6. A Hebrew anticipatory anachronism and other unusual Jewish-related items in the alleged “original manuscript”: A. “Heshvan.” B. “Amen, Amen and Amen.” C. “peace upon him” and “peace upon them.” D. “the Unnameable One.” “He, may His name be unspoken,” and “His unspoken name.” E. “land of Sinim” ~ Sinim “China”

The material in Selbourne 1997a gives the Jewishly knowledgeable reader a strong impression that although the real “Jacob” made an enormous effort to impart a decidedly Jewish flavor to his text, he blundered often in at least two ways: many of its supposedly “Jewish” features are inauthentic and in many passages where we expect Jewish features they are absent (when suspicious of inauthenticity, the textual critic looks not only for errors of commission but also for errors of omission). Examples follow in this section and later ones. Mind you, my treatment is not exhaustive, for I have chosen only a few curious usages.21

A. “Heshvan”

Several times, Selbourne’s translation contains “Heshvan,” which is a lay English romanization of the informal Hebrew name of the Jewish month known formally in Hebrew as marcheshvan.22 In a formal text like the alleged “original manuscript,” we expect the full form of the name. But that is just a quibble (see note 157). Read on for a somewhat weightier criticism.

Gavriel Birnbaum, of the Academy of the Hebrew Language, wrote me on 29 July 1999 that the earliest attestation for the short form that he could find in the academy’s files, the largest lexical database for Hebrew ever assembled and still growing, is in a responsum written by Rabbi David ben-Shelomo ibn-Abi-Zimra (ca. 1479-1589), who lived in Egypt and the Land of Israel.23

As with the Italian and Latin words discussed in earlier sections, our earliest known attestation of cheshvan may not be the first use (see the first paragraph of note 7), but, at least for the time being (has any earlier evidence been uncovered since the day Birnbaum wrote me?), we can do no better than rely on that attestation in the academy's files and conclude that, yet again, the supposedly thirteenth-century “Jacob” used a form for which we have no evidence until appreciably later, here some 240 to 300 years later.

Now for some more instances of unusual Hebrew, besides those mentioned elsewhere in the present essay. Here, we will see that Selbourne could not argue, as he could by invoking the first paragraph of note 7, that “Jacob”’s usages are anedatings.

B. “Amen, Amen and Amen”

The last words of Selbourne’s “translation” of the alleged “original manuscript” are “Amen, Amen and Amen.” Hebrew has amen veamen ‘amen and amen’, first attested in Psalms 41:14, 72:19, and 89:53. Yiddish has omeyn-veomeyn, which derives from the Hebrew expression. Presumably, other Jewish languages too have a two-part expression. So far as I can tell, no Jewish language has a three-part one. Are we to believe that just a single known manuscript penned by a Jew has a three-part one?
Furthermore, “By the early 13th century, papal documents had evolved into two distinctive groups; solemn privileges and letters. Solemn privileges can be distinguished by [...] a threefold amen at the end of the text [...]” (Herder 1991:594). We wonder, therefore, whether the real “Jacob,” in an effort to make the alleged “translation” sound archaic (see the first paragraph of section 5 and note 43), wanted to bone up on thirteenth-century style, could not, for want of any substantial Jewish knowledge, find out how Italian Jews at the time were writing (one would have to know at least Hebrew-Aramaic and Jewish Italian), dipped, consequently, into thirteenth-century non-Jewish texts or discussions of their style, and thereby came upon the triple amen. Then again, we might have here nothing but a coincidence. In any case, however, the fact remains that ‘amen, amen, and amen’ does not occur, so far as we know, in any known Jewish text.

C. “peace upon them”

When the alleged “Jacob,” as allegedly “translated” by Selbourne, mentioned living Jews, he often added the phrases “peace upon him” and “peace upon them,” as here: “my brother Isaia, peace upon him” (Selbourne 2000:65, twice) and “a man may go about the streets of Zaitun as if it were a city of the whole world [...] in one separate quarter are the Mohometans. In another the Franks, in another the Armenians. In another the Jews (peace upon them) [...]” (Selbourne 1997a:137); and once he applied the expression to living non-Jews (in the last paragraph but one of chapter 9).

The real “Jacob” presumably had a vague recollection of the Hebrew expressions alav bashalom and alehem bashalom, the literal meaning of which is respectively ‘upon-him the-peace’ and ‘upon-them the-peace’. They are used only after mentioning dead Jews whom one respects, they thus being the denotational equivalents of Latin requiescat in pace, requiescant in pace, English may he rest in peace and may they rest in peace, Judezmo ke en gan éden esté and ke en gan éden estén, Spanish que en paz descansen and que en paz descansen, and so on. Inversely, if we start by examining the expressions of that type which Jews add, when so prompted, after mentioning one or more living Jews (like Yiddish zol lebn un gezunt zayn ~ zoln lebn un gezunt zayn ‘may he ~ she ~ they live and be healthy’, as in “mayns an elter-bobe, zol lebn un gezunt zayn, hot zikh letstns aribergetsoygn fun ritin kin bresle” ‘one of my great-grandmothers, may she live and be healthy, recently moved from Rohatyn to Wroclaw’), we find none that refers to peace.

We thus have here another failed attempt on the part of the real “Jacob” to make the “translation” sound Jewish.

See section 14 for another example of how the alleged “Jacob” referred to certain living people as if they were dead and Selbourne did not remark on the anomaly.

D. “the Unnameable One,” “He, may His name be unspoken,” and “His unspoken name”

Selbourne’s “translation” contains this passage: “But they, because of the evil works of idolatry, have no true conception of God, may the Unnameable One be exalted, who remains one and shall remain One to the end of days. For that man stands for them in the light of God, blessed be He, whom they therefore cannot know” (Selbourne 2000:56).
At least one negative reviewer (Halkin 2001a) has already commented on the phrase “the Unnameable One”:

One can have one’s doubts about such prose. It is unlike that of any other Jewish writer of the Middle Ages, a period that did not encourage stylistic originality, and seems verbose and discursive in comparison with medieval Jewish travel documents like Benjamin of Tudela’s or Petahiah of Regensburg’s (both from the late 12th century). Furthermore, if originally written in Hebrew, there are puzzling things about it. Whereas ‘that man’ for Jesus is genuinely Hebraic, phrases like ‘Unnameable One’ or ‘an impulse toward God’ are not.

Even if not originally written in Hebrew, the alleged “original manuscript” is suspect because of many of its ostensibly “Jewish” features.

Since “The Unnameable One” would be a Jewish way of referring to ‘God’ (prompted by Exodus 20:7, Deuteronomy 5:11, and Leviticus 24:16), it would presumably be based on a Hebrew, Jewish Aramaic, or Jewish Italian phrase in the alleged “original.” Jewish languages do have many euphemisms the referent of which is God (Halkin should have written “genuinely Jewish” instead of “genuinely Hebraic”), but none that could be translated as “*the Unnameable One*. It would therefore be good to know what the alleged “original manuscript” has. Might it be something in medieval Anconitan Jewish Italian (see note 10), about which Selbourne seemed to know something the rest of us do not? Could we get its spelling too?

Here is Selbourne’s rejoinder to Halkin: “[...] in the manner of all the other experts—off the back of his head but as if he knew for certain—that the epithet ‘Unnameable’ used of the deity by Jacob is anachronistic. He should read Leviticus. ‘If he [the Israelite] pronounced the name YHWH, he shall be put to death.’ Not new to a Jew of the 1270’s, then, and in any case Rashi (1040-1105) uses the term. But this is how lack of scruple in criticisms does its harms, and has done with *The City of Light* since Jonathan Spence started it, first in private and then in the *New York Times*” (Selbourne 2001).

Halkin being acquainted with Leviticus 24:16, Selbourne need not have told him to “read Leviticus” (rather, it is Selbourne who needed to be informed of Exodus 20:7 and Deuteronomy 5:11, which are more central to the discussion than Leviticus 24:16). But that’s just a quibble (see note 157).

Halkin did not say that a phrase that one could reasonably translate as ‘the Unnameable One’ is anachronistic. He said it was “[not] genuinely Hebraic” (see above for a better wording). In plain English: among the dozens of theonyms in various Jewish languages (the two largest collections are in Stutshkov 1950 and 1968) is none that could reasonably be so translated (for other Jewish languages, we have no collections at all).

Rashi uses the term? What precisely is “the term” and where precisely does he use it? See elsewhere in the present essay for other examples of Selbourne’s vague “rejoinders” that turn out to be no rejoinders once they are examined.

As for “He, may His name be unspoken” (Selbourne 2000:69) and “His unspoken name” (idem, p. 106), since no expressions in any Jewish language could reasonably be so translated into English, we again what to know what the alleged “original manuscript” has.
E. “land of Sinim” ~ “Sinim” ‘China’

The sciences suffer from various degrees of lay intrusion. To take examples from both ends of the continuum, nuclear physics and quantum optics suffer no lay intrusion because the laity has no access to the phenomena whereas the study of human language and Jewish studies suffer considerably from such intrusion for precisely the opposite reason, that is, anyone can gather a corpus of Jewish family names (see, for example, Gold 1996 on lay intrusion into the study of Jewish family names). If a science suffers from lay intrusion, scientific advances often do not come to the attention of the interested laypeople, who therefore still cling to disproven beliefs. Even worse, they may be aware of the advances but reject them, like flat-earthers.

We will now see how Jews have down through the ages accurately interpreted a certain Biblical Hebrew ethnonym; how an early-nineteenth non-Jewish student of Biblical Hebrew, apparently unaware of the Jewish interpretation, suggested that the ethnonym had a Chinese connection; how certain Christian laypeople latched on to that suggestion; how what began as a mere suggestion became, by dint of repetition, a “fact” in their eyes (recall the parlor game called telephone in American English and Chinese whispers in British English); how even a few Jews in the nineteenth century took the suggestion to be a statement of fact (see paragraph G below); how the suggestion was eventually rejected in knowledgeable circles; how probably at least some laypeople still take it to be a statement of fact; how, wonder of wonders, the alleged thirteenth-century “Jacob” allegedly used that ethnonym as a toponym meaning ‘China’; how we have now found yet another smoking gun in Selbourne’s book, namely, misuse of the ethnonym as a toponym meaning ‘China’ (a blunder which no Jewishly learned Jew, as the alleged “Jacob” is alleged to have been); and how is more evidence either that the alleged “original manuscript,” if it exists, is a nineteenth- or twentieth-century fabrication or, if no “original manuscript” exists and, consequently, Selbourne’s “translation” is actually an original piece of writing of his, he was one of those latter-day laypeople who wrongly believed that the Biblical Hebrew ethnonym in question had a Chinese connection.

Spence 1997 asks, “Why, for example, does Jacob always call China ‘Sinim’? Was he referring to the famous passage from Isaiah 49:12 that ‘these from the Land of Sinim’ would one day be called home to Israel?” Spence also says that according to Selbourne the alleged author of the alleged “original manuscript” always wrote Sinim “in Hebrew letters, to avoid confusion with the almost identical word Syene, customarily used for the area of the upper Nile in Egypt.”

Isaiah 49:12 (as we will see presently, a better name for the verse would be Deutero-Isaiah 49:12) mentions a place which it calls erets sinim. The meaning of erets here is clearly ‘land of’ and has thus never been unknown, vague, or disputed. With the specific element of that collocation, we have several problems: is sinim a scribal mistake? if it is, what is the right form? Whatever the right form is, is it a place name or is it an ethnonym? whether it is a place name or an ethnonym, to what place or to what people?

Only a few of the specifics of the debate concern us here, namely the ones relevant to the alleged “Jacob”’s use of sinim in the sense of ‘China’. This much is certain:

A. Isaiah 49:12 has nothing to do with China or the Chinese. In fact, neither that country nor that people is mentioned anywhere in the Jewish Scriptures.
B. Isaiah 49:12 refers to some place in northeastern Africa or western Asia, in all likelihood to Syene, Egypt.

C. Under the influence of Arabic al-s_n ‘China’, Hebrew-Aramaic acquired the place name sin ‘China’. The earliest known attestation of Hebrew-Aramaic sin ‘China’ is in the works of Yehuda Halevi (Krauss 1935:402), who died in 1141 (see the first paragraph of the discussion of ginger in section 4). When that Hebrew-Aramaic place name came into being, it was for three reasons a foregone conclusion that the language would also acquire the word siti both as an adjective meaning ‘Chinese’ and as a noun meaning ‘Chinese [person]; native and/or resident of China’ (noun), those two reasons being (1) the word is the straightforward derivative of Hebrew-Aramaic sin ‘China’, (2) if a place name arose, a corresponding adjective and noun were needed too (‘China’ --> ‘Chinese’), and (3) if Hebrew-users borrowed Arabic [al-]s_n ‘Chinese’, they were likely to borrow Arabic s_ni (which has the same meanings as Hebrew-Aramaic siti) as well. Hebrew-Aramaic siti has these forms: siti (masculine singular), sitit (feminine singular; siti is also a feminine singular glottonym meaning ‘Chinese’), sinim (masculine or unmarked plural), and siniyot (feminine plural).

D. The coinage of the two Arabic-induced Hebrew-Aramaic words mentioned in the previous paragraph did not lead Jewish exegetes to reinterpret Isaiah 49:12 as referring to China (they clearly saw, rightly, that the collocation refers to some place south of the Land of Israel -- a topic to which we will turn presently).

E. It is only certain Christian researchers of the nineteenth century who mistakenly raised the possibility, or believed, that erets sinim in Isaiah 49:12 referred to China. The first of them may have been Friedrich Heinrich Wilhelm Gesenius (1786-1842); if he was not the first, he was certainly the most prominent of those suggesting that the verse referred to that country.

Gesenius’s dictionary of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic originally appeared in fascicules between 1810 and 1813. In the English translation by Samuel Prideaux Tregelles published in 1893, we read the following about the place name erets sinim in Isaiah 49:12:

[...] the context requires that this must be a very remote country, to be sought for either in the eastern or southern extremities of the world. I understand it to be the land of the Seres or Chinese, Sinenses; this very ancient and celebrated nation was known by the Arabians and Syrians [...] and might be known by a Hebrew writer living at Babylon, when it was almost the metropolis of Asia.

F. Gesenius’s dictionary was, and to some extent still is, popular among Christian students of the Jewish Scriptures who want to read the text in the original. As a result, the notion spread in Christian circles that -- lo and behold! -- “the Bible mentions China!” -- when Gesenius offered only his interpretation (“I understand”), it is wrong, and he failed to see the situation for what it is, namely and instance of homonymy: sitim the masculine or unmarked plural of siti ‘Chinese’ and sinim occurring in Isaiah 49:12 are spelled identically and pronounced identically in any given variety of Hebrew but they share no meaning and each has its own etymology.

G. The opinion of Jewish exegetes notwithstanding (see paragraph D), Gesenius’s interpretation did have a bit of influence on nineteenth-century Hebrew, where erets sinim was at least on four occasions used in the sense of ‘China’: Doron Rubinshteyn, of the Academy of the Hebrew
Language, has sent me four approximate bibliographical references, which he got from Amnon Shapira, to Hebrew publications in which the collocation is so used: Blok, Shevile etsem (1822); Aharon Gintsburg, Toldot bene haadam (1835); a passage in Hamagid (1857), a newspaper; and Sirkin, Maarachat badonem (1869).

H. In the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, Biblical scholarship rejected Gesenius's suggestion, but, as often happens, the news did not reach lay circles, so that we still hear that "the Bible mentions China." 27

I. In light of the foregoing it is clear that application of Hebrew erets sinim or sinim to China in Selbourne 1997a is not only a blunder but a blunder of which no Jewishly knowledgeable person (like the alleged thirteenth-century "Jacob") is capable and a blunder which resulted from uncritical copying from Gesenius or from one of his contemporaries or followers who espoused his suggestion. Thus, a blunder which could not predate Gesenius (as we in fact see from the dates 1822, 1835, 1857, and 1869 in paragraph G above). Which is also to say that Selbourne's alleged "translation" contains yet another dramatic anticipatory anachronism, this one being of over five hundred years.

Since the alleged thirteenth-century "Jacob" could not have copied from Gesenius or anyone else in the nineteenth or twentieth century, the copier must have been the real "Jacob."

