

Francis Bacon (1561-1626), *The New Atlantis*, and the Jewish-Christian Imagination

by Joshua Andrew Johnson

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In his short and immensely intriguing work, the *New Atlantis* (1627), the English philosopher Francis Bacon (1561-1626) presents a narrative of Iberian merchants finding an uncharted island, Bensalem, in the South Pacific. While previous commentators have highlighted the *New Atlantis* in light of his other work and read it as a model society of his philosophical views regarding natural science, few have focused on its religious and cultural aspects in the autobiographical mode. They have seen it as primarily a morality tale of sorts depicting the ideal life of the mind in the new scientific revolution, a model scientifically-informed society, in the words of Urbach, “a utopian society that is carefully organized for the purposes of scientific research and virtuous living.”¹ While those perspectives are valid, they ignore the Jewish and Christian religious and cultural themes in the work.² The present essay explores the *New Atlantis* as a product of Bacon’s “Judeo-Christian imagination,” a term which consists of the author’s disposition towards both Jewish and Christian themes and his hope for future religious relations.³ *New Atlantis* is best understood in its historical context of the Iberian exiles in light of the Spanish expulsion and subsequent Sephardic diaspora after 1492, and presents Bacon’s own views on Judaism and Christianity, namely, that Bensalem is a model religious society whose origins are in the ancient Hebraic past and encourages Jewish life on the island, and that Jews and Christians should live in harmony as they do on Bensalem. With the thesis proved, the paper shall then endeavor to ask why an English natural philosopher of the seventeenth century would create a “Jewish-Christian imagined society” and for what purposes?

1. Urbach, *Francis Bacon’s Philosophy of Science: An Account and a Reappraisal* (1987), 10, cited in Jürgen Klein and Guido Giglioni, “Francis Bacon,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2020, np and David Simpson, “Bacon, Francis,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* agree with Urbach and make substantially the same claim. They view Bensalem as merely the expression of Bacon’s scientific views on a societal scale.

2. Scholar Travis DeCook even notes that “Jewish elements have largely been ignored in this discussion.” Travis DeCook, “Francis Bacon’s ‘Jewish Dreams’: The Specter of the Millennium in *New Atlantis*,” *Studies in Philology* 110, no. 1 (2013): 116.

3. For the “Judeo-Christian imagination,” see Joshua Andrew Johnson, “When Brethren Walk Together: Immanuel Tremellius (c. 1510–1580), Jewish–Christian Conversion, Christian Hebraism, and Reformed Christianity” (master’s thesis, Washington State University, 2019), chap. 5, “Tremellius and the Jewish-Christian Imagination.” The term refers to both elements in an author’s own works that reflects Judaism and Christianity, and also his own views of an (imagined) society in which Jews and Christians could live in harmony.

Part I

The Spanish Origin of the Sailors

In the first place, the historical Iberian context of *New Atlantis* is compelling. While it is not explicitly stated, a close reading of the text indicates that the group of merchants who lands on Bensalem, the autobiographical subjects (and authors) of the tale, are Spanish merchants (and perhaps exiles). The Spanish origin of the narrators is apparent from their travel itinerary and their language. In regards to their travel itinerary, the narrator opens with the first line: “We sailed from Peru (where we had continued by the space of one whole year) for China and Japan, by the South Sea, taking with us victuals for twelve months; and had good winds from the east, though soft and weak, for five months’ space and more.”⁴ In 1626, when Bacon wrote, Peru was under Spanish dominion: from 1542 to 1824, the Vice-royalty of Peru, also known as the Kingdom of Peru, ruled from its capital, Lima. The Vice-royalty of Peru composed most of the northern, western, and southern quadrants of present-day South America, essentially everything west of a demarcation line bisecting Brazil lying along the 46th meridian, as established by the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494. Everything west of the line was Spanish and everything east of which was Portuguese. However, while Bacon was writing, from 1580 through 1640, Portugal and Spain were united in monarchy; therefore Peru, with its capital of Lima (which established the Inquisition in 1570), was under Spanish jurisdiction, as were the other territories visited by the travellers.

As for the route, this was a standard Iberian trade route. Bacon’s route of Peru–China–Japan represents the opposite direction of Pedro Teixeira’s 1600 route of Malacca–Singapore–Manila–Nagasaki–Acapulco described in his *Journey from India to Italy* (Antwerp, 1610).⁵ According to Loureiro, the cross-Pacific route between Manila in the Spanish-controlled Philippines and Acapulco in Mexico was a regular Spanish trade route.⁶ This route was called the Manila galleon, and included extra legs from Acapulco between Panama and Lima. The Manila galleon route plied the Pacific between 1565 and 1815.⁷ In fact, the Spanish lay claim to the Pacific to such a degree that they applied the old doctrine of *mare clausum* (“enclosed sea”) to the entire, unbounded Ocean, as if it had been *mare nostrum*, “our sea,” the Mediterranean; Padre Medina called the Pacific “the Spanish Sea.”⁸ In terms of discourse current to the time, Bacon was absolutely correct in assigning this role to the Spanish.

4. Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 199.

5. For an analysis of Teixeira, see Joshua Andrew Johnson, “Between East and West: John Mildenhall (1560-1614) and Pedro Teixeira, Two Early Modern European Voyagers into the Lands of the East” (December 2023). For Teixeira’s journals, see Pedro Teixeira, *The Travels of Pedro Teixeira; with his “Kings of Harmuz,” and extracts from his “Kings of Persia”*, ed. Donald Ferguson, trans. William F. Sinclair, Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society, Second Series, No. IX (Hakluyt Society, 1902), 1–9. For the Spanish, see Pedro Teixeira, *Relaciones de Pedro Teixeira, d’el origen descendencia, y succession de los Reyes de Persia, y de Harmuz, y de un viaje hecho por el mismo avtor dende la India Oriental hasta Italia por tierra* (Amberes [Antwerp]: Hieronymo Verdussen, 1610).

6. Rui Manuel Loureiro, “Medical practices and Asian drugs: in the *Relaciones* of Pedro Teixeira (Antwerp, 1610),” *Romance Philology* 71, no. 2 (2017): 504.

7. William Lytle Schurz, *The Manila Galleon* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1939), 15.

8. Schurz, *The Manila Galleon*, 288.

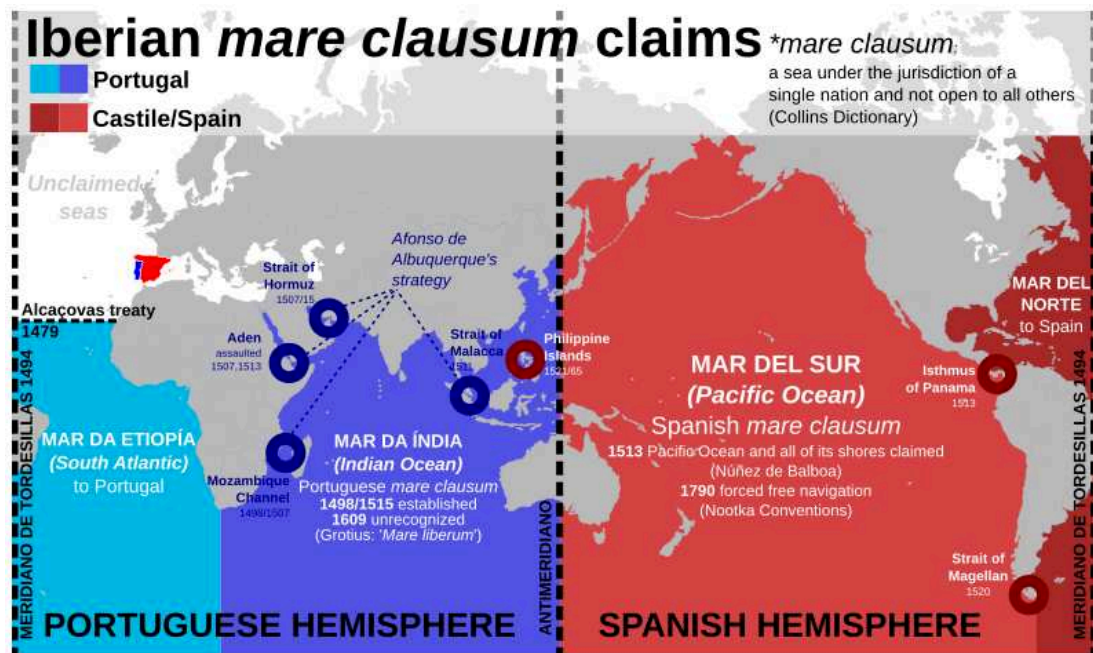


Figure 1: Global claims of the Spanish and Portuguese empires. The line of demarcation was not relevant under the United Monarchy, 1580-1640. User-submitted, Wikimedia.

