawton (1642-1677), who made his own manuscript copy of the tractate.²⁶

That the Mishnah offered access to traces of the Mosaic oral law -- and, as such, to some sort of divinely inspired revelation -- led him into the most controversial passage of his preface, which we have already seen would exercise Thomas Baker at the end of the seventeenth century. That ancient Rabbis spoke with divine inspiration 'perhaps you may not believe', Sheringham acknowledged, 'but why should you not believe it, when Christ our Saviour plucked many things from these ancient Rabbis into his own sermons, which have now been inserted into canonical Scripture'. He then provides three examples of Christ's parables which have immediate parallels in the Talmud: the Rich Banqueter and Poor Man Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) finds a parallel in the Babylonian Talmud tractate Berakhot; the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20) has a parallel in the Jerusalem Talmud, tractate Berakhot; and the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25) has a parallel in the Babylonian Talmud on Shabbat.²⁷ The first parable is sufficient to show the kinds of connections here. In Luke 16, 'a certain beggar named Lazarus' came to the gates of a 'certain rich man', 'desiring to be fed with crumbs which fell from the rich man's table'. When the rich man died he was taken to hell, 'being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom' (KJV). In the parallel passage adduced in Berakhot, Rabbi Eleazar has asked the Lord to grant him a son. And the Lord responds:

²⁵ Sheringham, *Joma*, sig. c1r-v: 'in commentariis si quid difficile sit ad verbum reddo, ut ex his subsidium haberent ad ulteriorem progressum qui modos loquendi Talmudicorum nondum exactè sciunt'.

²⁶ See London, British Library Harley MS 1795. I am planning a separate study of this manuscript, which I am most grateful to Joanna Weinberg for bringing to my attention.

²⁷ Sheringham, *Joma*, sig. a3v: 'Huic forte non credis: quidni credas, cum multa Christus Salvator noster in concionibus suis ex istis carpsit quae jam canonicis Scripturis inserta sunt', with Talmudic parallels drawn until sig. b1v.

There was indeed a rich man, who prepared a great feast, and invited many guests: There was also a certain poor man, who lying at the gates, said: May you bestow upon me some crumbs, falling from your table, I beg you. The rich man entirely neglecting this offered him nothing. So the beggar spoke to the Head of the Household: Lord, from your dinner, which you have prepared, do you not judge me worthy to bestow a crumb?²⁸

Whether the parable really seems to make a rather different ethical or spiritual argument to that found in Luke 16 is not discussed by Sheringham. The point is simply to show that some of Christ's memorable formulations and the Rabbis' sayings in the Talmud have their common origins in the words of 'ancient Rabbins' who were 'inspired by God'.

All Sheringham's examples (as he acknowledges) are drawn verbatim from a book by Julius Conradus Otto (1562-?) called *Gali Razia, or the Discovery of Secrets*. Otto was a former Rabbi who had converted to Christianity, and had been appointed to teach Hebrew at the University of Altdorf in 1603.²⁹ *Gali Razia* is presented by Otto, in his preface, as an apologetic work designed to help conversion of his formerly fellow Jews. His essential argument is that there is commonalty to be found between the beliefs of Jews and Christians, and to demonstrate this he places Talmudic passages, which he drew from 'an early sixteenth-century compendium of rabbinic aggadah', Jacob ibn Habib's *Ein Ya'akov*, alongside Jesus's parables.³⁰ Having

²⁸ Sheringham, *Joma*, sig. a4r: 'Ibi Rabbi subjicit: Erat quidam dives, qui magnum convivium apparabat, & multos invitabat hospites: erat & pauper quidam, qui ad fores jacens, dicebat: Mihi saltem micam de mensa cadentes, quaeo, largiamini. Ille verò hunc negligens nihil ipsi impertivit. Tunc is Patrem-familias allocutus: Domine, de tanta coena, quam apparasti, non me, cui micam largireris, dignum judicas?'

²⁹ On Otto see Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg, *I have always love the Holy Tongue': Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a Forgotten Chapter in Renaissance Scholarship* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 233-253.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

quoted the example of the 'Evangelist's parable about the rich and poor man', he explains that from it 'this Rabbi intended to teach nothing different than the Evangelist, and at the same time to exhort the Jewish people to recognition of Jesus Christ'. 'And from here it is clear,' he concludes, 'that even the most ancient Rabbis taught and wrote about the Evangelist's parables'.³¹ Otto is arguing, therefore, that the Talmudists borrowed parables from the New Testament in order to acquaint Jews with Christian teachings. Sheringham uses Otto's examples to make the opposite argument. 'Perhaps someone', Sheringham says, silently invoking Otto, 'may say that the later Rabbis took these things from the Evangelist, and were able to put them forth in the name of the ancient Rabbis'. But this was not conceivable of the 'Rabbini posteriores', who call Christ 'the cunning imposter'. 'Would they treat the man as holy? Collect his sayings? Put them forth in the name of the ancient Rabbins? I think it more likely', Sheringham concludes, 'that the Rabbins who wove both Gemara have never read the Evangelists'.³² It is far more plausible, therefore, in Sheringham's eyes, that Christ drew upon the words of divinely inspired Rabbis, which were then set down independently in both the New Testament and in the Gemara.

This argument provoked Sheringham's contemporaries long before it disturbed Baker. Thomas Bang (1600-1661), Professor of Hebrew at the University of Copenhagen, objected to it in his 1657 account of the fragmentary and apocryphal Book of Enoch.³³ Amidst a discussion of conceptions of angels, he paused to observe the deleterious effects of the early Fathers' interests

³¹ Conradus Otto, *Gali Razia Occultorum Detectio* (Nuremberg, 1605), sig. Lijr: 'Quibus hic Rabbi nihil aliud quam Evangelium docere voluit, & simul gentem Judaicam ad agnitionem Jesu Christi adhortari, cum expressè is Parabolà Evangelica de divite & paupere utatur. Et hinc liquet, etiam antiquissimos Rabbinos praedixisse & scripsisse de parabolis Evangelicis'.

