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Political Hebraism and the Early Modern ‘Respublica Hebraeorum’: On Defining the Field

Abstract: This paper raises the question of the term “political Hebraism” as used with respect to early modernity, and distinguishes between a narrow definition of Christian Hebraism and a broader conception of “Hebraic writing.” Early modern political Hebraism is described as a unique phenomenon which treated the biblical polity as a historical entity that could be compared to other types of polities studied by political thinkers. Within political Hebraism, a genre of writing in this period dealing with the ‘Respublica Hebraeorum,’ or the republic of the Hebrews as a political model, is identified as a distinguishable unit. Although the works in this genre did not share a political vision, they created a common language of political discourse that in turn may have influenced thinkers such as Hobbes and Spinoza.¹

Terminology

The inauguration of a new field of study requires definition, and the re-discovery of “political Hebraism” suggests the need for clearer focus on its scope.

The term “political Hebraism” may be misleading, because it suggests a relationship with the phenomenon known as Christian Hebraism, which is often used to refer to writings of Hebraists, those versed in the Hebrew language.² One contemporary scholar suggests defining Hebraism as

¹ Based on a paper given at The Shalem Center’s colloquium, “Political Hebraism: Judaic Sources in Early Modern Political Thought” (Jerusalem, August 23–26, 2004). Part of this paper is based on my Ph.D. dissertation, “The Literature of the Respublica Judaica: Descriptions of the Ancient Israelite Polity in the Antiquarian Writing of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries” (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002), written under the supervision of Professor Michael Heyd.

² Moritz Steinschneider, Christliche Hebraisten: Nachrichten über mehr als 400 Gelehrte, welche über nachbiblisches Hebräisch geschrieben haben (Hildesheim: H.A. HEBRAIC POLITICAL STUDIES, VOL. 1, NO. 1 (FALL 2005), PP. 57–70, © 2005 SHALEM PRESS.
“efforts by... Christian scholars to use the Hebrew language for interpreting the Old Testament,” while distinguishing between “lexical Hebraism,” based on the independent ability of the Christian to read biblical and postbiblical texts, and “cultural Hebraism,” in which the knowledge of Hebrew depends on conversation with a living Jew.¹

In fact, the reach of the political reading of the Tanach (Hebrew Bible) exceeds the grasp of Hebraism, although it does not include all Hebraists. Hebraists (in the limited sense) did not take a special interest in political questions, and their attempt to study the text in the original focused on other areas, such as those related to theological issues or that enhanced their understanding of the New Testament. On the other hand, the investigation of the political message of the Hebrew Bible was not limited to scholars with firsthand or even secondhand knowledge of the Hebrew language, but included those who read the text in translation.⁴

Avoiding a narrow definition of “political Hebraism” raises the danger of a notion so broad as to be nebulous. The wider concept of “Hebraism” or “Hebraic writing” as a general cultural phenomenon (often contrasted with Hellenism) is an elusive concept, which has been perceived differently at different points of cultural history, most famously by Heinrich Heine and Matthew Arnold.⁵

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⁴ The wish to avoid using the term “Hebraism” for the phenomenon we are describing is evident in one of the first academic studies in the field, the Hebrew University M.A. thesis of Shaul Robinson, submitted in 1940, entitled “The State of Israel as a Model State in the Writings of Political Thinkers of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Biblicism in Political Thought from Machiavelli to Adam Miller.” The work, with a slight change in the title due to the establishment of the modern State of Israel in the interim, was published in a posthumous volume of Robinson’s essays entitled Education Between Continuity and Openness (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975), pp. 13–70. [Hebrew] “Biblicism,” however, is also awkward for describing the field of study, especially for the Christian reader who would not understand that the reference is specifically to the Old Testament. If we accept the usual definition of Christian Hebraism, then the title of Jonathan Ziskind’s article “Cornelius Bertram and Carlo Sigonio: Christian Hebraism’s First Political Scientists,” Journal of Ecumenical Studies 37 (2000), pp. 381–400, is misleading, as Sigonio knew no Hebrew.