In addition to the trade route, it is sufficiently clear from the language of Bacon's mariners that they were Spanish merchants. When the merchants meet the islanders, they describe as a land "flat to our sight, and full of boscage [trees], which made it show the more dark." They saw the islanders, who discouraged them from landing, holding "bastons in their hand," with *baston* being the Spanish word for "cane" and a staple of Filipino martial arts. The islanders came forth to the ship in a small boat with 8 passengers. They carried a "tipstaff" of yellow cane, "tipped at both ends with blue," and they proceeded to board the ship. One of the islanders

drew forth a little scroll of parchment (somewhat yellower than our parchment, and shining like the leaves of writing tables, but otherwise soft and flexible), and delivered it to our foremost man. In which scroll were written in ancient Hebrew, and in ancient Greek, and in good Latin of the School, and in Spanish, these words: "Land ye not, none of you, and provide to be gone from this coast within sixteen days, except you have further time given you. Meanwhile, if you want fresh water, or victual, or help for your sick, or that your ship needeth repair, write down your wants, and you shall have that which belongeth to mercy."⁹

Clearly, the islanders knew and read Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Spanish. Travis DeCook draws attention to the "pervasive Hebraic iconography," and the work's many details derived from "Jewish material

9. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 199.

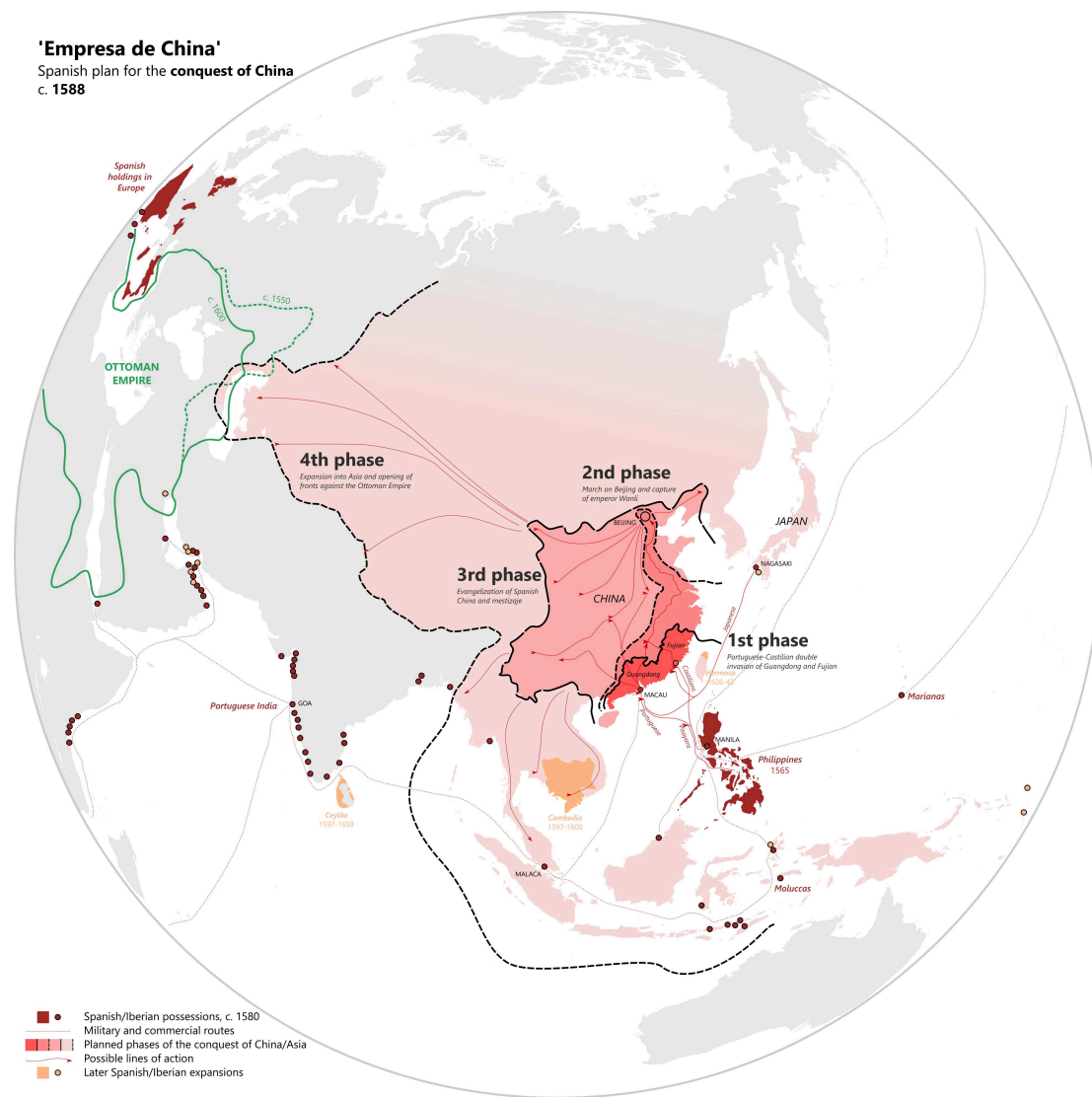


Figure 2: “Empresas de China,” the planned Spanish conquest of the Far East from Spanish-held possessions in Malacca, Macau, and Manila, c. 1580. User-submitted, WikiMedia: Nagihuin.

culture,” including “the use of scrolls and the wearing of turbans.”¹⁰ Bacon, expanding the religious symbolism, adds: “The scroll was signed with a stamp of cherubin’s wings, not spread, but hanging downwards, and by them a cross” — which is an Israelite symbol (cherubim from the First Temple) with the Christian symbol of the cross; in fact, here, the cherubim’s wings form a cross.¹¹ The merchants

10. DeCook, “Francis Bacon’s ‘Jewish Dreams’,” 117. He also notes that the contemporary travelogue *Crudities* (1611) by Thomas Coryat makes reference to Middle Eastern Jews wearing turbans.

11. Julie Robin Solomon, *Objectivity in the Making: Francis Bacon and the Politics of Inquiry* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 217, highlights the kabbalistic tradition of cherubim as guarding the Shekinah and Tree of Life.

respond “in the Spanish tongue.” At a second point, an Islander addresses them “in a loud voice, in Spanish.”¹² At another point, the narrator describes a man whose “hat was like a helmet, or Spanish montero.”¹³ Then, the narrator notes a ruler spoke to him “in the Spanish tongue.”¹⁴ Each time that the narrator specifies which language the crew is spoken to or speaks, it is “Spanish.” Not every speech is so marked, but no other language besides Spanish is indicated as a spoken language (the references to Hebrew and Latin are to written languages). While Bacon wrote in English, it is clear from the itinerary of the crew, his description of their spoken language, and the use of Spanish terms, that the crew are Spanish merchants.

Part II

The Ancient Island and the Jews

In this section, I will argue that Bacon shows the ancient, classical, and Hebrew origins of the islanders, states his own perspective on the Jewish problem in Europe, and describes the ideal disposition of Jews towards Christianity.

1 The Ancient Origins of the Islanders and the Myth of Atlantis

As for the islanders themselves, they have a relatively diverse origin, but it is clearly indicated that one strain of their ancestry is tied to the ancient Hebrews, in addition to Persia and India. In the first place, they are able to read and write Hebrew (in addition to other classical languages). Additionally, the island itself is revealed to be *Bensalem*, which is anglicized Hebrew for “son of peace.” Bacon notes that “so they called it in their language.”¹⁵ While they also spoke Spanish, this aside may indicate that the islanders speak Hebrew regularly, although Bacon does not specify what “their language” consists of. Other linguistic evidence suggests the Persian and Indian origin of the islanders. They call “a mile and a half” a *karan*, which is a Hindi-sounding word, and a Hindi name and surname. At various points, the officials are described wearing turbans. They have a festival in which the father (who must have 30 descendants) gives gifts of inheritance to his progeny, at which the paterfamilias is called the *Tirsan*.¹⁶ They call a herald a *Taratan*.¹⁷ The scant linguistic evidence gives a general sense of the Hebrew, Persian, and Indian origins of the inhabitants of Bensalem.

12. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 200.

13. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “montero”: “A cap of a type formerly worn in Spain for hunting, having a spherical crown and (frequently fur-lined) flaps able to be drawn down to protect the ears and neck.”

14. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 210.

15. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 202.

16. The editor notes that there is no known word with this meaning. I searched Wiktionary and I found a Central Kurdish word, derived from Persian, *tirsan*, which means “to fear.” The standard Persian form is *tarsan*. The i-theme vowel is indicative of Kurdish.