³² Sheringham, *Joma*, sig. b1v-b2r: 'At forte dicat aliquis Rabbinos posteriores haec ex Evangelio sumere, & nomine antiquorum Rabbitorum edere potuisse [...] eum vafrum impostrem appellant [...] Hunc sine ut sanctum putarent? ut dicta ejus colligerent? ut antiquorum Rabbitorum nomine ederent? opinor magis Rabbinos qui utramque Gemaram contextuerunt Evangelia nunquam legisse'.

³³ On Bang see Gina Dahl, *Books in Early-Modern Norway* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 107.

in Platonic philosophy. 'These are the impure waters of Plato, these swamps of Platonic things, from which the Fathers had drawn such steams of filth into their own writings', he exclaimed, noting that the emperor Julian (331-363), generally known as Julian the Apostate, was particularly taken with neo-Platonising.³⁴ Even Augustine 'seemed to have been too much addicted to Platonism' and affirmed in several of his works 'that the Platonic doctrine came quite near to Christianity'.³⁵ Just as Augustine saw false connections between Platonism and Christianity, so 'in our age are to be found those who derive several parables of the Evangelists from the Talmudic writings' (presumably implying that what would be written down in the Talmud was known through oral traditions at the time of Christ). And he gave an example of a particular culprit: 'Among whom is Robert Sheringham, an Englishman, who in the Preface to his Talmudic volume, *Joma*, on Jewish Sacrifices, brings forth out of the *Gali Raziah* of Julius Conradus Otto, a baptized Jew, and one time professor of Hebrew at the University of Altdorf several of Christ's parables. 'But Sheringham', he observed, 'was ignorant that Otto invented many things, that he added things, that he interpolated and cut short passages of the Talmud for the favour of the Christians, to whom as a proselyte he attempted to reach out his hand'.³⁶

Partly we find a simple mistrust of the extent to which Sheringham has built his argument on examples offered by a converted Jew. More interesting, however, is Bang's analogy between Patristic Platonising and modern harmonisations of Christianity and Judaism, which he diagnoses

³⁴ Bang, *Caelum Orientis*, 49: 'Hae sunt impurae scaturigines *Platonis*, hae *Platonicorum* paludes, e quibus *Patres* tantam sordium conflagem in sua scripta traxerant, ut alia taceamus'.

³⁵ Bang, *Caelum Orientis*, 53: 'Quin & *Augustinus* Platonicis nimium addictus esse videtur [...] doctrinamque *Platonicam* ad Christianam quam proximè accedere affirmat'

³⁶ Bang, *Caelum Orientis*, 53: 'Haud mirum *Augustino* hoc venisse in mentem, cum nostrâ aetate inveniuntur, qui parabolas Evangelicas nonnullas e scriptis Thalmudicis derivent. In quibus est *Robertus Sheringhamius* Anglus, qui Praefat. in Codicem Thalmudicum *Joma* Sacrificia Judicia tractante e *Julii Conradi Otthonis*, baptizati Judaei, tandemque Professoris Hebraei in Academia Altorfina גלי רזיח *Gali Raziah* [...] Sed ignoravit *Sheringhamius Otthonem* multa confinxisse, de suo addidisse, loca Thalmudis interpolasse & mutilasse in gratiam Christianorum, quibus ceu proselytus palpum obtrudere conabatur'.

explicitly as twin forms of damaging syncretism. ‘Let these new Julians’, Bang implores, suggesting that Sheringham and others who derive Christ’s parables from the Talmud are the heirs of Julian the Apostate, ‘cease from insulting the holy Evangelists, under the guise of σύγκριστις [compounding], or to give it a truer name, σύγχυσις [confounding, muddling]’.³⁷ Bang seems to me at least partly right that Sheringham's argument about the divine inspiration of the 'ancient Rabbis' looks back to older Christian Kabbalist and syncretist arguments about the availability of divine inspiration across pagan and Jewish traditions around the time of the coming of the Messiah (Virgil prophesying Christ in his *Eclogues*, for instance). It is perhaps in synthesising these older notions of divine inspiration with modern techniques of New Testament historicization that Sheringham’s thought became problematic to his contemporaries. It is one thing to say (as many Christian scholars of Jewish texts did) that Christ, as a Jew, must be understood within a Semitic linguistic and cultural context, but another to say that the religious figures of that culture were themselves divinely inspired. Some contemporaries clearly found this mixture of syncretist talk of divine inspiration with the latest tools of seventeenth-century Mishnaic studies to be dismaying.

That Sheringham seemed slightly out of kilter with mainstream contemporary attempts to justify the study of Jewish texts by appeals to the historicization of the New Testament may be another product of his marginal position as a scholar. He was clearly aware of some of the most urgent debates in New Testament studies of his day, but his book was not primarily an intervention into them, making few attempts to use the Mishnah to illuminate the New Testament. One of the very few examples when he does use the Mishnah in this way is to be found, significantly, at the very end of his edition. Here, Sheringham is explicating the Mishnah's

³⁷ Bang, *Coelum Orientis*, 53: ‘Desinant igitur novi Juliani insultare sanctis Evangeliiis, conspectâ hac σύγκριστι, seu, ut veriùs dicamus, σύγχυσει’.

argument that, on the Day of Atonement, atonement can only be effected for ‘transgressions between man and his fellow’, if the one seeking atonement ‘has appeased his fellow’.³⁸ Sheringham discusses how atonement ought to be sought (from both the living and the dead) by citing Jacob ben Asher’s *Arba‘ah Turim*, a popular source among contemporary Christian students of Judaism. Finally, he argues that Christ similarly argues that forgiveness must be sought before bringing an offering to the altar.³⁹ ‘Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee’, Christ says, ‘leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift’ (Matthew 5:23, KJV). It is striking here that Sheringham makes this rare connection between the Mishnah and the New Testament not when discussing a minute matter of ritual observance, but when asking deeper ethical questions which are raised by the Day of Atonement, about the nature of God’s forgiveness.⁴⁰ In finding commonalities between the Gospel of Matthew and the Mishnah a legal compilation of a later date, Sheringham sets a seal on his whole book, showing how divine inspiration might be found across these traditions.

