Katja Vehlow, University of South Carolina, vehlow@sc.edu

still to do: use of the vernacular. I have to think about the implications of the fact that this text virtually predates most vernacular translations of Josephus. not a specialist in early english printing culture

Let me start with a quote

*Thou shalt read here of terrible and horrible eventes of sedicion and rebellion, yea there was no such cruelti exercised upon them by their external ennemies, as they bled amongst themselves one upon an other, subiectes against their princes, and subiectes: in so muche that nothing hastened their destruction so greatyle as their own doggidnesse (and intestine hatred). Be thou warned therefore by [12] their harms, and take hede that thou maist avoid the like. ... Consider more ouer and marke well, the Jewes were counted Gods people, the Romaines contrary his enemies, as whithout all doubt, hauing no knowledge of God, & being Idolaters as they were at that time, they could not be gods people: yet for al this, God would they should preuaile against the Jewes, and subdue them under their yoke....*

*Being moued and requested of a certayne honest ma[n] prynter of Lo[n]den, studiousse in his vocation of the commoditie of this our cuntrey, that I wold take in hand to translate this part of the history of the Jewes, to the intent that as there is amongst us already, in our native tong, the originall beginninge of that nacion, & the continuance also for a long space in the Bible, and annexed to the same: so there might be likewise an vnderstanding and declaration to al men in the English tong as wel as in other, of the destruction of so famous a commune wealth.*

With these words, the 17th c. royal historiographer James Howell introduced his *Wonderful and most deplorable history of the Latter Times of the Jews, and of the City of Jerusalem*. First published in 1652, this would become an extraordinarily popular work, and was regularly printed for centuries. It was one of the first Hebrew texts to be printed in the vernacular. After listening to the papers yesterday afternoon, this even more remarkable since Howel's text then predates most English versions of Josephus Flavius, too.

vehlow@sc.edu
This was also one of the first Jewish books to be printed in America in English, and was issued for the last time by a Quaker Press in Vermont, in 1819. Howell does not speculate about the author's person and probably relied on the information, given in the text itself, namely that this was the Book of Joseph the Priest, the son of Gorion [Wars of the Jews, p. 2].

The text was indeed indirectly related to a version of the Book of Joseph the Priest, namely to Josippon, the most important Hebrew-language history of the Jewish Middle Ages that we heard so much about yesterday.

Like many medieval texts, Josippon reflects Jewish and non-Jewish texts to create a vision of the past and presence that synchronized Jewish and non-Jewish history in a way that spoke to its readers over centuries. The work was copied and re-written, and translated into many languages, and read a lot. About 15 years ago, for instance, when I was a student waiting in line in misrad ha-pnim to extend my student visa, I was reading Josippon (in Flusser's edition). Suddenly a voice behind me piped up: “They still make you read this old book? We read that in high school, too.” And then we had a whole discussion about the importance of the text as an account of the past. This, I assume, has become rare these days, and Josippon is obviously not studied as an eye witness, but rather as literary testimony of the creativity of tenth-century Byzantine Italian Jewry, and, more difficult to assert, the many audiences that continued to enjoy the work over centuries.

But in fact, our story is even more complicated: Against his expectations, James Howell was not reading Josephus Flavius, or a copy of Josippon, or at least not a straight-forward one. Rather, he had translated an otherwise virtually unknown Iberian version of Josippon that had been written by the twelfth-century historian and philosopher Abraham Ibn Daud of Toledo, also known under his acronym Raba"D (he was rabad harishon, rabad the First, to distinguish him from a number of name sakes). Ibn Daud had, in the 1160s, written an intricate Hebrew world chronicle that recounted Jewish history up to his day, and also defined rabbinic Judaism as he saw it, in an ideological battle against Karaites, Christians, and Muslims.