J. Selbourne might now invoke paragraph G: if at least four Jews in the nineteenth century used erets sinim to mean 'China', why could a fifth, in the thirteenth-century, not have done so? If he so argued, here is my response:

i. The at least four nineteenth-century Jews were prompted to use erets sinim in the sense of 'China' under the influence of Gesenius or one of his colleagues or followers. Consequently, Selbourne would have to argue that we have here a mere coincidence: the thirteenth-century "Jacob" misinterpreted erets sinim to mean 'China' and so did Gesenius. However, the number of allegeable "coincidences" in Selbourne's alleged translation is too many to be believable.

ii. In the sense if 'China', erets sinim is not quite grammatical (which is also an argument against Gesenius's interpretation): the collocation would have to be *erets hasinim to be grammatical in the sense of 'China' (literally, 'land of the Chinese'). Hence Gesenius's interpretation was a bit forced to begin with. Consequently, one would have to assume that the alleged "Jacob"’s alleged reinterpretation of the collocation in Isaiah 149:12 as meaning 'the land of the Chinese' was likewise forced. Again, that would be too much of a coincidence to be believable.

iii. Furthermore, the alleged "Jacob"’s also calls China just sinim. So far as I can tell, in only three passages in all of Jewish literature is a Hebrew masculine and unmarked plural ethnonym used as a place name: kasdim 'Chaldea' in Jeremiah 50:10, 51:24, and 51:35 derives from kasdim 'Chaldeans'. Selbourne would therefore probably argue that if Jeremiah could write what he did in those three verses so too could "Jacob" in his account. Believe that if you will, but I prefer a different explanation, namely that a Jewishly unknowledgeable person in our time -- the real "Jacob" -- misinterpreted the specific element of the English phrase land of Sinim. Let us now see how that could have come about.

When translators do not understand a word or do not know how to translate it, they may just transliterate or transcribe it. Thus, unable to make heads or tales of sinim in Isaiah 49:12, many if not most translators of that verse into non-Jewish languages have merely transcribed the word: for example, English, French, and Italian translations respectively have the land of Sinim, le pays de Sinim, and
Now consider the fact that phrases like *the Land of God* (an epithet of Punt) and *the Land of Egypt* have the same surface structure but different deep structures: on the surface, both appear to be grammatically identical: they consist of a noun phrase (which in turn consists of the definite article and a noun), a preposition meaning ‘of’ and a proper noun. However, in the deep structure, the two phrases differ, inasmuch as the preposition in the first one expresses possession of some sort (‘the land which belongs to God’, ‘the land which is dedicated to God’, or something similar) whereas in the second one the same preposition expresses apposition or co-reference (‘the land called Egypt’).

When English-, French- and Italian-users come across ambiguities of that sort, they use their knowledge of the language to tell them which sense of the preposition is intended. Thus, no competent speaker of English, for instance, would interpret *the Land of God* to mean *'the land called God'* or interpret *the Land of Egypt* to mean *'the land belonging to Egypt'*: The specific knowledge required in such cases is the knowledge that *God* is not a place name and that *Egypt* is a place name.

But say that the meaning of the specific element of such phrases is unknown. Suppose, for example, that I make up a proper noun, like *Spant*, and do not tell you whether it is a personal name or a place name. If so, you will not be able to decide whether the phrase *the Land of Spant* means ‘the land belonging to Spant’ (compare *the Land of God*), in which case it is a personal name, or ‘the land called Spant’ (compare *the Land of Egypt*), in which case it is a place name. And if you guess, you stand a fifty-percent chance of being wrong.

It may therefore be assumed that the real “Jacob,” who lavished on us abundant evidence that he was Jewishly unknowledgeable, directly or indirectly learned of Gesenius’s suggestion that Isaiah 49:12 mentions China (many lay treatments of the history of Jews in China begin by mentioning that verse) and thus, in accordance with his desire to give the “translation” a Jewish flavor (a desire for which we have much evidence), called China *the Land of Sinim* and, not knowing the status of the specific element *Sinim* in the phrase *Land of Sinim*, mistook it to be a toponym, when in fact it is an ethnonym, the result being that here and there in his alleged “translation” he used the short form *Sinim* (compare shortening of *the Land of Egypt* to *Egypt*), which is also a blunder because Hebrew *sinim* is an ethnonym, not a toponym. The real "Jacob" was skilled in packing many blunders into small spaces.

Because Gesenius's suggestion was nothing short of ridiculous, serious research literature about the Jewish Scriptures since at least the late twentieth century has dismissed it, either by passing over it in silence (see, for example, the entries for *Sinim* and *Syene* in Achtemeier et al. 1985, quoted later in this section) or by rejecting it curtly.

*  

After the foregoing examination of Hebrew *sinim*, we could conclude by saying that the fictitious "Jacob"’s and Selbourne's use of *the land of Sinim* and of *Sinim* to mean 'China' is not a smoking gun but a smoking cannon. However, because of Selbourne's arrogance (see, for instance, note 157 on his attempt to dismiss serious researchers as "academic peashooters"), we choose to continue the dissection in such excruciating detail until it becomes painfully obvious that just their misuse of *the land of Sinim* and of *Sinim* is more than enough to dash Selbourne's enterprize to smithereens.
As we will now see, Isaiah 49:12 does not and cannot refer to China.

At least three of the world's languages have delimiting expressions that refer to the whole of a country or area by mentioning two of its extremities. In the following list, (N-S) means that reference is roughly from north to south and (S-N) that it is roughly from south to north:

A. English *from Land's End to John o'Groats* refers to the whole of Britain (S-N). Actually, the most northerly point in the British Isles is the rock on which Muckle Fugga Lighthouse stands (off the island of Unst, in the Shetland Islands); the most northerly part of the British mainland is Dunnet Head; and the point on the British mainland farthest from Land's End is Duncansby Head; but idioms need not be fully realistic to be graphic, so that reference to John o'Groats is good enough.

B. French *de Quimper à Toulon* 'from Quimper to Toulon' refers to the whole of France (N-S).

C. Biblical Hebrew *midan ad-beer sheva* 'from Dan to Beersheba' (Judges 20:1) refers to all of the Holy Land (N-S). That expression was the model for English *from Dan to Beersheba* 'from limit to limit; throughout the whole region; through, or in, any extent' (so defined in the 1957 imprint of *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language: Second Edition: Unabridged*).

D. Biblical Hebrew *migeva ad-beer sheva* 'from Geba to Beersheba' (Second Kings 23:8) refers to the whole of the Kingdom of Judea (N-S).

E. Biblical Hebrew *miteman udedane* 'from Teman even unto Dedan' (Ezekiel 25:13) refers to the whole of Edom (S-N).

F. Biblical Hebrew *mimigdol sevene vead-gevul kush* 'from Migdol to Syene even unto the border of Cush' (Ezekiel 29:10) refers, as we will now see, to the whole of Egypt (N-S).

G. Biblical Hebrew *mimigdol sevene* 'from Migdol to Syene' (Ezekiel 30:6) refers, as we will now see, to the whole of Egypt (N-S).

H. Israeli Hebrew *mimetula leelat* 'from Metula to Elat' refers to the whole of the State of Israel (N-S). The expression is a modernization of expression C.

Having noted the existence of delimiting expressions of that kind in at least three languages, including Biblical Hebrew, we want to look more closely at F and G because they refer to Syene, which is located in the area which Isaiah 49:12 probably mentions, but before turning to that question, we have to comment on the form sevene.

Hebrew has a suffix, called *be-hamegama* in Hebrew and *be directive* in English, which is added to nouns and nounlike words to indicate motion or direction toward a place, as in *shama* 'thither' (= *sham* 'there' + he directive) and *tsafona* 'northward, northwards, to the north' (= *tsafon* 'north' + he directive), words with that suffix formerly being considered by English-writing Hebrew grammarians to be in the accusative case. That suffix is thus the semantic equivalent of the English suffix *-ward ~ -wards*.

Mostly, the consonant preceding he directive is pointed by a kamats gadol (as in *shama* and *tsafona*, where that vowel is represented in my romanization by the last a), but in two instances in the Jewish Scriptures it is pointed by a segol (*nove* 'to Nob' in First Samuel 21:2 and *dedane* 'to Dedan' in
Ezekiel 25:13 [see expression E], where that vowel is represented in my romanization by the last e) and in one instance by a tsere (sevene 'to Syene', where that vowel is represented in my romanization by the last e).

Thus, in the five Biblical Hebrew delimiting expressions, we see three ways in which Hebrew designates motion to or toward a place:

a. with a preposition, as in expression C: ad 'to'.

b. if motion from a place has just been mentioned, with a preposition preceded by the word meaning 'and', as in expression F: mi 'from', reed 'even unto'.

c. with the directive, as in expressions E, F, and G:

i. dedane 'unto Dedan'.

ii and iii. sevene 'to Syene'.

To get the base form of the Biblical Hebrew for 'Syene', we have to remove he directive from sevene, the result being either *seven (where the first e stands for a mobile sheva and the second one for a tsere) or *sevan (where the first e stands for a mobile sheva and the second one for a kamats gadol). 30

Having therefore looked at the form and function of the place name sevene and having extracted from it the possible base forms *seven and *sevan (since neither of the base forms seems to occur anywhere in the corpus of Hebrew writings, we cannot tell which one is right), we turn to meaning:

1. Egyptian records dating to the New Kingdom, which began in 1570 BCE and ended in 1085 BCE, mention Magdol and place it on the border between Egypt and the Land of Israel (thus, in northeastern Egypt). Migdol, the Hebrew name of Magdol, is a blend of Egyptian Magdol and Hebrew migdal 'tower' (the phonological similarity of the Egyptian place name and the Hebrew for 'tower' induced the Hebrew blend; if the place had a prominent tower, its presence would have been an additional inducement for the blend).

2. Kush 'Cush' refers to an area which is now part of northern Sudan.

Hebrew mimigdol sevene reed-gevul kush thus refers to the whole of Egypt as seen from north to south (a longitudinal perspective would be expected for a country where location is often expressed by reference to the Nile, which runs longitudinally) and it mentions a place along that axis, Syene, which is in fact on the Egyptian border with Cush. In contrast, mimigdol sevene refers only to Magdol and Syene.

3. It is reasonable to assume that Ezekiel, who lived in the fifth century BCE, would not have mentioned Syene if he had thought that his audience would not know where it was. Because Syene had a Jewish military garrison in his day, a certain portion of his audience presumably knew where it was: in the Nile opposite Syene is an island called Abu and Yeb in Egyptian (phonological variants of the same name?), yer in Hebrew (the Hebrew name comes from the latter Egyptian one), jaz-lat asw-n in Arabic (literally 'Aswan Island'), and Elephantine in English. Aramaic papyruses attest the existence of a military garrison on the island in the fifth century BCE (the soldiers, among whom numbered some Jews, were in the service of the Persians and from the fact that they brought their families to live with them the
military garrison has also been called a military colony in twentieth-century English-language research literature). Thus, not only the soldiers and their families would have known of Syene but also relatives, friends, and former neighbors back home, wherever "back home" was.

For possibly a second reason too, Syene might have been known to a portion of Ezekiel's audience. At noon on the day of the summer solstice the sun casts no shadow there (a fact recorded in Pausanias's Periplus τῆς Ἑλλάδος 'Description of Greece'). Since Pausanias was alive at least from 143 to 176, we cannot be sure that something known in his day was also known some six hundred years earlier or that something known in Greek circles was also known in Jewish ones, so that in Ezekiel's day

Therefore, for at least one reason and possibly two, at least a certain portion of Ezekiel's audience, he could have assumed with a high degree of certainty (as he presumably did), must have understood expressions F and G. The fact that Ezekiel referred to the place three times also supports our assumption that he presumed that a good portion of his readers would know what he was talking about.

4. In the Old Kingdom of Egypt (c. 2575 BCE - c. 2130 BCE), Elephantine was known as 'the door of the south' since it was the starting point for trade with the people living south of Egypt (see note 30). During the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty (664 BCE - 525 BCE), that is, during the rule of the Saite, the island was the site of a fortress built to protect the southern border of Egypt (one of three that Psamtik ordered built to protect the country from invasion). Thus, we may assume that the location of Syene at the southern extremity of Egypt was known to at least many Egyptians. If so, Egyptians' knowledge of the location of Syene could have been imparted to any number of Jews.

5. Consequently, latter-day serious researchers' opinion that expressions F and G refer to Syene is well-founded. In contrast, any suggestion that Ezekiel had China in mind would not be:

i. The interpretation *'from Migdol [thus, northeastern Egypt] to China even unto the border of Cush [thus, southernmost Egypt]' would make expression F senseless because it would zigzag from northern Egypt to China and from China to southern Egypt and no area can be reasonably so defined.

ii. The interpretation *'from Migdol [thus, northeastern Egypt] to China' would make expression G refer to the whole of Asia as seen from east to west, something which in itself would not be impossible, but, just as we have till now considered the Biblical Hebrew place name under discussion here in its context (namely, expressions F and G), so must we now consider expressions F and G in their context, namely chapters 29 and 30 of Ezekiel: since both chapters deal mainly with Egypt, reference to China in particular or to Asia in general would be out of place (in fact, Ezekiel and his contemporaries in all likelihood had no conception of Asia as a geographical entity).

Furthermore, were reference to China, we would have to assume that Ezekiel thought that his audience would understand him. However, it would be impossible to believe that in the fifth century BCE any Jews were aware of China. "Individual Jews might have visited China before the eighth century [CE (D.L.G.)], but the first authoritative evidence of their presence dates only from that period" (Kedar 1972:468; in saying that "Individual Jews might have visited China before the eighth
century” CE, Kedar does not mean that we have any indication that such might be the case -- he is merely leaving the possibility open). Thus, if the evidence for the first Jewish contacts with China date only to some twelve hundred years later, it is unlikely in the extreme that Jews in Ezekiel's times knew of the place, even if we allow for the possibility that people need not know of a place at first hand to be aware of its existence. In sum, reference to China in the Book of Ezekiel would have been too recondite even for vague recognition and it would have served no purpose because chapters 29 and 30 deal chiefly with Egypt.

Consequently, for two reasons (the first one possibly being the stronger one), we could not accept any suggestion that expressions F and G refer to Asia or any part of it.

Let us for the moment leave expressions F and G and return to Isaiah 49:12, where, in the version of that verse which has come down to us, the collocation "erets sinim" occurs. Here, erets, which is not a scribal mistake, means 'land of'. As for "sinim" (spelled samech yod nun yod mem sofit in the only version of the verse known to us), at least some serious students of the Jewish Scriptures have suggested that it is a scribal mistake for *sevenim 'Syenites' or *sevanim 'idem' (both spelled samech vav nun yod mem sofit):

A. If not a scribal mistake, the Biblical Hebrew form "sinim" could mean only *natives and/or residents of the inhabited place called sin in Hebrew and Pelusium in Greek, which, now submerged in the sea, was once located in the marshes on the eastern border of Egypt (Ezekiel 30:15 calls the place maaz mitsrayim, which means either *?'a stronghold of Egypt' or *?'the stronghold of Egypt') or 'natives and/or residents of the desert called sin in Hebrew', which is mentioned in Exodus 16:1, Exodus 17:1, and Numbers 33:12. However, neither of those possibilities would permit a reasonable interpretation of "sinim" in Isaiah 49:12. Consequently, 'natives and/or residents of the inhabited place called sin in Hebrew and Pelusium in Greek [...] is probably not the meaning of our problematic word in Isaiah 49:12 and 'natives and/or residents of the desert called sin in Hebrew' most certainly is not (how many Jews, if there were any at all, could have been living in that desert?).

B. If not a scribal mistake and we suppose the word to mean 'natives and/or residents of Syene', the form "sinim" cannot reasonably be derived from Hebrew *seven ~ *sevan 'Syene'.

C. Consequently, the only possibility left, that of a scribal mistake, is presumably the right one. It is a reasonable possibility:

i. The rarer a form is in a given text, the likelier it is to be mistranscribed if the text is copied. In all of the Jewish Scriptures, the five-letter word spelled samech yod nun yod mem sofit occurs just once, in Isaiah 49:12.

ii. The smaller the number of letters involved in a suggested scribal mistake, the less unlikely the suggestion. Here, just one letter is involved: instead of samech yod nun yod mem sofit (= the spelling of "sinim" in the version of Isaiah 49:12 that has come down to us), the suggestion is that the right spelling is *samech vav nun yod mem sofit, that is, the second letter should be not a yod but a vav.
iii. The more the pairs of letters involved resemble each other, the less unlikely the suggestion. The written forms of yod and vav differ only in length (if the yod is a bit too long, it can be mistaken for a vav; if the vav is a bit too short, it can be mistaken for a yod). For the same argument, see section 19 on the twenty-second and twenty-seventh letters of the Arabic alphabet.

iv. The more problems which suggested correction solves, the less unlikely the suggestion. Here, we have at least one problem and it would be solved if the suggestion is right: the derivations "*seven 'Syene' + -im = *sevenim 'natives and/or residents of Syene'" and "*seven 'Syene' + -im = *sevenim 'natives and/or residents of Syene'" (*sevenim and *sevenim represent possible vocalized forms of the letters *samech vav nun yod mem sofit) would be unproblematic whereas "*seven 'Syene' + -im = sinim 'natives and/or residents of Syene'" or "*sevan 'Syene' + -im = sinim 'natives and/or residents of Syene'" cannot be right.