Interpreting the Mishnah: Sheringham’s Commentary on Yoma

How does Sheringham's conception of the Mishnah as an embodiment of the oral law, preserving fragments of inspired Jewish thought, shape his approach to interpreting its text in his commentary? One thing that follows relatively directly, and which Sheringham’s commentary demonstrates throughout in practice, is that the Mishnah must be interpreted from within the

³⁸ Translations of the Mishnah are those of Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), Yoma 8:9.

³⁹ Sheringham, *Joma*, 208-209.

⁴⁰ I am grateful to Joanna Weinberg for sharing her insight on this point.

matrix of the Jewish commentary tradition. In his own attempts to do so, he relied most of all on the commentaries of Maimonides and Bertinoro. He frequently closely translates their elucidations of difficult passages, even without always noting that he was doing so. It is as though his commentary worked in parallel with theirs. On the other hand, Sheringham does not seem to have used the commentary of Yom-Tov Heller (to which Selden had access in his copy of the 1614 Prague edition of the Mishnah, and which he cited).⁴¹ While Sheringham made not insignificant use of Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah*, citing various parts of Avodah (the laws of the Temple Service), especially the eighth chapter of Kelei ha-mikdash (Vessels of the Temple), he was less reliant on that work as his essential source than were many of his near contemporaries who were engaged in reconstructing the Jewish state. Maimonides's Mishnah commentary lent itself more naturally to Sheringham's work. When, however, he found little to help him in the commentaries of Maimonides and Bertinoro, he used other Hebrew sources to fill in the gaps. As we have already seen, codes helped to fill in details of Jewish life and ritual. To expand on the prohibition against wearing sandals on the Day of Atonement, Sheringham turned to *Arba'ah Turim*, where he found that the prohibition was quite specifically against the wearing of leather shoes (slippers of cloth were allowed). However, he goes further, supplementing this insight from the thirteenth-century code with the evidence of a more modern work which gave insight into Jewish customs, Menasseh ben Israel's *Thesouro dos Dinim* (published only shortly before Sheringham's *Joma*), which he quotes in Portuguese.⁴²

Sheringham also frequently interprets Yoma in the light of the Sifra, the earliest midrash on Leviticus, as well as a seventeenth-century commentary on the Sifra, *Sefer Korban Aharon*, written by Aaron ibn Hayyim (d.1632). The work of this Moroccan biblical and Talmudic

⁴¹ Toomer, *Selden*, 458.

⁴² Sheringham, *Joma*, 193, quoting Menasseh ben Israel, *Thesouro dos Dinim* (Amsterdam, 1645-47).

commentator helped Sheringham to unpick some of the minute reasoning which lay behind the Mishnah's prescriptions. For instance, it helped him to understand how the priest's bath at the top of the house of Happarvah can still be sacred, when other high rooms were generally profane (*Korban Aharon's* answer is that the priest's bath was only as high as the roof of the Temple Court, which can still be sacred).⁴³ The Sifra itself provided Sheringham with valuable information. One of his longest Hebrew quotations in the whole book is from this work, which helped him to grapple with the question of why the High Priest had to wash himself five times and sanctify himself ten times on the Day of Atonement. The Sifra gives a rich explanation of this question, weaving together passages of Leviticus with rabbinic discussion in a passage that is closely argued, yet lucid and immediately rooted in the biblical text. Sheringham quotes and translates this passage, but does not comment on it, leaving the reader to piece together its explanatory significance.⁴⁴

What is more striking, however, than his use of all these commentaries, is the depth of his engagement with the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds. In his preface, Sheringham pays lip service to the conventional contrast between the Mishnah and Jerusalem Talmud on the one hand, and the Babylonian Talmud on the other. 'It is inane when they chatter about Talmudic fables and lies. For in the Mishnah and the Jerusalem Talmud either no fabricated things appear or do so rarely and infrequently. Truly the Babylonian Talmud, which is different, is fecund with lies'. But then he immediately doubles back on himself — 'however the lies do not stop other things being read with utility'.⁴⁵ His commentary goes on to use Talmud Yoma for a huge

⁴³ Sheringham, *Joma*, 58.

⁴⁴ Sheringham, *Joma*, 51-52, quoting and translating Sifra, Acharei Mot, Chapter 6, 3-5.