Howell read this text as a warning to his fellow citizens to mend their ways and to avoid the mistakes that God's former favorite people had committed lest they and their beautiful city, London, would suffer a similar fate. The consequences of the misdeeds of the Jews, after all, were well known: Jews were universally despised, greedy, forever cheating, unreliable, and had no home. They stank, too, and were allied with the enemies of England. Many Jews, he complained, were now living in London, and his introduction, and perhaps the translation as a whole, is a vigorous argument against the re-establishment of organized Jewish communities in England.
Howell was the fourth Christian writer to translate this particular text into the vernacular. The translations, among the earliest texts to be published in print in the vernacular, were made possible by a Latin–Hebrew edition carried by the eminent Hebraist Sebastian Münster that appeared in 1529. Within a year, the writer of church hymns Hans Schwytzer, who was then living in Strasbourg and a follower of the Radical Reformation under Schwenckfeld, had published a first German translation. This was followed in 1557 by a second rendering by the Swabian Pietist pastor Georg Wolff von Grimma that appeared in Ursel.

But it was in English that the work found its greatest audience, in Peter Morwen’s 1558 edition, reprinted over a dozen times and especially in the version quoted at the beginning of my remarks today that had been published by James Howell in 1652. Although all authors worried that their work might be dismissed because they were written in the vernacular, still a new idiom for serious scholarly work, all were printed many times, some of them literally dozens of times.

But why? What made this version of the Antiquities so popular?

According to its translators, the work deserved a wide readership because, of course, it was somehow connected to Josephus Flavius, the first-century Jewish historian of the Roman-Jewish war who was widely seen as an eye witness to the very events he recounted. The translators knew of course that this text differed from Josephus Flavius, and some comment on this. To begin with, it was written in Hebrew, not in Greek or in Latin. It often had unusual versions of personal and geographic names that diverged from Josephus Flavius or other historical texts covering the same era, and some texts „correct“ the text, while others do not. Perhaps more importantly, it was considerably shorter than other versions of the Antiquities and omitted some key figures and events. It really is a page-turner (if you are into such kind of thing): there’s a massacre on every second page.

The translators and printers of these vernacular versions of the Antiquities subscribed for the most part to the ideas of the Protestant Reformation. They identified in new ways with Israel and the Jews. They saw themselves as the New Israel, of course, prone to the same mistakes made by those who had been God’s people before them. If, their dedications and introductions insist, God could punish his own people so they would suffer so terribly, who were a universally despised people without a home that was constantly repenting for the murder of Christ and other acts of defiance against God, what would happen to them who, while the New Israel, remained newcomers to the covenant with God?

With the exception of Howell and some of his later publishers who were actively opposed to a Jewish presence in their midst, the translators seem to have focused less on Jews as real, living,
breathing people, but rather on Jews as a trope. Hermeneutical Jews, to use a term coined by Jeremy Cohen, who were somewhat obsolete yet fulfilled an important function in the salvific history of the Church.

Furthermore, a streak of political quietism permeates the text, even more than its model, Josippon. Subjects are regularly told to submit to a ruler's authority, while rulers are evaluated according to certain criteria: Where they of Davidic origin (a condition, in medieval Jewish eyes, for rightful political authority)? Most were not, but did they act on advice of the religious leadership of the day? Did they strive to heal rifts that were opening up in society? Did they defend orthodoxy and defy heretical groups? These ideas, prominent in the text, possibly appealed to sixteenth and seventeenth-century political theorists who were recalibrating the relationship between Church and state. Many of them read Josephus Flavius, one of the earliest texts to discuss these ideas. I suspect that this version's brevity appealed to readers who could find therein the entire story of the Second Temple period, on a fraction of the pages this took in the usual editions of the Antiquities.

To sum up: These four translations, by Schwyntzer, Wolff, Morwen, and Howell, brought an Iberian Hebrew text written by an Islamicate Aristotelian philosopher to the attention of an early modern Christian audience in Europe and America. They were not aware of the many permutations the text had taken, but their work lays testimony to the complex reception history of Hebrew medieval texts, and of the many versions of the Antiquities circulating in early modern Europe.