D. Even though the suggestion of a scribal mistake has at least four of the markings typical of scribal errors (i-iv in paragraph C), we cannot be sure that it is right. Hence the cautious wording of the first sentence in that paragraph.

* Just as we have put expressions F and G and chapter 29 and 30 of Ezekiel into context, we must now do the same for Isaiah 49:12. First, however, a clarification.

Calling that verse "Isaiah 49:12" is a misnomer, for, like all of the rest of the Book of Isaiah from chapters 40 to 55 inclusive, the verse was written not by Isaiah (who lived in the eighth century BCE) but by another prophet, whom Biblical researchers, because his name is not known, call Deutero-Isaiah 'the Second Isaiah' (see section 18 on the unknown author of chapter 51 of Ecclesiasticus for an analogous situation). Some students of the Book of Isaiah also assume that chapters 56-66 were written by a third person, likewise of unknown name, whom they call Trito-Isaiah 'the Third Isaiah'. Deutero-Isaiah prophesied during the Babylonian Exile, which began in 597 BCE and continued for fifty and some odd years (he thus lived at least in the sixth century BCE). That fact is important because it gives us the historical setting of the verse, which in turn allows us to grasp its meaning better.

The verse as it has come down to us reads hine-ele merachok yavou vebine-ele mitsafon umiyam vele meerets sinim 'Behold, these shall come from far; And, lo, these from the north and from the west, And these from the land of Syenites'. It is a prophecy alluding to the Ingathering of the Exiles, that is, to the Return of the Jews to the Land of Israel, who at the time were exiled chiefly in Babylonia. Once we understand the context of the verse (it was written during the Babylonian Exile) and its purpose (it is a prophecy about the return of the Jews), we can interpret it more closely:

A. The purpose of merachok 'from far' is to suggest that Jews will come from many places far from the Land of Israel.

B. Two directions are mentioned explicitly, namely tsafon 'north' (which could, additionally, allude to Babylonia inasmuch as erets tsafon, literally 'land of the north', which occurs in Jeremiah 6:22 and 16:15 and Zechariah 2:10, definitely designates Babylonia) and yam 'west'.

C. Consequently, "meerets sinim" must in some way refer to direction too. If we read that
collocation as originally being *erets sevanim* or *erets sevenim* 'land of Syenites', it makes sense: reference would be to the south (just as in expressions F and G sevene 'to Syene' is to be interpreted as 'to the southern border of Egypt') and the verse would therefore refer to a third direction, to complement tsafon 'north' and yam 'west'.

In contrast, if we read the verse as meaning *'Behold, these shall come from far; And, lo, these from the north and from the west, And these from the land of Chinese', we would have to make unrealistic assumptions:

A. That China had a substantial Jewish population in the sixth century BCE.

B. That the Jewish population of China was so significant that Deutero-Isaiah singled it out for specific mention in that verse.

C. The verse would be the only evidence we had, for several centuries to come, of any Jewish presence in China.

D. To suppose that a people who in the sixth century BCE were concentrated in western Asia and Egypt had a substantial far-flung outpost in, of all places, China would force us to suppose that at least certain in-between areas, like Persia, had Jewish populations too.

No serious student of Jewish history would be willing to make any of those assumptions. Notice, by the way, that to take "sinim" in Isaiah 49:12 as referring to Syenites, we do not have to suppose a large Jewish population in Syene at the time because Deutero-Isaiah could well have chosen to mention the city in 49:12 chiefly because of the city's status as the southernmost in Egypt (see above on how "erets sinim" complements the directional terms meaning 'north' and 'west') -- which is probably in fact the case because, if he wanted to mention a place outside the Land of Israel with a large Jewish community, Syene was, by far, not the best candidate.

Everything thus points to the conclusions that a scribe mistook an overly short vav for a yod and that his mistake was perpetuated.31

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If anyone still supports Gesenius's suggestion about Isaiah 49:12, let us why it is right and my explanation wrong.

As noted above, serious students of the Jewish Scriptures deemed Gesenius's suggestion so implausible that they either dismissed it summarily or they dismissed it by passing over it in silence (we will soon see an example). In contrast, the laity was for the most part unaware of the dismissal and, since Gesenius's dictionary came to be extremely influential among Christian students of the Jewish Scriptures in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (indeed, since by the early twentieth century not even Jewish students of the Jewish Scriptures had produced a better dictionary of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic, certain Jews also dipped into it), the notion spread that "the Bible mentions China!"32

Selbourne, who gave every evidence of being not only Hebrewless in particular (see note 157 for his confession, "I'm not a Hebraist") but also Jewishly unknowledgeable in general (see the evidence elsewhere in the present essay), would be just the kind of person to be misled by Gesenius's
now outdated treatment of "erets sinim" (or misled by someone whose misinformation about that collocation could be traced to Gesenius).

In contrast, had the imaginary "Jacob" been a real thirteenth-century Jew and had he been the Jewishly knowledgeable person that Selbourne and his tiny band of supporters made him out to be (an "astonishing intellectual titan" [see note 35] who was a rabbi, the grandson of "the great rabbi Israel of Florence," and of "noble rabbinical lineage"), he would have interpreted Isaiah 49:12 correctly, for in the Jewish exegetical tradition, with which he would have been well acquainted, sinim in that verse has always been correctly interpreted to mean 'Syenites' and erets sinim to refer to the area around Syene, that is, southern Egypt: "as all the ancient commentators appreciated, Sinim is none other than the Syene of Upper Egypt mentioned in Ezekiel XXIX, 10 and XXX, 6" (Rabinowitz 1948:65, ft. 6). Rabinowitz goes on to specify who the ancient commentators were: the Midrash, Targum Jonathan, Ibn Ezra, and David Kimchi. The first two are Jewish texts (thus, the commentators are the Jewish authors of the texts); the last two, Jewish exegetes. Hence all are Jewish sources.

In sum, erets sinim in Isaiah 49:12 could not possibly mean 'China'; use of land of Sinim, le pays de Sinim, il paese di Sinim, and so on in the sense of 'China' arose only after Gesenius published his untenable suggestion about that verse; use of Sinim to mean 'China' stems from ignorance of Hebrew and a misinterpretation of the preposition in land of Sinim, le pays de Sinim, il paese di Sinim, and so forth; and the laity, being the laity, has preferred a dramatic interpretation of the collocation erets sinim ("Wow! The Bible mentions China!") even though it is wrong, to the humdrum explanation (the collocation refers to an area on the southern border of Egypt), even though it right.

Since Selbourne did not correct the alleged "Jacob"'s blunders with respect to erets sinim and sinim or even comment on them, we can assume only that he too blindly followed Gesenius (whether directly or indirectly). Nay, since the French version of Selbourne's book includes a map with China labeled SINIM (see below), our assumption is a certainty, so that once again we see that the fictitious "Jacob" and the person we think is the real "Jacob" made -- how could it be otherwise? -- the same mistakes. Because the fictitious "Jacob" is said to have lived long before Gesenius, Selbourne was born long after Gesenius died, and we are sure of not committing here the fallacy of post hoc ergo propter hoc, we conclude that the chain of error was "Gesenius --> (---> ?) Selbourne --> the fictitious "Jacob."

Here now are the entries for Sinim and Syene in Achtemeier 1985:

**Sinim** [sin'eem, KJV; RSV: "Syene"]. See Syene.

**Syene** [s_een'nee; KJV: "Seveneh"] a town on the east bank of the Nile just south of the First Cataract. Called Swn (modern Aswan) by the Egyptians, it was at the southern border of Egypt; Ezekiel's pronouncement on the forthcoming fate of all Egypt at the hands of the Babylonians speaks of 'from Migdal to Syene' (Ezek. 29:10; 30:6). On the island of Elephantine (Heb. Yeb), across from Syene, there was a late sixth- and fifth-century B.C. military colony in the service of the Persians. The Elephantine papyri, several
groups of Aramaic documents found on the island, show that the colony included many Jews, who had their own temple to God, were permitted to celebrate the Passover festival, and lived both on the island and in Syene [James W. Weinstein].

Thus, not even an allusion of China, not even an allusion to Gesenius's suggestion -- not because Weinstein or any of the other authors of the dictionary were unaware of his suggestion but because it was too ridiculous to deserve even an allusion, let alone mention. The only correction one could make is with respect to Seveneh, which could not be the base form of the Hebrew place name.

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How ironic that Selbourne's "earnest, in the interim, of the authenticity of the text" (see the first paragraph of section 3), where he told us that the alleged thirteenth-century "Jacob" always wrote Sinim "in Hebrew letters, to avoid confusion with the almost identical word Syene, customarily used for the area of the upper Nile in Egypt," has turned out to be further evidence either of the non-existence of the alleged "original manuscript" or, as I believe, of its non-existence.

Which is also to say that the higher you climb the harder you fall. If only Selbourne's book had called China China, if only it did not mention the land of Sinim or Sinim anywhere, the person whom we suppose to be the real "Jacob," namely Selbourne, would not have shot himself in the foot. But he wanted to give "Jacob"'s story a Jewish flavor, he was far from possessing enough Jewish knowledge to know how to impart that flavor authentically, and so he stumbled and fumbled from cover to cover.

How interesting that, even as late as 2000, in the French version of his book, Selbourne (following the alleged "Jacob," who, we submit, was following the real "Jacob," who, we suppose, was Selbourne) was still calling China "the land of Sinim" and "Sinim." To boot, the inside front and back covers of that version sported a map with China labeled SINIM in letters larger than that of any other place.

Which is to say that even three years after the publication of Selbourne 1997a, not one of the alleged but to this day unnamed "Hebraists" who, Selbourne claimed, supported him (have such people ever existed?) knew enough Hebrew, enough about the Jewish Scriptures, enough about Jewish history, and enough about the history of Biblical Hebrew lexicography (I have in mind the reception of Gesenius in Jewish studies) to tell him to eliminate all instances of the Land of Sinim and Sinim from the book (that Selbourne was capable to eliminating smoking guns is clear from section 19, where it is noted that the telltale spelling "Baiciu" in Selbourne 1997a became the innocuous "Ianciu" in the French version of his book, published three years later). Not even "Dr. Tudor Parfitt, lecturer in Hebrew and Jewish studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies" (see section 7), knew enough Hebrew to steer Selbourne away from using the Land of Sinim and Sinim to mean 'China'. In knowledgeable Jewish circles, the correct interpretation of Isaiah 49:12 is elementary. Consultation of even a one-volume Bible dictionary (see above on Achteneier 1985) would have been enough to save the real "Jacob" from catastrophe.

The reason for Selbourne's different treatment of "Baiciu" and of the Land of Sinim and Sinim is clear: Barrett 1997 and 1998b pointed out that "Baiciu" was evidence of inauthenticity whereas no one
until the publication of the present essay has noted that use of the Land of Sinim and Sinim in the sense of 'China' are evidence of the that kind.

Now that Selbourne knows that the Land of Sinim and Sinim meaning 'China' are smoking guns, will they too disappear from future versions of the book? Even if they do, Selbourne, as with "Baiocu," cannot eliminate what has already appeared. He can try to hide smoking guns under the carpet, but the smoke will come wafting out. Selbourne can try to run, but he cannot hide.

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Here's more bad news for Selbourne. An entry in the glossary of Selbourne 1997a reads "Sinimiani inhabitants of China" (p. 477; it is retained in the French version: "Sinimiani habitants de la Chine" [p. 533]). The appearance of a word in the glossary means that Selbourne alleged it to be present in the alleged "original manuscript," so that he alleged it to have been written by the alleged "Jacob."

The masculine plural form "sinimiani" is either pseudo "basically educated Tuscan" or pseudo-Latin. If the first, it implies the masculine singular form *"sinimiano"; if the second, the masculine singular form *"Sinimianus." Those singulars would consist of Biblical Hebrew sinim and, respectively, the Italian suffix -iano or the Latin suffix -ianus.

For at least four reasons, the alleged thirteenth-century "Jacob," even had he existed, could not have coined such forms:

A. Being the Jewish intellectual giant that he was, thus being acquainted with the Jewish exegetical tradition, he would have known that sinim in Isaiah 49:12 was a masculine or unmarked plural ethnonym that already had an ending, namely -im, as a result of which it would not have occurred to him to suffix it further (it is as if someone did not know that the English word Londoners contains a plural ending and therefore added to it -ians (as in English Bostonians 'natives and/or residents of Boston'): "Londonersians" 'natives and/or residents of London'.

B. Being the Jewish intellectual giant that he was, he would have known that Sinim had no Chinese connection of any kind and thus not use that word or coin any derivative of it at all.

C. Italian does have a suffix -iano, but it was not until the twentieth century that it began to be used to form words meaning 'native and/or resident of [...]', examples being iraniano 'Iranian', israeliano 'Israeli', and hollywoodiano 'Hollywoodian'. Thus, if the latter-day coiner of "sinimiani" intended the word to be "basically educated Tuscan," it is a dramatic anticipatory anachronism.

D. If on the other hand the latter-day coiner of "sinimiani" intended it to be Latin (in Higher Macaronic the only rule is "anything goes" [see note 137]), the word would be just as inauthentic as if it were intended to be "basically educated Tuscan" because the Latin suffix -ianus is not added to place names.

Thus, whereas for various reasons no authentic text should have the form "sinimiani" (whether meaning 'Chinese' or anything else), someone living in the twentieth century, if possessing a bit of knowledge but not much knowledge (a little knowledge is little knowledge), could easily have coined
that monstrosity. Required here were these ingredients:

A. Gesenius's suggestion that *erets sinim* in Isaiah 49:12 meant 'China' transmogrified into a statement of fact (see above on the game of telephone or Chinese whispers).

B. knowledge that Italian has a suffix *-iano* or that Latin has a suffix *-ianus*.

C. lack of knowledge that Jewish exegetes have always interpreted *sinim* to mean 'Syenites'. Mind you, the fact that the Jewish exegetical tradition does not support Gesenius's suggestion does not make that suggestion wrong. Rather, I am implying here that by being unaware of the traditional Jewish interpretation of that word, the real "Jacob" was unaware of a red light warning him that Gesenius could be wrong.

D. lack of knowledge that *sinim* is probably a scribal mistake for *sevenim* 'Syenites' or *sevanim* 'Syenites', lack of knowledge that Gesenius did not know that *sinim* is probably a scribal mistakes, and thus lack of knowledge that Gesenius's suggestion rests on a probable scribal mistake.

E. lack of knowledge that the Italian suffix *-iano* is not known to be added to place names until the twentieth century.

F. lack of knowledge that the Latin suffix *-ianus* is not added to place names.

G. lack of awareness that if you are going to coin "sinimiani," you are, in light of A-F, playing with fire.

Once again, therefore, we see that the real "Jacob" knew a smattering of this and a smidgen of that, but he lacked broad and deep knowledge in the relevant disciplines (above all, Jewish studies) to keep him from walking off cliff after cliff after cliff. Who could the real "Jacob" have been? The least we may say about him is that he must have been a smug daredevil who thought he could pull the wool over our eyes. In any case, once again the real "Jacob" managed to pack many blunders into a small space.

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Mutatis mutandis, the foregoing remarks also apply to the real "Jacob"'s coinage "Mancini" (see the second paragraph of note 137).

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So far, then, we are getting the impression that the author of "Jacob"'s tale was not the alleged "Jacob of Ancona," allegedly a merchant-rabbi-physician who was an "astonishing intellectual titan" (how curious that such a giant is known to us from no source, whether primary or secondary, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, other than Selbourne's book), but a latter-day unknowledgeable botcher who stumbled from one blunder to the next, unknowingly filling the alleged "Jacob"'s tale with anticipatory anachronisms, anomalies, and oddities of other sorts.35

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A few odds and ends remain to be dealt with.
Since the probable scribal mistake *sinim* in Isaiah 49:12 is spelled samech yod nun yod mem sofit (= five letters) and the spelling of Hebrew *seven 'Syene' or *seven 'idem' is samech yod nun sofit (= three letters), they differ in the number of letters and they share only one (samech), though one could say that they share one and a half because the difference between the two kinds of nun is allographic only (*nun 'non-word-final allograph of the letter nun' versus *nun sofit 'word-final allograph of the letter nun*'). Therefore, because those two Hebrew words share only one or, at most, one and a half letters, it is, at least at first, hard to understand why Selbourne told us that "Jacob" wrote *sinim* "in Hebrew letters, to avoid confusion with the almost identical word Syene, customarily used for the area of the upper Nile in Egypt."