17. *Taratan* happens to be an adverb in Arabic meaning, “sometimes, at times,” related to Jewish Aramaic תִּרְחָן and Hebrew.

Bacon states that the Islanders originated from Hebrew, Persian, and Indian cultures, which explains their linguistic diversity. The governor of Bensalem addresses the questions of the crew thoughtfully and explains they originated 3000 years prior, which would be around 1400 BCE (close to the alleged time of the Trojan war and possibly the Exodus from Egypt). The governor explains that trade and navigation were much more fluent then. He discusses the Phoenician, Tyrian, Carthaginian, Canaanite, Egyptian, and Chinese fleets which used to explore these waters. Based on the namesake of the book, the governor brings up “great Atlantis,” and tells them it’s what “you call America.” That is, in the mind of the Bensalemites and Bacon, Atlantis is the New World. Bensalem was peopled by Persians, Chaldeans (Aramaic-speakers), and Arabians. Bensalem had a fleet of 1500 ships, which rivaled those of the other seafaring nations, and trade was conducted through the Pillar of Hercules (Gibraltar) between the Atlantic and Mediterranean Seas.

The origin of Bensalem is tied to the myth of Atlantis. Bacon based several of his works on classics from the Aristotelian and Platonic canon. In each case, he was expanding and revising the classical work. In the case of *Novum Organum/New Organon* (1620), Bacon is building a new mode of interpretation, based on Aristotle’s *Organon*, his six books on logical analysis — *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, *Prior Analytics*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *On Sophistical Analysis*. In the case of *Nova Atlantis*, Bacon was reappraising the myth of Atlantis as found in Plato’s *Timaeus* and *Critias*.

In the original myth of Atlantis in Plato, the figures of Critias and Timaeus take turns describing the ancient civilization in their dialogue with Socrates. The dialogue takes place right after Plato’s Republic (or rather, Socrates’ Republic) — which Bacon also drew upon in his idea of a model state. In the Athenian context, Critias’ grandfather was a good friend of Solon, who learned the legend from an Egyptian priest; Critias claimed to have seen a document describing the locale in his grandfather’s possession, so Socrates (and the reader) can take it in good faith. Repeatedly, in the story, there are references to an even greater antiquity than the Athenians can imagine. In the Egyptian’s version of history, there were “many destructions of mankind arising out of many causes,” such as fire and water; while “you remember a single deluge only, but there were many previous ones.”¹⁸ In the legend, Solon describes how in the year 9400 BCE,¹⁹ before the great deluge, Athens was a pre-eminent city (itself serving as a model for Plato’s *Republic*, according to Moore-Smith). However, the Athenians had to fend off an invasion from Atlantis, which was a powerful and warlike nation: “This power came forth out of the Atlantic Ocean, for in those days the Atlantic was navigable; and there was an island situated in front of the straits which are by you called the Pillars of Hercules; the island was larger than Libya and Asia put together, and was the way to other islands, and from these you might pass to the whole of the *opposite continent* which surrounded the true ocean...and the surrounding land may be most truly called a boundless continent” (*Timaeus*, 25). In this reading, Plato’s Atlantis would be between Spain and America, which was known to Socrates as “the opposite continent.” In the narration, the Athenians

18. Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, vol. 6, 444–445. In *Great Books of the Western World*, 2nd ed., ed. Mortimer J. Adler, Clifton Fadiman, and Philip W. Goetz, 60 vols. (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1990).

19. If Plato lived around 400 BCE, the text states that these events happened 9,000 years prior. In Critias’ retelling, the Egyptian priest implies that the Hellenes have no knowledge of antiquity; their civilizations have continually been destroyed by floods and destructions, but the Egyptians preserve even more ancient knowledge that the Athenians have lost and do not remember.

fend off the Atlanteans; the Athenians “defeated and triumphed over the invaders, and preserved from slavery those who were not yet subjugated, and generously liberated all the rest of us who dwell within the pillars.” But after the victory came misfortune, including “violent earthquakes and floods.” “In a single day and night of misfortune all your warlike men in a body sank into the earth, and the island of Atlantis in like manner disappeared in the depths of the sea. For which reason the sea in those parts is impassible and impenetrable, because there is a shoal of mud in the way; and this was caused by the subsidence of the island.”²⁰

In *Nova Atlantis*, Bacon shifts the story slightly. Instead of making Atlantis a land that sank into the ocean, Bacon equates Atlantis with America. Instead of being fully destroyed by an earthquake, Atlantis was partially, but only partially, destroyed by a particular deluge or “inundation.”²¹ In Bacon’s retelling, “the same inundation was not deep, not past forty foot in most places from the ground, so that although it destroyed man and beast generally, yet some few wild inhabitants of the wood escaped.”²² Accordingly, “you must account your inhabitants of America as a young people, younger a thousand years at the least than the rest of the world, for that there was so much time between the universal flood and their particular inundation.”²³ When the inhabitants of Atlantis-America began repopulating the land after the inundation, they did not retain letters, arts, or civilization and those who dwelt in the mountainous climes clothed themselves with “the skins of tigers, bears, and great hairy goats,” while those who dwelt in the warm valleys began to go about naked and take great pride and delight in “the feathers of birds” (a clear reference to Quetzalcoatl). In this way, Bacon identifies the newly found land of America with Atlantis; but he was writing a *new Atlantis*.²⁴

For Bacon’s story, while inspired by the spirit of the new discovery of America, Bacon must find an as-yet uncharted space. As Moore-Smith summarizes, “The country called *New Atlantis* was however not America, but an island lying between the Great Atlantis or America and China and Japan.”²⁵ Bensalem, or *New Atlantis*, is *not* America; it is further afield. In fact, in his narration, Bacon uses the destruction of the civilization to account for the loss of trade relations between Atlantis/America and Bensalem. In Bacon’s mind, when the Atlanteans assayed forth against Bensalem and were fought back by king Altabin, “a wise man and a great warrior,” God punished the Atlanteans for attacking the Bensalemites: “the divine revenge overtook not long after those proud enterprises.”²⁶ Within a century, Atlantis was submerged and destroyed in the deluge.

Bacon describes the rich trade relations that took place between Atlantis and Bensalem. He notes that Peru and Mexico, “mighty and proud kingdoms,” traded many goods with the island kingdom,

20. Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, 446; *Timaeus*, 25.

21. G. C. Moore-Smith, ed., *New Atlantis: An Unfinished Work* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1919), xx.

22. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 205.

23. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 205.

24. Bacon was not the first to identify Atlantis with America. Before him, Francisco Lopes de Gomara had done so in his *Istoria de las Indias* in 1555. Guillaume Postel had made the association in 1561 (*Cosmographicae disciplinae compendium*, Basel, 1561). Similarly, Ortelius had written, “There are some, including Mercator, who believe that Plato under the name Atlantis described America” (*Theatrum orbis terrarum*, Antwerp, 1570). See Moore-Smith, *New Atlantis: An Unfinished Work*, xix–xx.

25. Moore-Smith, *New Atlantis: An Unfinished Work*, xx.

26. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 205.

trading “arms, shipping, and riches”. Bacon notes that Peru was then called Coya, and Mexico was called Tyrambel, names he entirely invented.²⁷ These trade networks were so vast that Tyrambel made an expedition into the Mediterranean via the Atlantic, and Coya went west to the South Pacific, visiting Bensalem (just as the narrator himself voyaged west from Coya/Peru at the incipient of the tale).²⁸

Bacon produced a geography of trade relations between Bensalem and the Far East which is based on his interpretation of Marco Polo’s voyages. Bacon mentions *Paquin*, which is the Portuguese form *Pequim*, or Beijing. Bacon identifies Beijing with *Cambaline*, which is an older corrupted form from Marco Polo’s journals.²⁹ *Cambaline*, in turn, is a printer’s error for *Cambaluc*, which occurs in the English version of Marco Polo, which itself is a corruption of *Khanbalik*, meaning “City of the Khan,” the version used after the Mongol conquests of 1264 CE.³⁰ The inhabitants of Bensalem also traded with “Quinzy, upon the Oriental Seas, as far as the borders of the East Tartary.”³¹ *Quinzy*, according to Moore-Smith, is to be identified with “Quinsai, the great city described by Marco Polo, now Hangchowfoo.”³² In current romanization, this is Hangzhou in Zhejiang province.

