



Book Reviews

American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War. By Eran Shalev. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013. Pp. xii, 256. \$40.00.)

We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. . . . And, besides our first birthright—embracing one continent of earth—God has given to us, for a future inheritance, the broad domains of the political pagans, that shall yet come and lie down under the shade of our ark, without bloody hands being lifted.

—Herman Melville, *White Jacket* (1850)

Never being one to allow grandstanding missionaries, unctuous politicians, or confidence men of any stripe to utter facile rhetoric without parodying their swindle, Herman Melville satirizes the jingoistic zeitgeist of antebellum America. The hoary techniques of hitching religion to the bandwagon of nationalism, of yoking Old Testament typology to xenophobia, and of wrapping imperialism in the pious cloak of liberty and the pursuit of property have long been the focus of the academic monographs that commanded our attention for a decade or two around the bicentennial. It is fair to say that a virtual cottage industry of such studies sprang up in the wake of Perry Miller's New England tomes—long since complemented with like volumes by such well-known scholars as Ursula Brumm, Sacvan Bercovitch, Emory Elliott, Mason I. Lowance, Donald Weber, and Ruth Bloch. Professor Eran Shalev's recent *American Zion*—the companion piece to his earlier *Rome Reborn on the Western Shores* (2009)—once more traverses the burned-over district of the period's filiopietist rhetoric. Yet he brings a fresh perspective to a perennially fascinating theme: He uncovers in five chapters a string of key tropes and a strain of biblicism that have so far escaped critics of American culture.

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The popular Exodus trope in which (American) Israelites escaped from English (Egyptian) bondage, passed through the Atlantic (Red Sea) to a New English Canaan, and there established an American Zion in their City upon the Hill “may have obscured other equally important Old Testament structures and narratives” (p. 7), Professor Shalev astutely points out as he surveys the terrain in his introduction. And if, in the biblical metaphors of the period from colonization to the Civil War, a Winthrop, Washington, or even a Lincoln could assume the mantle of a Moses, Joshua, or Nehemiah; and a Stuart, Hanoverian monarch or latter-day Jefferson Davis could trade places with Pharaoh, Ahasuerus, or Nebuchadnezzar—then we understand the degree to which the heroes and narratives of the Hebrew Bible resonated with Bible-reading Americans. *American Zion*, we are told, “takes ‘Hebraic’ moments and distinct vocabularies as vantage points from which to gain fresh insights into the processes that were shaped by, and in turn helped to drive, the momentous transformations of the young American republic from the Revolution to the era of the Civil War” (p. 12).

In chapter 1, “The Jewish Cincinnatus,” Shalev demonstrates that as the Exodus trope rapidly lost momentum after the Revolution, tropes such as George Washington emulating the civic republicanism of the Hebrew Gideon in the garb of a Roman Cincinnatus were on the ascendant. Yet the truism that power corrupts even a most virtuous leader was a well-grounded fear. It agitated educated elites raised on Cato, Cicero, and Seneca just as much as it did semiliterate farmers reared on the civic humanism of the Bible. American clergymen of the early national period well understood this dilemma, and they deployed appropriate arms to target the hoi polloi.

Chapter 2, “The Hebrew Republic as Political Model before the Civil War,” is among the most intriguing contributions in Shalev’s book. In this chapter, the author accomplishes for antebellum America what Eric Nelson’s prize-winning *The Hebrew Republic* (2010) does for the transformation of European political thought; that is, he demonstrates how the Mosaic constitution, as a divinely sanctioned archetype, served as a model for republican thought in the early modern period. Petrus Cunaeus’s *De Republica Hebraeorum* (1617) and the Mosaic stringencies on the powers of the chief magistrate, the Great Sanhedrim, and on the Hebrew republic’s popular assembly equally informed the influential *Discourse Concerning Government* (1680), by England’s foremost republican political theorist Algernon Sidney, who was widely studied in antebellum America.

The backbone of this important chapter, however, stretches along the political tracts and homilies of, for instance, Nathaniel Whitaker, Gad Hitchcock, Samuel Langdon, Joseph Huntington, David Tappan, Lyman Beecher, and Enoch Wines—well-known pulpit warriors, all. They knew how to project OT types beyond their NT abrogation into the republican discourse of America's early national period.

"Pseudobiblicism, the Early Republic, and the Cultural Origins of the Book of Mormon" is the focus of chapter 3. Here, Shalev cogently illustrates how the hallowed language of the 1611 King James Version—archaic even in the time of its inception—resonated with America's Bible-reading audiences. When imitated, it endowed even pedestrian discourses with the liturgical decorum of holy writ. Examples include John Leacock's *The First Book of the American Chronicles of the Times* (1774–75), Richard Snowden's *The American Revolution: Written in Scriptural, or, Ancient Historical Style* (1802), and John McDonald's *Isaiah's Message to the American Nation* (1814). Faux-biblical texts, couched in the hoary idiom of the KJV, employed a discourse that lost its force only after the Jacksonian period—not, however, before preparing the way for Joseph Smith's seminal *The Book of Mormon* (1830). Whether an inspired creation or mere translation, this uniquely American bible employs a "textual style and mode" in which Smith's contemporaries had been schooled since the Revolution. "Pseudobiblicism then," Shalev argues convincingly, "plays an important role in understanding the reception of the Book of Mormon among its early readers, who were operating in a world that sanctioned the uses of the Bible's language" (pp. 114–15).

