

# *The Jewish Discovery of Islam*

STUDIES IN HONOR OF BERNARD LEWIS

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# I

## *Pedigree Remembered, Reconstructed, Invented: Benjamin Disraeli between East and West*

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In the summer of 1877, William Gladstone (1809–98)—never a great admirer of Benjamin Disraeli—offered this assessment of his character in a private letter: “Though he has been baptized, his Jew feelings are the most radical and the most real, and so far respectable, portion of his profoundly falsified nature.”<sup>1</sup> A year later, after the signing of the Treaty of Berlin, Otto von Bismarck’s astonished pronouncement was on everyone’s lips: “Der alte Jude, das ist der Mann!”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, despite Disraeli’s conversion, and even at the height of his career, his Jewish origins were never forgotten—not in England and not abroad, not by supporters and not by opponents.<sup>3</sup> Disraeli himself did not forget them either. But what is meant when we say “he did not forget”?

Recalling the origins of Benjamin Disraeli (1804–81) is a complex task that entails constructing, or reconstructing, his lineage, personal history, and way of remembering. For Benjamin Disraeli had at least three “pedigrees.” The first can be documented through the historian’s usual tools of the trade. In other words, it is the one closest to verifiable fact. The second is the fictitious pedigree that Disraeli himself presented as his own. Since it was fabricated, this lineage has a history of its own,

with its own stages of development. It is not a static, finished version of his genealogy but rather a picture in motion, more reminiscent of a film.

Disraeli's third pedigree is no less imaginary than the second, but it is utterly different from it both in substance and function. Whereas the second lineage had some connection with reality, and was intended for "daily use," the third is totally imaginary; it represents the element of Disraeli's historical and spiritual memory. This lineage served Disraeli, first and foremost, as an inner beacon that lit his way through life. This third pedigree is also a dynamic one, with its own internal history and stages of creation and evolution.

The historical elements of Disraeli's lineage, when viewed as a totality, may provide us with a deeper understanding of the link between his own past and the world view underlying his policies with regard to the East. In a broader context, such a discussion may shed some light on the nature of memory in general.

### *The Father's Choices*

Benjamin Disraeli did not convert out of a personal decision. He was baptized into the Anglican Church in 1817 at the age of thirteen, together with his brothers and sisters, on the initiative of his father, Isaac D'Israeli (1766–1848).<sup>4</sup> The reasons for the father's action are not entirely clear, but they can be summarized as an expression of his own desire not to continue on the path open to a normative Jew in the England of his time, although he had no other religious preference.

Thus he left the Bevis Marks synagogue at precisely the point when he would have been obliged to make the necessary preparations for his son's transition into manhood in the eyes of Jewish law, with responsibility for his actions and his transgressions.<sup>5</sup> While he himself led the life of a "Jew without a synagogue," it would seem that he did not view this as an adequate solution for his children. The Anglican Church, in his eyes, offered the answer to the social problems and questions of affiliation that would confront them if he left them in the status that he had chosen for himself.<sup>6</sup>

Isaac D'Israeli himself never converted. He was the ultimate Spinozist in his religious philosophy, and a "Jew without a synagogue" in his actions.<sup>7</sup> In both thought and deed, there was not a great deal separating him from the generations of "New Christians" who made their way to

Italy, the Netherlands, France, and England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There they found that they had to forge their own brand of Judaism, since there was no connection between the faith of their fathers, as they had imagined it in the countries of their persecution, and what Judaism turned out to be in those parts of the world where Jews were permitted to observe their religion unhampered.<sup>8</sup>

Although Benjamin Disraeli, like his father, did not fit the pattern of the normative Jewish believer, he differed from his father in his tremendous ambition. The clash between his modest origins and his lofty ambitions led to his invention of fictitious pedigrees and the emergence of a man altogether different from D'Israeli the father, both in actions and in attitude toward the origins and the role of the Jewish people.

### *Lineage A: The Established Pedigree*

The following are the facts relating to Benjamin Disraeli's background that can be verified:

Benjamin D'Israeli the elder (1730–1816), the grandfather of the statesman, was a hatmaker who moved to London from Italy in 1748 at the age of eighteen. The earliest known link on the family tree is that of Benjamin Disraeli's great-grandfather, Yitzhak D'Israeli, from the small town of Cento, near Ferrara.<sup>9</sup> The origins of the name "Israeli" or "Israel" can be traced back as far as the tenth century.<sup>10</sup> The name was very popular among the "New Christians," who returned to Judaism after several generations as practicing Christians. In cases where they did not know the original Hebrew family name, but had a family tradition that they were not a Cohen or a Levi, some of them simply adopted the name "Israel." Families with this name are recorded in 1546 in Salonika,<sup>11</sup> in 1613 in Venice,<sup>12</sup> 1624 in Jerusalem,<sup>13</sup> and later in Livorno, Rhodes, Ancona, and Alexandria.<sup>14</sup>

Disraeli's family, then, may be assumed to have a Spanish-Portuguese origin. They reached a "place of Judaism" in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, and wandered the eastern parts of the Mediterranean until Benjamin D'Israeli the elder decided to try his luck in London. He ultimately left a sizeable inheritance to Isaac D'Israeli that enabled him to dabble in literature without having to work a day in his life.<sup>15</sup>

The lineage of the mother of Benjamin Disraeli's grandfather, Henrietta, is much clearer. She came from an ancient Italian family,

di Rossi, that claimed to trace its roots to one of the four families that the Emperor Titus brought back with him from Jerusalem after the destruction of the Temple.<sup>16</sup> Ironically, Disraeli was unaware of this myth, and so made no use of it. Disraeli's paternal grandmother was Sarah Syprut (née Gabbai Villa-Real) (1742/3–1825). The Gabbai Villa-Reals were a well-to-do Portuguese family of merchants from Livorno that had branches in every place where there was a profit to be made from trade.<sup>17</sup>

Thus far we have presented the ascertained facts regarding the father's side of the family, which served as the basis for Disraeli's fictitious pedigree. Disraeli never made use of the family history of his mother, Maria D'Israeli (1775–1847), despite the fact that her lineage was a good deal clearer than that of his father. This may be due to an estrangement between mother and son,<sup>18</sup> although another possible explanation is the lesser importance that Disraeli attached to his mother's family tree. Be that as it may, she came from an Ashkenazic family by the name of Basevi (actually "Bashevis" in Yiddish, meaning "belonging to Batsheva"). Her mother was Rebecca Rieti of the ancient Italian-Jewish family of that name, and her grandmother belonged to the Aboab Cardoso family which had settled in England as far back as the late seventeenth century. The Aboab Cardoso family claimed a connection with the rabbinic sage Yitzhak Aboab of Castille, who led his congregation to Portugal at the time of the expulsion.<sup>19</sup> Whether or not this is true, this branch of the family could have provided Disraeli with a history of four generations in England, at a time when his opponents claimed he had only one generation in England behind him. However, he never made explicit reference to this information.

These are the facts that are verifiable, to a greater or lesser extent.<sup>20</sup>

### *Lineage B: The Fictitious Pedigree*

Disraeli presented his fictitious pedigree, in its virtually completed form, in 1849 in the introduction to a collection of his father's writings. Its resemblance to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *halakhic* works is inescapable. Books published by the children or relatives of the author, or even by strangers, always contained an introduction with a detailed description of the author's lineage.<sup>21</sup> This is exactly what Disraeli did.