⁴⁵ Sheringham, *Joma*, sig. b3v: 'Inane est & illud quod de fabulis mendaciisque Talmudicis garriunt. In Mischna enim Gemaraque Hierosolymitana figmenta nulla aut rarè & insolenter occurrunt. Gemara verò Babylonica, ne quid dissimilem, ferax est faetaque mendaciis; quae tamen non impediunt quin caetera cum utilitate legantur'.

variety of insights into the Mishnah's meaning: that in the Temple, the Parhedrin Chamber was built opposite the house of Abtines and was next to the House of Washing; that there was a space between the two veils in the inner sanctum of the Second Temple which the Jews were uncertain was sacred or not; and many more.⁴⁶ Sheringham's Mishnah commentary invited his readers to interpret the Mishnah not only in the light of later and often simplified commentaries, but in the light of the Gemara itself.⁴⁷

In a revealing moment early in Sheringham's Mishnah commentary, we see him side with interpretations of the Mishnah found in the Talmud against those of Maimonides. In Mishnah 1:7, it states that if the high priest were to fall asleep when preparing for the Day of Atonement, younger members of the priesthood were to 'snap their middle finger before him' to wake him up. Both Rashi (in his commentary on Babylonian Talmud Yoma) and Maimonides agree that the younger priests did indeed snap their fingers, but Sheringham finds this implausible. 'For it is not likely', he argued, 'that the younger priests so uncouthly would snap their fingers in the presence of the high priest'. 'And I am astonished', he went on, 'that the great Rabbis did not understand the Gemara better, or if they understood it, that they departed from it'.⁴⁸ There he has found a much better interpretation: that the priests themselves played musical instruments with their index fingers. Drawing on the Jerusalem Talmud, Sheringham concludes that the younger priests played musical instruments made from bones, blowing into them and stopping various holes with

⁴⁶ Sheringham, *Joma*, 5-6 (BT Yoma 19a), 100 (BT Yoma 51b). See also e.g. *Joma*, 29 (BT Yoma 23a), 36 (BT Yoma 26a), 41 (BT Yoma 26b), 64 (BT Yoma 37a). I have drawn on translations of the Babylonian Talmud in Isidore Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud*, 34 vols (London: Soncino Press, 1935-1959).

⁴⁷ For a similar approach to the Gemara see Piet van Boxel's chapter on Wagenseil.

⁴⁸ Sheringham, *Joma*, 20: 'neque enim verisimile est Sacerdotes juniores tam rusticè coram Sacerdote magno collisis digitis perstrepuisse. Et miror magnos Rabbinos meliùs Gemaram non intellexisse, aut si intellexerint, ab eadem recessisse', then citing JT Yoma 7b. I have drawn on the translations of Jerusalem Talmud Yoma in Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, ed. and trans., *The Jerusalem Talmud. Second Order, Mo'ed. Tractates Pesahim and Yoma* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013).

their fingers. This, Sheringham argues, is what the Mishnah is referring to. Throughout his commentary, Sheringham has to make complex judgments about which interpretations seem most authoritative. In this case, he is persuaded by the Talmud's greater plausibility. More broadly, a proper interpretation of the Mishnah, for Sheringham, *must* be thoroughly grounded in an understanding of the Talmud.

Although often cited with admiration, the extent of Sheringham's reliance on the Talmud was greeted with surprise and some suspicion by some of England's seventeenth-century Hebrew scholars. John Spencer (1630-1693), in his monumental account of the cultural debts owed by the Jews to the Egyptians, cited Sheringham several times, particularly in his account of customs surrounding the sacrificial goat on the Day of Atonement. Here, Spencer tells the story in the Babylonian Talmud that scarlet thread was attached to the head and the neck of both the sacrificial goat and the scapegoat, to help distinguish them from other goats and from one another. He scoffed that 'this fable, with almost no semblance of truth, was believed among the Jews through many ages. For they are accustomed certainly to receive dogmas transmitted through the ages with a supine faith, even though they are monstrous'. But what has really shocked Spencer is that several Christian scholars 'have been ignorant enough to swallow so crass and monstrous a fable out of the very Talmudists themselves'. Here he cites Sheringham's explanation of this passage, based directly on the Babylonian Talmud, which, to Spencer, 'does not contain anything of sense'.⁴⁹ More subtle was the scepticism expressed by the York clergyman and former fellow of Peterhouse, Christopher Cartwright (1602-1658), a theologian

⁴⁹ John Spencer, *De Legibus Hebraeorum Ritualibus et Earum Rationibus Libri Tres* (London, 1685), 1008-1009: 'Haec, nullâ licèt veri similitudine nitatur, fabula, Judaeorum longè plurimorum fidem per multas aetates tenuit. Illi nempe dogmata, monstrosa licèt, à seculis antiquis transmissa, fide supinâ recipere solent; [...] ex ipsis Talmudicis nonnulli fabulam tam crassam & monstrosam deglutire nesciunt. [...] At neque ratio illa quid sani continet'.

well versed in rabbinic commentators. In 1653, Cartwright brought out his 'Targumic-Rabbinic' commentary on Exodus, dedicated to the Irish Biblical scholar and Archbishop, James Ussher. Cartwright cites Sheringham's book warmly on several occasions. Nevertheless, he was unpersuaded by Sheringham's account of the oracle, Urim and Tummim, a crucial element of which relied upon the Jerusalem Talmud. The exact nature of Urim and Tummim, through which God was able to communicate prophecies directly with the ancient Jews, was one of the most disputed issues within early-modern Jewish studies.⁵⁰ Sheringham argued that the High Priest's breastplate was studded with gems engraved with the names of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, and their letters would flash to spell out the words of God's prophecies. Unfortunately, as scholars had already noted, the gems would lack several letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Sheringham embraced the ingenious solution of the Jerusalem Talmud: the words 'All these are the twelve tribes of Israel' were also engraved upon the breastplate.⁵¹ In his detailed discussion of Urim and Tummim (spanning nine quarto pages), Cartwright discussed Sheringham's argument, only to reject it, especially his turn to the Jerusalem Talmud: 'I think there is no-one who does not see their fabrication'.⁵² Even for scholars who admired much of Sheringham's work, the extent of his reliance on the Talmud was deemed credulous.

If Sheringham's approach to the Gemara amounts to an implicit defence of the value of such traditions, that defence also underpinned Sheringham's many comparisons between Jewish

⁵⁰ For more on debates about Urim and Tummim in the period (with reference to John Spencer and Johannes Braun) see Jetze Touber, *Spinoza and Biblical Philology in the Dutch Republic, 1660-1710* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), 138-145. I am grateful to Kirsten Macfarlane for this reference.