⁵ Regarding Heine and Arnold and the topos of Hebraism as opposed to Hellenism in general, see Yaacov Shavit, Athens in Jerusalem: Classical Antiquity and Hellenism in the Making of the Modern Secular Jew (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization,
For our purposes “Hebraic political writing” refers to texts that convey readings of the Hebrew Bible (or postbiblical Jewish texts) in a political context, whether or not the author read those texts in the original Hebrew. The fact that special attention was given to the Old Testament might produce theological pitfalls. Mining the text for a relevant political message often engaged Christian writers with the question of the relevance of Old Testament law. Some of those writers could be subject to accusations of Judaizing, a claim not uncommon in the theological struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Now that we have focused our view on the political uses of the Hebrew Bible, we must try to identify when such use is significant for the student of intellectual history. There is a need to find criteria that will allow us to distinguish stock examples from meaningful influence on the development of ideas.

The problem at hand is exemplified by the chapter on “Hebraic politics” in Adam Sutcliffe’s book Judaism and Enlightenment. Sutcliffe refers to the use made by Levellers, Diggers, and Quakers of “biblical rhetoric that made intensive use of the moral polarities of Abel and Cain, Jacob and Esau, and Israel and Amalek.” While the employment of such examples certainly reflects the common knowledge of the Old Testament

1999). See, for example, Harold Fisch, Jerusalem and Albion: The Hebraic Factor in Seventeenth-Century Literature (New York: Schocken, 1964), p. 15, n. 2: “The present work is not concerned with Hebrew learning as such, but rather with the ‘Hebraic factor’ as a deeper and more pervasive influence.” This factor is characterized in different ways by Fisch, sometimes by referring to questions of style such as “Hebraic earnestness and sublimity” (p. 41), or “Hebrew imaginative structure” (p. 51), sometimes by alluding to the Old Testament concepts of covenant (pp. 93–114), or “the active impulse seeking… the fulfillment of a messianic hope” (p. 89). While not unaware of the dangers of “oversimplification or distortion” (p. 65), he uses different criteria for identifying “the factor of Jerusalem” (p. 114), a factor that goes far beyond references to the Old Testament. Interestingly enough, he mentions Milton’s use of biblical sanction for the republican form of government as an example of “men going wrong by making false equations” (pp. 124–125).


among members of those groups, it is hard to see the use of such topoi as impacting on the content of their political thinking. Are we to see every comparison of a good king to David and an evil one to Ahab as part of “Hebraic politics”? If not, how are we to justify this exclusion? I would suggest distinguishing between rhetorical use of biblical imagery on the one hand, while on the other hand noting the more systematic use of the Bible as a source for political ideas (whether or not such use was decisive or even central in the work of a given writer).9

**Early Modern Use of the Hebrew Bible**

There is no doubt that early modern Europe saw an expansion of Hebraism in the sense of the study of the Hebrew language10 as well as the rise of new approaches to the Old Testament.11 Among these was reading the

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Old Testament as a political work. The striving to return \textit{ad fontes}, the "struggle for stability,"\footnote{I am alluding to the title of Theodore K. Rabb, \textit{The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).} and the pursuit of models from the past to inform contemporary political discussions ("ancient constitutionalism") stimulated a political appreciation of the biblical text.\footnote{For example, see the following characterizations by G.N. Clark and Donald Kelly: \newline G.N. Clark, \textit{The Seventeenth Century} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), p. 215: "A tendency of the political thought of the period... was the comparative study of political phenomena. Studies of the actual constitutions of different countries of which there are few earlier examples, now became common. Particular attention was paid to states like Venice, which were supposed to be models of good government but no state was neglected...." \newline Donald R. Kelly, "Elizabethan Political Thought," in J.G.A. Pocock, ed., \textit{The Varieties of British Political Thought} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 72: "[P]olyhistorical learning and legal biblical and classical tradition, tended to prevail in political debate, and demonstrations of antiquity or particular precedents were the basis of disputation, a mode of argumentation reinforced by the increased availability of printed records and sources...."}

What is new about the political Hebraism of early modern Europe? Frank Manuel notes that before the seventeenth century there was great reluctance to turn the narrative parts of the Old Testament into a consecutive secular story or to analyze the institutions of the patriarchal age, the period of Moses’ rule or the kingships of the first and second commonwealths, as if they were states with histories similar to those of other nations.\footnote{Frank Manuel, \textit{The Broken Staff: Judaism through Christian Eyes} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 118.}