His version was an approximation of reality. In this account, Disraeli's family left Spain during the expulsion and settled in Venice where they

"dropped their Gothic surname and, grateful to the God of Jacob who had sustained them through unprecedented trials and guarded them through unheard of perils, they assumed the name of Disraeli, a name never borne before or since by any other family in order that their race might be forever recognized." In Venice, they flourished "as merchants for more than two centuries under the protection of the lion of St. Mark." Then, towards the middle of the eighteenth century, his great-grandfather sent the younger of his two sons, Benjamin, to England "where the dynasty seemed at length established through the recent failure of Prince Charles Edward and where public opinion appeared definitively adverse to the persecution of creed and conscience." The other son, so Disraeli alleged, remained in Venice as a banker and became a friend of Sir Horace Mann (1701–86), the British envoy in Florence.<sup>22</sup>

The voluminous correspondence of Sir Horace Mann offers no indication of any ties to the Disraeli family, and the only Disraelis with a genuine connection to the family who settled in Venice were the two sisters of his grandfather, who moved there at an advanced age and founded a school for girls. It is interesting to note that when Disraeli visited Venice in 1826, his relatives were still living there, but there is no mention in his letters of any attempt on his part to seek them out. In other words, he considered his true lineage unworthy of any investment of his time, not to mention the fact that it stood in the way of his attempts to reshape his past into a form more to his liking.<sup>23</sup>

Another link in the fabrication of Disraeli's past grew out of his encounter with a woman by the name of Sarah Brydges Williams, also known as Sarah Mendez da Costa. She was about seventy years old when she met Disraeli in 1851. Their relationship was a multi-faceted one. Disraeli was deeply in debt throughout most of his life, a fact of which Sarah was unaware. She was a childless widow, fabulously wealthy, who gave Disraeli to understand that she would leave him her worldly goods, which she ultimately did.

The most interesting aspect of the ties between them was Sarah's belief that, being descended from the Mendez da Costa family and, through them, the Lara family, she was also connected to the Spanish Lara dynasty. Disraeli also believed that there was a link between his own family and the Lara clan. His father's first wife, Rebecca Furtado, was the sister-in-law of the wealthy banker Francisco Aaron Nuñez de Lara, and the mother-in-law of his son Aaron Lara. It would appear that there were no blood ties between the two families, but Disraeli took pleasure in be-

lieving that there were. Sarah Mendez da Costa saw Disraeli as representing the future, and was immensely proud of him; at the same time, she also cultivated in him an awareness of his “noble ancestry.” Matters reached such a point that in 1859, Disraeli pressed the ambassadors of Spain and Portugal to locate the family crests of the Mendez da Costa and Lara dynasties, partly to placate Sarah but also because the entire enterprise substantiated what he had always wished to believe about himself: that he stemmed from nobility.<sup>24</sup>

### *Lineage C: The Pedigree in Spirit*

Disraeli was motivated by an urgent desire to reach great heights. In a society where a good pedigree, preferably accompanied by an income to match, was the usual prerequisite for glory, he tried to achieve it by two other routes: literature and politics. In different ways, these two paths reflected a colossal arrogance on his part. Disraeli might not have been a literary genius, but he was, without question, a gifted artist in his use of the English language—the language of a people that viewed him as alien. Partly through his mastery of language, he ultimately became one of Britain’s greatest prime ministers.

But even the political route, which eventually brought Disraeli the renown he sought, was extremely difficult to follow without the right pedigree. Disraeli’s problem was that, even if he had wished to do so, he could not pretend to be anything other than what he was: his black curls, his hooked nose practically shouted: “I am a foreigner, I am a Jew.”

The only way to stay the path to glory was to prove that this same foreign ancestry, which so many found repulsive, was superior to the pedigree of the society whose heights Disraeli wished to scale. This need is also the reason why Disraeli did not do the first thing that any apostate who wishes to assimilate into larger society would do: he did not change his name. And his name, along with his appearance, loudly proclaimed: “I stem from the Israelites,” i.e. the Jews.

Proving his nobility was therefore a basic element of Disraeli’s inner being and his personality. It should be recalled that one’s lineage was a central value not only of the society in which Disraeli sought fame. In Spanish-Jewish society, as in Iberian society in general, lineage was a central—if not a supreme—value. The “New Christians” maintained lengthy genealogical charts in order to prove that their blood had not been

tainted by that of the “old Christians” and that they were in fact proper Jews, while the Spanish and Portuguese kept similar records to prove the purity of their own blood—*limpieza de sangre*. A long and verifiable family tree was part of the *honra*, the honor, of the Spanish male, such that it is not hard to comprehend the cultural and historical memory that shaped Disraeli’s preoccupation and motivated his actions.<sup>25</sup>

The most compelling expression of the impact of this historical memory on Disraeli’s personality is the lineage that I have termed his “spiritual pedigree”—the beacon that illuminated his way. It has no connection with reality. Yet it expresses various strata of Disraeli’s personality and his perception of his origins. This lineage appears throughout his literary works.

All of Disraeli’s biographers have made use of his novels as a historical source, especially since, in most of these works, he described the society in which he lived. Moreover, the protagonists were often drawn from Disraeli’s daily life. His biographers, whether sympathetic or critical, have detected in these novels an attempt to refine and polish the image of the Jewish people. Some see in them a simple identification with Disraeli’s true origins, while others point to a connection between the glorification of his roots and the constant struggle that Disraeli was compelled to wage against the anti-Semitism of British society.<sup>26</sup> Yet none have delved into the gradual evolution of the imaginary spiritual lineage that Disraeli constructed for himself in his novels. At most, his biographers have attempted to identify obvious historical figures in specific literary characters.<sup>27</sup> The failure to grasp the full significance of this genealogy has prevented Disraeli’s biographers from fully understanding his perspective regarding relations between East and West—expressed long before Disraeli had the power to affect the fate of peoples and nations.

### *Between Literature and Autobiography*

It is no accident that the first two works important for this purpose began to take shape in Cairo at the end of Disraeli’s journey to the Levant in 1831.<sup>28</sup> The work *Contarini Fleming* is described by Disraeli as “a development of my poetic character,” and the subtitle itself defines the book as a psychological romance. The book is written in the first person, and

in certain ways is an autobiography of Disraeli, a sort of "Disraeli as a young man."

The autobiographical aspect of this work consists of two elements: a fictitious component in which symbols and surrogates take the place of the protagonist and his family, and their true ancestry; and a documentary component which recounts, almost in the style of a travelogue, the story of Disraeli's journey from England, by way of Spain, to Italy, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. At the same time, through the symbols he employs, Disraeli presents the central conflicts of his existence. Already in the title of the work, Disraeli offers his own view of his character: to borrow from the world of flora, he sees himself as a north European graft onto a Mediterranean shoot. Contarini is the name of the patrician Venetian family to which the protagonist's mother belongs, and Fleming is the family name of his father, a north European nobleman. Contarini Fleming is the product of this grafting, a descendant of nobility who harbors elements of both East and West engaged in a perpetual inner struggle.