Impossible to understand, that is, if you believe that "Jacob" was a real person, that an "original manuscript" exists, and that "Jacob" wrote *sinim* in the way that Selbourne said he did and for the reason that Selbourne said he did. If, however, you are not a true believer and you believe that Selbourne was the real "Jacob," everything falls into place and all puzzlement disappears (the present essay gives many examples of that phenomenon: stick with Ptolemy and you have myriad insoluble problems on your hands; ditch Ptolemy, accept Copernicus, and all problems are solved).

Therefore, since we do not believe that "Jacob" and any "original manuscript" have ever existed, we do not need to wonder why he wrote *sinim* "in Hebrew letters." No "Jacob," no problem.

Yet Selbourne did write what he did about the alleged "Jacob"'s alleged concern that his readers might mistake *sinim* for the name of Syene. The question therefore becomes why Selbourne said what he said, my guess being that, in reading superficial literature about the Jews of China, the real "Jacob" learned of Gesenius's suggestion about the meaning of *sinim* in Isaiah 49:12 and decided to chalk up another "first" for "Jacob." Here is the reaction that I assume the real "Jacob" wanted to trigger in readers of his book:

Wow! More than five hundred years before Gesenius, whom today's researchers hold to be the first to say that the word *sinim* in Isaiah 49:12 means 'China' [actually, Gesenius only suggested that interpretation and his suggestion was that the word means 'Chinese' (D.L.G.)], our genial Jacob, way back in the 1270s, was already thinking about that problematic word and decided, just as Gesenius did much later, that it means 'China' [sic (D.L.G.)]. What a pioneer! What stupendous knowledge he possessed! What clarity of vision! Jacob was truly an astonishing intellectual titan, centuries ahead of his time!

And if we go on the assumption that the real "Jacob" was trying to make us react in that way, a possible explanation comes to mind of why Selbourne said that the alleged "Jacob" always wrote *sinim* "in Hebrew letters, to avoid confusion with the almost identical word Syene, customarily used for the area of the upper Nile in Egypt": by saying so, he (Selbourne) could intimate that the alleged "Jacob" wanted his (the alleged "Jacob"'s) readers to make sure that they realized that he (the alleged "Jacob") took *sinim* to mean not 'Syene' but 'China' and he (Selbourne) could have a pretext for calling attention to the alleged "Jacob"'s use of the word in the [allegedly (D.L.G.)] "right" meaning hundreds of years
before Gesenius was to point out the [allegedly (D.L.G.)] "right" meaning.

Whether or not my supposition about Selbourne's motives is right, the fact remains that land of Sinim and Sinim in the sense of 'China' and "sinimiani" are smoking cannons.

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Before going on to more that is suspicious in "Jacob"'s tale and Selbourne's story, we have to go back to Gesenius. What follows should have been said when discussing his misinterpretation of Isaiah 49:12, but since it is too long for a note and as an excursus in the text it would have broken its smooth flow, it is given here.

It was not before the late eighteenth century at the earliest that scientific study of Biblical names of people and places began. Gesenius and his contemporaries were thus pioneers, so that even if they were wrong no matter how many times, we walk along the trails they blazed (his dictionary is still useful if used critically -- though beware of Tregelles's many baseless attempts to read Christian theology into the Jewish Scriptures).

When using sources critically, we must at times ask what motivated the writers to write what they did (see above on the real "Jacob"'s presumed desire to allow the imaginary "Jacob" to chalk up another of his many "firsts") and, if they were wrong, what made them go astray (in etymological research, for example, we can often write an etymology of a misetymology, that is, an explanation of why someone misetymologized and how other people copied the misetymology uncritically). The question thus becomes, with respect to Gesenius on Isaiah 49:12: what misled him? These reasons come to mind:

A. He failed to consider what Jewish exegetes had to say (we know that he neglected them because he did not mention them in his remarks on *"erets sinim") -- not that he should have relied on them uncritically, inasmuch as every source must be used critically, but at least he should have given them a fair hearing.

B. Seeing the word merachok 'from far' in the verse, Gesenius wrote that "the context requires that this must be a very remote country [...]" (Gesenius 1893:DLXXXIV, s.v., erets sinim). "Remote" is right, but "very remote" may be exaggerated. In any case, seeing the words mitsafon umiyam 'from the north and from the west', he rightly observed that the country was "to be sought for either in the eastern or southern extremities of the world." However, he apparently failed to ask himself what 'afar' and 'the extremities of the world' might have meant in western Asia of the sixth century BCE, the only place and the only period relevant to the discussion.36

Thus, if Gesenius considered 'Syenites' as the possible meaning of sinim, he rejected it presumably because he did not think that Syene was far enough from the Land of Israel (or from Babylonia?) to be considered distant. Too bad that, although coming close to the right answer (compare "southern extremity[...] of the world"), he went off on a wild-goose chase to China.

C. Gesenius failed to consider the possibility of a scribal mistake. When faced with a hapax legomenon of unclear form, unclear meaning, or both (which is the case of sinim in Isaiah 49:12), the careful researcher always considers such a possibility.
D. Arabic s._ni 'Chinese', if Gesenius knew the word, may have misled him into thinking that sinim was a cognate of it.

Once Gesenius settled on 'Chinese' as the meaning of sinim, he should have tried to find evidence that Jews in the sixth century BCE or before knew of China or that the country had a Jewish population at the time or, at least, that non-Jews in western Asia knew of it. All he wrote on that score, however, was that "this very ancient and celebrated nation was known by the Arabians and Syrians by the name [...] and might be known by a Hebrew writer living at Babylon, when it was almost the metropolis of Asia" (ibidem). By "the Arabians and Syrians" when? In the sixth century BCE? Gesenius seemed to be clutching at straws here.

Jews in western Asia in the sixth century BCE could easily have considered Syene faraway (whatever later perspectives may have been), so that Isaiah 49:12 would not have sounded unusual to them had it read *'Behold, these [reference is to exiled Jews returning to the Land of Israel (D.L.G.)] shall come from far; And, lo, these from the north and from the west, And these from the southern border of Egypt'. Furthermore, the verse could be an allusion to the Jewish military outpost on the island of Yeb, in which case we are to understand an interpretation like this: *'Behold, these [reference is to exiled Jews returning to the Land of Israel (D.L.G.)] shall come from far; And, lo, these from the north and from the west, And even these from the far-flung garrison on Yeb on the southern extremity of Egypt will return'.

In any case, as Gesenius failed to appreciate, important here is not necessarily actual distance but perceived distance: Syene to inhabitants of western Asia of the sixth century BCE must have been what ultima Thule -- probably Norway, though possibly Iceland or Mainland (the largest of the Shetland Islands) -- was to the ancient Greeks and Romans: one of the boundaries of the world as they knew it, one of the "ends" of the Earth.

Luckily, Gesenius's suggestion was rejected in serious research circles, a scribal mistake was rightly supposed, and the age-old Jewish interpretation of the word sinim, however inauthentic that form of the word probably is, was accepted.

In contrast to what went on in serious research circles, Selbourne's book, produced and launched in the world of little or no learning, gave a new lease on life to Gesenius's untenable suggestion about sinim, though in knowledgeable circles no one, as expected, has listened to him.37

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Let us sum up. In his day, Gesenius (who died in 1842) was in the forefront of the scientific study of Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic vocabulary, but that achievement did not confer on him infallibility. No serious researcher of our time sees any mention of China or of the Chinese anywhere in the Jewish Scriptures. However, as in all fields of knowledge, the laity has not kept up with scientific advances, so that researchers' rejection of his suggestion has not come to as many laypeople's attention as we would like it to, as a result of which they have either continued to entertain it or, worse, forgotten that his suggestion was only a suggestion and instead have elevated it to the level of a proven statement of fact. And so it is that a rejected suggestion has become yet another piece of lay fakelore.

As often happens too in lay circles, Gesenius's suggestion has been distorted in more than one
way: we see here not just its transmogrification into a statement of fact but also replacement, at least by the real "Jacob," of 'Chinese' by 'China' (Gesenius never said that *sinim* in *erets sinim* could mean 'China') and misunderstanding, at least by the real "Jacob," of what Syene was: not, as Selbourne wrote, "Syene, customarily used for the area of the upper Nile in Egypt" but as Gesenius rightly described the place, "a city, situated on the extreme southern limits of Egypt."

See section 7 for a bit more on Gesenius. 38

7. Selbourne will not have the last word: a Moroccan Arabic anticipatory anachronism and ectopism in the alleged "original manuscript" and his lame responses

In Selbourne’s alleged "translation" of the alleged "original manuscript" we read that "Indeed, on the Sabbath the sultan goes in secret to his house in the Mellah in order to hold discourse with him and to sit at his table, as the said Asher told me" (Selbourne 2000:82), where reference is to the "sultan" of "Cormosa," that is, of Hormuz, Persia, and "his" and "him" refer to a local Jew.

The author of that passage managed to pack in several absurdities:

A. By 1258, H_leg_, a grandson of Ghengis Khan, had conquered all of Persia. H_leg_ was succeeded in 1265 by Abagha, who ruled until 1282. Thus, during the entire decade of the 1270s Persia was under Mongol rule. Since those Mongol rulers were Buddhists, not Muslims, they did not use the Muslim title translated into English as 'sultan', namely, Arabic *sult_n*, Persian *sult_n*, Turkish *sultan*, and so on. Rather, their title was *il-kh_n*, which is Persian for 'deputy khan, subordinate khan'. True, Mah m_d Gb_z_n (Abagha's grandson), who ruled Persia from 1295 to 1304, converted from Buddhism to Sunnite Islam, but he did so after his accession to power, so that it is still impossible that in the 1270s Persia had any sultan.

B. Arabic *sult_n*, Persian *sult_n*, Turkish *sultan*, and similar words in other Muslim languages are applied only to sovereign rulers, thus to rulers of independents territories. The island of Hormuz was not independent in the 1270s.

C. Even had there been sultans or whatever other potentates the real "Jacob" might have imagined at that time and in that place, they would not have visited other people's homes, even in secret, for that would have been a gross humiliation -- people go to the sultan, not the sultan to them.

D. Even more humiliating, hence more absurd, for that era would be a non-Jewish potentate's visiting a Jew's home, even in secret.

E. Yet even more absurd (if such is imaginable) would be a non-Jewish potentate's visiting a Jew's home "to hold discourse with him and to sit at his table," even in secret, thus, treating the alleged "Asher" as his equal. A non-Jewish potentate may condescend to having guests at his table but he is the guest of no nonpotentates, to say nothing of being the guest of a Jew.
Already, we are getting the impression that the real "Jacob" was a person with serious gaps of knowledge in the relevant disciplines. But we are far from finished with him.

The first to react publicly to that passage about the alleged "sultan" of Hormuz and his alleged visits to an alleged Jew were the Wassersteins:

En route to China, on a journey whose every incident is recounted in loving detail, the traveller arrives at the Persian Gulf city, the modern name of which is Bandar Abbas. Here, we are informed, Jacopo visited the Jews in their 'mellah'. Selbourne, in his learned Glossary, defines this word as '(Arabic) Jewish quarter of a town'. 'Mellah' is indeed an Arabic word for the Jewish quarter of a town. But it is used exclusively in the Maghreb, not in the Middle East. Moreover, its hitherto earliest known usage is in the fifteenth century. Against this, it might plausibly be suggested that Jacopo, a seasoned traveller around the Mediterranean, had picked up the word on an earlier trip to Morocco. As for the problem of date, it might be maintained that Jacopo's usage, far from casting doubt on its authenticity, simply shows that the word is older than previously thought.

Inconveniently, however, this cannot possibly be so. For the origin of the word 'mellah' is precisely known and dated. It comes from a root meaning 'salt.' It was first used in the sense mentioned by Selbourne in 1438, when a specific area of salt marsh in the city of Fez was set aside for use as a Jewish quarter. Later, the usage spread to other towns in Morocco. It is therefore impossible that it appeared in this sense in Jacopo's manuscript, which Selbourne argues was probably written 'in the early 1280s'. Selbourne surmises that the manuscript may not be in Jacopo's own hand and may be a fourteenth-century copy, but that dating does not dispose of the difficulty of the use, or rather the misuse, of a fifteenth-century word. It is as if Shakespeare or Sheridan discussed shareware or shopaholism. On this ground alone, we must conclude that the manuscript (if it were ever produced) could only be a forgery [Wasserstein and Wasserstein 1997]

David Wasserstein spoke shortly later in the same vein:

While sailing south through the Persian Gulf, Jacob reaches the Persian shore at the entrance to the gulf, where he describes a "mellah," a small Jewish quarter, according to a glossary written by Selbourne.

Mellah is roughly equivalent to "ghetto," said David Wasserstein, who added that it did not come into popular usage until more than 150 years after Jacob's purported voyage.
The root of the word is salt, and the word is derived from a community near a salt marsh in Fez, Morocco, where Jews gathered after 1438.

"We can say conclusively that this case is proven," Mr. Wasserstein said, "because it requires something parallel to the appearance of 'Oldsmobile' or 'shopaholism' in the Dead Sea Scrolls" [Carvajal 1997]

Barring a few minor mistakes, the Wassersteins are right. Let us first attend to those slight imperfections, which fall into two categories:

A. Two which do not weaken their argument:

i. "[...] near a salt marsh [...]." Actually, the Jewish quarter of Fez arose just outside a southwestern stretch of the wall of the city, near a place where salt merchants probably stored their salt (later, a wall was built on the southern side of the quarter so that, like the city, the Jewish quarter would be completely surrounded by a wall: still enclosing the Jewish quarter on its northern side is the old wall of the city and on its southern side the new wall). For details see Lévy 1992 and for a map showing the location of the quarter see, for example, Sherwood 2007:9.40

ii. In connection with Selbourne's dating of the "original manuscript," at least in Selbourne 2000 he wrote, "I myself showed that no date before the 1280s was possible" (Selbourne 2000:442-443; see section 14 in the present essay for further comment).

B. Three which, when corrected, actually strengthen the Wassersteins' (indeed, all the Iacobomastiges') argument against Selbourne:

i. The Wassersteins' reference to "the Persian Gulf city, the modern name of which is Bandar Abbas" is based on an uncritical acceptance of Selbourne's equating Bandar-e `Abb_s and Hormuz (see the passage "Hormuz, or Bandar Abbas" later in this section, quoted from Selbourne 2000). In point of fact, Hormuz was (and still is) on an island (of the same name) and Bandar-e `Abb_s was (and still is) on the mainland. In discussing the passage below, we will show how that correction leads us to another smoking gun.

ii. "[...] it did not come into popular usage until more than 150 years after Jacob's purported voyage" and "[...] its hitherto earliest known usage is in the fifteenth century." The word in question is Moroccan Arabic mell_h, which is also romanizable as mellah, m_{ll}h, and m_{ll}lah, depending on how one wants to represent the sheva in the first syllable and indicate vowel length in the second one. Lévy 1992 estimates that the meaning of the word in focus here arose only at the end of eighteenth century more or less: "En fait le signifié «quartier juif» pour Mell_h est une extension de sens relativement récente - deux siècles environ" (Lévy 1992:41). However, to give Selbourne every advantage, I will suggest in paragraph c below that mell_h 'Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area in Morocco]' arose after 1667 and that Lévy's dating -- "[il y a] deux siècles environ" -- could be wrong (a suggestion which I would make anyway, even if Selbourne had never undertaken his enterprise).
Here is a summary of the semantic history of the word as Lévy reconstructed it:

a. It presumably first designated an area near the gates of Fez where salt merchants stored their salt.

b. Someone who died in 1349 wrote that *M_* _l_ *h_ was the name of a certain part of Fez. Someone writing around 1360 called the area *Mellab* (so romanized in a French translation published in 1867). At that time, the name had no ethnic connection.

c. As late as the seventeenth century, the word by itself was still being used without any ethnic connection, though by this time we find the collocations *Mell_b al-Muslimin* and *Mell_b lihud*, that is (in my translation), 'the Muslim [part of] Mell_b' and 'the Jewish [part of] Mell_b' respectively. Since *Mell_b al-Muslimin* is found as late as 1667, we know that even by that year a modifier was needed in Fez to signal ethnicity, which is to say that Mell_b by itself was still ethnically unmarked. Which is to say that if the word itself had already acquired a Jewish connection (*'the Jewish quarter of Fez'*), we would not find Mell_b al-Muslimin and, because the collocation would be redundant, we would not find Mell_b lihud either. **Comment by D.L.G.:** Since we seem to have no post-1667 record of mell_b with ethnic qualifiers (whether Mell_b al-Muslimin, Mell_b lihud, or whatever), the better dating for mell_b [*Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area in Morocco]*] is "after 1667" rather than Lévy's "end of the eighteenth or beginning of the nineteenth century," but if post-1667 evidence for the word with an ethnic qualifier is found, our estimated dating will change accordingly. In any case, we could not push the mell_b [*Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area in Morocco]*] back to the thirteenth century or assume that it has ever been used in Iran. And, in any case, too, the difference between my and Lévy's datings of the emergence of mell_b [*Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area in Morocco]*] is only about 130 years, so that our disagreement about the age of the usage is not serious.