2 The Hebrew Associations of Bensalem

After the loss of Atlantis, and perhaps due to divine judgment, sailing and shipping stopped, and the island of Bensalem became hidden, as it were; they adopted a course of isolationism, so that their memory was forgotten from the earth. Their ruler and lawgiver *Solamona*, who flourished circa 400 BCE and who is not to be identified with *melek Yisrael* Shlomo/Solomon, whom Bacon calls *Salomon*, exhibited “how sufficient and substantive this land was, to maintain itself without any aid at all of the foreigner.”³³ The island became self-sufficient, and adopted a law of “interdicts and prohibitions which we have touching entrance of strangers,” a policy which, Bacon notes, Bensalem shares with “an ancient law in the kingdom of China, and yet continued in use.”³⁴ The governor mentions that China also has an isolationist stance, yet they continue to sail around the world; Bensalem has preserved its sanctity by receiving “the good which cometh by communicating with strangers, and avoiding the hurt.” Bensalem gave up their sailing expeditions.

King Solamona established a society called Salomon’s House, which *is* named after the Hebrew

27. As Moore-Smith, *New Atlantis: An Unfinished Work*, 71, 72 notes, Coya: “a supposed older name of Peru (coined by Bacon)” and Tyrambel: “a supposed older name of Mexico (coined by Bacon).”

28. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 204–205. In fact, Bacon considers this expedition of Tyrambel into the Mediterranean as the same incursion of the Atlanteans to the Athenians, although interpreted differently by Plato.

29. Moore-Smith, *New Atlantis: An Unfinished Work*, 71. notes, “As Mr. Speding suggests, Bacon almost certainly wrote *Cambalue* (or *Cambaluc*), (the earlier name of Peking, as given by Marco Polo and other travellers), and the form *Cambaline* is a misreading of the printer.”

30. Martijn Theodoor Houtsma, *E.J. Brill’s First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913–1936*, v. 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), 898, s.v., “Khanbalik.”

31. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 204.

32. Moore-Smith, *New Atlantis: An Unfinished Work*, 72.

33. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 205. Solamona pointed out that the island was 5,600 miles in circuit “and of rare fertility of soil, in the greatest part thereof.”

34. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 206.

king Solomon. The islanders maintain “some parts of [Solomon’s] works which with you are lost; namely, that Natural History which he wrote of all plants, from the cedar of Libanus to the moss that groweth out of the wall; and of all things that have life and motion.”³⁵ The society is also called the College of the Six Day’s Works, whereby “our excellent king had learned from the Hebrews that God had created the world, and all that therein is, within six days: and therefore he instituting that house” dedicated “to the study of the works and creatures of God.”³⁶ In Bacon’s imagined paradise, the islanders name their central society after a Hebrew king, they apparently had contact with that Hebrew king and maintained his ancient secret Hebrew writings, and they honor the Hebrew work week. Bacon’s creation clearly has a Hebraicizing or Judaizing tendency.

In order to maintain their connections with the outside world, however, King Solamona had instituted that every 12 years two ships should leave on a research trip and fact-finding mission. Under the auspices of the Salomon’s House, three “brethren” of the Society were tasked with finding out knowledge of the affairs and state of the other foreign countries of the world, and (most importantly for Bacon), their “sciences, arts, manufacturers, and inventions of all the world,” and to bring back “books, instruments, and patterns in every kind.”³⁷ The brethren are to go incognito among the nations until the next voyage picks them up in 12 years, and relay the information back to Bensalem. In that way, the island is kept abreast of any technological and intellectual advances in the world at large, while maintaining their sanctity. Additionally, if any outsiders happen to wash up on the island, they are given treatment, and are given the option to stay or are free to leave (as is the case with Bacon’s travellers). In the time since Solomona’s policy, “we have not memory of a single ship that has returned.” Yet thirteen individuals have chosen to stay on the island and join the community. Despite the island’s isolationist policy, it treats foreigners well, where they stay at the “Strangers’ House” and are given everything they need to help their needs. This is consonant with the law of the Torah, וְגֵר לֹא תִלְחָץ וְאַתָּם יִדְעֶתֶם, “And a *ger* (foreigner) you shall not oppress! For you know the plight of the *ger* (lit., “soul of the ger”), because you yourselves were *gerim* in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9).

The religion of the island is a mixture of Hebraic elements with Christian belief.³⁸ In 50 CE, the islanders had a revelation of Yeshua/Jesus. The inhabitants of Renfusa, a city on the east coast of the island, saw a great pillar of light and a cross in the night sky. The Society of Salomon’s House decided to investigate the pillar of light, and set out on boats and prayed to “the Lord God of Heaven and Earth.”³⁹

35. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 206.

36. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 206.

37. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 206–207.

38. DeCook calls it a “Christianized Hebraic” dominant culture. DeCook, “Francis Bacon’s ‘Jewish Dreams,’” 122.

39. The text of the prayer was as follows: “LORD God of heaven and earth, thou hast vouchsafed of thy grace to those of our order, to know thy works of Creation, and the secrets of them: and to discern (as far as appertaineth to the generations of men) between divine miracles, works of nature, works of art, and impostures and illusions of all sorts. I do here acknowledge and testify before this people, that the thing which we now see before our eyes is thy Finger and a true Miracle. And forasmuch as we learn in our books that thou never workest miracles, but to divine and excellent end, (for the laws of nature are thine own laws, and thou exceedest them not but upon great cause,) we most humbly beseech thee to prosper this great sign, and to give us the interpretation and use of it in mercy; which thou dost in some part secretly promise by sending it unto us.”

The light disappeared, and in place of the light, a small ark appeared. In this small cedar chest, on which grew “a small green branch of palm,” was found “a book and a letter, both written in fine parchment, and wrapped in sindons of linen.” In the book was contained “all the canonical books of the Old Testament and New Testament, according as you have them (for we know well what the churches with you receive), and the Apocalypse itself; and some other books of the New Testament, which were not at that time written.”⁴⁰ The letter was from Bartholomew, apostle of Yeshua. According to the governor of the island, a greater miracle happened after the revelation itself: “for there being at that time, in this land, Hebrews, Persians, and Indians, besides the natives, every one read upon the book and letter, as if they had been written in his own language.”⁴¹ Here, we clearly see that the demography of the island was composed of Hebrews, Persians, and Indians, in addition to the indigenous people of the land.

The islanders maintain a special inheritance ceremony wherein the father chooses one of his chief sons to inherit, who is ever after called “the Son of the Vine.” They say, “Happy are the people of Bensalem” [*Ashrei anshei Bensalem*]. Then they sing a hymn, the subject of which is “always the praises of Adam, and Noah, and Abraham.” The father then blesses each of his children one by one, and they kneel before him and he lays his hand upon the son or daughter’s head and he recites the following blessing: “Son of Bensalem, (or daughter of Bensalem,) thy father saith it: the man by whom thou hast breath and life speaketh the word: the blessing of the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, and the Holy Dove, be upon thee, and make the days of thy pilgrimage good and many.” While this prayer uses Christian imagery, the language of father, prince, and dove is nowhere attested in Christian literature.⁴² Then the father gives a token to each of his children, “laying his arm over their shoulders, they standing; ‘Sons, it is well ye are born, give God the praise, and persevere to the end.’ And withall delivereth to either of them a jewel, made in the figure of an ear of wheat, which they ever after wear in the front of their turban or hat. This done, they fall to music and dances, and other recreations, after their manner, for the rest of the day. This is the full order of that feast.”⁴³

The Hebraic elements of the island are quite extensive, and not fully enumerated here. Bacon produced a land which had Hebrew names, revered a Hebrew lawgiver, had Hebrew people, employed Hebrew books, spoke the Hebrew language, and followed Hebraic customs such as honoring the stranger and honoring parents (in addition to general Hebrew ethics). Bacon makes great pains to express that the origin of the Islanders is Hebraic. As one commentator wrote, “An Oriental love of colour pervades the book; Hebrews and Hebrew words and Hebrew customs play a prominent part in it; and no language less dignified than Spanish is tolerated in its pages.”⁴⁴ While the islanders clearly have Hebraic origins, what is the state of the Jews on the island?

40. Bacon, here, acknowledges the anachronism of receiving the New Testament in the mid-first century CE, when all the books of the NT had not yet been finished. Striking also is the mention of the Apocalypse, or Revelation, as if it were a separate collection; throughout Christendom in the early centuries, the canonicity of Revelation was disputed; but it was firmly in the canon by the sixth century CE. Revelation was probably the last to be written, with a probable date of 70 to 95 CE.

41. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 203.

42. With the omission of the prince of peace and holy dove, it would be a perfectly fine Jewish prayer, although both these phrases, prince of peace, and dove, come from the Tanakh; Isaiah 9:6 (*avi-ad sar shalom*) and Genesis 8:11.

43. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 208.