The father of young Contarini Fleming tells his son that he will one day be prime minister. Like Disraeli, Contarini abandons his original faith, but in this case for Catholicism, and sets out on his "odyssey of initiation" through the East. Disraeli's poetic novel reflects his own view of himself in 1831, at the age of twenty-eight—a young man struggling with questions of national, religious, and cultural identity. His culture is British, but beneath the surface are distant, alien elements from which he cannot bring himself to sever all ties. How convenient it would be if, like Contarini Fleming, he were descended on one side from European or British nobility! But this is only a poetic history—and he knows it—so he creates for himself a different nobility.<sup>29</sup>

Concurrent with *Contarini Fleming*, Disraeli began to write a historical novel entitled *Alroy*. Relying heavily on literary license, he described the revolt and eventual fall of the false messiah, David Alroy, who was active in the northeastern Caucasus, Iran, and Iraq in the twelfth century. Disraeli referred to this novel as portraying his "ideal ambition." This particular work has baffled most of Disraeli's biographers, who have had difficulty explaining the nature of this ambition. And what benefit did Disraeli foresee for himself—a young man pursuing a political career in Britain—in writing a fictional, highly emotional work describing the heroic but unsuccessful struggle of a Jewish leader, a descendant of King David, to achieve political redemption for the Jewish people?<sup>30</sup>

In the words of David Alroy:

You ask me what I wish: my answer is, a national existence, which we have not. You ask me what I wish: my answer is the Land of Promise. You ask me what I wish: my answer is, Jerusalem. You ask me what I wish: my answer is, the Temple, all we forfeited, all we have yearned after, all for which we have fought, our beautiful country, our holy creed, our simple manners, and our ancient customs.<sup>31</sup>

David Alroy appraises the past and present of the Jewish people:

There was a glorious prime when Israel stood aloof from other nations, a fair and holy thing that God had hallowed. We were then a chosen family.... We shunned the stranger as an unclean thing that must defile our solitary sanctity, and keeping to ourselves and to our God, our lives flowed on in one great solemn tide of deep religion, making the meanness of our multitude feel greater than the kings of other lands.... It was a glorious time. I thought it had returned, but I awake from this, as other dreams.<sup>32</sup>

The question not posed by Disraeli's biographers is this: How did *Contarini Fleming* and *Alroy* spring from the author's pen at the same time?

The answer, to my mind, lies in Disraeli's experiences on his Levantine odyssey. There is no doubt that the entire journey, and especially the trek through the Holy Land and the few days he spent in Jerusalem, left a profound impression on Disraeli. In this sense, it was unquestionably a classic journey of initiation. The literary outburst at the end of the journey was a releasing of his emotional tension, and the two novels are Disraeli's literary expression of the two sides of his personality.

The first novel, *Contarini Fleming*, said: "This is me, this is what I do, this is what I am going to do in future. I am an Englishman. I have foreign roots, but do not be mistaken: I am of noble blood like you, and I will be a great statesman." *Contarini Fleming*, for all its fictitious nature, represents reality. *Alroy*, in contrast, is the unattainable ideal: "This is what I would have liked to be, this is what I should have done. I would like to have been a courageous leader possessed of supernatural powers, who brings redemption to his people, the people of Israel." But in *Alroy*, even more than in *Contarini Fleming*, the message is unmistakable:

"Know that my lineage is more ancient and more noble than any you can imagine."

The title that Disraeli confers upon Alroy, namely "the prince of captivity," has significance beyond that of a mere translation of the Hebrew term *rosh ha-golah*. It expresses the sharp dichotomy between nobility and captivity—a dichotomy which is a recurring theme in Disraeli's perception of himself. He was born to rule, but his hands are shackled by invisible chains. Did Disraeli not realize the likely damage to his political career from a work on the political independence of the Jewish people, in a country where a Jew was not even permitted to sit as a member of Parliament? The answer is simple: Disraeli would have encountered these same obstacles even had he not written this book (and his later works). Instead of avoiding the issue, he seized the bull by the horns, so to speak, and offered this response to those who would denigrate his origins: "I come from an ancient, distinguished people, superior to yours. I would like to act on behalf of my people, but this is not possible. In truth, you should consider yourselves fortunate that I strive to act on behalf of *your* people."

Disraeli continued to develop his fictitious lineage and his personal identity in the political novel *Coningsby*, published in 1844. The novel sprang from his struggle with the then-prime minister of England, Sir Robert Peel (1788–1850). Peel did not recognize Disraeli's abilities and hampered his advancement. A disappointed Disraeli founded the Young England opposition, operating within the Tory party, and sat down to write *Coningsby* to explain his political ideology. *Coningsby* therefore is meant to represent political reality. But embedded in the novel once again is his idealized ambition, this time not in the form of David Alroy, the twelfth-century hero, but in a later incarnation: Sidonia, the ideal Jewish leader of the mid-nineteenth century. The true hero of *Coningsby* is not Coningsby at all but Sidonia. Sidonia, like Alroy, is Disraeli's alter-ego, two links in the fictitious family tree that shapes his inner world.

All of Disraeli's biographers have identified Sidonia with Rothschild. Blake, as well as Monypenny, Buckle, and Ridley speculate as to Disraeli's true intent, and describe Sidonia as a combination of Rothschild and Disraeli.<sup>33</sup> The truth is that Sidonia is much more than Nathaniel Meyer Rothschild (1777–1836) or Lionel Nathan de Rothschild (1808–79). He also contains elements of Moses Montefiore (1784–1862), and readers of *Original Letters from India, 1779–1815* by Eliza Fai, will also find in Sidonia traces of Señor Franco of Livorno.<sup>34</sup> None of Disraeli's

biographers offers much in the way of an analysis of the character of Sidonia beyond the statement that he is an enigmatic figure. And none attempts to pursue the significance of the strong similarity between Disraeli and Sidonia.

The enigma embodied in Sidonia's character stems from the superhuman qualities with which Disraeli endows him.<sup>35</sup> Sidonia is a Jewish businessman of Sephardic origin, amazingly well-educated and highly knowledgeable in the mysteries of international politics, including those of Britain. His wealth is legendary and he has branches and agents in every corner of the globe. He knows all the world's leaders personally, and they know and respect him. Disraeli places in Sidonia's mouth his own political and social commentary and perceptions—the same perceptions that will guide his own actions in future.

But there is a flaw in Sidonia's personality: he is unfeeling. He is unfeeling in the sense that he experiences neither the agony nor the ecstasy of love. This flaw deprives him of one of the most wondrous expressions of the human condition. Yet it makes him freer and stronger than most other men. It should be noted here that Sidonia is not the equivalent of the actual Disraeli; Sidonia, like Alroy, is what Disraeli would wish to be. He would wish to be powerful, all-knowing, and capable of absolute control over his emotions, but this does not mean that he is. Disraeli, it should be stated here, did not marry for love.

Disraeli constructs a family tree for Sidonia. He was born in Aragon to a noble family of "New Christians" who provided the Spanish nation with statesmen, members of the church hierarchy such as the archbishop of Toledo, and even one grand inquisitor. They always remained secretly loyal to their Jewish faith, and many were burned at the stake for this sin. And so things continued until the youngest Sidonia decided to leave the Iberian peninsula and settle in London. In the description of Sidonia's lineage, we again encounter the element of the prince in captivity, the nobleman trapped behind a mask, forced to dissimulate, shackled by invisible chains.