⁵¹ Sheringham, *Joma*, 186-187, citing JT Yoma 38b.

⁵² Christopher Cartwright, *Electa Thargumico-Rabbinica; sive Annotationes in Exodum* (London, 1653), 365: 'totumque illud de literis emicantibus confictum arbitror, praesertim cum Talmudici ad perficiendum Alphabetum praeter duodecim Patriarcharum nomina, etiam Abrahami, Isaaci & Jacobi nomina, nec non haec verba כל אלה שבטי ישראל (i.e. *omnes hae tribus Israel*) lapidibus inscripta fuisse velint; quod ipsorum esse commentum nemo, opinor, est qui non videat'.

and pagan cultures which pepper his commentary. The Jews burn their sacrificial offerings; so did the ancient Greeks, often therefore using the words *θύειν* and *καίειν* interchangeably, as citations from Hesiod and Theocritus demonstrate. Internal organs of sacrificial animals were burnt on the altar; Sheringham finds the same practice described in Virgil's *Aeneid*. The number seven bore mystical significance in both Jewish and pagan culture, as Virgil's *Aeneid* again suggests. Both the Jews and the pagans wore special clothes when they asked questions of their oracles.⁵³ Although often presented without any suggestion of a causal link, Sheringham makes it clear that he does not see these to be chance commonalities. He was happy to admit that one 'vexatious invention' of the Rabbis was perhaps inspired by Greek culture and literature. This was the story of the Foundation Stone of the Temple of Jerusalem, which some argued was so named, Sheringham explains, because 'things were created from it, as from the first material or first foundation'. 'The Rabbis perhaps took occasion from the Greeks of fabricating' this tale, who had 'fabled that men were created from stones thrown by Deucalion and Pyrrha'. 'That this Greek fable gave occasion to the Rabbis of devising a lie so audacious and shameless is not improbable', Sheringham concludes.⁵⁴ This example, crucially, concerns later, post-Christian Jewish culture. At this time, Sheringham clearly believes that malign influence had come from pagan culture *to* the Jews. This illustrates a point Sheringham had made in defence of the Babylonian Talmud in his introduction: that 'the later Rabbis ought to be forgiven if they invent something in the Gemara', because 'the itch of deceiving had entered many writers of this time'. Greek writers like Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, or Strabo had told plenty of tall tales too, as had

⁵³ Sheringham, *Joma*, 144, 145, 163-164, 180-181.

⁵⁴ Sheringham, *Joma*, 104-105: 'alii dicunt vocari lapidem foundationis, quia caetera ex ipso tanquam ex prima materia seu primo fundamento creata sunt, quemadmodum pisces ex matri, & homo ex terra creatus dicitur. Rabbini fortè a Graecis ansam arripuerint fingendi putidissimum hoc commentum, qui homines ex lapidus à Deucalione & Pyrrha projectis procreators esse fabulantur. [...] A Graecis fabula haec ad Latinos quoque pervenerit'.

Livy and Pliny. The implication is clearly that Jewish Hellenization had led them to acquire the taste for fables for which they were condemned by modern scholars who at the same time valorized pagan culture.

When it comes to the ancient Jews, however, Sheringham is clear that the cultural traffic is in the other direction: from the Jews *to* the pagans. His vision is of Jewish culture as the wellspring of customs and religious practice across the ancient world. During the water-drawing celebrations of the Feast of the Tabernacles, songs and music were played. 'And this I think', Sheringham argued, 'the Romans received from the Jews, who were also accustomed to play on flutes when libations were offered'.⁵⁵ Elsewhere, Sheringham observed that 'in imitation of the High Priest', the 'priests of the Gentiles wore crowns on their head when they would make sacrifices'.⁵⁶ In his gloss on the Mishnah's injunction that the priest should offer 'the seven unblemished lambs of a year old', Sheringham explained that 'unblemished' meant 'immaculate, whole, complete in all its parts'.⁵⁷ 'Once the ancients,' he then argued, in a crucial turn, 'who put to use almost all the rites and customs of the Jews in the cult of their false gods, required this attractiveness and elegance in certain sacrifices'.⁵⁸ Read in this context, the Mishnah became a key with which to demonstrate the primacy of the Jews as a cultural force in the ancient world, the origin of pagan 'rites and customs'. Although, as we have already seen, Surenhusius admired Sheringham's demonstrations of the Hebrew origins of pagan customs, his ideas would not win universal support among later seventeenth-century scholars. Dmitri Levitin has argued that mid-

⁵⁵ Sheringham, *Joma*, 39-40: 'Atque hoc, ut puto, Latini à Judaeis acceperunt, qui etiam libaminibus offerendis tibiis ludere solebant'.

⁵⁶ Sheringham, *Joma*, 179: 'Ad imitationem Sacerdotis magni Gentilium Sacerdotes sacrificaturi coronas capite gestabant'.

⁵⁷ Danby, trans., *The Mishnah*, Yoma 7:3.

⁵⁸ Sheringham, *Joma*, 164: 'Veteres olim, qui omnes ferè Judaeorum ritus & consuetudines in deorum falsorum cultu adhibuerint, hanc in quibusdam sacrificis venustatem & elegantiam requirebant'.

seventeenth-century English scholars made a concerted move away from precisely the kinds of arguments Sheringham was making. The theologian, natural philosopher, and later bishop of Oxford, Samuel Parker (1640-1688), for instance, published an essay 'The supposed Agreement between Moses and Plato', in which he sought to show that the Greeks had no commerce with the Jews, and thus could have learnt nothing from them.⁵⁹ For all the pioneering nature of Sheringham's focus on the Mishnah, which seems to anticipate currents in later seventeenth-century English orientalism, in many ways his work looked *backwards*, not forwards.