d. Elsewhere in Morocco, that place name became a transferred name by the seventeenth century: in 1682 a Jewish quarter was created in Meknes called *Mell_b*; somewhat earlier in the seventeenth century, the same had happened in Marrakech: a Jewish quarter was set up in that city and it was called *Mell_b*.

e. In 1808 Jewish quarters were set up in Rabat, Sla, and Tetuuan. They too were each called *Mell_b* in Moroccan Arabic. **Comment by D.L.G.:** It is unclear whether those were transferred place names or, by now, common nouns. Since Arabic does not have capital letters, we cannot tell which was intended. Hence my romanizations with both upper and lower case to allow for both possibilities. Therefore, when dealing with other researchers' romanizations of citations for the word from the gray period (still a place name only? now a common noun too? now only a common noun?), we should not set any store by upper or lower case. Consequently, the anticipatory anachronism is not, as the Wassersteins supposed, one of about 165 years (1270s - post-1438), but one of about four hundred at least (1270s - post-1667) -- and if Lévy is right, more than six hundred (1270s - around 1792).

iii. "But it is used exclusively in the Maghreb [...]" (we are again quoting the
It is unclear which definition of the Maghreb the Wassersteins had in mind: Arabic al-maghreb, literally 'the west', means (i) 'North Africa, except Egypt', (ii) 'North Africa, except Egypt, and Spain', and (iii) 'Morocco'. Presumably, they had the third meaning in mind. In Morocco, commonization of the word mellḥ and its spread were, as we have seen, gradual; and even in the nineteenth century it was possible to find traces of an earlier Moroccan Arabic word meaning 'Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area in Morocco]' (see Lévy 1992:42-43 on hara, a word still used in Algerian, Tunisian, and Libyan Arabic). It seems, therefore, that the original word in North African Arabic (except Egyptian Arabic?) for 'Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area]' was hara and that in Morocco mellḥ slowly replaced it in the course of several hundred years, ousting it completely at some time in the nineteenth century. Mellḥ 'Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area]' has never been used outside Morocco, not even in Algeria, to say nothing of farther east (the Jewish quarter of Damascus, for instance, is called hāy al-yahḍ). Only someone living in a world of fantasy could claim it was a Persian usage.

Which is to say that we have here a double-barreled smoking gun: an allegedly "Persian" usage which is in fact Moroccan only; and a usage of the 1270s which did not exist even in Morocco at the time and was to emerge there only after 1667.42

The Wassersteins were thus right to equate the alleged "Jacob's" blatant anachronism and blatant ectopism with, hypothetically, Oldsmobile and shopabilism in the Dead Sea Scrolls or shareware in Shakespeare or Sheridan. See notes 96 and 137 for more on anachronism and ectopism.

All anomalies vanish if you suppose that the "original manuscript," whatever it may be, was penned by someone in the nineteenth or, more likely, the twentieth century who possessed nothing greater than a nodding acquaintance with the English word "mellḥ" or the French word "mellḥ" and knew nothing at all about the Moroccan Arabic word of which the English and French words are reflexes.

Significant too is that of all the words in Muslim languages meaning 'Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area]' only Moroccan Arabic mellḥ has an English or French reflex of any significant currency (not surprisingly, "mellḥ" is the only such reflex listed in Oxford English Dictionary). Thus, an Arabicless reader of English or French might easily come across the word "mellḥ" in reference to Morocco and correctly understand that it means 'Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area]' (= a half truth) but not know its spatial currency (= another quarter of the truth) and its temporal currency (= another quarter of the truth), just as when a Spanishless reader of English today comes across an English sentence like "A few blocks away is the zócalo of Mexico City" (say, in a guidebook) and correctly understands that zócalo means 'main square' but not know that the Spanish etymon of that English word, namely Spanish zócalo 'main square', is limited to Mexico and dates to no earlier than 1807 (when a socle [= Spanish zócalo] was put in place in the main square of Mexico City, upon which a pedestal was then erected, upon which a statue of King Charles IV of Spain was then placed), so that if that person then fabricated a "translation" of an alleged but unseen seventeenth-century text, wrote something like "I arrived in Caracas in May 1674 and went straight to the zócalo," and claimed in his "critical apparatus" that the word zócalo appears in the Spanish "original manuscript" and means 'main square', we would
We will now see how Selbourne attempted to parry the Wassersteins' criticism. Naturally, he did not try to disprove anything in Lévy's article, of which he was not even aware (though that goal is presumably now on his long agenda). Rather, he had recourse to one of his frequent stratagems, namely, a brief counter-assertion without any supporting evidence:

"Such non-readings, part-readings and slovenly readings [by my critics (D.L.G.)] have not of course inhibited a kind of spurious certitude about uncertain historical matters -- including, in the Wassersteins' case, the antiquity and provenance of the Arabic word for "mellah", their presumptive killer-punch -- nor deterred the foreclosing of all possibility of new knowledge, such as is provided by Jacob's text, on the past" (Selbourne 1997d).

A dissection:

A. If you decide that a matter is "uncertain," it is easy to brand someone possessing sure knowledge about it as exhibiting "a kind of spurious certitude" (give a dog a bad name and hang him). The fact of the matter is, however, that the Wassersteins are right (save the five minor details articulated above, two of which do not weaken their case against Selbourne and three of which actually strengthen it).

B. Selbourne's choice of the marked word *antiquity* instead of the unmarked one, *age*, seemed to be a ploy to make *mellah* 'Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area in Morocco]' appear older than it actually is, as if it stretched back into hoary antiquity (we are presumably supposed to be reminded here of Greek or Roman antiquity). See below on another marked word, *ancient*, which he chose for the same purpose. Selbourne's attempt to narrow the temporal gap between the time of the alleged "Jacob"'s alleged trip and the emergence of Moroccan Arabic *mellah* in the sense indicated will not work: as long as we have only the early attestations which Lévy gathered, our dating of that usage will stand. Notice that, as always in his brief retorts, Selbourne did not quote any specific, reliable sources, whether from the primary or the secondary literature; instead, he spoke ex cathedra ignorantiae and expected us to take him at his word. We would rather see him try to refute the Scourges of Jacob by substantiating each of his claims with detailed arguments and abundant examples in a manner acceptable in the highest relevant research circles.

C. We cannot take an unseen piece of writing of unproven and doubtful existence as a source of "new knowledge." Only factual writings known to exist may be sources of new knowledge. Even if the author were known, we would take nothing on faith: an alleged but unseen manuscript of an allegedly "recently discovered" Sherlock Holmes story by Conan Doyle does not give us "new knowledge" about Victorian England; even an easily examined, authenticated Sherlock Holmes story in Conan Doyle's hand is nothing more than fiction; even one free of even the slightest anachronism or other anomaly; even one mentioning real people, real places, and real events (say, Queen Victoria, the Thames, and the Crimean War). See note 35 and the comment on Quotation J in section 20.

In the same vein, Selbourne, who again appeared to see reality as a reflection of his fiction, had
this to say about his critics: "But I did not expect that mere opinion and supposition would be presented [by my critics (D.L.G.)] as counter-facts, nor the false assumption made that what today's academics do not know - or did not know until they read the Ancona manuscript - could not be knowledge" (Selbourne 1997c). We welcome new knowledge, which can come only from reliable nonfictional sources known to exist. Selbourne's book is not reliable and it gives abundant evidence of being fiction (originally written in English). Again, see note 35.

D. Selbourne thus put the cart before the horse. First prove to us that the alleged "Ancona manuscript" exists; then authenticate it in every way possible; then show that it is factual. Only then will we be ready to talk about any possible "new knowledge." Until that time, we deem the alleged manuscript not to exist.

E. In sum, we agree about "non-readings, part-readings and slovenly readings" and about "spurious certitude," but not about who the readers are or who is spuriously certain: not the Scourges of Jacob (except in the few instances in which they have been wrong [see the end of section 3, including note 13]) but Selbourne and his tiny group of cheerleaders, including the commercial publishers.

* *

Trying to defend Selbourne, Melanie Phillips, whose credentials and achievements in the relevant disciplines are unfindable (see note 35 and below), followed in his footsteps by putting more ammunition into the hands of his critics (how amusing that every time Selbourne and his few supporters attempted a defense, they sank deeper into absurdity): she wrote that "nor is the use of the word 'mellah' such a smoking gun. Dr Tudor Parfitt, lecturer in Hebrew and Jewish studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, says it probably derives from 'mahalla', a word used in many Arab countries for Jewish quarter, though the Wassersteins dispute this" (Phillips 1998).

Instead of trying to find out who is right about mell_h (they still had no clue even about something as simple as the correct romanization of the word), Phillips gave Selbourne the last word and left the matter hanging. We will do neither.

Notice Selbourne's change of strategy. At first we were dealing with the Moroccan Arabic word mell_h. Then, seeing that the critics had driven him into a corner, Selbourne found out that Arabic also has the word maballab (sic recte) 'district, neighborhood, quarter, section [of an urban area]' (sic recte); he was presumably told that it is pan-Arabic (which it indeed is); and he decided that with that word (rather than with mell_h besides mell_h), he would again try to fight his way out of his corner.

The stratagem will not work, for Moroccan Arabic mell_h 'Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area in Morocco]' and pan-Arabic maballab 'district, neighborhood, quarter, section [of an urban area]' are different words. To boot, they are etymologically unrelated to each other and maballab has no more of a Jewish connection than English district, neighborhood, quarter, or section does. No Arabists worth their salt will dispute those facts. Even Arabic-speakers without any training in linguistics know they are different words (just as the linguistically untrained Selbourne and Parfitt knew, say, that English malt and melt, red and rid, sack and sick, and so on are different words).
Arabic *mahallah* 'district, neighborhood, quarter, section [of an urban area]' is the etymon of Persian *mæhællé* 'idem', which at least by the late nineteenth century had acquired the additional meaning, in both Jewish and non-Jewish Persian, of 'Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area]'. Consequently, that Persian word is not related to Moroccan Arabic *mell_h* either.

The Arabicless and Persianless troika of Selbourne, Parfitt, and Phillips cannot get around the fact that "mellah" arose in the nineteenth century as the English and the French lay romanization of the Moroccan Arabic word *mell_h*.

The troika cannot get around the fact that the Moroccan Arabic word, if it at all existed in the 1280s or even the 1290s, did not come to mean 'Jewish quarter' until much later.

The troika was merely trading either on the slight visual or the slight aural similarity between (A) Moroccan Arabic *mell_h* and (B) Arabic *mahallah* and Persian *mæhællé* -- as slight to anyone knowledgeable about Arabic and Persian as the similarity between, say, English *party* and *porter* would appear to anyone knowledgeable about English -- and trying to pull the wool over our eyes.

Whereas the Scourges of Jacob rely on a relevant, reliable source in this matter (Lévy 1992), which is, to boot, the most detailed treatment of the Moroccan Arabic word that we have so far, members of the troika, speaking, as they always did in this affaire, not just contra mundum but also ex cathedra ignorantiae, only asserted, never giving us any meaty, step-by-step argument that would stand up in the highest relevant research circles.

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The Arabicless and Persianless Selbourne returned to the Moroccan Arabic word, still as deliberately clueless as ever, still incapable even of doing something as simple as romanizing the word correctly. Here they are again, pontificating ex cathedra ignorantiae in their *second attempt* to avoid recognizing the obvious:

"Then there was the supposedly decisive 'smoking gun' in Jacob of Ancona's text: his use of the Arabic word *mellab* for the Jewish quarter of Cormosa (Hormuz, or Bandar Abbas) in the Persian Gulf. This word, it was declared, was first used in 1438, 'when a specific area of salt marsh in the city of Fez [in Morocco] was set aside for use as a Jewish quarter'. For *mellab*, it was implied, has an exclusive association with the Arabic word for 'salt', and Jacob's use of it was a crashing anachronism.

"There are no salt marshes in Fez. Moreover, the word *mellab*, employed by Jacob some 140 years before our critics would allow it, is more likely to derive not from the word for 'salt' but to be a variant of *maballa*, or 'encampment', a common and ancient term in Arab lands for 'Jewish quarter', with the associated meaning of 'place of refuge'. Moreover, as Dr Tudor Parfitt of London University School of Oriental and African Studies has informed me, the word was in use with this meaning at the time of Jacob's journey in Iraq and in Persia; that is, precisely where it occurs in his account" (Selbourne 2000:445-446).

A dissection:
A. Since, as noted above, Hormuz and Bandar-e `Abb_s are different places, the question is which one the alleged "Jacob" allegedly visited. Since Cormosa (a real Italian place name? one made up by the real "Jacob"?) is almost identical with Hormuz and does not resemble Bandar-e `Abb_s at all, it must refer to Hormuz. Consequently, the alleged "Jacob" visited Hormuz. However, we have no evidence for any Jews in Hormuz until the sixteenth century.

To sum up so far, the fictitious "Jacob," we are asked to believe, visited a presumably fictitious Jewish community in Persia in the 1270s, where he learned an allegedly local word which is actually Jewish Moroccan Arabic and non-Jewish Moroccan Arabic only and, to boot, the word was not to come into existence until after 1667 (in Morocco...) -- and to that quarter came, in secret, a "sultan" -- when Persia at that time had no sultans -- to visit a probably fictitious Jew, "Asher." Non è né vero né ben trovato. See note 39 on Selbourne's knack for packing many blunders into small spaces.

Section 19 quotes Selbourne as having said, "I cannot follow Professor Barrett far down the foxhole into which he has currently retreated." No, Barrett did not retreat into a foxhole. It is Selbourne and his tiny band of followers who plunged headlong into Fantasyland -- and they are still there, alone, unaware of where they are.

B. Having been trained in the law and admitted to the bar, Selbourne knew that one must tell not only the truth but also the whole truth. The sentence "There are no salt marshes in Fez" may have been the truth in 2000 or whenever he made that claim (whether he was right is not important), but even if it was, in the present context it is a half-truth, not the whole truth. Apparently, Selbourne cherished the hope that we would not notice the present tense of the verb; that we would let his remark pass (as the naive, superficial, undemanding, all-accepting, and unqualified Melanie Phillips did when trying to defend him); and that we would not call him to book. If so, he was naive.

The other half of the truth -- the important half because it is the only pertinent half -- concerns the past, the only relevant epoch. Thus, to prove his point, Selbourne would have to show that when the Moroccan Arabic word arose, Fez had no salt marshes. He would fail, as he will realize when reading this passage from the pen of an informed person, who, unlike himself, knows the city at first hand and has looked into the historical record:


Thus, no salt marshes, but "salines situées à six milles de la ville: ces mines occupent un terrain de dix huit milles," that is, "salt mines located six miles from the city; these mines cover an eighteen-mile area" (where the quoted material is based on an early-fourteenth-century Moroccan source). The mining, preparation, and marketing of salt must therefore have been a major industry of Fez. Lévy supposes that the Jewish quarter of the city which later came to be known as the am-mell_h 'the mell_h'
was at least at first situated near a place where salt dealers stored their merchandise.

C. In connection with the double-talking Selbourne's attempt to squirm out of a bind by referring to the present when only the past is relevant, here are just a few of the unreckonable number of examples that could be cited from languages around the world of how the present-day names of places may refer to features of the physical or human landscape that no longer exist (for good measure, a few names that are not place names and some other usages are thrown in):

Aftenposten, an Oslo newspaper, at first appeared in the evening (the name means 'Evening Post') and is still so called although for many years it has appeared in both morning and evening editions. See Corriere della Sera.

Billingsgate. This London, England, place name continues to be used, even long after the gate in the city wall which it commemorates disappeared.

Bosque Redondo. By no later than 1864, the area south of Santa Fe, New Mexico Territory, called Bosque Redondo (Spanish for 'Round Forest') had become an arid and alkaline, yet at least until that year the name was still used.

Case Western Reserve University is named for the Western Reserve, which ceased to exist in 1800.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The chapel for which the city is named no longer exists.

Charterhouse. In 1671 or shortly thereafter, a school so called was established in London, England, on the site of a charterhouse that had been dissolved in 1535. The name of the school was thus a misnomer from the very beginning. In 1872, the school was removed to Godalming, Surrey, where it still operates under the same name, so that since that year the name has been even more of a misnomer.