In his description of Sidonia's family tree, Disraeli for the first time addresses his relationship with the world of Islam. The genealogy is traced backward from the present; thus, after establishing the noble ancestry of the Sidonia family, who stem from the "New Christians," he shifts his attentions to an ancient link in their history. Where did the family live originally, before coming to the Iberian peninsula? They came from the Middle East by way of North Africa and settled in Iberia long before its

conquest by the Arabs. It is at this juncture that Disraeli expresses, perhaps for the first time, his concept of the origins of the Jewish people. He imparts this view through an "objective" description of the migration of the Jews around the Mediterranean basin, placing it in the mouth of Sidonia for good measure. The Jews are Mosaic Arabs, while the Muslims are Mohammedan Arabs. Race is all-important—and Jews and Muslims are of the same race.

Disraeli then offers his own history of the Iberian peninsula. The amazing success of the Mosaic Arabs aroused the envy and hatred of the Visigoths, who initiated a brutal persecution against them. The Mosaic Arabs turned for help to the Mohammedan Arabs, who had already established themselves across the Strait of Gibraltar. The sons of Ishmael (i.e., the Muslims) favored the sons of Israel (the Jews) with equal rights, and thus was launched the golden age of Spanish Jewry. When the situation was reversed with the Reconquista, the "Spanish Goths" still treated the Jews with courtesy and consideration, but the moment they had conquered the last Muslim stronghold, the fate of Spanish Jewry was sealed—along with the fate of Spain itself. It was the Muslims and the Jews who had provided Spain with its wealth and achievements, and these vanished without a trace upon their expulsion.

Where is that tribunal that summoned Medina Sidonia and Cadiz to its dark inquisition? Where is Spain? Its fall, its unparalleled and its irremediable fall, is mainly to be attributed to the expulsion of that large portion of its subjects, the most industrious and intelligent, who traced their origin to the Mosaic and Mohammedan Arabs.<sup>36</sup>

The notion of a noble Arab desert nomad who is both Jewish and Muslim is a romantic version of the biblical Abraham. The figure of Abraham, forefather of Ishmael and Israel, was certainly familiar to Disraeli from his childhood. But the unique qualities with which Disraeli endows this noble savage were apparently a product of Disraeli's journeys through the East. The more Disraeli probed the question of relations between different religions, peoples, and races—and the fate of the Jewish people in particular—the more the notion evolved and solidified. In *Coningsby*, Disraeli outlines the basic features of this noble nomad, bringing him to the origins of the Sidonia dynasty: the Arabian desert, from which everything began.

Sidonia was well aware that in the five great varieties into which Physiology has divided the human species—to wit, the Caucasian, the Mongolian, the Malayan, the American, the Ethiopian—the Arabian tribes rank in the first and superior class, together, among others, with the Saxon and the Greek. This fact alone is a source of great pride and satisfaction to the animal man. But Sidonia and his brethren could claim a distinction which the Saxon and the Greek and the rest of the Caucasian nations have forfeited. The Hebrew is an unmixed race. Doubtless, among the tribes who inhabit the bosom of the Desert, progenitors alike of the Mosaic and the Mohammedan Arabs, blood may be found as pure as that of the descendants of the Sheikh Abraham. But the Mosaic Arabs are the most ancient, if not the only, unmixed blood that dwells in cities. An unmixed race of a first-rate organisation are the aristocracy of Nature. Such excellence is a positive fact, not an imagination.<sup>37</sup>

This presentation of Sidonia's world view insinuates not only a certain criticism of British society regarding its view of Disraeli's origins, but also a debate with an unseen interlocutor, who, we are to imagine, asks Disraeli: "If you are so superior and wise and noble, why are you so downtrodden?" The question was at the core of Jewish-Christian polemic in Europe, and echoes of this debate are heard in Sidonia's thoughts on the future of the Jewish people. He sees the Jews' shortcomings, yet he is hopeful:

In his comprehensive travels, Sidonia had visited and examined the Hebrew communities of the world. He had found, in general, the lower orders debased; the superior immersed in sordid pursuits; but he perceived that the intellectual development was not impaired. This gave him hope. He was persuaded that organisation would outlive persecution. When he reflected on what they had endured, it was only marvellous that the race had not disappeared. They had defied exile, massacre, spoliation, the degrading influence of the constant pursuit of gain, they had defied Time.<sup>38</sup>

Sidonia is therefore not merely another chronological stage in Disraeli's spiritual lineage; he also represents a certain ideological evolution. Whereas David Alroy sees no hope for the Jewish people, Sidonia does feel hopeful. He still does not express this hope explicitly, but he will do so shortly.



## *Tancred and the Peoples of the Desert*

In 1847, Disraeli's novel *Tancred or the New Crusade* appeared. From a literary point of view, the novel is incomplete and even illogical. The plot unfolds in a certain direction only to be abruptly cut off without explanation. The reader is left dumbfounded at being cast adrift by the author. There were two possible explanations that might have occurred to the baffled reader of the time. The first: perhaps there would be a sequel. The book ends in a manner reminiscent of a serial, and some may well have expected a sequel—which, of course, never appeared.

But there is a second possible explanation, albeit one that the naïve reader of Disraeli's generation would have been hard-pressed to offer. Disraeli began his literary involvement as a means of achieving fame and glory, but most of his novels served as instruments for explaining himself or his views. The plot was only a means to this end. *Tancred* ends at precisely that moment when Disraeli has finished saying what he wished to say. Any additional development of the plot would have forced him to address its inherent contradictions.

*Tancred* is a parable dealing with Britain's role in the East, and, in particular, relations between East and West. In the course of the story, all the questions that were raised briefly in *Coningsby* are addressed in broader form: relations between religions, relations between peoples—Israel, Ishmael, and Albion; and relations between races—the peoples of the desert vis-à-vis the peoples of the woods.

Tancred is the wise, beloved, honest, naïve, emotional, and religious son of an ideal English noble family. He is the direct and predictable result of the proper British education that he has received. But surprisingly, upon completing his studies, he adamantly refuses to continue along the path that has been laid out for him, namely, a seat in Parliament, a brilliant political career, a "correct" marriage, and the perpetuation of the Montacute dynasty. He insists on following in the footsteps of his ancient ancestor Tancred, who participated in the First Crusade. He must understand "where it all began." Friends of the family are shocked. The young man's interest in the Holy Land appears obsessive. Lord Milford's remarks on the subject express the typical British attitude toward the East as seen from Disraeli's (mocking) point of view: "My brother was there in '39; he got leave after the bombardment of Acre, and he says there is absolutely no sport of any kind."<sup>39</sup>

But Tancred stands his ground, and his overprotective family arranges a meeting between him and Sidonia. Their intent is that Sidonia, by means of his vast connections throughout the Middle East, will help the son to make the journey, wind it up quickly, and return safe and sound to the "normalcy" of England. In *Tancred*, Disraeli continues to develop the character of Sidonia "the all-powerful," but places him in the background. Sidonia remains in England, where he serves Tancred—just as he served Coningsby—as moral compass and anchor.