This soon gave Sheringham's book a belated quality in the eyes of its readers. We have already seen that John Spencer found Sheringham credulous in his approach to Talmudic traditions; but Spencer also scrutinised Sheringham's assumptions about the directions of cultural traffic in the ancient world. Yoma tells that Ben Katin had made a device to stop the waters of the priest's bath becoming polluted overnight (Yoma 3:9), which led Sheringham to discuss beliefs that night brings pollution. 'From the Jews, it seems likely', Sheringham argued, 'the Gentiles once drew these superstitions, who also think that the world is polluted by night', and he cited passages from Persius and Virgil to support his point.⁶⁰ Spencer discusses this argument in his own account of the 'origin and antiquity' of Jewish laws concerning pollution. 'Forgive me', he asks, having quoted Sheringham, 'if I do not agree with this most learned man'. Spencer argues such a custom *ought* not to derive from the Jews: 'for the honour owed to the holy people compels that all superstition may be thought to have found its first origin among the pagans; and

⁵⁹ Dmitri Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom in the Age of the New Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), ch.3.6. See Samuel Parker, *A Free and Impartial Censure of the Platonick Philosophie* (Oxford, 1666), 92-115.

⁶⁰ Sheringham, *Joma*, 71: 'A Judaeis, ut verisimile est, suas olim superstitiones hauserint Gentiles, qui nocte etiam mundum pollui existimarunt', citing Persius, *Satire 2*, lines 15-16 and Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book 4, lines 6-7.

that the Jews may have been the followers rather than the teachers of so ridiculous a custom'.⁶¹

This is just one small moment in the wider thrust of Spencer's argument, which is the opposite to that of Sheringham, depicting the Jews as the *recipients* of influences from the ancient peoples whom they encountered.⁶² In this respect, Sheringham's arguments about the primacy of Jewish cultural influence in the ancient world and his attitude toward rabbinic sources are of a piece. They both seek to defend the originary authority of Jewish traditions. The flashes of divine inspiration in the Mishnah, a descendant of the oral law given to Moses, were crucial in making that argument.

Sheringham seems not to have felt a contradiction (as modern readers might) between reading the Mishnah as a key to demonstrate the historical primacy of Jewish culture in the ancient world and reading the work typologically, as a prophecy of the coming of Christ.⁶³ Across the religious spectrum in early seventeenth-century England, there was widespread agreement that every element of Leviticus 16 was laden with typological significance. For the defender of Laud and Laudianism, Peter Heylyn (1599-1662), the High priest figured 'Christ our Saviour'.⁶⁴ For the Calvinist biblical critic, Andrew Willet (1561/2-1621), the scape-goat is also 'understood to bee a type of our Saviour Christ, upon whom the Lord layd our sinnes'.⁶⁵ The separatist Henry Ainsworth (1569-1622) used Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* to make detailed

⁶¹ Spencer, *De Legibus Hebraeorum*, 172: 'Haec Ille: sed parcatur mihi, si cum viro doctissimo sentire nequeam: cogit enim honos genti sanctae debitus, ut superstitione omnis primam inter Ethnicos originem invenisse putetur; & ut Hebraei dogmatis aut moris alicujus ridiculi, consecrati potius quam magistri habeantur.'

⁶² On the aims and context of Spencer's work see Dmitri Levitin, 'John Spencer's *De Legibus Hebraeorum* (1683-85) and "Enlightened" Sacred History: A New Interpretation', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 76 (2013): 49-92.

⁶³ For help with this discussion of Sheringham and typology I am indebted to Jeffrey Miller.

⁶⁴ Peter Heylyn, *Theologia Veterum, or, The Summe of Christian theologie, positive, polemical, and philological, contained in the Apostles creed, or reducible to it* (London, 1654), 292-296.

⁶⁵ Andrew Willet, *Hexapla in Leviticum. That is, A Six-Fold Commentarie vpon the Third Booke of Moses, called Leviticus* (London, 1631), 382.

typological readings of Yom Kippur.⁶⁶ Such typological readings took nothing away from the need to study the Old Testament: far from it, as its providential symbolism confirmed its truth. Sheringham frames his work from the outset, however, as though it were a rebuttal of extreme Puritans who argued that the fulfilment of the Old Testament types in Christ rendered the study of Jewish history irrelevant. 'Many may perhaps exclaim that I do something untimely', Sheringham writes at the start of his preface, 'I who inquire about Judaic affairs that are long since abrogated and obsolete'.⁶⁷ Perhaps there were figures making such arguments in Sheringham's Cambridge: William Dell (d.1669), who would become Master of Caius College shortly after Sheringham's book was published, argued that the injunction to 'get knowledge (to wit of the Scriptures) by Studies, and Humane Learning, and not by Inspiration', has the 'visible mark of Antichrist upon it'.⁶⁸ More generally, perhaps, and notwithstanding Vallance's arguments that Sheringham was likely not as firm an adherent to Laudianism as has been believed, Sheringham's framing of his entire book in this way is suggestive in its immediate Civil War context. If the Jewish rites were *not* obsolete, they might be taken to underpin and figure forth ceremonialism in the contemporary Christian church. This chapter introduced Sheringham as a *local* figure, and it is no surprise that his book should be addressed to the immediate world of civil war politics in England (and indeed Cambridge) just as much as (or even more so than) to the international learned world. That he had an eye on local political concerns in publishing his book might also go some way to explaining Sheringham's lack of adroitness in situating his edition within the latest currents of international Hebrew thought.

⁶⁶ Henry Ainsworth, *Annotations Upon the Five Bookes of Moses; The Booke of the Psalmes, and the Song of Songs, or, Canticles* (London, 1627), 88-97.