Chemical Bank, the name of a bank chartered in New York City in 1824 as a division of the New York Chemical Manufacturing Company (and thus apposite at the time) is still used even though in 1844 the company disposed of its chemical business.

College Park, Georgia. Cox College, for which the city is named, no longer exists.

Coney Island, Brooklyn, New York. The stretch of land so called was an island until 1929, when landfill made it a peninsula. See Isle of Dogs, Randalls Island, and Wards Island.

Corriere della Sera, a Milan newspaper, at first appeared in the evening (the name means 'Evening Courier') and is still so called although for most of its existence it has been a morning newspaper. See Aftenposten.

Covent Garden, London, England. The convent (covent is an older, now otherwise obsolete, form of English convent) at this place disappeared long ago, as did its garden.

Düsseldorf, Germany. The second component of the name comes from German Dorf 'village', though the place has long been a city. See Satu Mare.
Encyclopædia Britannica (now The New Encyclopædia Britannica). Since 1901 an American company has produced the encyclopedia so called, but its name has not been changed to *Encyclopædia Americana or *The New Encyclopædia Americana.

Fort Worth, Texas. The city grew out of the military outpost ("fort" was a misnomer from the very start) which Major Ripley Arnold had established in 1849 to fight the Comanches. The outpost no longer exists.

Governors Island, New York City. The summer home of the British governors of New York was located on the island until the American Revolution. No governor has lived on it since the end of British rule.

Herald Square. The square so called, in New York City, was so named in 1895 for The Herald, a newspaper which had its headquarters on its northern edge. The newspaper has been defunct for several decades, but the name of the square endures.

Kyoto, the Japanese name of the city in Japan usually called Kyoto in English, comes from Japanese kyo_to 'capital city', the place being so called because the imperial family lived there from 794 to 1868 and thus it was considered the capital of the country (though between 1192 and 1338 the shogunate was located elsewhere). Ever since 1868 the name has been a misnomer but it has not been replaced.

Le Château, French for 'The Castle', is the name of a hill in Nice, France, so called because of the castle built atop it. The castle was destroyed in 1706 and never rebuilt, but the name of the hill has not changed.

L'École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, France. The school still called 'The Special Military School of Saint-Cyr' has not been located in Saint-Cyr since World War Two.

Le Quartier Latin, Paris. The neighborhood in which the Sorbonne is located was named 'The Latin Quarter' in French because until the French Revolution its students and teachers spoke Latin to one another. The area is still so called.

Les Tuileries, Paris. The palace so called, which Catherine de Medici began in 1564, stood on the site of a former tileworks (French les tuileries 'the tileworks'). In 1871 fire destroyed the palace and in its place a garden was laid out, called to this day le Jardin des Tuileries. Memory of the tileworks thus lives on in the names of a now non-existence palace and an existing garden having nothing to do with tiles.

Low Memorial Library. In 1893 Columbia University built a new library, which it named Low Memorial Library, but librarians soon began complaining that it was poorly suited for the purpose and not long afterward a new building was therefore erected. However, the building erected in 1893, which has not been a library at least since 1934, is still officially called Low Memorial Library (informally shortened to Low Library), that name still appearing on its façade and in the addresses of offices located therein. Since 1934, the library of Columbia University has been called Butler Library and it has been housed in South Hall, a different building. Yet the caption of a photograph of the façade of Low Memorial Library in Metro (New York) of 16-18 September 2005 reads "Many MBA graduate
students at Columbia University are familiar with the campus library" and all imprints of *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language: Second Edition: Unabridged* (first published in 1934 and reprinted at least through 1957) have an illustration (between pages 92 and 93) of the "Library of Columbia University," which is actually of Low Memorial Library.

**Newcastle**, England. The city is named for a castle finished in 1172, thus one that is hardly new today. See the next entry.

**Nowy Port**. Today, the older port area in Gda\_sk is called *Nowy Port* 'the New Port' (the newer port area being called *Port Po\_nocny* 'the Northern Port'). See the previous entry.

**Randalls Island** and **Wards Island**, Manhattan, New York. In the twentieth century, most of the narrow waterway running east to west between the two islands was filled in, so that for years there has been just one island, but the two names are still used, the first one for the northern part of the unified island and the second one for the southern part (the unified island is nameless). See *Coney Island* and *Isle of Dogs*.

**Sandhurst**. At some time between 1947 and 1992 the Royal Military Academy was moved from Sandhurst to Aldershot, but people still associate the school with Sandhurst ("The captain is a graduate of Sandhurst"), not Aldershot ("The captain is a graduate of Aldershot").

**Satu Mare**, Rumania. The first component of the name comes from Rumanian *sat* 'village', though the place has long been a city. See *Düsseldorf*.

**Scotland Yard** as the name of the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police of London, England, is doubly anachronistic inasmuch as the rationale for both *Scotland* and *Yard* has disappeared. Here are two complementary accounts.

"During his boyhood months in the Blacking Factory at Hungerford Stairs Scotland Yard was the name of a wharf where coal from barges was taken ashore" (Brown 1963:115). "Soon the nearness to Whitehall and the offices of Government made the area too valuable to be left as a village. The Commissioners of Police came in and began to create the Scotland Yard of today, and the arrival of the developing Civil Service made the place truly urban and, for Dickens, dismally genteele. The new kind of Charing Cross was growing up but the old name lingered. The Scotland part of it was based on the previous existence of a palace which was used in the Middle Ages by the Kings of Scotland if they came to London to negotiate or pay fealty. The Yard was the docking-place of the coal barges. Now everybody has head of Scotland Yard and few know the cause of its title or its condition, squalid perhaps but lively, when Dickens went to the hated labours of his boyhood" (idem, p. 116).

"The [...] head-quarters [were] situated from 1829 to 1890 in Great Scotland Yard, a short street off Whitehall [...]; from then until 1967 in New Scotland Yard, on the Thames Embankment; and from 1967 in New Scotland Yard Broadway, Westminster [...]' (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

The anachronism is thus even more pronounced, for New Scotland Yard and New Scotland Yard Broadway (the latter actually being "the new New Scotland Yard") have at no time had anything to do with Scotland or a yard.
Seneca Falls, New York. The waterfall for which the village is named disappeared in 1892, when the Cayuga-Seneca Canal was built, but the name lives on.

Stilton cheese. In our day the cheese is made in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, and Nottinghamshire, but not Stilton.

Sydney Mines. The last mine in Nova Scotia town so called was closed in 1975 and the last time it had at least two working mines (which would justify the plural form) was some years before, but the town is still so called.

The Battery, New York City. The battery of cannon here was removed long ago.

The Cherry Lane Theater, Manhattan, New York, has for some time been located at 38 Commerce Street.

The Cinque Ports (compare Anglo-French cinque ports 'five ports') was originally the name of a confederation of five Channel ports in England (Dover, Hastings, Hyghe, New Romney, and Sandwich). Rye and Winchester were later added to their number and still later more than thirty other towns were added, among them Deal, Faversham, Folkestone, Lydd, Margate, Ramsgate, and Tenterden, but that name was never changed.

The Curb. The American Stock Exchange, which originated around 1849, was originally known as The Curb because at first its transactions took place on the street. No later than 1908 its name was changed to The New York Curb Agency. In 1921 it moved indoors. In 1929 its name was changed to The New York Curb Exchange. In 1953 its name was changed to The American Stock Exchange. Thus, from 1921 to 1953 its name reflected a no longer current reality.

The Drury Lane Theatre, London, England. Years ago the theater moved from Drury Lane to Catherine Street, where it is still located.

The Elgin Watch Company. The company was founded in Elgin, Illinois, and though it moved away in 1970, it is still so called.

The Isle of Dogs. At least in recent times, the place so called in London, England, has been a peninsula. See Coney Island, Randall's Island, and Wards Island.

The Isle of Ely. When the fens around the Isle of Ely were drained, the island became a hill on dry land, yet the hill is still so called.

The Jefferson Market Library, Manhattan, New York. Jefferson Market, for which the library is named, disappeared long ago.

The Stadium View. The apartment house erected in 1909 at 445 Riverside Drive, Manhattan, New York, was so named because it is near the site on which Columbia University had since 1906 been planning to erect a stadium. The stadium never went up, but the apartment house is still so called.

Ulmer Park, Brooklyn, New York. The amusement park so named closed in 1899 but
that is still the name of a nearby bus depot and a nearby branch of the Brooklyn Public Library. No park of any kind in the vicinity is so named.

**Unter den Linden**, Berlin. The linden trees which once graced the central promenade of the street so called are long gone.

**Var**, a department of France set up in 1790, was named for the Var River, which at the time ran through it. After Grasse and the surrounding area were detached from the department and transferred to the newly created Department of the Maritime Alps, in 1860, no part of the river remained in the Department of Var, but *Var* is still the name of the department.

**Wall Street**, Manhattan, New York. The wall, made of logs stacked twelve feet high, to protect New Amsterdam from incursions by the British disappeared long ago.

It has been decades since telephones have had hooks, yet we still speak in English of *leaving the telephone off*, *taking the telephone off the hook*, and its *being off the hook*, in French of *décrocher le téléphone* and *raccrocher le téléphone*, in Spanish of *descolar el teléfono* and *colgar el teléfono*, and so on and so forth. Most if not all of the liquors called *cordials* in English do not invigorate the heart or stimulate circulation, yet the word, which goes back to the Latin for 'heart', is still used.

In sum, the vocabularies of the world's languages are full of relics of the past.45

**D.** As for Selbourne's claim that *mell_b* is "more likely to derive not from the word for 'salt' [...]" he was again proudly displaying his ignorance. Just as any competent student of English will tell you, correctly, that English *sing* and English *song* are related, any competent student of Moroccan Arabic (nay, even lay speakers of Moroccan Arabic) will tell you that *mell_b* and *m_llh* are related: they derive from the same triconsonantal root <mlh>.

As even lay speakers of Arabic know (to say nothing of Arabic linguists), Arabic *maballab* comes from the Arabic root <hll> 'settle' (the literal meaning of the noun is thus 'settlement'), /m/ being the Arabic preformative used to coin nouns designating places where the action indicated by the root takes place. That derivation is as transparent to speakers of Arabic, including Arabic linguists, as the derivation of English *neighborhood* from English *neighbor* or of English *settlement* from English *settle* is to speakers of English, including English linguists.

The Arabic roots <mlh> and <hll> are unrelated to each other (Selbourne and Parfitt should not fail to observe that they share only two of their three phonemes).

Selbourne's adamant denial of the obvious (namely that what he spelled as "mellah" has nothing to do with what he spelled as "mahalla") tells us only that he knows he's cornered, he knows he has no way out of the bind, he knows that the jig is up.

**E.** As for Selbourne's claim that *maballab* is "a word used in many Arab countries for Jewish quarter" (the version of 1998) and "a common and ancient term in Arab lands for 'Jewish quarter', with the associated meaning of 'place of refuge'" (the version of 2000), let us have the list of Arab countries or Arab lands, the evidence that *maballab* there means *'Jewish quarter', the evidence that the usage is
"ancient" (see above on his choice of a similarly marked word, antiquity), and the evidence for all his other ignorance-based claims.

F. As for the Arabicless Parfitt, "lecturer in Hebrew and Jewish studies," notice that he merely "has informed" Selbourne. Again, therefore, no evidence was presented, whether from reliable native speakers of the varieties of Arabic in question, reliable primary sources in Arabic, or reliable secondary sources like K Lévy's article.

G. Notice too the ambiguity of the phrase "this word": is that word mell_h or is it mahallah? Or maybe Selbourne decided not to be specific so that he would have double the chance of being right: if it turned out that mell_h was "in use with this meaning at the time of Jacob's journey in Iraq and in Persia," he could say he had had that word in mind, and if it turned out that mahallah was the word in use, he could say it was that one.

Presumably, "this meaning" is 'Jewish quarter', but, again, we do not know and maybe Selbourne was deliberately vague.

As for the "probable" etymology that "mellah" comes from "mahalla," no competent student of Arabic would agree with Selbourne. Not out of inadvertence does Lévy not mention mahallah in his treatment of mell_h: since one word has nothing to do with other, it would not occur to any Arabist dealing with the origin of the latter word to mention the other any more than an English etymologist writing on the origin of, say, milk would think of mentioning make, meek, or muck.46

* 

Also in 2000, the French version of Selbourne's book appeared. Here, he returned twice to the word (these, then, were his third and fourth attempts to squirm out of a corner), still unable to do something as simples as romanizing the Arabic word correctly.

As for Selbourne's third try, he delivered himself of this most precise of statements: "à en croire d'autres spécialistes qui m'inspirent davantage de respect, le mot était utilisé dans le monde arabe dès le XIIe siècle" (p. 556). Selbourne seemed to be a reincarnation of the "judges" of the Star Chamber: as his wont was, he did not name the so-called "spécialistes" (because they did not exist?), we were not told in what they were "spécialistes," and we were not given any evidence, not even weak circumstantial evidence, for the alleged thirteenth-century use of "mellah" in the sense of 'Jewish quarter [...] in "the Arab world" ("le monde arabe"). Apparently, if Selbourne was capable of thinking that Persia had sultans when it was under Mongol rule (an equivalent would be, say, speaking of "the King of the United States of America in 1793"), we should not be surprized that he thought it was chiefly an Arab country and that its chief language was Arabic. And, as always, we had to take everything on faith -- to boot, from someone who, at least in this enterprize of his, made us only arch away in disgust from everything he scribbled.

It was a foregone conclusion that the unnamed "spécialistes" would inspire more respect in Selbourne ("m'inspirent davantage de respect") than any serious students of Arabic (had Selbourne not been scared to death to ask any), for he paid knee-jerk "respect" to anyone who told him what he
wanted to hear about his book, even, it would seem, unnamed, unseen, unheard, and thus presumably imaginary entities.

As for Selbourne's fourth attempt, the French version of his book also contained what purported to be a French translation of Phillips 1998. Whether through inadvertence or for some other reason (Selbourne's enterprize was studded with so many mysteries that it could have provided the American television program "Unsolved Mysteries" with material for decades), Phillips 1998 is in this "translation" dated 11, not 18, October 1998 (p. 587). More important, it is not a translation of Phillips 1998 but -- though neither Selbourne nor the "translator" told us -- a translation of a considerably revised and considerably expanded version of Phillips 1998, which the recognition-starved Selbourne triumphantly paraded as "an investigation conducted for London's Sunday Times" (see note 35).

Selbourne's fourth attempt not to recognize the truth about the word "mellah" reads as follows: "Mais la critique la plus accablante du travail de Selbourne est peut-être celle de Bernard et David Wasserstein, selon qui le mot mellah, employé par Jacob pour désigner le quartier juif de Bandar Abbas, n'a jamais été utilisé en ce sens avant 1438. À les en croire, c'est la « preuve décisive » du faux, parce que le mot vient du ghetto construit au xve siècle sur les anciens marais salants de Fez -- mellah ayant pour racine un mot arabe désignant le sel.

"À quoi le Dr Tudor Parfitt, qui enseigne l'hébreu et les études juives à la School of Oriental and African Studies de Londres, répond qu'on voit mal comment cette explication serait recevable, puisqu'il n'y a pas de marais salants à Fez, région verdoyante et arrosée. De surcroît, l'étymologie du mot est loin de faire l'unanimité: on en est réduit à des spéculations. En conséquence, la « preuve décisive » des Wasserstein n'a pas valeur de pièce à conviction. Et Parfitt d'ajouter: « Tout cela sent son étiologie populaire. Le mot en question dérive plus probablement de maballa, employé dans maints pays arabes pour désigner les quartiers juifs. La véritable explication est que mellah est tout simplement une métathèse [une forme transposée] de ce mot bien plus courant et employé ailleurs au Moyen Orient. »

"Pour des raisons tant géographiques que chronologiques et linguistiques, les Wasserstein rejetten cette théorie. Les deux éditions de l'Encyclopaedia of Islam, qui fait autorité, témoignent de la controverse à ce sujet. Une édition donne raison à Parfitt et précise que maballa désigne le « quartier d'une ville avant de citer un éminent savant arabe du nom de Dozy, qui voit même dans mellah, le nom donné aux quartiers juifs dans les villes d'Afrique du Nord, une métathèse de maballa. Et sous la rubrique maballa, on peut lire: « Les quartiers juifs sont appelé maballa en Perse. Les Wasserstein objectent que ni Dozy ni personne n'a produit de preuves satisfaisantes à l'appui de cette suggestion, formulée il y a un siècle. Ils font aussi observer que la toute dernière édition de l'encyclopédie rejette toutes les autres théories pour ne retenir que l'explication liée à Fez. Mais la conclusion la plus honnête est assurément que la question de l'étymologie de mellah est loin d'être réglée et continue d'opposer les spécialistes. Dès lors, comment y voir la preuve décisive d'une imposture ?