Tancred personifies naïve, innocent England confronted with the charms and mysteries of the East. And the greatest mystery of all is the human race as embodied in the characters of Eva Besso and Fakredeen. Eva Besso is the beautiful daughter of a Jewish banker from Aleppo, Adam Besso, who maintains branches throughout the East, from Istanbul to Jerusalem. He is, of course, closely linked to Sidonia in London. Fakredeen is the son of the Emir Shihab, ruler of Lebanon, who was murdered during a revolt against the Ottoman Turks.<sup>40</sup> The infant Fakredeen was smuggled to the home of Adam Besso and raised as a brother to Eva. Eva's grandfather is a Jewish bedouin sheikh, king of the desert. He is the embodiment of the idealized bedouin of Jewish origins already portrayed in *Coningsby*. Eva, her father, and his family are a refined, urbane version of this ideal. While Eva and her family symbolize pride and honesty, Fakredeen represents the Muslim Levantine (Disraeli does not concern himself with the fine points) whose entire existence revolves around plots and schemes. From Disraeli's perspective, Eva and Fakredeen are two sides of one entity; what unites them is their shared origins in the Arabian desert.

The lives of these three characters symbolize the course of history in the East as Disraeli sees it. The East is the cradle of Western culture, of the three monotheistic religions, which, according to Disraeli, are actually one religion first revealed to the desert tribes at Mount Sinai. In his view, the Jews and the Muslims are the original and far superior races, both believing in the one God of Sinai.<sup>41</sup> Christian Europe (and, by extension, England) cannot rule the East; this is not its historic role. And if it tries to do so, it will fail, just as Tancred's ancestor, the original Crusader, failed. Disraeli is uncertain who will rule Jerusalem, but it will most assuredly not be Europe or England:

Jerusalem, it cannot be doubted, will ever remain the appanage either of Israel or of Ishmael; and if, in the course of those great vicissitudes which

are no doubt impending for the East, there be any attempt to place upon the throne of David a prince of the House of Coburg or Deuxponte, the same fate will doubtless await him as, with all their brilliant qualities and all the sympathy of Europe, was the final doom of the Godfreys, the Baldwins, and the Lusignans.<sup>42</sup>

And so what role should England play in the East? A somewhat muddled one, as a “supreme power” that can bridge the numerous contradictions among the different elements in the region.

Early in the novel, Fakredeen attempts to make use of the money and influence of Besso, and the power of England (via Tancred), to unite all of Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine under his rule in an ideal state inhabited by Sunni and Shi‘ite Muslims, Druze, Maronites, and Jews. If need be, the state would be under the aegis of the Sublime Porte. Minimally, he would settle for Lebanon and Syria alone. He is aware of the objective difficulties:

“But you forget the religions,” said Fakredeen. “I have so many religions to deal with. If my fellows were all Christians, or all Moslem, or all Jews, or all Pagans, I grant you, something might be affected; the cross, the crescent, the ark, or an old stone, anything would do; I would plant it on the highest range in the centre of the country, and would carry Damascus and Aleppo both in one campaign; but I am debarred from this immense support; I could only preach nationality, and, as they all hate each other worse almost than they do the Turks, that would not be very inviting; nationality, without race as a plea, is like the smoke of this nargilly, a fragrant puff. Well, then, there remains only personal influence: ancient family, vast possessions, and traditionary power.”<sup>43</sup>

Tancred has other beliefs. He sees no purpose in taking over the world in order to spread a certain dynasty; dynasties become tainted by outsiders, they break apart, they come to an end. Better to conquer the world in order to spread an idea, for ideas live forever. But to his great sorrow, he does not know what that one great idea is. The revelation that he awaits has yet to come, and he begins to suspect that the right place is not enough. A person must also be from the right race in order to merit such a revelation: one must be a Mohammedan Arab or a Mosaic Arab. But Fakredeen does not desist; he persuades Tancred that he has an idea, together with a new plan—this time, a master plan that will surely be successful:

Let the queen of the English collect a great fleet, let her stow away all her treasure, bullion, gold plate, and precious arms; be accompanied by all her court and chief people, and transfer the seat of her empire from London to Delhi. There she will find an immense empire ready made, a first-rate army and a large revenue. In the meantime I will arrange with Mehemet Ali. He shall have Bagdad and Mesopotamia, and pour the Bedouen cavalry into Persia. I will take care of Syria and Asia Minor... We will acknowledge the Empress of India as our suzerain, and secure for her the Levantine coast. If she like, she shall have Alexandria, as she now has Malta; it could be arranged. Your queen is young; she has an *avenir*. Aberdeen and Sir Peel will never give her this advice; their habits are formed. They are too old, too *ruses*.<sup>44</sup>

### *The Fate of the Jews*

The future of the Jewish people as an independent entity is not entirely clear in this scenario. At the end of the novel, Tancred and Adam Besso finally meet at the latter’s home in Damascus, and their conversation unfolds as follows:

[Besso:] “My daughter tells me you are not uninterested in our people, which is the reason I ventured to ask you here.”

[Tancred:] “I cannot comprehend how a Christian can be uninterested in a people who have handed down to him immortal truths.”

[Besso:] “All the world is not as sensible of the obligation as yourself, noble traveller.”

[Tancred:] “But who is the world? Do you mean the inhabitants of Europe, which is a forest not yet cleared; or the inhabitants of Asia, which is a ruin about to tumble?”

“The railroads will clear the forest,” said Besso.

“And what is to become of the ruin?” asked Tancred.

[Besso:] “God will not forget His land.”<sup>45</sup>

The question of the future of the Jewish people preoccupied Disraeli on more than just the literary level. In the England of the 1840s and 1850s, the notion of establishing a Jewish state in the Holy Land, under the aegis of Great Britain, was a popular topic of discussion. The rationale behind the various proposals was that such a state would help ensure stability in the East, and consolidate and safeguard British interests in the

region. It should be noted that British statesmen were not the only ones to raise such proposals.<sup>46</sup> In the 1850s, London was home to a group of Italian political exiles who were active in the Risorgimento movement. These included Benedetto Musolino (1809–85) of Calabria, who in 1851 formulated a detailed plan to establish a Jewish state in Palestine under British protection. He was seeking a way to present his plan before the British government during the period when Disraeli served as a member of the Opposition.

Coincidentally, the Disraelis' home in the tiny ghetto of Cento adjoined the home of the Carpi family. Leone Carpi (1815–98), a Risorgimento activist, was one of the Italian political exiles residing in London in 1851, and even had occasion to meet Disraeli. It is unclear whether Musolino and Disraeli ever met, or if Disraeli ever actually saw Musolino's plan; but it is not hard to imagine that the "Italian connection" played a role in bringing the plan to Disraeli's attention.<sup>47</sup> In any event, the idea of a Jewish political renaissance, much like the notion of an Italian resurgence, was being bandied about at the time. Disraeli's attitude might therefore best be viewed within the intellectual context of these contemporary circles.

The memoirs of Edward Henry Stanley (1826–93; son of Britain's prime minister, Lord Stanley) provide a fascinating glimpse into Disraeli's state of mind shortly after the publication of *Tancred* and at about the same time as Musolino was active in London. There, Stanley describes the lengthy conversations he had with Disraeli as the two would stroll along together (walking being the only physical activity that Disraeli enjoyed). During these walks, Disraeli spoke of two subjects: politics and the origin of the various religions. He believed that as the human race became more educated, religion would no longer fulfill any function. On one especially cold winter's day, he held forth in all seriousness on the return of the Jewish people to its land. Oblivious to the frigid weather, Disraeli stopped to sketch the details of his plan in the dirt:

The land might be bought from Turkey. Money would be forthcoming: the Rothschilds and leading Hebrew capitalists would all help. The Turkish empire was falling into ruin; the Turkish government would do anything for money. All that was necessary was to establish colonies, with rights over the soil, and security from ill treatment. The question of nationality might wait until these had taken hold. He added that these ideas were extensively entertained among the Jewish nation. A man who should carry them out would be the next Messiah, the true Saviour of

his people. He saw only one obstacle arising from the existence of two races among the Hebrews, of whom one, those who settled along the shores of the Mediterranean, look down on the other, refusing even to associate with them. "Sephardim," I think he called the superior.<sup>48</sup>

Stanley wrote that he had never seen Disraeli so animated as during that walk in the cold air at the estate of Lord Carrington. The reference to the question of nationality during this conversation indicates that Disraeli was not blind to the political significance of the Jewish people's return to its land, nor to the potential conflict that this entailed. But in reality, as in *Tancred*, he offered no clear solution. And just as, in reality, he preferred to defer a solution to the future, on the literary level he proposed a solution that "glossed over" the historical facts in much the same way he had brushed off details when constructing his personal lineage.

