
Eva Johanna Holmberg’s methodical treatment of what seems to have been thought about contemporary Jews in early modern England is a noteworthy addition to Ashgate’s series on “Transculuralisms, 1400-1700.” The underlying assumption of this straightforward study is that Jews were good indicators of what might be thought of as “the present state of the world” insofar as they “made the places they inhabited seem either multicultural and cosmopolitan or corrupt and vice-ridden” (151). The recorded descriptions and observations of Jews, as well as details concerning how host states, cities, and centers of trade dealt with members of this “scattered nation,” provide a lens through which a wide range of notions about the customs, moralities and policies of the day can be seen and assessed.

Among the distinctive features of this study is its abductive approach to cultural historicism. Declining to assert either the “bottom-up” thinking associated with inductive inquiry (constructing propositions derived from specific examples) or the “top-down” method of deductive reasoning (where a certain conclusion is reached from one or more general statements), Holmberg works from the available data descriptions to reach reasonable conclusions that help account for the appearance of the textual record itself. Specifically, rather than assembling the extant data to make a sweeping and definitive claim about early modern ideas about Jews, this book systematically presents the often contradictory descriptions found in travelers’ accounts, diaries, and itineraries, and secondarily in treatises on diet, disease, foreign universities, and the topography of London. The argument sensibly presumes that these records are not immediately legible documents of the way things in reality were but that they reflect mediated accounts serving a variety of purposes. For, in the end, as Holmberg claims, “these writings and views cannot be easily categorized as being either anti-Semitic or philo-Semitic” (3). As a result of this judicious approach to the data, Holmberg’s steady unfolding of the observational accounts reaffirms the extent to which Jews, as late as the seventeenth
century, still were considered by the English to be a source of “continuing wonder and study,” whether affirming the righteousness of the Christian Faith or seeking to discover how, despite dispersion and expulsion, they continued to thrive (4).

Unlike Achsah Guibbory’s *Christian Identity: Jews and Israel in Seventeenth-Century England* (2010) which focuses on the political uses of the dominant metaphors associated with the tribulations, triumphs, and institutions of the ancient Hebrews, *Jews in the Early Modern English Imagination* contends that accounts of Jews abroad and in the Holy Land formed a rich cache of information about their customs, beliefs, and physical presence that could not be scrutinized first-hand in England. This book centers on how the English and Scots reported back to their countrymen about what they encountered while traveling in the Low Countries and the Mediterranean—especially Italy and North Africa—as well as in the Levant and Arabic East. The underlying thesis is that the active process of “imagining the Jews” is bound up with the production of “culturally shaped and conditioned ideas about Jews in England” (5), such that contemporary Jews are taken to be the subject of imaginative storytelling. This paves the way for a critical “engagement with cultural knowledge” insofar as imagination during this period “participated in the process by which all information was transmitted” (6).

Consistent with this cultural historical assessment of imagination informing Holmberg’s study, readers are reminded that both early modern travel as well as travel writing “owed much to pilgrimage and crusade narratives,” and that travel writing, as such, had as much to do with a journey into alien lands as it did with providing “a venue for writing a traveler’s life” (8). Implicit in this literary activity was the desire to attract new patrons and new readers through one’s narrative project, thus fashioning and sometimes fixing for oneself an authoritative, and at times pious, identity. Holmberg’s own narrative relies on what amounts to a roll call of the expected, fairly well-known and easily accessible sources: Biddulph’s *Travels*, Blount’s *Voyage into the Levant*, Boorde’s *Introduction of Knowledge*, Coryate’s *Crudities*, Moryson’s *Itinerary*, Nicolay’s *Navigations into Turkie*, Purchas’s compendious *Pilgrims*, and Sandys’ *Journey*. The requisite passages about Jews from Nashe and Browne are also cited. Several instructive
glimpses of Jews abroad from less well known sources include works by John Weemes, Hebrew scholar and exegete; Philip Skippon, the distinguished soldier who fought for the Palatinate on the continent and then later for the Parliamentarians at home; William Prynne, Puritan polemicist extraordinaire; and the indefatigable Scots traveler, William Lithgow, who claimed to have covered 36,000 miles on foot. Corroborative secondary studies by scholars in related fields pepper the book throughout, most notably David Katz, Elliot Horowitz, and James Shapiro.

Although there are occasional references to English drama (Shakespeare’s Shylock and Marlowe’s Barabas naturally) and theatrical conventions (such as the development of the racial “Jewish nose,” and how red beards came to be associated with Jews owing to this characterization of Judas in medieval spectacles), this is not a book about stereotypical representations of Jews in the usual sense. Instead it concerns matters such as why Jewish ceremonial apparel, so different from the garments customarily worn by English Protestants, would have been viewed with suspicion—“probably because of the easy comparison to Catholic liturgical paraphernalia” (79). Reasonable guesses like this one prompt Holmberg to propose, abductively, that the Jewish body “seems to have been produced to fit the needs and narratives following from writers’ various agendas” (128).

With so much careful attention to making reasonable inferences about early modern reports on the appearance, clothing, customs, and demeanor of Jews, it is unfortunate that the only illustration accompanying this volume is on the dust jacket. Most libraries, as part of the accession process, remove such jackets prior to shelving new books in the stacks. Thus the opening sentence (“The image adorning the cover of this book …”), for most readers will be an ekphrastic description of a dignified if egregiously turbaned Jewish cloth merchant. They will not be able to be edified by or contemplate in detail the picture unless they go to John Stell’s 1585 English translation of Nicolay’s account of the people and geography of Turkey. And second, it is unfortunate because more illustrations could have served to buttress further Holmberg’s overarching assumption that “Jewish practices and bodies were interpreted with the help of widely shared cultural knowledge of English men and women” (9). At all events this
book does achieve the author’s main goal of recovering a broad range of ideas “attached to Jews and the information that was circulating about them” prior to their 1656 readmission into England (2). Owing to the steady stream of data presented about the ways in which both preconceptions and lived experience influenced how Jews were imagined in the seventeenth century, this book will be a useful and reliable resource for students of cultural history, social anthropology, travel literature, and especially diaspora studies.


In the predominantly oral and visual culture of early modern Europe, theater, ceremony, and festival served as ubiquitous reminders of civic order and the rhythms of the Christian calendar. While the didactic and entertainment purposes served by such modes of performance have been well-documented by theater historians, M.A. Katritzky’s engaging monograph, *Healing, Performance, and Ceremony in the writings of Three Early Modern Physicians* adds a welcome new dimension to existing knowledge of early modern performance culture. In her assessment of the extensive body of source materials associated with three German-speaking physicians, Hippolytus Guarinonius and half-brothers Felix and Thomas Platter, Katritzky explores the largely heretofore overlooked relationship between the medical marketplace and theatrical events. Inasmuch as *Healing, Performance, and Ceremony* clearly showcases Katritzky’s expertise as a theater historian, it also incorporates an innovative analysis of urban culture and the economies of healthcare in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe.

In her analysis of the three physicians’ private journals, medical treatises, and descriptions of the theatrical events they encountered across Europe, Katritzky seeks to identify the ways in which early modern medical practice was profoundly shaped by the culture of performance. She argues that physicians were especially receptive to