44. Moore-Smith, *New Atlantis: An Unfinished Work*, xxiv, quoting Dr. Abbott.

3 The Jews of the Island

3.1 Bacon's Opinion on the Jewish Question

In his description of the Jews of the island, Bacon reveals his own views about Jews in Europe and indicates how he thinks they should relate to Christianity. The narrator introduces the reader to a Jewish merchant he meets in the city on sixth or seventh day of their arrival.⁴⁵ His name was Joabin and “he was a Jew and circumcised,” Bacon then adds, “they have some few stirps [OED: “A scion, member of a family”] of Jews remaining amongst them, whom they leave to their own religion.”⁴⁶ The fact that the Jew was a merchant coheres with Bacon's own views on the importance of mercantilism.⁴⁷ In his description of Joabin, Bacon adds his own side-view of the Jewish situation in Christian Europe: [these Jews] “are of a far differing disposition from the Jews in other parts. For whereas they hate the name of Christ, and have a secret inbred rancour against the people amongst whom they live; these, contrariwise, give unto our Saviour many high attributes, and love the nation of Bensalem extremely.”⁴⁸ Here, Bacon gives his perspective of the Jewish situation, while simultaneously purveying popular medieval Christendom notions of Jewry, namely, that they are a world apart, separate, and that they hate Christians and Christ. The difference for the situation of Bensalem, which Bacon hints at, is that the Jews would not hate Christians if they weren't being persecuted, as in Bensalem they are free. In fact, the reason the Jews of Bensalem are so happy is that they are not being persecuted, which can be read as Bacon's jab at the societal treatment of Jews in Europe.

3.2 Bacon's Ideal Jews and Jesus

Bacon describes the Jews of Bensalem as having an incredible reverence for the person of Yeshua. Surprisingly, the Jews of Bensalem agree with some of the central tenets of Christianity. Bacon describes Joabin's beliefs about Christ: “Surely this man of whom I speak [Joabin] would ever [=always] acknowledge that Christ was born of a Virgin and that He was more than a man; and he would tell how God made Him ruler of the seraphim, which guard His throne; and they call Him also the Milken Way, and the Eliah [sic.] of the Messiah, and many other high names, which though they be inferior to His divine majesty, yet they are far from the language of other Jews.”⁴⁹ To summarize this extraordinary account, the Jews of Bensalem believe:

45. As Bacon relates it: “By that time six or seven days were spent, I was fallen into straight acquaintance with a merchant of the city, whose name was Joabin” (209). “Straight” here can mean “unwavering, fixed, proper, fitting,” or “immediate,” per the OED, which begs the question: why did the Spanish merchant get into such close and immediate contact with a Jewish merchant (just as Teixeira found Jewish merchants wherever he went)?

46. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 209.

47. DeCook, “Francis Bacon's ‘Jewish Dreams,’” 122, citing Solomon, 25, finds great importance in Bacon's highlighting of the mercantile status of Joabin. Solomon, *Objectivity in the Making*, xiv, notes that Bacon was married to a London alderman's daughter and was related to the great Elizabethan merchant Thomas Gresham through marriage. “Bacon was interested in the promoting English trade—as was the king—but his pleas for the protection of merchant's interests were much strident than his monarch's, for Bacon saw merchants as the ‘vena porta’ (blood-supplying vein) of the whole realm.”

48. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 209.

49. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 209.

- in the virgin birth
- that Jesus was “more than a man”
- God made Jesus “ruler of the seraphim” beside His throne
- he is the Milky Way
- he is the Elijah of the Messiah, that is, not the messiah himself, but his forerunner
- Jesus is not God (“inferior to His divine majesty”)

What are we to make of this account? Bacon's Jews seemingly have more in line with certain historical Jewish-Christian sects and perhaps Islam than they do with either Judaism or Christianity, which is curious. The language about the “Milken Way” is especially curious. In an article in *Forward*, intellectual commentator Philologos shows how there is no innate Hebrew or Aramaic word for the “Milky Way.” Rather, to express this concept, Jewish tradition had to resort to the apocalyptic vision of Daniel. The Aramaic phrase *nehar di nûr* means “Milky Way,” or in Hebrew *nehar ha-esh*, “river of fire.”⁵⁰ If Bacon's Jews indeed referred to Jesus as the *nehar di nûr*, this is incredible, as this phrase is situated in Daniel's throne vision, which reads:

[דניאל פרק ז] (ט) הִזָּה הָיִיתָ עַד דֵּי כְרִסְוֹן רָמִיּוֹ וְעֵתִיק יוֹמִין יִתֵּב לְבוּשָׁה כְּתֹלַג חֲזֹר וְשָׁעֵר
רֹאשָׁה כְּעֹמֶר נִקְא פְּרִסְיָה שְׂבִיבִין דֵּי נֹר גְּלִגְלוּהִי נֹר דְּלֶק: (י) נָהָר דֵּי נֹר נִגְד וְנִפְק
מִן קְדָמוּהִי אֶלְף אֶלְפִין יִשְׁמְשֻׁנָּה וְרַבּוֹ רַבְּבִין קְדָמוּהִי יְקוּמוּן דִּינָא יִתֵּב וְסַפְרִין פְּתִיחוּ:

I was seeing until thrones were placed, and an Ancient of Days (*Attîq Yomin*)⁵¹ sat. His garment was like white snow, and the hair of his head was like sheep's wool. His throne was sparks of fire, his wheels flashing fire! A river of fire (*nehar di nûr*) was flowing and exuding from before him! A thousand thousands were serving him, and a million millions were before him! The court of judgement sat, and books were opened. (Dan. 7:9-10)

Back-translating from Bacon's English “milken way,” we get to Aramaic *nehar di nûr*. Note that Bacon links this concept with the seraphim and God's throne. Such a linkage is made explicit in a late antique midrashic text, the Sayings of Rabbi Eliezer (*Pirquei de-Rabbi Eliezer*). Given that Bacon's mother was a Hebraist (more on that later), it is not out of the question that Bacon knew Hebrew, too, and that he could have read Rabbi Eliezer. In fact, such a text explicitly links the elements that Bacon did (*nehar di nûr*, standing, throne, and serafim), suggesting that Bacon knew *Pirquei Eliezer*, or the tradition from another text. In the text, Rabbi Eliezer fuses *merkavah* (divine chariot) literature with creation literature (*maaseh bereshit*), while drawing on Genesis, Ezekiel, and Daniel:

50. Philologos, “Was Daniel's ‘River of Fire’ Really the Milky Way,” *The Forward*, March 2014,

51. The indefinite nature of *Attîq Yomin* perhaps indicates that *Attîq Yomin* is a class of beings to which this one belongs, perhaps “immortal” or “eternal one.” The phrase is made definite later, in verse 13.

[פרקי דרבי אליעזר פרק ד] (מח) והחיות עומדות ביראה ובאימה ברתת ובזיע. (מט) ומזעת פניהם נהר של אש מושך ויוצא לפניו, שנאמר [דניאל ז, י] נהר די נור נגד ונפק מן קדמוהי. (נ) שנים שרפים עומדים, אחד מימינו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ואחד משמאלו. (נא) שש כנפים שש כנפים לכל אחד ואחד.

And the *Hayyot* were standing in fear and awe, in trembling and sweat. From the perspiration of their faces *nehar shel esh*, a river of fire, emerged and issued in front of Him, as it is stated in Daniel, "*Nehar di nûr*, A river of fire, flowing and exuding from before him!" Two serafim are standing — one on the right side of the *Qadosh Baruch Hu* [The Holy One, Blessed Be He], and one on his left. Six wings, six wings to each one. (*Pirquei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chap. 4) [all translations my own]

The linkage between seraphim standing by God's throne and the river of fire is made explicit in Rabbi Eliezer. However, there is no mention of a second divine being in Pirquei Eliezer. That, however, is indicated in Daniel 7:13, where a younger divine being approaches the Ancient of Days:

13 חִזָּה הָיִית בְּחֻזֵּי לַיְלָא וְאָרו עִסְעֻנֵּי שְׁמַיָּא כְּבַר אֲנָשׁ אֲתָה הָוָה וְעַד־עֵתִיק יוֹמֵיָא מָטָה וּקְדָמוּהִי הִקְרְבוּהִי: 14 יָד וְלֵה יְהִיב שְׁלֵטֹן, וְיִקְרַר וּמַלְכוּ, וְכָל עַמְמֵיָא אֲמֵיָא וְלִשְׁנֵיָא, לֵה יִפְלָחוּ; שְׁלֵטְנָה שְׁלֵטֹן עָלֵם, דִּי־לָא יַעֲדָה, וּמַלְכוּתָהּ, דִּי־לָא תִתְחַבֵּל.