The early modern treatment of the Hebrew Republic (which begins at the end of the sixteenth century) has the Old Testament read as a consecutive narrative and not as a prefiguration of eternal truths.\footnote{Auerbach notes that in the Middle Ages "the figural interpretation changed the Old Testament from a book of laws and a history of the people of Israel into a series of figures of Christ and the Redemption." Eric Auerbach, "Figura," in his \textit{Scenes from the Drama of European Literature} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 52–53; see Annette Weber-Möckl, \textit{Das Recht des Königs, der über euch herrschen soll: Studien zu 1 Samuel 8:1ff. in der Literatur der frühen Neuzeit} (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1986).} Early modern Hebraic politics sees the polity of the Hebrews as subject to historical processes and as such may be analyzed in a way similar to political systems of other nations.

To be sure, this approach to the Bible also has its own ancient and medieval pedigree, including (to name two outstanding examples)
Josephus and Thomas Aquinas. In a celebrated passage in Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities* (IV, 223), there is a depiction of the political system of the Hebrews. In that passage as well as in numerous others, Josephus is not averse to utilizing the terminology of political discourse to describe the Hebrew polity. In a similar way, Thomas portrayed the regime of Moses using the classical models of political thought and introduced the concept of the mixed constitution to the study of the Israelite polity.

These writings antecedent the more extensive and more systematic treatment of the ancient biblical polity in the early modern period, which was intimately concerned with the political questions of the time.

It must be emphasized that there is no common political denominator unifying the early modern political uses of the Bible. It was used to support different polarities of such questions as whether monarchy or a republic is the preferred regime. As is well known, the biblical text itself seems to present contradictory positions on the question of monarchy as opposed to other regimes. The book of Deuteronomy assumes the establishment of a king, while Samuel was opposed to the institution of monarchy. Early modern writers quoted various Old Testament and rabbinic sources (and often the same ones) both to defend monarchy as well as to attack it. Typical examples of this phenomenon are two works written in 1649 and 1650, respectively, namely *Defensio regia pro Carolo I* (*Defense of the King on Behalf of Charles I*) by Salmasius (Claude de Saumaise) and the response by John Milton, *Pro populo Anglicano defensio* (*A Defense of the English People*). These works used Hebraic sources, among other arguments for and against the regicide of King


18 It would be difficult to accept Salo Baron’s sweeping statement that “the adherents of a republican constitution always referred to the Jewish Bible while the advocates of monarchy looked for support to the New Testament.” See Salo Baron, “Azariah De Rossi’s Attitude towards Life,” in *History and Jewish Historians: Essays and Addresses by Salo Baron*, eds. Arthur Herzberg and Leon A. Feldman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1964), p. 188.
Charles I, to prove their points. Political Hebraism is as a whole better seen as a common mode of discourse than as a defense of a specific political position. I would suggest that it is not effective to posit an “authentic” biblical political philosophy and use that as a yardstick to distinguish between “real” political Hebraism and crass manipulation of the Bible for political purposes. Rather, it is preferable to view the Old Testament as forming one of the common bases for discourse on politics in early modern Europe. The “Mosaic moment” in political thought should take its place of honor among other languages or paradigms, which have been exposed to the light of scholarly investigation in the last forty years.

These works face common questions of exegesis and interpretation, promote different political and ecclesiastical images of the Israelite polity, and deal in various ways with major themes of politics and religious thought.

The Literature of the 'Respublica Hebraeorum'

What are the sources for our study of political Hebraism? In what kinds of literary works are we to find analyses of the ancient Israelite polity in terms of universal political categories? Mapping the field would include various types of religious writings (such as sermons or polemical works) as well as specifically political works of the period, a period in which historical examples were no less important than theoretical argument and in which the Bible provided examples alongside classical Greece and Rome and contemporary Venice.

There is another type of literature that describes the politics of ancient Israel. I am referring to the genre that may be called the literature of the

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Respublica Hebraeorum (Republic of the Hebrews) and that attempts to systematically study the ancient Israelite polity.