⁶⁷ Sheringham, *Joma*, sig. A3r: 'Multi forte me rem facere intempestivam exclament, qui de rebus Judaicis jampridem abrogatis obsoletisque disquiro'.

⁶⁸ William Dell, 'A Plain and Necessary Confutation Of divers gross and Antichristian Errors', published in *The Tryal of Spirits Both in Teachers & Hearers* (London, 1653), 37.

Having said that, Sheringham does not choose to use typology to make this kind of ecclesiological argument explicitly. Instead, he argues against his opponents (Puritans, implicitly) in broader theological terms: that 'by the same reasoning' which they use to attack Talmudic studies 'they may prove that the great part of the Old Testament is of no moment' and that the Talmud is full of 'many prophetic things' from which 'it is possible evidently to be demonstrated that the Messiah had already come, and had been none other than Christ'.⁶⁹ In his commentary on Yoma, he does very occasionally highlight such moments of prophetic, typological significance. When commenting on the requirement that the priests clean themselves by being immersed in water, Sheringham makes a link with Exodus 30:20, where God decreed that priests should wash their hands and feet when they enter the tabernacle. 'God commanded this', Sheringham explained, 'so that this solemn and established ceremony should prefigure holy Baptism'.⁷⁰ Sheringham offers another typological reading in his discussion of Yoma 5:3, the injunction that the High Priest should 'sprinkle the blood once upwards and seven times downwards'. 'This is what God mandated in Leviticus 16:14', Sheringham began, before spelling out the typological significance of the passage. 'God commanded that under the Old Law all things are purged by blood, so that the blood of the sacrificial victims may be a type of the blood of Christ', Sheringham argued, the causal link here ('so that...') showing him to imagine God as a providential designer of types' meanings.⁷¹ That typology was felt to be a dimension of Sheringham's commentary that was somewhat lacking is hinted at by the decision of the German

⁶⁹ Sheringham, *Joma*, sig. b3r-v: 'Eâdem certè ratione probent magnam partem Testamenti Veteris nullius esse momenti. [...] multa item vaticinia [...] ex illis Messiam dudum venisse, eundemque non alium quàm Christum fuisse, possit evidenter demonstrari'.

⁷⁰ Sheringham, *Joma*, 49: 'Praecipit hoc Deus, ut solennis haec statque cerimonia sacrum Baptisma praefiguraret'.

⁷¹ Sheringham, *Joma*, 109: 'Hoc est quod mandavit Deus *Levit.* 16.14 [...] Omnia siquidem Deus sub veteri lege sanguine purgari voluit ut sanguis victimarum sanguinis Christi typus esset'.

Hebraist and Professor of Oriental Languages in Franeker, Jacob Rhenferd, to republish Sheringham's book in 1696 together with a supplementary essay which offered a 'Comparison of the Annual Expiation of the High Priest in the Old Testament with the Once and Eternal Expiation of Jesus Christ'.⁷² For some readers, though, Sheringham's typological observations were already sufficient to provide irresistible invitation to go further. One was Samuel Lee (1625?-1691), the non-conformist preacher and natural philosopher, who travelled to New England at the end of his life, where Cotton Mather commented of him that 'hardly a more universally learned person trod on the American strand'.⁷³ A figure of very different religious-political inclinations to Sheringham, Lee still enthusiastically embraced his book, using the work of this 'learned man' to bolster details of his own intensively typological analysis of every detail of the Jewish Temple.⁷⁴ Typology can be hard to delimit: the invitation Sheringham offered to read typologically was taken up by his readers. But typology cannot be said to have been at the centre of his own reading of the Mishnah. Perhaps this was an element that he knew readers would expect to find in his commentary and he certainly did not exclude typology entirely. When the Mishnah was read alongside scripture, it helped to complement well-known typological readings. That it confirmed the providentialist schemes found in the Bible itself must surely have been to Sheringham just another confirmation of the Mishnah's origins in divine revelation.

Conclusions

⁷² Jacob Rhenferd, 'Comparatio Expiationis Anniversariae Pontificis Maximi in V.T. cum Unica Atque Aeterna Expiatione Jesu Christi', in *Joma: Codex Talmudicus* (Franeker, 1696), 113-140.

⁷³ Quoted in Dewey D. Wallace, jun., 'Lee, Samuel (1625?-1691)', *ODNB*, online edn.

⁷⁴ Samuel Lee, *Orbis Miraculum* (London, 1659), 322.

We began by observing that Sheringham's *Joma* seemed a surprising book: surprising in that Sheringham, a relatively isolated figure, did not seem an obvious author of such an original work of English Mishnaic scholarship. Having examined the book more closely, it will be clear that this book was surprising in many more ways. In an era when the idea that Christianity needed to be contextualized by reference to Jewish custom was already part of the 'ordinary scholarship' of the age, Sheringham seems to have had substantially different ambitions than to use Jewish texts to offer another cultural history of aspects of the New Testament.⁷⁵ Instead, his work constitutes a rhetorically impassioned defence of the antiquity of Jewish customs and traditions, and of the capacity of even their non-biblical literature to preserve unwritten traditions that stretched back to utter antiquity, and that had continued to be renewed since then by divine inspiration.

Sheringham's book was therefore diagnosed by his contemporaries as both very learned, but also credulous and even transgressive; highly original, but also firmly rooted in an ahistorical cross-cultural comparativism that soon started to feel dated to seventeenth-century Hebrew scholars. In its focus on the Mishnah, its treatment of the Talmud as a legal corpus, its minute antiquarian reconstruction of the practices of the Jewish Temple, its engagements with the leading Hebrew scholars such as Buxtorf and Selden, Sheringham's work is immediately recognisable as a product of the Hebrew scholarship of his era, both in England and on the Continent. But it is as striking as much for its belatedness and idiosyncrasies as it is for its contemporary urgency in scholarship or polemic.