Chapter 4 links the quest for the Lost Tribes in America with a curious episode in the history of American proto-Zionism: Mordecai Manuel Noah (1785–1851) and his plans to establish the Hebrew Republic of Ararat as a safe haven for European Jews on Grand Island in the Niagara River—a stone's throw away from the famous falls. Whether or not this American Noah truly believed that descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel were to be found among Native Americans, he nonetheless staged an Indian chief (in Hebrew-Indian accoutrements) along with a flock of animals in an ark floating toward his new Holy Land. Yet even as this Noah's plan came to naught, Old Testament biblicism coupled with end-time visions of an imminent millennium in an American Zion proved powerful.

The patriotic use of Old Testament tropes was a potent tool in fashioning King George III's American subjects into the republican citizenry of a newly independent nation. Shalev insists, however, that

the rise of evangelicalism during the Second Great Awakening, the contentious debate about slavery, and the resurgence of the New Testament Jesus completely eclipsed Hebrew biblicism in the decades before the Civil War. This is the subject of chapter 5, arguably the richest in Shalev's book. Itinerant Methodist and Baptist preachers—orchestrating Finneyan anxious benches and mass camp revivals—were primary engines in the shift from OT biblicism to the NT Gospels, from the jealous, strafing Jehovah to the all-merciful and atoning Christ. To be sure, neither the Second Great Awakening nor the triumph of Free Will Arminianism, not even the emerging Enlightenment secularism alone, is responsible for this metamorphosis. Instead, the tenacious debate on the institution of slavery, Shalev argues, must be credited as a major cause for the Christian Jesus taking center stage in the political discourse of the time.

Ironically, both sides in the debate equally invoked both Testaments, either to justify the peculiar institution as sanctioned in the Bible or to controvert its continued validity by historicizing the struggle of the Israelites. As Daniel Coker (1780–1846), a founding member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, fittingly put it in his “Dialogue Between a Virginian and an African Minister” (1810): “The Israelites were not sent by a divine mandate, to nations three hundred miles distant, who were neither doing, nor meditating any thing [*sic*] against them, and to whom they had no right whatever, in order to captivate them by fraud and force” (quoted in Shalev, p. 178). If Abraham Lincoln welcomed Harriet Beecher Stowe with the memorable address, “So you're the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war,” it is perhaps equally memorable that African Americans in the antebellum period, like many of their descendants in the Civil Rights marches a century later, felt drawn to the Exodus story and merged the figures of Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Lincoln, and Dr. Martin Luther King with the figure of the Old Testament lawgiver and liberator of the Israelites.

Eran Shalev's analysis of biblicist rhetoric in American political discourse is a fine example of scholarship that teases fresh insights out of almost-forgotten texts. *American Zion* affirms just how potent the tropes and metaphors of the Hebrew Bible were in the political, social, and moral formation of antebellum America. Every scholar of the period should own a copy of this book.

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first commentary on the Bible, COTTON MATHER'S BIBLIA AMERICANA (1693–1728). He is also writing a new intellectual biography of Mather for Yale University Press.

John Eliot and the Praying Indians of Massachusetts Bay: Communities and Connections in Puritan New England. By Kathryn N. Gray. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013. Pp. xx, 172. \$70.00.)

The missionary career of John Eliot (1604–90), the Roxbury, Massachusetts, minister and millenarian known as the “Apostle to the Indians,” has received considerable critical study since the 1965 publication of Alden Vaughan’s *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620–1675*. For the remainder of the twentieth century, Eliot scholarship was dominated by historians such as Francis Jennings, James Axtell, Daniel Mandell, Jean O’Brien, Karen Kupperman, and Vaughan himself, who published revised editions of his book in 1979 and again in 1995. But beginning around 2000, Eliot passed from historians to literary critics and literary theorists like Thomas Scanlan, Hilary Wyss, Joshua David Bellin, and Kristina Bross.

The redirection of the scholarly literature redefined the issues. Vaughan, Jennings, and other historians were concerned with such questions as the function of Eliot’s mission in localizing the “praying Indians” on reservations and thereby opening up their remaining ancestral lands to English settlement; the treatment of Native Americans, Christian and non-Christian, in the Puritan legal system; the financing of the mission, an obligation largely assumed by benefactors in England and not by the colonists themselves; the mission’s failures and successes as an instrument for “civilizing” and Christianizing the local Algonquians; and the role of the mission in provoking, however inadvertently, the conflict known as King Philip’s War (1675–76 in southern New England; 1675–78 in northern New England). Scanlan, Wyss, and their fellow textualists were more interested in the praying Indians as “performers” in public ceremonies like covenant renewals, worship services, and funerals and as literary constructs in Puritan sources rather than as historical actors in the colonial enterprise.

Kathryn N. Gray, a literature professor at Plymouth University in the United Kingdom, continues this recent trend in her *John Eliot and the Praying Indians of Massachusetts Bay*. Indeed, the work of late twentieth-century historians is peripheral or nonexistent in the pages of the work. Gray divides her book into five topical chapters.