I was seeing, in the visions of the night! Look! With the clouds of the heavens, like a son of humanity was coming, even until he reached the Ancient of Days. And to him was given sultanate and honor and kingship, and all of the peoples, the nations, and the languages worshipped him! His sultaniship was an eternal sultaniship, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom (one) which shall not be destroyed. (Dan. 7:13-14)

In Christian interpretation, this second divine being, this *bar enash*, is Jesus. Bacon's passage only makes sense when one combines the midrashic rabbinic interpretation of Daniel found in Pirquei Eliezer with a Christian interpretation of the same passage that draws on the Hebrew and Aramaic literary antecedents. How on earth did Bacon know this? It is clear that Bacon had some knowledge of Hebrew sources, even if perhaps filtered through a Christian Hebraist or "ethnographic" book available to him. In fact, Bacon did know rabbinical sources.

In both *Advancement of Learning* and *Essays*, Bacon cites the "Rabbins" to make his point. In the former work, he inquires, "And will you hearken to the Hebrew rabbins?" and adds an interpretation of his favorite verse: "youth is the worthier age, for that visions are nearer apparitions of God than dreams?"⁵² a verse he cites: *Wəhāyā ʾahārē-kēn ʿēšpōk ʿet-rūḥiy ʿal-kol-bāsār wənibbāʾū bənēkem ūbənôtēkem ziqnēkem ḥālōmôt yaḥlōmūn baḥūrēkem ḥezyōnôt yirʾū*, or as Bacon reverses the quote: "Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."⁵³ In his essay "On Youth and Age," Bacon writes: "A certain rabbin, upon the text, 'Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams,' inferreth that young men, are admitted nearer to God than old, because

52. Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, 8, bk. 1.III.3.

53. Joel 2:28 in Christian Bibles/3:1 in Hebrew. F. Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, 8, bk. 1.III.3.

vision, is a clearer revelation, than a dream.”⁵⁴ Feuer is of the opinion that Bacon is here quoting Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508), who, like Bacon, saw his career shattered in later life.⁵⁵ It appears that Feuer is correct, because the following quotation can be found in Abravanel's commentary on the verse in Joel:

השאלה השנית באומרו זקניכם חלומות יחלומון ובחורכם חזיונות יראו, וזה כי למה יחס החלומות לזקנים והחזיונות ייחד לבחורים כי הנה הנבואה בחזון או במראה היא מדרגה יותר עליונה ונכבדת מהחלום הנבואי ולכן היה ראוי ליחס החזיונות לזקנים שקנו חכמה והחלומות לבחורים שלא הושלמו כ"כ בנבואה:

My second query [on the text] is from the verse “Your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions.” Why are “dreams” connected to old men and “visions” designated for young men? Because prophecy, whether in a vision or by sight, is a step above, and is more honorable (lit. weighty) than the prophetic dream. Therefore, it is fitting to connect visions to old men who acquired wisdom and dreams to young men who did not attain it, so it is with prophecy. (Abravanel on Yoel 3:1) [translation my own]⁵⁶

Further in the *Advancement of Learning*, Bacon quotes rabbinic sources, arguing that some applied a philosophical lens to the Torah of Moshe. Let us continue, Bacon writes, “to Moses the lawgiver,” whom Bacon calls “God's first pen.” Moses was “adorned by the Scriptures with this addition and commendation, ‘That he was seen in all the learning of the Egyptians.’”⁵⁷ In “the ceremonial law of Moses,” you will find “the exercise and impression of obedience, and other divine uses,” namely, “that some of the most learned rabbins have travailed profitably and profoundly to observe, some of them a natural, some of them a moral, sense” of the Torah. According to Bacon, the Torah accords with natural reason. Bacon quotes the law of leprosy (Lev. 13) and quotes an unnamed rabbi who upholds “a principle of nature, that putrefaction is more contagious before maturity than after.” Bacon quotes “another” rabbin, who “noteth a position of moral philosophy, that men abandoned to vice do not so much corrupt manners, as those that are half good and half evil.” Here, Bacon draws on the moral sense of a scriptural law, which he finds in a rabbinic source. Bacon concludes, “So in this and very many other places in that law, there is to be found, besides the theological sense, much aspersion of philosophy.” In other words, some rabbis were interested in the philosophical, in addition to the religious, dimensions of their work. Later on, Bacon writes “there is no such enmity between God's words and his works,” between religion and nature. “For to seek heaven and earth in the word of God, whereof it is said, ‘Heaven and earth shall pass, but my word shall not pass,’ is to seek temporary things amongst eternal: and as to seek divinity in philosophy is to seek the living amongst the dead, so to seek philosophy in divinity is to seek the dead amongst the living.” One can't find pots and lavers from the courter courts of the Temple in the Holy of Holies. Bacon concludes that these two interpretations “have been received and

54. Francis Bacon, *Essays and Apothegms of Francis Lord Bacon*, ed. John Buchan, The Scott Library (Walter Scott Publishing Company Limited, 1894), 126.

55. Lewis Samuel Feuer, “Francis Bacon and the Jews: who was the Jew in the *New Atlantis*?” *Jewish Historical Studies*, no. 29 (1988): 6.

56. Abravanel, *Commentary on the Tanakh, Commentary on Yoel 3:1*, Hebrew text from Sefaria. Translation mine.

57. F. Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, 18, bk. 1.VI.9.

pursued in imitation of the rabbins and cabalists.”⁵⁸ It is clear that Bacon had some familiarity with rabbinic literature, but whether through translation or the original is unclear.

In addition to the extraordinary beliefs of the Bensalemi Jews, Bacon gives remarkable precedence to the status of the Jews. The Jew Joabin is the one who leads the narrator through his trip on the island, and is the one who connects him with “the father of Salomon’s House,” who gives them a tour of the scientific proceedings on the island. Joabin greets them, introduces them to one of the “fathers” of the House who is coming “in state,” and at one point leaves them on errand as the city had charged Joabin with the diplomatic task of entertaining the visiting dignitary. In Bensalem, the Jews are given free range, are accepted by society, and are a part of the day-to-day functioning of the diplomatic and civil service. As Rose-Mary Sargent argues, “The introduction of Joabin to the narrative also indicates that the island practices a somewhat high degree of religious toleration, which conforms with Bacon’s idea that religious controversy can be kept in check by an enlightened scientific society. The Jews on the Island are permitted to follow their own religion.”⁵⁹ In fact, Bacon’s entire narrative hinges on Joabin: previously, the company had landed on the island, were received by the governor, and learned about the ancient and Hebraic origins of the civilization. When Joabin comes on the scene, it’s midpoint in the narrative, and the governor is not heard from again; everything that follows, including Bacon’s climax of seeing the College of the Six Day’s work in action, is orchestrated by Joabin. Bacon presents a Jewish-influenced narrative from beginning to end.

In addition to the pivotal role of Joabin in both the narrative and the crew’s journey, he reveals some additional interesting points about the Bensalemi Jews, which gives a greater understanding of Bacon’s purpose in writing. Firstly, Joabin reveals that in addition to Hebraic heritage, the Hebraic portion of the islanders are actually descended from Abraham through “another son, whom they call Nachoran.” Bacon solidifies the antiquity of the Bensalemites by tying them to the greatest biblical patriarch, while maintaining their otherness by making them the product of a son previously unheard-of. Second, Joabin reveals that “Moses by a secret cabala ordained the laws of Bensalem they now use.” Previously, we had learned that the laws of Bensalem were from king Solomon, now we learn that the laws derive from Moshe himself. Moshe instituted a secret “chain of tradition” (what *kabbalah* means), whereby they received a Torah. Throughout history, Bensalem has maintained contact with the Avrahamic and Jewish people, and at crucial junctures have received from them: their origins from Abraham, their laws from Moses, and their wisdom and their society from Solomon. Bacon thereby reveals that Bensalem is another “chosen priesthood, a peculiar people.” Finally, and most shockingly, Joabin reveals that “when the Messiah should come, and sit in His throne at Jerusalem, the King of Bensalem should sit at His feet, whereas other kings should keep a great distance.” That is, the kingdom of Bensalem is second only to the kingdom of Israel and can be considered an extension of it: the King of Bensalem will be the viceroy to King-Messiah. This extraordinary status highlights the extraordinary role of Bensalem: it is the version of Israel that has been kept safe from the destruction and pollution of the world, as Joabin states, “You shall understand that there is not a under the heavens so chase a

58. F. Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, 99, bk. 2.XXV.16.

59. Rose-Mary Sargent, “Bacon as an advocate for cooperative scientific research,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon*, ed. Markku Peltonen, Cambridge Companions to Philosophy 92 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 157.

nation as this of Bensalem, nor so free from all pollution or foulness. It is the virgin of the world.”⁶⁰ Just as Israel is the “virgin daughter” to God, so is Bensalem “the virgin of the world.” In fact, both nations occupy a similar role in the world as a “light unto the nations.” The only difference is that the Kingdom of Israel is known to the world (and scattered), whereas the kingdom of Bensalem is hidden. As another sixteenth-century traveller declared regarding a “hidden people” (*gens occulta*) in the mountains of Peru,⁶¹ so Bensalem is a hidden people — *Israel occulta* to world Jewry’s *Israel conspicua et dissipata*, “hidden Israel” and “open and dispersed Israel.”