Disraeli continued to pursue the dreams expressed in *Alroy* not only in his vision of a Jewish state but in his concept of the superior nature of the Jewish race. As time went on, this notion of supremacy, entwined with an overall theory of race and bloodlines as the basis of human history and fate, became almost an *idée fixe*, which he developed both in his writing and in private conversations. The refining of this concept—absurd as it may seem—and its extension to theoretical extremes, were an outlet for the never-ending frustration experienced by Disraeli on two levels: one, his personal humiliation throughout his career, as a result of his Jewish ancestry; the other, his inability to achieve any change in the actual status of his people.<sup>49</sup>

In all fairness to Disraeli, one cannot omit mention of the fact that at the most critical juncture of his career—when he numbered among a select group of individuals who held the fate of both Europe and the Middle East in their hands—he sought to do something for his own people as well. He planned to bring before the Congress of Berlin a proposal for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine under British protection. As a first step, the plan was published anonymously in Vienna in 1877, under the title *Die jüdische Frage in der orientalischen Frage*. According to Johann Freiherr von Chlumetzky (the Austrian statesman who translated the booklet from English to German at the request of the British Embassy in Vienna), Otto von Bismarck and the foreign minister of Austria, Count Julius von Andrassy (1823–90), were opposed to any move in this direction. Bismarck in particular argued that any discussion of the matter would provoke a huge political scandal in Germany.

The Congress of Berlin was intended to correct what Great Britain saw as an untenable agreement: the Treaty of San Stefano, concluded in 1877 following the Russo-Turkish War. The pact placed Russia in a superior position with regard to the other European powers, which were now attempting to seize as great a slice as possible of the crumbling Ottoman Empire. Disraeli's mission was to achieve one of the following: either rein in the appetites of the Great Powers, including Russia, or improve Britain's own position in the struggle for control over the Middle East.

The first option was considered preferable, as the second one meant the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the possibility of war. A dispute with Austria and Germany even before the opening of the congress would not have furthered Disraeli's agenda. So he shelved his plan: according to Baron Chlumecky's account to Leo von Bilinski (1846–1922; later, finance minister of Austria), Disraeli ordered that the booklet be destroyed. But not all copies of the work were done away with. One of them was preserved—together with other important documents relating to the history of Zionism—in the personal archives of Leo von Bilinski. Only thus has this record of Disraeli's only attempt to turn his idealized spiritual autobiography into reality come down to posterity.<sup>50</sup>

The ideas expressed in this booklet are much more prosaic than those expressed in Disraeli's novels. The booklet opens with the statement that the days of "the Sick Man on the Bosphorus" are numbered, and his estates are destined to turn into new national states. It proceeds to argue the right of the Jewish people to such a state. But the Jews, dispersed among other nations for so many centuries, have lost the qualities needed to found and maintain an independent state. The author therefore suggested a period of "political apprenticeship" for the Jewish state, which would be placed under the control of one of the European powers.

The Jews, out of love for their ancient motherland, and with the whole-hearted certainty that they may expect only justice and freedom under this Power, shall come from all the countries and settle there and found colonies. Would not it be reasonable to expect that after fifty years, there will arise there a Jewish people of millions, speaking one language, the language of the state which protects them; a people imbued with one spirit, a spirit typical of it; a people capable of self-government and independent self-management?... Our generation should be satisfied with ploughing the soil and sowing the seed. The grandchildren shall harvest.<sup>51</sup>

Which of Europe's powers was suited to the purpose, if not England? The last part of the booklet echoes both Disraeli's conversation with Stanley, and the syncretistic ideas expressed in *Tancred*:

This enterprise needs strong support from beginning to end! Each and every man from Israel who has the talents and the means, should bring his contribution to the temple of Jewish nationality. Thank God, there are still people rich in talent and money to be found in Israel. Both should shoulder the great enterprise together. Right at the outset, it would need a great practical talent, to get the enterprise off to a good start and protect it from its adversaries; but also afterwards, when the time will come to found committees to support settlement, a great know-how will be needed. Then will come the turn of the plentiful purses, small and large, which will always be open and will provide immense trusts, so that settlement will be vast, and its success speedy. Finally, it might not be redundant to add that this Jewish national revival is to be a national one, not a religious one. A Jewish state should be founded, but it should be a modern state, and not a state of the sons of Moses only. It is not that we would like the principles of the Mosaic religion to disappear from the world of Jewish beliefs and religious ideas. These principles were and are still today exalted and divine, and their role has not been exhausted in the history of human civilization. Nevertheless, as regards the Mosaic religion, the demands of the modern age should be taken into account. Therefore, the religious element should be detached from the state, in such a way that will prevent religion from encroaching upon the rights of the state.<sup>52</sup>

In demanding the separation of religion and state, Disraeli envisioned a state for the Jewish people in which "Mohammedan Arabs" as well as Christians—all the descendants of Judaism—would occupy their rightful place.

But in 1878, as in 1847, a Jewish state remained a distant vision. Disraeli might have been a dreamer, but he was also a pragmatic man of action who preferred solid ground to flights of fancy. For him, politics represented the art of the possible, and so he discarded his plan for a Jewish state.

Here ends this brief journey through the pathways of memory—and not only that memory subject to verification. Memory is not always a recollecting of what has happened; often it is a recalling of what one wished had happened, what one wants to remember. By such a process, a political world view may be shaped. Such an outlook is not necessarily

the result of intellectual and pragmatic considerations. Memory, in the sense deployed here, plays a crucial role in its formation.

Disraeli's odyssey begins in the Arabian desert, circles the shores of the Mediterranean, shifts to England, and returns to the East. Traces of this odyssey are reflected in all of his actions, and in all of his quandaries. With the perspective of time, many of his writings appear almost prophetic. It was his good fortune to be able to realize some of these prophecies during his lifetime. Other issues with which he grappled remain as insoluble today as when he first engaged them.