A first attempt to identify this genre is in Bibliotheca Latino-Hebraica (The Latin-Hebrew Library) by Carolo Joseph Imbonato (Rome, 1694), which lists some hundred volumes in the category of De Republica, Synagoga, Legibus, et Ritibus Iudaearum (On the Republic, the Synagogue, the Laws, and the Rituals of the Jews). Manuel refers to this list in the context of his section in The Broken Staff entitled “Anatomy of the Republic of the Hebrews.” In this, he was judging the books by their covers (or by their titles). Many of the works in the list do not deal with the political aspects of the ancient Hebrews but with descriptions of Israelite religion. Therefore, the true number of books that incorporate systematic treatments of the Israelite polity is much lower. They include works such as De Politia Judaica tam civili quam ecclesiastica (On the Jewish Polity, Both Civil and Ecclesiastic) by Cornelius Bertram, De Republica Hebraeorum (On the Republic of the Hebrews) by Carlo Sigonio, Legum Mosicarum Forensium explanatio (Explanation of the Juridical Laws of Moses) by Wilhelm Zepper, De Republica Emendanda (On How to Emend the Republic), an early work by Hugo Grotius, De Republica Hebraeorum (On the Republic of the Hebrews) by Petrus Cunaeus, and Jus Regium


22 Manuel, Broken Staff, p. 120.

23 A typical example is the famous work of John Spencer, De Legibus Hebraeorum Ritualibus et earum Rationibus. The book (despite the fact that it is mentioned by Manuel on p. 123) does not contain a description of the political system (but rather, one isolated chapter is devoted to an explication of the concept of theocracy, in which the political is subsumed under the religious).

24 Geneva, 1574. Bertram (1531–1594) taught Hebrew in the Academy of Geneva and was close to Theodore de Bèze, the successor of Calvin.

25 Bologna, 1582. Sigonio (1522–1584) was one of the most important historians in sixteenth-century Italy. His most significant works were on the history and institutions of the Roman republic.

26 Herborn, 1604. Zepper (1550–1607) was a major figure in the development of Calvinism in Germany, as part of the process known as the “Second Reformation,” which centered on the Hochschule of Herborn. He wrote extensively on church government.

27 Even though the work was written before 1609, it was published first in 1984. See Arthur Eyffinger et al., “De Republica Emendanda: A Juvenile Tract by Hugo Grotius on the Emendation of the Dutch Polity,” Grotiana, n.s. vol. 5 (1984), pp. 3–121.

Hebraeorum (The Laws of the Hebrew Kings) by Wilhelm Schickard, as well as De Synedriis (On the Assemblies) by John Selden, probably the greatest Hebraist of his day.

This genre should be seen in the context of early modern antiquarianism, a phenomenon that has been studied in the works of Arnaldo Momigliano and Anthony Grafton. Momigliano has characterized the antiquarians as describing the past in a way not based on chronological development but rather on the systematic descriptions of ancient institutions, religion, and law. The antiquarian was descriptive, attempting to reconstruct the material culture and institutions of the past, rather than explain their development. In addition, antiquarians often used nonliterary sources in order to learn about the past. This methodology found its way into biblical studies as well. Peter Miller has called the tendency of seventeenth-century biblical studies to delve into questions of biblical realia “the antiquarianization of biblical scholarship.” This did not only include the many works on the physical realia of the Bible. Inspired by the works of antiquarianism and by the general interest in “the ancient constitution,” the genre of the Respublica Hebraeorum set out to reconstruct the ancient Israelite polity.


30 London, 1650–1655. Selden (1584–1654) was a jurist, antiquarian, and scholar who wrote many works on the history of English law as well as works that showed his erudition in rabbinics. His Hebraic scholarship has not yet been studied systematically. See Jonathan Rosner Ziskind, John Selden on Jewish Marriage Law: The Uxor Hebraica (Leiden: Brill, 1991).


32 Miller, Peiresc’s Europe, pp. 80–81.
It is not always evident that the motivation for the work is other than pure scholarship. Sigonio was first and foremost an antiquarian and historian. His attempt to describe the political system of the Hebrews after writing descriptions of the systems of the Romans and the Athenians seems to reflect the same academic interest.\textsuperscript{33} Other writers had additional concerns, such as defending a view of church-state relations (Bertram), presenting a model for the welfare of the United Provinces (Cunaeus), or even hinting at the impossibility of reinstituting the Mosaic state (Zepper).