Part III

Significance

What does this all mean? What are we to make of seventeenth-century English philosopher who creates a myth of his ultimate paradise, a world in which the Jews are, ultimately, on top, or at the very least, on an equal footing with their surrounding society?

There are several considerations. First, it must be noted that this work was published unfinished and posthumously. Like its Platonic namesake *Critias*, which retells the Atlantis myth, Bacon’s *New Atlantis* ends mid-scene. Bacon left a cryptic apothegm: “*The rest was not perfected*”⁶² The meaning is not clear, as it could refer to the work, the activities of Solomon’s College thus described, or life itself. There is a peculiar Jewish ring to it, as the Jewish halakha is to leave a bit of one’s house unfinished, to remember the destruction of the Holy Temple, or as it has been interpreted, *unperfected*. The second consideration is that since Bacon did not live to see it published, he did not have control over its publication and therefore over its subsequent *interpretation*.

In regards to its interpretation, it seems that most commentators have focused merely on the scientific aspect of the work, and the model of Solomon’s House for a bastion of natural science education in the burgeoning Age of Discovery. While clearly the natural science aspect of the narrative is important, as I have shown, there is clearly more going on than just an ode to the natural sciences. However, from the inception of its publication, *New Atlantis* has been interpreted thusly. William Rawley, the man who published the work a year after Bacon’s death, published it alongside *Sylva Sylvarum: Or a Naturall Historie. In Ten Centuries* in 1627, which cemented the book as a work of natural history. In addition, Rawley added this preface which provided *his own* interpretation of Bacon’s work. The preface reads, in part: “This Fable my Lord devised to the end that He might exhibite therein a Modell or Description of a Colledge instituted for the Interpreting of Nature and the Producing of Great and Marvellous Works for the Benefits of Men.”⁶³ Just as Bacon’s scientists were interpreting nature, so his publishers were interpreting Bacon and, by matter of course, eliminating other possible readings of

60. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 209.

61. Antonio de Montezinos, “Relacion de Aharon Levi, alias, Antonio de Montezinos,” in *Conversos in the New World*, ed. and trans. Ronnie Perelis, 1, from Menasseh ben Israel’s *Esperança de Israel*, 1644.

62. F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 214.

63. Moore-Smith, *New Atlantis: An Unfinished Work*, ix.

the text, say, as a plea for religious toleration or a picture of what Bacon imagined as a perfect civic and religious society.

If we look at the text more critically, we can see that it offers a back-handed critique of European treatment of Jews. The role that Bacon *chose* to give to Spanish merchants is a clear nod to the Spanish Inquisition and the expulsion of Jews, including the curious fact that our Spanish narrator immediately befriends another Jewish merchant, Joabin. We have support from this line of thought from other works of Bacon. In another work, Bacon did write a plea for religious tolerance: his essay “On Unity of Religion” argued, essentially, that church and state should not enforce uniformity of belief. Bacon wrote, “Surely in counsels concerning religion, that counsel of the apostle would be prefixed, *Ira hominis non implet justitiam Dei*. And it was a notable observation of a wise father, and no less ingenuously confessed; that those which held and persuaded pressure of consciences, were commonly interested therein, themselves, for their own ends.”⁶⁴ If he wrote for religious toleration in other works, surely *New Atlantis* certainly could share that theme.

From his other writings, especially his *Apothegms*, Bacon expressed enmity for the Spanish rulership and their treatment of Jews. As Feuer summarized, it is “in his *Apothegms*, especially those published posthumously, that Bacon derided the Spanish persecution of the Jews.”⁶⁵ The posthumous ones he may not have wished published. Bacon enjoyed mocking the Spaniards, especially when it came to Jewish and Moorish relations: “There was a cowardly Spanish soldier, that in a defeat the Moors gave, ran away with the foremost. Afterwards, when the army generally fled, the soldier was missing. Whereupon it was said by some that he was slain. ‘No sure,’ said one, ‘he is alive; for the Moors eat no hare’s flesh.’”⁶⁶ In another sassy apothegm, it appears that Bacon was aware of Judaizing and even lightly accused the Spanish diplomat in London of the same. In the quote, they each refer to each other by their title. The peerage title of Baron Verulam was expressly created for Bacon, as was the Viscount of St Albans (St. Alban was a christian martyr from Verulam - so the post commemorates his legacy). Thus, Bacon was the 1st Baron Verulam and 1st Viscount St Albans. Diego Sarmiento de Acuña (1567—1626) was count de Gondomar, and had two diplomatic missions to England (1613-18 and 1620-22), during which Bacon was politically active. Gondomar’s role was to persuade James I to abandon his alliance with France and the Protestant countries on the Continent and to form an alliance with Catholic Spain. Gondomar was not liked publicly, and the dramatist Thomas Middleton made him a villain in a suppressed play. Here, Bacon clearly mocks the Spanish ambassador: “Count Gondomar sent a compliment to my lord St. Alban, wishing him a good Easter. My lord thanked the messenger, and said, ‘He could not at present requite the count better than in returning him the like; that he wished his lordship a good Passover.’”⁶⁷ The tit-for-tat nature of the exchange almost implies that Bacon was a Judaizer; the diplomat, assuming that Bacon celebrated Easter, would appreciate the compliment, but in reality, Bacon “returned the like” and wished him a Passover sameach. Was Bacon a judaizer?

64. “The wrath of man does not satisfy the justice of God,” James 1:20. “Of Unity in Religion,” F. Bacon, *Essays and Apothegms*, 6-11, here 10-11.

65. Feuer, “Francis Bacon and the Jews,” 6.

66. F. Bacon, *Essays and Apothegms*, 233-234, 287.

67. F. Bacon, *Essays and Apothegms*, 242.

In his essays, Bacon continually mocks Spanish military, bureaucracy, and diplomacy. In one humorous example, “The Spartans and Spaniards have been noted to be of small despatch: ‘Mi venga la muerte de Spagna;’ Let my death come from Spain; for then it will be sure to be long in coming.”⁶⁸ Bacon includes many other references to Spain, including the Spanish conquest of Portugal, and mocking references to Spanish officials including Count Gondomar, Dr. Pena, and Alonso Cartilio. Bacon also introduced a joke about a Spaniard who rebuked a Frenchman for the fact that the French didn’t bother to stop when they passed a house where a priest administered the sacrament, whereas the Spanish did. The Frenchman replied, “There is reason for it; for here with us Christ is secure amongst his friends; but in Spain there be so many Jews and Moranos, that it is not amiss for him to have a convoy.”⁶⁹ This joke indicated that Bacon implied that Jesus was at home in France with the Jews and marranos and not in Spain where they were not allowed. Clearly, an anti-Spanish sentiment is present in his writings.

From these apothegms, we can clearly see that Bacon was aware of the Spanish Inquisition and the Sephardic diaspora, which served as the backdrop for his *Nova Atlantis*. At age 33, Bacon also had a personal encounter with a product of the Inquisition which may have shaped his views. Bacon encountered the Queen’s personal physician Dr. Roderigo Lopez, a crypto-Jew of Portuguese extraction, when the latter was framed in a plot of treason against the Queen, and he was accused of being a Spanish agent. Bacon at first bought into these views about Lopez, and was part of the public calumny against him. Bacon wrote, “This Lopez, of nation a Portuguese, and suspected to be in sect secretly a Jew (though here he conformed himself to the rites of Christian religion), for a long time professed physic in this land.”⁷⁰ Lopez’ detractors alleged that he had agreed to poison the Queen in return for 50,000 crowns from the King of Spain. On 28 February 1594, Lopez was tried for conspiracy at Guildhall, and hanged, drawn and quartered alongside two fellow Portuguese alleged co-conspirators the following June.⁷¹ In fact, Lopez was a spy, but he was spying for the English government against Spain, using a network of marrano informants started by Hector Nuñez another Marrano physician. In a woeful defense, Dr. Lopez stated he wanted to somehow con the King of Spain out of money to exact revenge against the Spanish. Evidently, Queen Elizabeth had misgivings about the whole affair, as she pardoned Lopez’ widow Sarah Anes, the daughter of crypto-Jewish merchant Dunstan Gonsalvo Jorge Anes, on 7 June 1594, an unc customary pardon for the spouse of an alleged regicide.⁷² Anes and her descendants settled on the island of Jamaica, forming a crypto-Jewish community there.⁷³

How did Bacon feel about the Lopez case? Evidently, he went through a change of heart. Initially,

68. F. Bacon, *Essays and Apothegms*, 73, “Of Despatch.”

69. F. Bacon, *Essays and Apothegms*, 226.

70. Feuer, “Francis Bacon and the Jews,” 3.

71. Alan Stewart, “Birth of a National Biography: The Lives of Rodrigo Lopez, Solomon Lazarus Levi, and Sidney Lee,” *EnterText* 3, no. 1 (2003): 184.