## Notes

1. Stanley Weintraub, *Disraeli: A Biography* (New York: Truman Talley Books and Dutton, 1993), 576–77.
2. *Ibid.*, 598.
3. Disraeli's more recent biographers agree on this point to a greater or lesser extent. See *ibid.*, xi–xii, 23–24, 113, 190–92, 196, 219–225, 247–48, 273, 276–77, 384, 426, 451, 453, 563–608; and Jane Ridley, *The Young Disraeli* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), 22, 255–56, 342. The more conservative biographers are either reluctant to touch the subject or disregard it. See, for example, William Flavelle Monypenny and George Earle Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, rev. ed., 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1929). The word “anti-Semitism” does not appear. Compare with Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966), 10–11, 49–50, 81, 283–84.
4. Monypenny and Buckle, *Life*, 1:27; Blake, *Disraeli*, 10–11; Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 19; Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 31–32.
5. The views concerning the reasons for Isaac D'Israeli's departure from the Bevis Marks synagogue differ. Monypenny and Buckle, *Life*, 1:26–27, attribute his decision to the pressure exerted on him by the elders of the synagogue to serve as a warden of the synagogue. So does Blake, *Disraeli*, 11, and Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 18–19. Ridley, as well as Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 31, allude to the fact that if he would not have left the synagogue at that stage, he would have had to take some practical steps in preparation for Benjamin's upcoming bar mitzvah. It was one thing to lead the life of “a Jew without a synagogue” when one had no practical obligations; it was another matter when obligations became mandatory and one's deeds or omissions also affected the lives of one's children.
6. The choice of the Anglican Church was due to the influence of Isaac D'Israeli's friend, Mr. Sharon Turner; Monypenny and Buckle, *Life*, 1:27; Blake, *Disraeli*, 11; Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 19; Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 31–32. According to Weintraub, the first to be baptized were his younger brothers, on 11 July 1817, and only on 31 July of that year was he himself baptized. Sarah was baptized on 28 August. The gaps between the baptisms suggest that the decision to convert was not taken lightly.
7. For Isaac D'Israeli's spiritual world, see Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 12–15, 18–19; Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 24–27.
8. On the molding of the “secular Jew” among the “New Christians” from the seventeenth century onwards, see especially Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Yosef Kaplan, *Mi-Natzrut le-Yahadut: Hayav u-fo'olo shel ha-anus Yitzhak Orobio de Castro* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1982); Richard H. Popkin, “Skepticism, Theology and the Scientific Revolution in the Seventeenth Century,” in *Problems in the Philosophy of Science*, eds. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Amsterdam: North-Holland Pub. Co., 1968), 1–28.
9. I am indebted to my teacher and friend, Prof. Daniel Carpi (whose family resided next to the D'Israeli family in Cento), for sharing with me a wealth of information about the D'Israeli family and the role of Disraeli in the history of Zionism.
10. Just a few examples: the physician-philosopher Isaac ben Solomon Israeli of Egypt (ca. 855–955); Israel Israeli of Toledo (d. 1317), who was a renowned Spanish Talmudist; and his brother, the famous astronomer Isaac ben Joseph Israeli.
11. See the tombstone of Istruga, daughter of Mosheh 'Ali and wife of Mosheh Ha-Israeli, in I. S. Emmanuel, *Matzivot Saloniqi* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute and Kiryat Sefer, 1963), 1:108–9. The inscription was written in a mixture of Hebrew and Ladino. The name “Ha-Israeli” is the exact equivalent of D'Israeli.
12. Daniel Carpi, “Benjamin Disraeli, la ‘questione orientale’ e un suo presunto progetto di costituire uno stato ebraico in Palestina,” in *Gli Ebrei a Cento* (Cento: Comune di Cento, 1994), 80.
13. Here, the use of “Israel” as a family name is quite common. See, for example Elia Israel and Mosheh Israel, who were active in Jerusalem during this period; Horvot *Yerushalayim*, ed. Minna Rozen (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1981), 55–56, 104, 106.
14. The Israel family of Jerusalem produced rabbis who served in all these communities. See Simon Marcus, *Toldot ha-Rabanim le-Mishpachat Yisra'el mi-Rodos* (Jerusalem: R. Mass, 1935).
15. See Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 19–21.
16. *Ibid.*, 21.
17. *Ibid.*, 22; McLeod, “Genealogy.”
18. For the relations between Disraeli and his mother, Maria, see especially Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 16–18.

19. Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 27–28; Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 15.
20. Concerning Disraeli's ancestry, see also the detailed discussion in Cecil Roth, *Disraeli ha-Yehudi* (Tel Aviv, 1955), 9–25. For a detailed and documented family tree of the Disraelis, see J. McLeod, "Genealogy of the Disraeli Family," *Genealogists Magazine* 24, no. 8 (December 1993): 342–48.
21. By way of example, see Eli'ezer ben Nisim Ibn Shanji, *Sermons, Dat va-Din* (Istanbul, 1726); introduction by the author's son, Hayim Ibn Shanji.
22. See also Monypenny and Buckle, *Life*, 1:6–8; cf. Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 19–20, and Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 10–12.
23. Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 73; Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 56.
24. Monypenny and Buckle, *Life*, 1:1268–80; Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 307–10, 377–78; L. Wolf, "Mrs. Brydges-Williams and Benjamin Disraeli," *The Jewish Historical Society of England: Miscellanies* 1 (1925): xx–xxiii; McLeod, "Genealogy." It is noteworthy that the names of Spanish aristocratic families are commonly found among the "New Christians" and their descendants, because the converts frequently received the family name of the godfather (often a member of the Spanish aristocracy) at their baptism. What this indicates, of course, is the frequent lack of any blood ties between the "New Christian" family and the "old Christian" family of the same name.
25. Kaplan, *Mi-Natzrut le-Yahadut*, 151–52, 284–85.
26. On *Alroy*, see Monypenny and Buckle, *Life*, 1:197–204, who considers the novel a simple expression of Disraeli's hidden hopes for his people and for himself—hopes he was too practical to pursue: "With all his dreaminess, Disraeli's genius was far too practical to permit him to devote his life to the pursuit of a mere phantom; but it is probable that these early visions never wholly forsook him. They had a soil of genuine racial sentiment from which perennially to spring, and though it would be easy to exaggerate their significance, yet to know them is to get a glimpse into the inmost recesses of Disraeli's mind.... More than any of Disraeli's works, more even than *Tancred*, it reveals the Hebraic aspect of his many-sided nature." Blake, *Disraeli*, 38, does not elaborate at length on the significance of this novel. Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 71, 125–27, stresses the meaning of *Alroy* as an effort to overcome Disraeli's Jewish inferiority complex. Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 111–14, also understands it as a step towards bolstering his self-esteem rather than the expression of a dream or hope. For *Contarini Fleming*, see Monypenny and Buckle, *Life*, 1:185–97; Blake, *Disraeli*, 13–17, 38, 50, 86; Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 105; Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 20–21, 29–30, 36–40, 43, 63, 67–70, 79, 92, 96–97, 102–3, 105–6, 595. For *Coningsby*, see Monypenny and Buckle, *Life*, 1:560, 569, 581, 595–625, 628, 665–701, 817, 848; Blake, *Disraeli*, 16, 165–69, 190–218; Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 265, 275–85; Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 93, 119, 154, 188, 242–43, 246, 269, 344, 362, 436, 502, 521, 531. For *Tancred* see Monypenny and Buckle, *Life*, 1:353–54, 561, 654, 848–95;