The writers followed the principle of describing the Israelite polity in terms of general political thought but did not share the same reading of biblical history. Bertram saw the regime founded by Moses as containing a monarchial element mixed with aristocracy (the magistrates appointed after the reforms of Jethro) and democracy (the entire people or its representatives).\textsuperscript{34} After the death of Moses there was no longer a king, but military dictators were appointed in emergencies.\textsuperscript{35} The establishment of the king by popular demand in the days of Samuel was in effect a reinstitution of the mixed constitution from the days of Moses.\textsuperscript{36} On the other hand, Sigonio emphasized the arbitrary power of the king, as opposed to the rule of law that was instituted by Moses.\textsuperscript{37} Cunaeus saw the appointment of the king as a sign of moral decay, which brought about a wish for the opulence of a king as opposed to the ethical example of Moses.\textsuperscript{38} Zepper preferred a monarchy, but since he did not see the biblical example as binding, he believed that the proper regime should be determined by rational thought and human experience.\textsuperscript{39} Schickard seems to have had an ambivalent attitude toward monarchy. He quotes conflicting rabbinic opinions about kingship and also raises the question

\textsuperscript{33} William McCuaig, Carlo Sigonio: The Changing World of the Late Renaissance (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). McCuaig does not discuss the work of Sigonio on the Israelite polity, but his description of Sigonio as a scholar leaves no doubt as to the nature of his antiquarian interests. A comparison of the table of contents of Sigonio’s work on the Hebraic state with that of his book on the Athenian state highlights the common denominator between them.

\textsuperscript{34} Bertram, De Politia Judaica, p. 39.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., pp. 50–51.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 53.

\textsuperscript{37} Carlo Sigonio, De Republica Hebraeorum, annotated by Johann Nicolai (Leiden, 1701), p. 86.

\textsuperscript{38} Petrus Cunaeus, De Republica Hebraeorum, annotated by Johann Nicolai (Leiden, 1703), p. 11.

\textsuperscript{39} Wilhelm Zepper, Legum Mosicarum Forensium, p. 218.
Methodology and Reconstruction

How did such writers go about writing the constitutional history of the Hebrews? The reconstruction of the Israelite polity raised methodological questions for scholars and antiquarians. Such a history has to be based on a solitary source, the Old Testament (whether read in the original Hebrew or in translation), and occasionally supplemented by Josephus or rabbinic texts. Obviously, the authors took for granted the historical accuracy of the biblical books (although some of these writers, such as Sigonio, might have been skeptical about the Vulgate version) and the unity of the biblical text. This required them to harmonize contradictions found in the various biblical descriptions. In general, the biblical text does not easily lend itself to systematic political description. As is well-known, the Tanach does not quite read like Aristotle's Constitution of Athens. Its depiction of political events is secondary to its status as a religious work. In addition, the events described in the Bible span hundreds of years, and it is difficult to identify the function of political institutions at any given time. On the one hand, the Bible itself describes changes in the political regime of the Hebrews, such as the institution of the magistrates by Jethro or the establishment of the kingdom in the days of Samuel. On the other hand, there are gaps in the description of the institution in each period of the biblical story. The different authors writing on the Hebrew republic had to find their own interpretative strategies to fill those lacunae.

Sigonio had previous experience in using the works of Cicero to reconstruct the mechanisms of the Roman assemblies. It is not surprising that, assuming similarity between the Hebraic and Roman republics, he used the Roman model to fill in the blanks in the biblical text. For example, he assumes that when the Bible describes assemblies of the people, it is referring to a formal institution subject to precise laws. Therefore, just like in Rome, only a ruler with imperium (supreme political authority) could convene such an assembly. Following that assumption, he defines

40 Wilhelm Schickard, Jus Regium Hebraeorum, p. 55ff.
which offices described in the Old Testament carried with them *imperium*, trying to use the biblical terms (or their Latin equivalents—Sigonio knew no Hebrew) in a consistent way.\(^{43}\) Sigonio also quotes from the appropriate passages in Josephus, using him as a major source for his recognition of the Israelite polity.\(^{44}\)

Cornelius Bertram, on the other hand, seems to have used different methodological principles. He tries to base himself as much as possible on the biblical text itself (he was an accomplished scholar of Hebrew).\(^ {45}\) In addition, he seems to assume that institutions remained static for the extent of the biblical period, unless the text specifically describes a change. Therefore, Bertram writes that the institution of the elders that existed during the sojourn in Egypt before the Exodus continued to exist during the entire biblical period and even beyond.\(^ {46}\)