Comparison between Sheringham's edition and the later editorial work of William Guise makes Sheringham's idiosyncratic position within the English Mishnaic tradition clear. Whereas

⁷⁵ Quotation from Anthony Grafton, 'Polydore Vergil Uncovers the Jewish Origins of Christianity', in *Inky Fingers: The Making of Books in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2020), 105-127, at 106.

Sheringham clearly believes that the Jews are the ideal guides to the Mishnah's meaning, Guise's commentary attacks the 'stupidity of the Jews' who fail to understand the meaning of their own Mishnah.⁷⁶ To Guise, furnished with the Bodleian's manuscripts and gifted in an array of languages, the modern Christian scholar is better able to understand the Mishnah than the Jews themselves. In addition, whereas Sheringham's commentary unfolds as an explication of the Mishnah in parallel with the Talmud, Maimonides, and Bertinoro, Guise asked different questions of the work than they did. He was preoccupied with matters antiquarian and etymological, which led him to investigate the interrelationships between Greek, Judaeo-Arabic and Hebrew sources. This independence from the Jewish interpretative tradition is entirely unlike Sheringham. Perhaps, however, this is as much a sign of the distinctive direction which English Mishnaic studies took in the later part of the seventeenth century, influenced especially by Edward Pococke's passion for Judaeo-Arabic sources, which necessarily drove scholars away from reading the Mishnah in the immediate context of the Gemara in the way Sheringham had done. Johann Christoph Wagenseil (1633-1705), indeed, who generally admired Sheringham's *Joma*, felt that Sheringham 'had spoken unfairly about the Jews' 'as if they were ignorant' of the geography of their own Temple, when in a rare moment of frustration with the Talmud, Sheringham had noted that the Gemara was not quite clear about the relative locations of the Temple's various Houses.⁷⁷ Sheringham's conceptions of the Mishnah would also be far from marginal to Surenhusius's edition. The notion that the Mishnah reflects the oral law delivered to Moses on Sinai, which Sheringham developed in his work's preface, was central to Surenhusius'

⁷⁶ William Guise, *Misnae Pars: Ordinis Primi Zeraim Tituli Septem* (Oxford, 1690), e.g. 84: 'Nam aliunde magis apparet Judaeorum in Misna sua interpretanda oscitantia & stupor, quam ex eo...'

⁷⁷ For Wagenseil's praise of Sheringham see his edition of *Sota* (Nuremberg, 1674), 363. For his other comment see 430: 'Eos adisse non poenitebit, quin & simul constabit, immerito de Judaeis pronunciasse Robertum Sheringamium in Joma p. 5 quasi ignorent, ubi locorum in Templo fuerint Conclave Parhedrorum, & Conclave Lapidum'.

edition of the Mishnah, illustrated visually on the engraved title page of that work's first volume and elaborated in its preface.⁷⁸

Deriving from Mosaic oral law, the Mishnah was, for Sheringham, a work inextricably linked to the Old Testament, even though it was written after the New Testament was complete. Perhaps Sheringham's own sense of the way in which Jewish texts might illuminate the New Testament is hinted at by some of his other surviving writings. In his only known surviving letter, dated 12 July 1663 and addressed from London, Sheringham sent to his friend Thomas Marshall (1621-1685), another scholar of both oriental and Northern European languages, an 'extraordinary passage' from Codex Beza, the late fourth- or early fifth-century manuscript of the New Testament presented by Theodore de Bèze to Cambridge University in 1581.⁷⁹ This dense passage follows Matthew 20:28. In it Jesus offers a little parable to illustrate his saying, 'seek to increase from that which is small, and to become less from that which is greater'.⁸⁰ Sheringham sent it to Marshall's 'according to your desire', and Marshall himself used it in his edition of the Anglo-Saxon and Gothic gospels (with generous thanks to 'the most erudite man, familiarly known to me, Robert Sheringham of Cambridge').⁸¹ But to judge by the letter, the passage seems to have interested Sheringham, too: he explains how he scoured 'an old swedish translation of the four evangelists, wherein ther is oftentimes a little differns from the Greek', in search of the passage. Similar interest in finding rare or unique New Testament passages may have motivated

⁷⁸ See the first title page of Surenhusius, *Mischna*, vol. 1 and that volume's preface to the reader (sig. **v). I am grateful to this volume's editors for pointing out this comparison.

⁷⁹ Bodl. MS Marshall 134, fols 16-17.

⁸⁰ Quoted in B. M. Metzger and B. D. Ehrman, *The Text of New Testament*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71.

⁸¹ Thomas Marshall, ed., *Quatuor D.N. Jesu Christi Evangeliorum versiones perantiquae duae, Gothica scil. Anglo-Saxonica* (Dordrecht, 1665), 496-498: 'occasione tunc datâ, petii à viro eruditissimo, mihi que familiariter noto, Roberto Sheringhamio, Cantabrigiensi, ut hoc quaecunque additamentum suâ manu mihi describeret ex ipso admirandae vetustatis monumento'.

Sheringham's interest in a remarkable edition of the New Testament in Russian, printed in Moscow in 1564, which Sheringham donated to the library of Caius College, where a manicule and marginal note (not obviously in Sheringham's hand) points to a passage in Romans, chapter 14: 'More than in the greek or latyn texte'.⁸² Perhaps there was something in common between these fragments of the New Testament and the words of 'ancient Rabbis inspired by God' in the Mishnah. All these are part of a penumbra of texts around the New Testament in which flashes of divine inspiration from the era of Christ might still be found; Sheringham's surprising edition was his principal attempt to make sense of them.

⁸² Gonville and Caius College, Lower Library F.3.7.