"En outre, Parfitt affirme que La Cite de Lumière apporte des éléments nouveaux et convaincants sur les habitants de l'île de Carnoran, au large des côtes de l'Arabie Saoudite et du Yémen. Comme rien n'a jamais été écrit sur eux, l'accusation suivant laquelle on serait en présence d'une habile compilation de matériaux connus devient moins vraisemblable. « Il est inhabituel et difficile de savoir qu'il y avait là-bas une communauté de ce genre, assure-t-il. Il faudrait être un bon connaisseur de

A dissection:

A. As usual, Selbourne and company were incapable of even something as simple as a correct romanization of the two Arabic words in question.

B. It now becomes clear that lecturer in Hebrew and Jewish studies Parfitt was the source of Selbourne's atemporalism, "There are no salt marshes in Fez" (= "il n’y a pas de marais salants à Fez, région verdoyante et arrosée"). How would you react if two people tried to refute the statement that before 1681 dodos were alive on Mauritius by saying that the island had none today?

C. The claim that the etymology of mell_h is still speculative ("De surcroît, l'étymologie du mot est loin de faire l'unanimité: on en est réduit à des spéculations") was Selbourne's (and Parfitt's?) self-serving assertion aimed at preventing us from closing the books on the impossibility that the word comes from mahallah.

Selbourne desperately needed to show that that impossibility was the correct etymology or, at least, a possibility because otherwise, as he presumably knew, his enterprise would collapse (how could the thirteenth-century "Jacob" use a Moroccan Arabic word that arose long after his death?), but he need not have worried, for even if he had succeeded in showing that that smoking cannon was no smoking cannon and not even a smoking gun, the Scourges of Jacob would still have had more than enough ammunition.

The fact remains that, aside from Dozy (who was a historian, not a linguist), nobody has ever doubted that Moroccan Arabic mell_h goes back to the Arabic for 'salt', the only disagreement being over etiology, that is, disagreement over how salt entered the picture. Lévy 1992 (of which those two Arabicless Arabic "etymologists" were still unaware) offered the best etiology (see above on how the word "presumably first designated an area near the gates of Fez where salt merchants stored their salt"), whereupon all the less probable etiologies (see note 42) no longer merited consideration.

See note 157 on Selbourne’s attempt to open or reopen debate on settled questions and on matters that were never questions at all ("Most of what scholars are saying is trivial and pettifogging, claiming as certitudes things that are of grave doubt") because he has no other way of getting out of a bind and he will not admit defeat.

D. It was easy for lecturer in Hebrew and Jewish studies Parfitt, who, like Selbourne, appeared to be untrained not only in Arabic and Persian but also in linguistics, to dismiss the generally accepted etymology of mell_h as a "folk etymology" ("Tout cela sent son étymologie populaire"), but it is in fact Parfitt and Selbourne’s attempt to link mell_h to mahallah that has not a leg to stand on.

E. Again we hear the claim that "mahalla" (sic) is used in many Arab countries to designate Jewish neighborhoods (the singular should be used), but, as usual, no evidence was supplied. Apparently, of the millions of Arabic-speakers, Parfitt or Selbourne not find even one to back them up.
F. And now a new (actually, an old) twist: "mellah" is, they alleged, a metathesis of "mahalla." Let them take that notion to Lévy or any other serious Arabist and they will be laughed out of court. Even if we supposed, for the sake of argument, a metathesis, the metathetic form would be limited to Moroccan Arabic of relatively recent times (*"Arabic mahallāb 'district, neighborhood, quarter, section [of an urban area]' > Moroccan Arabic mell_h 'Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area]'"), so that Parfitt and Selbourne would still be no closer in space or in time to Persia of the 1270s.

G. Incapable of marshaling evidence having any substance, Selbourne and his commercial publishers resorted to the stock in trade of blurblists and, well, commercial publishers: hyperbolic small-townisms like "fait autorité," "éminent," and "savant" (see note 70).

H. It would be interesting to compare treatments of Moroccan Arabic mell_h in all editions of Encyclopédie de l'Islam and its English version, Encyclopaedia of Islam, that list the word (here's a partial bibliography for the French version: (1) Leiden and Paris, 1913, 4 volumes + 1 supplementary volume; (2) new edition, 1975-1985, from A to MAHI; (3) Paris, Klinsieck, 1936, at least 4 volumes; (4) new edition of the 1913 edition, 1975-1985, from A to MAHI), but the only purpose of that exercise should be to see to what extent the encyclopedia has kept up with the latest research and guides the reader to it. If post-1992 editions do not give Lévy's etymology and refer to his article, they are not up to date.

I. Although it is true that an earlier edition of a work is on occasion more reliable than a later one, that is not the case here, where the second edition of that encyclopedia is more reliable than the first one with regard to mell_h. Parfitt and Selbourne's reliance on the first edition reminds us of the hordes of amateurs, dilettantes, and other self-styled "experts" who dig up long-refuted information buried in old publications and parade it around as if today's knowledgeable people still held to it. In addition to subsection E of section 6 on the life which Gesenius's stillborn suggestion about Hebrew erets sinim goes on living in lay circles, xxxxxx see, for example, Gold 1990a:117 and 1995:375 on the attempted resurrection, in 1989, of Noah Webster's long-ago refuted derivation of English lad from Hebrew yeled 'young boy' (and Bivens 1982 on Webster's etymological naiveness in general) and the next paragraph on Parfitt and Selbourne's dredging up Dozy's wild guess from the oblivion it has merited ever since it saw the light of day (way back in 1869).

J. As for the "éminent savant arabe du nom de Dozy" (Selbourne liked to use small-townisms such as "éminent" and "savant" when it suited him, whereas those truly expert in the matters at hand, namely his critics, were mere "peashooters" in his view), Reinhart Peter Anne Dozy (1820-1883) was a Dutch historian of the Arab world, who, though still respected as a pioneer in several fields, has for decades not been considered authoritative (even his best-remembered work, Histoire des musulmans d'Espagne, jusqu'à la conquête de l'Andalousie par les Almoravides, 711-1100, is no longer the standard treatment of the subject) and he has never been considered knowledgeable in any branch of Jewish studies, not even in his day, when standards were lower than they are now.

Indeed, the fact that Parfitt and Selbourne went so far as to dig out and try to resurrect an etymology offered way back in 1869 by someone who even then, when standards were lower than they are today, was not authoritative in Arabic etymology (Dozy was a historian) tells us that they failed to find any Arabic etymologist considered reputable by present-day standards or any reliable written source of any date to back them up. As we have seen or will see in the present essay, the scene
repeats itself: Selbourne, making frantic efforts to refloat his sunken tub bound for "Sinim," clutched to whatever straws he could grab onto -- here, with an etymology, rejected long ago, in a dictionary published way back in 1869; in section 6, with a suggestion, rejected long ago, in a dictionary published way back in the 1810s; and in section 19 (see especially note 113), with a misromanization, pointed out long ago, in a book published way back in 1843. Far be it from me to disdain a publication because it is old, my point being that many moons have passed since then, research has not stood still, and, with regard to the matters in question, those investigators of yesteryear were wrong. What would you say if in our day nonchemists posing as chemists approvingly cited, say, Georg Ernst Stahl (1660-1734) on phlogiston?

K. In suggesting a metathesis, Dozy was trying to etymologize Moroccan Arabic mell_h (which he mistakenly thought was found throughout North Africa), it being only as an aside that he noted that "Les quartiers juifs sont appelés maballa en Perse" (the correct romanization of the Persian word is mahallé). He did not link his suggestion and his aside (as any careful reader of the entry will see), that is, he did not say that the "metathesized" form (which, as we know, is not really metathesized) is found in Persia (had he linked the two, he would have been wrong to do so).

Consequently, even had Dozy been right that Moroccan Arabic mell_h derives from Arabic mah allah (by metathesis), nothing he wrote could be used as evidence that "mellah" has ever been used in Persia. Either failing to read Dozy carefully or reading him carefully but deciding to ignore a plain reading of his remarks because they did not tell them what they wanted to hear, Parfitt and Selbourne went ahead and committed a double blunder: they wrongly took Dozy's long-ago rejected etymology of the Moroccan Arabic word as right and they wrongly took his entry as evidence for the presence of the word mell_h in Persia. Their attempt at legerdemain having failed, that Arabicless pair once again fell flat on their faces.

L. Unable to bring themselves to admitting four defeats, the Arabicless and Persianless Parfitt and Selbourne wanted to reopen a closed case ("Mais la conclusion la plus honnête [...] "). In their world of fantasy they could do what they wished. In the world of reality they were alone. I challenge them to read Lévy 1992 (as refined earlier in this section), write a critique, and try to publish it -- not in any Mickey Mouse publication but in a high-level journal devoted to Arabic linguistics. They would get as far as Selbourne did when he allegedly took his alleged "translation" to Mondadori.

M. As for the paragraph beginning "En outre," you will believe me -- will you not? -- when I say that I have just finished translating a manuscript, which I cannot let anyone see, that documents the presence of a large Jewish community on the Isle of Wight in the thirteenth century. Since nothing else has ever been written about that community, the accusation leveled against me that I have skilfully patched together material about other Jewish communities taken from other sources is not likely to be valid.

How's that for a logical argument?

N. Thus, the proper conclusions to draw after writing "Comme rien n'a jamais été écrit sur eux," "Il est inhabituel et difficile de savoir," and "les sources manquent" are:

(i) If a reliable source confirms something in Selbourne's enterprize, we do not need him to tell
us about it (just as we do not need Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories to tell us, say, that London had a Baker Street in Victorian times).

(ii) If a reliable source does not confirm something in Selbourne's enterprise, it is either factual or fictional;

(ii.a) Sometimes we can tell that something unconfirmed is fictional because it is absurd (see, for example, section 17 on Jewish circumcision before the eighth day after birth).

(ii.b) Sometimes we do not know whether something unconfirmed is factual or fictional because it sounds plausible (in such cases we will not take Selbourne's book as evidence for it because both his tale and his story sound all made up). In that case, we withhold judgment.

All of which is to say that Selbourne's book is worthless for purposes of research, especially since he gave us abundant evidence of being an unreliable witness. "Evaluation is essential [in intelligence (D.L.G.)] because of the wide variety of sources, many of them of doubtful reliability. A standardized system is used. Source reliability may be rated A, B, C, etc., down a scale. Information accuracy may likewise be rated 1, 2, 3, etc., with 1 representing confirmed information and 3 denoting a 'possibly true' degree of accuracy. Thus the classification of a bit of information as C-3 could mean it came from a fairly reliable source and was possibly true" (Ransom 1991:722-723). Selbourne and his enterprise get the lowest marks possible on both counts.

See note 35.

* Ever the mumpsimus, Selbourne slogged relentlessly on (he must have recognized that "mellah" [sic] was a smoking gun), twisting himself into a pretzel trying to justify the appearance of that telltale word in the alleged "original manuscript."49

Again trying to repackage and remarket defeat as triumph, again speaking ex cathedra ignorantiae, Selbourne returned to the word a fifth time, still as deliberately clueless as ever:

"The Chinese themselves--and many of my correspondents, including Hebraists [...] have begun to challenge the judgments of Western medievalists and other 'experts' about the supposedly inaccurate details in Jacob's account, or in my 'novel' [...] the word mellah, used by Jacob for the Jewish quarter of a city in the Persian gulf, not known until '1438' and therefore 'anachronistic' (Bernard Wasserstein, formerly of Oxford)--wrong" (Selbourne 2001).

"Many of my correspondents, including Hebraists"? "Many"? "Hebraists"? Once again, affirmations without details. What were the names of those alleged "correspondents, including Hebraists"? What were their relevant credentials? What was their evidence? What was their argument? Why did they remain as anonymous, as silent, and as in the shadows as Selbourne's alleged "supporters" at the University of Oxford (see the first paragraph of note 147), as the alleged "present owner" of the alleged "original manuscript," and as the alleged "present owner"'s alleged "heirs" (see note 144)? Why did they not come forward on their own to defend Selbourne? If among those alleged "Hebraists" was "Dr" Parfitt, his drivel about "mellah" has already been dissected and discarded.
Unless those "Hebraists" were yet another figment of Selbourne's uberrimous imagination, let them come out into the bright sunshine and explain -- in Hebrew, of course -- why we are all wrong and Selbourne was all right.50

Come to think of it, why "Hebraists" if we are speaking of two Arabic and one Persian words? Let Selbourne find one competent Arabist or Persianist willing even to try to refute Lévy 1992 and to validate Selbourne's claims. Presumably, he did try to find an Arabist or a Persianist to back him up, was dismayed to see that none was willing, and thus had to make do with the Arabicless and Persianless Parfitt, unnamed (because non-existent?) "spécialistes," and "many of my correspondents, including Hebraists," all unnamed (because non-existent?).

*  

In summary, even with "Dr." Parfitt's misguided help, Selbourne could not even graze the ball, much less get to first base, to say nothing of hitting a home run (speaking of the "etymologists" of his day, Voltaire is supposed to have said that 'Etymology is the science where the consonants count for little and the vowels for nothing at all'). The more Selbourne and Parfitt opened their mouths, the more foolish they sounded. They would have been wise to heed Proverbs 17:28.51

We agree with Selbourne that a charge of spurious certitude must be leveled. The present essay levels it many times.
21. Selbourne tried to give “Jacob”’s tale a veneer of authenticity in another way too (likewise failing to achieve his goal), namely by “translating” it into archaizing English: “one labours through Selbourne’s mock-archaic English prose” (Jenner 1997:52); “a rebarbative, pseudo-archaic English that recalls the style of the spurious ‘Baron Corvo’ - but lacks his orotund archness and narrative dexterity” (Wasserstein and Wasserstein 1997:16). An example is the syntax in the sentence “The wretch Bekhor I thus summoned” (Selbourne 1997a:73), in which we find yet another anomaly, “Bekhor,” which occurs again on the same page: “our brother Bekhor.”

“Bekhor” can be nothing other than Hebrew bechor ‘eldest, first-born, senior; eldest son, first-born son’. Although Selbourne’s romanization of the word is acceptable, the alleged “Jacob”’s use of the word is not.

All puzzlement disappears when we turn the page and our eyes fall on the sentence “Isaac Bekhor had paid market taxes,” where reference is to the same person as on page 73, and from which we gather that the real “Jacob” must have found the collocation “Isaac Bekhor” in some authentic text and mistook it to consist of a given name and a family name, so that just as one can shorten, say, John Smith to Smith, he thought he could shorten Isaac Bekhor to “Bekhor.” However, the second half of Isaac Bekhor can be only a surname (in the sense in which anthroponymists use that word, not in the lay sense of ‘family name’), like the Great in Alexander the Great or Ivan the Terrible. Just as in English we do not shorten names like Alexander the Great and Ivan the Terrible to *the Great or *the Terrible, shortening of Isaac Bekhor to “Bekhor” is impossible and therefore a dead giveaway of inauthenticity. Since the imaginary “Jacob” as Selbourne presented him to us would have been far too Jewishly knowledgeable to commit that blunder whereas the real “Jacob,” who gave every indication of being Jewishly unknowledgeable, easily could have, we have no choice but to impute the mistake to the latter. As we will see by the end of the present essay, after all the evidence is presented, Selbourne gave every evidence of traveling with featherweight Jewish baggage, he being, I believe, as do other critics, the real “Jacob.”

22. A superstition motivates the shortening: certain Jews folk-etymologize the first syllable of marcheshvan as Hebrew mar ‘bitter’ and thus, so that the month be sweet rather than bitter, drop that syllable (etymologically, marcheshvan has nothing to do with the Hebrew for ‘bitter’). But the name of the month is of Babylonian origin and thus does not contain that Hebrew adjective.

23. He is better known to Jews acronymically: haradbaz.

Speaking of acronyms, we note that the alleged “Jacob” referred to Maimonides not by his acronym but by his full name, as here: “For idolaters [sic (D.L.G.)] are much given to such prophecy, as from the changing of the weather or the flight of birds, which reason cannot follow, and against which Rabbi Mose ben Maimon, whose memory be blessed, rightly counsels us, being unworthy of the wise man and a blasphemy for the pious” (Selbourne 2000:170).