Wilhelm Schickard based his description of the Israelite monarchy on postbiblical texts (and, like other writers, did not question the assumption that the Jewish postbiblical texts retained authentic descriptions of the polity of biblical times). He had access to a number of rabbinic texts such as *Midrash Rabba*, *Mishneh Torah* of Maimonides (which had already been utilized by Cunaeus),\(^ {47}\) and various Jewish biblical exegetes.\(^ {48}\) Schickard’s quotations from rabbinic material were used by writers such as Harrington or Milton, and even by scholars of Hebrew such as Selden.\(^ {49}\)

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\(^{43}\) Sigonio, *De Republica Hebraeorum*, pp. 590–595.

\(^ {44}\) Ibid., pp. 174, 177, 231, 274, 353, 402, 433, 599, 605, 613, 617, 622.


\(^ {48}\) In his introduction he mentions Kimhi, Ibn Ezra, Rashi, Gersonides, Nahmanides, Bahai, and Abraham Seba.

\(^ {49}\) Harrington’s list of rabbinic opinions on monarchy is identical to the sources listed by Schickard on the same subject. See The Political Works of James Harrington, ed. J.G.A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 575. Schickard was not mentioned in S.B. Liljebergen, *Harrington and the Jews* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1932), the only work devoted to this topic. Salmasius’ *Defensio regia* and Milton’s *Pro populo Anglicano defensio* show use of Schickard’s *Jus Regium Hebraeorum*, which also appears frequently in Selden’s marginal notes.
Theocracy in the ‘Respublica Hebraeorum’

One of the themes that recurs in many of the works is the question of theocracy, even when the term does not appear explicitly. The notion of the “kingdom of God” appears in the Tanach as an alternative to human kingdom, but the term “theocracy” appears first as a description of the Mosaic polity in Josephus’ Against Apion. The term is open to different interpretations (both as to the intent of Josephus and in subsequent discussions), and one can distinguish between radical interpretations of theocracy that see it as direct rule of God and theocracy, which in effect is hierocracy, the rule of priests.

The writers on the Respublica Hebraeorum often found themselves confronting the question of God as ruler. Sigonio describes the Mosaic polity as the rule of law but, utilizing a creative reading of Aristotle, identifies that regime as the rule of God. Despite the fact that he ignores the text in Against Apion and the term “theocracy,” he introduces the idea through the back door. Bertram also tries to integrate the notion of God’s rule in his political-historical analysis by positing God as one of the elements of a mixed constitution. Cunaeus quotes the passage in Josephus on theocracy and has his own explanation about the divine nature of the Hebrew commonwealth. He does not think that the constitutional institutions of the Hebrews are worth emulating (and perhaps they are not even worth extensive discussion), but instead the United Provinces should imitate the aequitas (equity) and iustitia (justice) which are the essence of the theocracy and are reflected in the Mosaic laws (and especially in the agrarian regime).

The recurring discussion of theocracy in the descriptions of the Hebrew republic raises the question of the relation of those descriptions to the treatment of the kingdom of God by two of the major thinkers of the seventeenth century: Hobbes and Spinoza.


51 Encyclopedia of Religion (Eliade), s.v. “Theocracy.”

52 Aristotle, Politics 1287a.

53 Sigonio, De Republica Hebraeorum, p. 86.

54 Bertram, De Politia Judaica, p. 39.
The descriptions of the political meaning of the kingdom of God in the third book of *Leviathan* as well as in *De Cive* (On the Citizen) have inspired a number of studies in recent years. The details of the political history of the Bible have yet to be compared with the descriptions in the literature of the *Respublica Hebraeorum*, but they share many themes and concerns.

Similarly the notion of theocracy is a central part of the description of the Israelite state in Spinoza’s *Theological Political Treatise*. The affinity between Spinoza’s work and the literature of the time dealing with the Israelite state has been noted by a number of scholars, but more extensive analysis of the relevant chapters and a comparison with the other writers show both the commonalities and the contrasts between the different interpretations.

The study of the literature of the *Respublica Hebraeorum* and of early modern political Hebraism will certainly prove to be an important addition to the intellectual history of the period and to the role of the Bible in Western civilization.

Jerusalem

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