- Blake, *Disraeli*, 194, 201–6, 214–16, 258–60, 284; Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 316; Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 103, 106, 231, 280, 289, 307, 309, 362, 382, 481, 549, 568. We have addressed only those novels which are most relevant to the theme of this study. Regarding the entire subject, see also Roth, *Disraeli ha-Yehudi*, 80–88, esp. 82.
27. See n. 26 above and n. 34 below.
28. On the development and writing of *Alroy* and *Contarini Fleming* see Monypenny and Buckle, *Life*, 1:185–203; Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 110–113; Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 105–27. The idea for *Alroy* came to Disraeli at his parents' mansion at Bradenham in the winter of 1829–30, at which time he made his first notes; Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 71, 124–25; Monypenny and Buckle, *Life*, 1:125–26.
29. Blake, *Disraeli*, 59–60, was the first to fully appreciate the importance of Disraeli's trip to the East and its influence on the shaping of his political views. Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 97, followed him.
30. See especially Monypenny and Buckle, *Life*, 1:199–201; Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 111–13.
31. *Alroy* (London: Peter Davis, 1927), 162.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Monypenny and Buckle, *Life*, 1:620; Blake, *Disraeli*, 202; Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 264, 266–68, 279–83; Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 214–18, 264. Sidonia's character was used by several anti-Semitic authors as proof of the validity of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*; see Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 674.
34. Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 68, 71, 91, 137, 156. See also W.J. Fischel, *Ha-Yehudim be-Hodu: Helkam be-Hayim ha-Kalkaliyim ve-ha-Mediniyim* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1960), 116–19. Cecil Roth, who claimed that no one had as yet offered an explanation of the name (1951), suggested that one of the prototypes for Sidonia might have been Sir Solomon de Medina (ca. 1650–1730). De Medina was active in Britain's international trade during the War of the Spanish Succession. Roth also alludes to a possible connection with the name Medina-Sidonia, a famous Spanish aristocratic family (*Disraeli ha-Yehudi*, 87).
35. Sidonia's supernatural aspects are also noted by Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, 280, who attributes them to the notion of the "Wandering Jew."
36. Sidonia appears briefly in *Endymion* (first published in 1880), but the major aspects of his personality are developed in *Coningsby or the New Generation* (first published in 1844), and later on in *Tancred or the New Crusade* (first published in 1847). See *Coningsby* (London: Heron Books, 1968), 220–33; *Tancred* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1881), 118–26, 166. It is no accident that the letter of introduction which Sidonia gives to Tancred is addressed to Alonzo Lara (a Spanish monk at the Convent of Terra Santa in Jerusalem), Lara being the Spanish aristocratic family with which Disraeli

- wished to associate himself (cf. above, n. 24). See also *Tancred*, 314–36. For the idea of the Mosaic Arabs and the Mohammedan Arabs, see *Tancred*, 253: “The Arabs are only Jews upon horseback.”
37. *Coningsby*, 231–32.
  38. *Ibid.*, 232.
  39. *Tancred*, 85.
  40. *Ibid.*, 196–222. Although the general framework of Middle Eastern politics described by Disraeli is accurate, he allows himself a great deal of literary license. The allusion here is to Emir Bashir II of the Shihab dynasty (1767–1850). For a historical survey of this period, see Moshe Ma’oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine, 1840–1861: The Impact of the Tanzimat on Politics and Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).
  41. Although in *Tancred*, the superiority of the representatives of Judaism and Islam is very clear, it is obvious that Disraeli’s ideas concerning the relationship between the various monotheistic religions underwent further development over the years. In *Lord George Bentinck* (London: Colburn and Co., 1852), 506–7, he presents Christianity as, simultaneously, an irresistible conquering force and the culmination of Judaism: “Has not Jesus conquered Europe and changed its name into Christendom? All countries that refuse the cross wither, while the whole of the new world is devoted to the Semitic principle and its most glorious offspring, the Jewish faith.... Who can deny that Jesus of Nazareth the Incarnate Son of the Most High God is the eternal glory of the Jewish race?”
  42. *Tancred*, 171; cf. 288–91.
  43. *Ibid.*, 258–59.
  44. *Ibid.*, 263.
  45. *Ibid.*, 393.
  46. For the British movement for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine from the 1830s to the 1850s, see Frederick Stanley Rodkey, “Palmerston and the Rejuvenation of Turkey,” *Journal of Modern History* 2 (1930): 214–16; Harold Temperley, *England and the Near East: The Crimea* (London: Longmans, 1936), 443–45; Charles K. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston, 1830–1841*, 2 vols. (London: G. Bell, 1951), 2:760–63; N.M. Gelber, *Tokhnit ha-Medinah ha-Yehudit le-Lord Beaconsfield* (Tel Aviv: Z. Leinemann, 1947), 5–8; idem, *Zur Vorgeschichte des Zionismus* (Vienna: Phaidon-verlag, 1927), 1:133, 137, 141, 256; Mayir Vereté, “Ra’ayon Shivat Zion be-Mahshavah ha-Protestantit be-Angliah be-1799–1840,” *Zion* 33, no. 3–4 (1968): 145–79; Menahem Kedem, “Tefisot ha-Ge’ulah shel ‘Am Yisra’el be-Eretz Yisra’el ba-Eskhatologia ha-Protestantit ha-Anglit be-Emtz’a ha-Me’ah ha-Yod-Tet,” *Cathedra*, no. 19 (1981): 55–72; Yesha’yahu Friedman, “Tokhnit Britiyot le-Yishuv Yehudim be-Eretz Yisra’el be-shnot ha-Arbai’ym shel ha-Me’ah ha-Yod-Tet (1840–1850),” *Cathedra*, no. 56 (1990): 42–69.

47. Carpi, “Benjamin Disraeli,” 79–92. See also Ferdinando Musolino, “Il sionismo e il suo vero precursore,” *Calabria Rotary* (December 1976): 53–65. Interestingly, this same Musolino in 1883 had suggested to Sultan Abdülhamid II a plan of reform for the Ottoman Empire which did not include his Zionist ideas. See Jacob M. Landau, “Un projet de réformes dans l’empire ottoman en 1883,” *Orient* 40 (1967): 147–67.
48. Quoted by Weintraub, *Disraeli*, 301–2. The same lines had caught the attention of Friedman, “Tokhnit,” 68–69. However, Friedman was unaware of the fact that Disraeli was the author of the booklet *Die jüdische Frage in der orientalischen Frage* (see below), and concluded his article with the statement that Disraeli did not make an attempt to turn his dream into reality, since the opportunity to do so without rocking the status quo of world politics did not materialize in his lifetime. Strictly speaking, Friedman was right; however, the omission of the affair of *Die jüdische Frage* understates Disraeli’s practical efforts.
49. See *Lord Bentinck*, 482–507; Roth, *Disraeli ha-Yehudi*, 88–106.
50. Gelber, *Tokhnit*, 9–111. See also idem, “She’elat ha-Yehudim li-fnei ha-Qongres ha-Berlinai be-Shnat 1878,” *Zion* 8 (1943): 35–50; cf. Roth, *Disraeli ha-Yehudi*, 194–97. Roth doubts very much Disraeli’s authorship of *Die jüdische Frage*. One of his arguments is that no mention of such an idea—or that Disraeli, Bismarck and Andrassy discussed it among themselves—appears anywhere in the vast documentation of the Congress or of the three men. The idea of Disraeli’s reluctance to publish the booklet under his own name also seems to Roth absurd. In my opinion, neither argument is satisfactory. While the first can easily be explained away by the unequivocal rejection of the entire idea by Disraeli’s interlocutors, the second point is even more readily explicable: Disraeli first initiated the publication of the booklet anonymously in order to test the political waters. When he realized, even before its distribution, that the idea had become unfeasible, he ordered the whole edition destroyed.
51. Gelber, *Tokhnit*, 11–13.
52. *Ibid.*, 14–15.