72. Feuer, “Francis Bacon and the Jews,” 4.

73. In a remarkable turn, Roderigo and Sarah’s descendant Manasseh Maaseh Lopes returned to England from Jamaica in 1802, converted to Christianity, and acquired a landed title as the 1st Baronet Lopes. Incidentally, the daughter of Queen-Consort Camila, Lara Lopes (Parker-Bowles), is married to Harry Marcus George Lopes, descendant of Maaseh Lopes. Also see Edgar Samuel, “Lopez [Lopes], Roderigo [Ruy, Roger] (c. 1517–1594), physician and alleged conspirator,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, January 2008, and Edgar Samuel, “Anes, Dunstan [formerly Gonsalvo Anes; alias Gonzalo Jorge] (c. 1520–1594), merchant,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 2004,

Bacon might have allowed his own hatred of Spain (and Catholicism) to get in the way of a clear deliberation of the case. In his “True Report,” Bacon praised the Queen, for “how God hath ordained her government to break and cross the unjust ambition of the two mighty potentates, the King of Spain and the Bishop of Rome.” When Beatrice Gracia Mendes visited England in 1535 with her family from Antwerp, she left a thriving crypto-Jewish community in London of 37 households.⁷⁴ They were regarded as Protestant refugees, and like Dunstan Anes, many belonged to the Established Church (or the so-called Spanish Church or Italian Church) and practiced Judaism in secret.⁷⁵ This community lasted for about a century. After seeing the Portuguese merchants suspected of Judaizing expelled from London in 1609 (a stipulation which lasted until the 1650s),⁷⁶ Bacon may have re-evaluated his beliefs. Feuer asserts that, “In later years, disgraced, and re-thinking his life’s deeds, Bacon might well have found wanting his own behaviour in the case of Dr. Roderigo Lopez. When in the *New Atlantis* he made Spanish the language that the men of Bensalem used with foreigners, and assigned its Jews a central role in its cultural and scientific life, he may have been making partial amends for his previous denigration.”⁷⁷ In any case, the Jewish experience evidently influenced Bacon’s thinking on the matter.

Francis’ mother, Lady Anne Cook Bacon (1528-1610), was an avid Hebraist and maintained ties with Jewish Hebraists and their circles. Lady Anne learned Hebrew at the behest of her father, Anthony Cook, who was a London merchant. As Gemma Allen summarizes: “Alongside Greek, Anne’s childhood education included schooling in Latin and Hebrew, as well as Latin, which she used to translate the sermons of the Italian evangelical Bernardino Ochino.”⁷⁸ Ochino was an associate of Ferrara-born Jewish-Christian Hebraist Immanuel Tremellius and also a friend of the Lady d’Este, the duchess of Ferrara. Anthony Cook travelled to Strasbourg and met with Reformed leaders. Thereby, Lady Bacon was reared in these reformed and spiritualist circles, some of which included conversos.⁷⁹ We don’t know how extensive Lady Bacon’s Hebrew knowledge was, but she signed many of her letters with the Hebrew אמן, *Amen*. In one letter to her son, Anne writes, “God kepe you saff from Spanish subteltyes and popery and και μητερα quoque אמן.”⁸⁰ The mention of Spanish interference is interesting, almost as if Lady Bacon feared that the Spanish could hurt their family. Thus, his mother Lady Anne Bacon is another conduit for possible information about Jews and Hebrew for Francis Bacon.⁸¹

74. Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), 137.

75. Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, 139, and Samuel, “Anes, Dunstan [formerly Gonsalvo Anes; alias Gonzalo Jorge] (c. 1520–1594), merchant”

76. Cecil Roth, *A History of the Marranos* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1932), 258, and Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, 144.

77. Feuer, “Francis Bacon and the Jews,” 5.

78. Lady Anne Cooke Bacon, *The Letters of Lady Anne Bacon*, ed. Gemma Allen, Camden Fifth Series, vol. 44 (Cambridge University Press, April 2014), 5.

79. Such as the converso spiritualist Juan de Valdes, as well as Tremellius himself. See Johnson, “When Brethren Walk Together,” 185–197. Lucien Wolf, “Jews in Elizabethan England,” *Transactions (Jewish Historical Society of England)* 11, nos. 1924-1927 (November 1926): 8, indicates many of the Antwerp conversos associated with the Reformed churches secretly. “All of the Marranos,” he says of a certain case in Antwerp, were “pseudo-Protestants.” They had “given up their mask of Catholicism for a not less hollow pretence of Calvinism,” because in Wolf’s estimation, “it was a form of Christianity which came nearer to their own simple Judaism.” Thus, we can find an association between converso and Calvinist circles.

80. L. A. C. Bacon, *Letters*, 232. The Greek and Latin phrase means “and your mother also.”

81. It will, in passing, be noted that the JewishGen database has 871 individuals surnamed Bacon, including a number of

4 Conclusion

Often, Francis Bacon is compared with the context of Antisemitism which produced Shakespeare's Shylock and Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*.⁸² Bacon's supposed dismissal of Joabin's views as "Jewish dreams" is seen as confirmation of antisemitism. However, as Travis DeCook noted, there is a long history to the phrase "Jewish dreams" before Bacon's composition, such as the Second Helvetic Confession (1586), Purchas his Pilgrimes (1613), Henry Finch (1621), and William Laud (1621).⁸³ In order to be received by his audience, Bacon had to denounce Jewish (and Protestant) millenarian aspirations. Bacon is playing to his audience, given them what they want to hear, not necessarily his own views, for after all, as we have noted, Bacon creates a Jewish paradise in which Jews are equal to Christians and have freedom of religion and they don't convert, even though they revere Jesus. A Jewish paradise. This would have been taboo for an England which removed its Marranos for judaizing.⁸⁴ The same argument holds with the plays *The Jew of Malta* and *The Merchant of Venice*. As Peter Herman indicates, these plays "summons anti-Jewish bias, but rather than confirming it, challenges antisemitism by turning the Jew into the aggrieved party, not the Christian." Both plays, Herman writes, "feature a Jewish protagonist who, however flawed, invites audience sympathy rather than unqualified hatred, and both plays unambiguously undermine the moral credibility of the Christians."⁸⁵ Herman shows how Early modern English writers mobilized anti-semitism to denounce anti-semitism.

Francis Bacon may have been doing something similar. Let's review the facts. Bacon created a world in which Jews and Christians get along and the Jews are the founders and are revered. Bacon loved mercantilism, calling it the life blood of England. Bacon hated Spain, yet he made his protagonists Spanish merchants. Bacon was clearly aware of the Spanish Inquisition, the Sephardic diaspora, and the Marrano community in London as he worked closely with one case (Dr. Roderigo Lopez) and may have known others (such as Joachim Gaunse). Bacon had some knowledge of Hebrew and rabbinic literature and grew up with a Hebraist mother. Bacon wanted to create his projected model on scientific observation. Bacon believed in religious toleration. As Markku Peltonen summarizes: "Jew and Christian live peaceably together and the whole society seems to the travelers as 'land of Angels.'"⁸⁶ It seems, that when we put the evidence together, we are left with the conclusion: Bacon created a Judeo-Christian paradise, in which Jews and Christians could work hand in hand to build a better society based on natural law, observation, and revelation, which could form a haven from the horrors of the Spanish and other European persecutions of Jews in the preceding centuries.

Holocaust records.

82. Contrariwise, in Feuer, Bacon is the exception to the rule: "Bacon's *New Atlantis* stands out as an exception to the dreary anti-Jewish sentiments that pervaded the great Elizabeth writers such as Marlowe and Shakespeare."

83. DeCook, "Francis Bacon's 'Jewish Dreams'," 127-129. In those contexts, "Jewish dreams" referred to millenarian views and "land-promises."

84. Such as Joachim Gaunse, the Prague-born Jewish metallurgist who said some "wrong things" about Jesus and was promptly put on the first boat out of England. Gaunse is mentioned by Feuer, Roth, Wolf, and others.

85. Peter C. Herman, *Early Modern Others: Resisting Bias in Renaissance Literature* (London: Routledge, 2024), 101.

86. Peltonen, *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon*, 277.

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