Mose ben-maymon ‘Moses the son of Maymon’ is indeed Maimonides’s full Hebrew name (Mose is the Italian for ‘Moses’), but using it in anything but the most formal of texts (a record of his birth, a record of his circumcision, a family tree, an inscription on a tombstone, and, optionally, an entry in an encyclopedia) would sound as stilted as, say, “Did you see William Jefferson Clinton on TV last night?” instead of “Did you see Bill Clinton on TV last night?” Except as just noted, Jews the world over have in everyday speech and writing, as in a diary, journal, or account of a voyage, called Maimonides by his acronym: Hebrew barambam, Jewish English the Rambam, Judezmo arambam, Yiddish der rambam, and so on. Consequently, “Rabbi Mose ben Maimon” sounds stilted and inauthentic, though again I may be quibbling. Even if so, quibbles do add up to something (see note 157).

Some may see a contradiction between my expecting marcheshvan (they might ask: if the formal marcheshvan is expected, why is the formal rabbi mose ben-maymon unexpected?) and barambam (if the informal barambam is expected, why is the informal cheshvan unexpected?), but I do not: along the (in)formal continuum, marcheshvan ranges from the highly formal to the slightly formal whereas rabbi mose ben-maymon is highly formal only. Consequently, in a moderately formal text, like the alleged “original manuscripts,” marcheshvan and barambam are expected. But again, I may be quibbling.
24. Here are three of the many passages in Selbourne's alleged “translation” of the alleged “Jacob”'s alleged tale with the usage in question:


B. “But first I should tell that the land of Sinim, or Mahacin, is divided into two parts, that of the Cataini of the north who have fallen under the Tartars and their Cane, Chubilai, and that of the Mancini of the south who live under a king called Toutson [...]” (idem, p. 127).

C. “Nevertheless, to this city come so many merchants, Franks, Saracens, Indians and Jews, as well as traders of Sinim and from the towns and villages of this province, that for the whole year [...]” (ibidem).

For a guide to misuse of Hebrew “sinim” in Selbourne 2000, see the entry headed “Sinim (China)” on page 536 (the entry head is itself an example of the mistake). Sections 14 and 20 dissect the name “Toutson.”

25. The quotation is from Spence’s review, not Selbourne’s book, but it is presumably based on information supplied by him or his publisher.

The commercial publishers of the various imprints of The City of Light in all likelihood made up so-called “press kits,” that is, crutches for unknowledgeable reviewers and “guides” to help slant the “reviews” in the “right” direction. Reviewers who need such crutches are not reviewers.

When a New York City commercial publisher once asked me to serve as etymologist for a short-term lexicographical project on which it had embarked, I was surprised to hear other members of the team refer to the dictionary we were working on as “the product” -- as if we were turning out beer cans or razor blades. The world of research and the world of commercial publishing often do not overlap even slightly.

Mind you, nothing is wrong with turning a profit -- as long as you care more about the truth and good taste than about money and “fame.”

26. The specific element of Arabic al-s_n (namely s_n) and the stem of Arabic s_ni (namely s_n-) go back to the Late Greek plural noun Sinai ‘Chinese [people]’ (whence, among other forms, the Late Latin plural noun Sinae ‘Chinese [people]’ and the English combining form Sino-), which is first attested in Ptolemy’s Ge_graphik_ byph_g_sis (see Thomson 1948 on that work) and which is related in some as yet unspecified way to the Sanskrit plural noun Cin_- ‘Chinese [people]’. Both the Greek and the Sanskrit words go back in one way or another to Ch’in (Wade-Giles) ~ Chinese Qin (Pinyin), which is the Chinese name of the dynasty that ruled China from 221 to 206 BCE, whence, eventually English China. English Sino- and English China are thus cognates.

Since Ptolemy lived in the second century of the Common Era, one cannot agree with Nicole Pétrin that “It was not until the fourth century A.D. that the name Sina or Tsinista, or some variant of this name became known to the Greco-Roman world (Marcian of Heracleia, Cosmas Indicopleustes)” (2008:18).

None of the above-mentioned words is related to any word in the Jewish Scriptures.

27. Pollak 1988 lists publications dealing with “sinim” in Isaiah 49:12 that appeared in 1846 (p. 367), 1888 (p. 362), 1906-1907 (p. 360), and 1936 (p. 361). All the authors copied uncritically from Gesenius, none considered the possibility of a scribal mistake, and none inspire confidence.

Facile writers “identify” Biblical place names facilely, another example being unsigned 1991a, who claimed (on what grounds?) that “Aden has it earliest recorded mention in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, where it is named alongside Canneh as one of the places with which Tyre had trading connections” (vol. 1, p. 95). Ezekiel 27:23 may but has
not been proven to refer to Aden.

28. Surprisingly, even one translation by Jews has “the land of Sinim,” namely the 1917 translation of The Jewish Publication Society of America. Presumably, its all-Jewish team of translators felt that the meaning of “sinim” was not clear.

29. The phenomenon repeats itself several times in Selbourne’s enterprise, as we will see in sections 10, 16, and 17: mistakes that the alleged “Jacob” made Selbourne made too and vice versa; what the alleged “Jacob” did not know Selbourne did not know either and vice versa. Were the phenomenon to occur once, we would ascribe it to chance (correlation without causation), but, like the anticipatory anachronisms we saw earlier, they keep on accumulating and reach such a number that we must assume correlation with causation. Only two possibilities come to mind, one of which must be right: either the alleged thirteenth-century “Jacob of Ancona” copied from the twentieth-century Selbourne or vice versa. Is it not the truth, therefore, that Jacob of Ancona was David Selbourne’s pen name? See note 70 for the several similarities between the pair.

30. That reconstruction of the Hebrew place name of Syene accords with its etymology: the name comes from the Egyptian name of the city, Swn, from which also come:

   A. the Coptic name of Syene: Swan (in romanization).
   B. its Greek name: Σωφρίς (<suv_ne> in transliteration).
   C. its English name: Syene.
   D. its Arabic name: Asw_n (in romanization), which was formerly spelled Assuan in English and is now usually spelled Aswan in that language. Thus, we are dealing with the area where the Aswan High Dam is now located.

   Deriving Hebrew *seven from Egyptian Swn (if that, rather than *sevan, is the base form of the Hebrew place name) would be easy. At the time it would have arisen, *seven would have presumably been pronounced *[s’e:wen]. If so, we would go on to note that since older Hebrew did not tolerate the consonant cluster /sw/, an epenthetic vowel was inserted (Arabic too did not tolerate that cluster either, but in that language the solution was not epenthesis, as in Hebrew, but prosthesis, so that the syllabification of Asw_n is /as-’wa:n/). As for the second vowel of *[s’e:wen], we would assume that it came from */e:/ in some earlier pronunciation of Egyptian Swn (the fact that the second vowel of the Greek name of the city is /e:/ would support that assumption).

   Deriving Hebrew *sevan from Egyptian Swn (if that, rather than *seven, is the base form of the Hebrew place name) would be easy too: we would assume that the /a/ of Coptic Swan and the /a:/ in the second syllable of Arabic Asw_n point to */a:/ in some earlier pronunciation of Egyptian Swn. That */a:/ would yield the sound represented by the kamats gadol.

   As for the meaning of Swn, two suggestions have been offered:

   A. *market’ (Wood 1967:853) or *the Mart’ (unsigned 1991b). See later in the text on Elephantine’s once being the starting point for trade with people living south of Egypt, a fact which supports both suggestions (which are in fact merely different wordings of the same suggestion).

   B. ‘opening, key’ (Champollion 1814, vol. I, p. 164), thus, presumably with reference to Syene either as the gateway to what lies south of Egypt, as the gateway to Egypt from the perspective of people south of the country, or as the gateway in both directions.

   Suggestion A seems to be the one accepted today.

31. Biblical Hebrew also has the masculine plural ethnonym sinim ‘Sinites’, an authentic form (not a scribal mistake) appearing in Genesis 10:17 and First Chronicles 1:15. It refers to the place called Sinna in Greek, Sinen and Sin in Latin, and Tar_bulus al-Sh_m in Arabic, that is to the place now in Lebanon called Tripoli in English. From the plural form sinim we may
backform the singular from (*\(sini\)) and from the latter form the place name itself, *rin. China is irrelevant here too.

32. We are reminded of the notion, as widespread as it is erroneous, that “Chaucer used a Yiddish word!” Actually, he used a Middle English word of Germanic origin having no Jewish connection, the Modern English reflex of which merged in the nineteenth-century with the Western-Yiddish-origin British English word *ganef* (Gold 1990b).

33. The history of the suggestion of a scribal mistake in Isaiah 49:12 should be reconstructed, if that has not already been done. The earliest evidence I can find for it is dated 1967: “If (as seems probable) the word *sînîm* in the current Hebrew text of Is. 49.12 is a scribal mistake for *\(\text{Syne}\) (Syene), the date of the Jewish settlement there would go back at least to the middle of the 6th century B.C.” (Wood 1967:853-854, where reference is to the Jewish military colony on Elephantine). Thus, both Rabinowitz and Wood, in my opinion, misgloss the problematic word as ‘Syene’.

Of the ancient commentators which Rabinowitz lists I have been able to see only *Bereishit ra\(b\)a* (a midrashic source): one manuscript has “sheva shemot nikreu lo darom […] vesinim,” that is, ‘it [the south (D.L.G.)] has seven names, *daron* […] and *sinim*’, and another has “sheva shemot nikreu lo darom […] USEGINIM,” that is, ‘it [the south (D.L.G.)] has seven names, *daron* […] and *seginim*’ (52:51b). Again, therefore, a meaning that is slightly different (so far, then, for “sinim” we have ‘Syenites’, ‘Syene’, and ‘south’), but, in any case, no indication that China or the Chinese are meant.

The existence of variants which cannot be explained either phonologically or morphologically, as in the two known manuscripts of *Bereishit ra\(b\)a* (we cannot get from “sinim” to “seginim” or vice versa by any known rule of Hebrew synchronic or diachronic phonology or morphology), is prima-facie evidence of at least one scribal mistake. In any case, however, it is clear that the word, whatever its correct form is, refers to the south. With regard to the date of composition of *Bereishit ra\(b\)a*, we have only a terminus ante quem: Rashi, who died in 1105 CE, cites it often.

34. In Italian *siciliano* ‘Sicilian’ (earlier spelled *ciciliano*), which goes back at least to the thirteenth century, and *persiano* ‘Persian’, which goes back at least to 1805, the ending is -ano (with reduction of */aa/ to /a/), as in *americiano* ‘American’ and *romano* ‘Roman’. In *astigiano* ‘native and/or resident of Asti’ and *parmigiano* ‘Parmesan’, the suffix is -\(i\)giano (with reduction of */ii/ to /i/). In *cagliaritano* ‘native and/or resident of Cagliari’, the suffix is -\(i\)tano (with reduction of */ii/ to /i/). Thus, none of those words ends in Italian -iano, which, as stated in the text, is not found to collocate with place names until the twentieth century.

35. In calling “Jacob” an “astonishing intellectual titan,” I am following Melanie Phillips, a reporter, who implied as much in her feckless defense of Selbourne against the reasonable assumption that he wrote everything in Selbourne 1997a.

Phillips appearing to have had no reason to get involved in the Selbourne Affair (that is, so far as I can determine, she had no credentials in any of the relevant disciplines), we wonder whether she had an ulterior motive in coming to Selbourne’s defense (Phillips 1998 and 1999). In any case, consider her naivete:

“To believe that Selbourne wrote The City of Light is to believe that he is an astonishing intellectual titan, with a detailed knowledge of 13th-century China, medieval Italian, Persian and Chinese, Talmudic scholarship and medieval Jewish and Arab society, not to mention 13th-century history across three continents” (Phillips 1998). By implication, therefore, she held the alleged “Jacob” to have been “an astonishing intellectual titan.”

In that brief passage, Phillips managed to pack in two unproven assumptions and four wrong ones:

**Unproven assumption 1:** The “original manuscript” exists.

**Unproven assumption 2:** The “original manuscript” is authentic.

**Wrong assumption 1:** The text of the “original manuscript” is completely factual.
Wrong assumption 2: A thirteenth-century Italian Jewish rabbi-physician-merchant was capable of writing such a text.

Wrong assumption 3: On the basis of unproven assumption 1, unproven assumption 2, and wrong assumption 1, Phillips concluded that the author of the alleged “original manuscript” was “an astonishing intellectual titan.” Had those three other assumptions been right, assumption 3 would have been too, that is, we would have been astounded that someone in the thirteenth century could have written an account so sophisticated, so reflective, so factual, so modern-sounding as the account which we would assume underlay Selbourne’s “translation.” However, the fact is that Selbourne’s “translation” and thus, by implication, the alleged “original manuscript” are so full of factual mistakes that the person who wrote the “original manuscript” (whether that is Selbourne’s alleged “translation” or some vorlage of that “translation”) astonished us only because of his lack of knowledge. See the last five paragraphs in the Comment on Quotation H in section 20.

Much correct information can be gleaned from latter-day research literature, for example, the day, month, and year in the Gregorian calendar on which Abraham Lincoln died (when Selbourne, in response to the charge that The City of Light was a hoax, pointed out that the book contains much correct information which the critics recognize as correct, Halkin was thus able to retort that “[...] such accuracy need only mean that Mr. Selbourne did his homework well. After all, for an English academic like himself to have learned a good deal about a medieval Chinese city is hardly an impossible task. [...] Mr. Selbourne boasts that many of Jacob d’Ancona’s statements about medieval Quanzhou, while scoffed at by Western scholars, are known to be true in China. What is know to be true in China could fairly easily have become known to Mr. Selbourne, too” [Halkin 2001b]; for a reaction identical to Halkin’s see Barrett 1998a, the title of which says it all).

Much correct information cannot be gleaned even from reliable research literature because that literature is not exhaustive, for example, the precise time that Abraham Lincoln’s maternal grandmother was born, a fact lost to history.

With the foregoing in mind, let us see what kinds of information Selbourne’s book contains:

The alleged “translation” contains certain correct information that is also found in sources which we know to be reliable (see two paragraphs above). Let us call it information of type A.

The alleged “translation” also contains information that is not found in reliable sources. Let us call it information of type B. That information falls into two subtypes:

B.1. information which we know is wrong (and, for that reason, is not found in reliable sources), like the passage, discussed in section 7, that implies that the word “mellah” (sic) was used in Persia of the 1270s.

B.2. information the factualness of which cannot, at least now, be determined, so that, like information of subtype B.1, it too is absent, though for a different reason, in reliable sources.

The negative reviewers have pointed out much wrong information in “Jacob”’s tale (thus, information of subtype B.1).

The tale also contains much information of subtype B.2: any percentage of it could be right and any percentage of it could be wrong (the two percentages should add up to 100), but we have no way of gauging what is right or wrong because we have no independent confirmation or refutation (see above about Lincoln’s grandmother). Thus, the state of our knowledge is not that far advanced and may never be. That information, because of its indeterminable status, is inadmissible into evidence for or against the authenticity of the alleged “original manuscript” (unless new research allows us to distinguish subtype B.2 from type A or from subtype B.1).

Inadmissible too is information of type A because anyone can fake a story by padding it with right information gleaned from reliable sources (see the quotation from Halkin 2001b above).
Consequently, to respond to Selbourne’s question, “Is it impossible for there to be new and valid evidence about the past?” (Honigsbaum 1997): new and valid evidence about the past is gleaned from reliable nonfictional sources, not from an alleged source allegedly seen by just one person, especially because he turned out to be an unreliable witness, especially because the source had the marks of fiction, especially because the source appeared to have been written not in the thirteenth century but in the nineteenth or twentieth. Like Dickens, Selbourne appeared to see reality as a reflection of his own fiction.

In sum, each for a different reason, information of type A and information of subtype B.2 are inadmissible into evidence when we judge whether a text or an alleged but unseen text is factual. Only information of subtype B is admissible and, by its nature, it is admissible only to support the hypothesis that the text or the alleged text is not factual. We have much evidence of subtype B in “Jacob”’s tale to tell us that the text or the alleged text is indeed not factual. Once that conclusion has been reached, Selbourne et hoc genus omne no longer have a case.

To get back to Phillips’s unproven or wrong assumptions:

Wrong assumption 4: The City of Light does not contain any information of subtype B.1.

Consequently, our conclusion should be the mirror image of Phillips’s: whereas she believed that only the thirteenth-century “Jacob,” not the twentieth-century Selbourne, could have written the “original manuscript,” the Scourges of Jacob believe that the alleged “Jacob” never existed, that even had he existed, he could, for several reasons, not have written the tale, and that only an inept faker much later, probably in the twentieth rather than the nineteenth century, could have penned that sorry excuse for a thirteenth-century text. As Timothy H. Barrett wrote me on 5 November 1999, “the level of knowledge displayed in the text suggests that it was created in the second half of the twentieth century; no outsider (or for that matter Chinese) could have created what we now have at any earlier date.”

Selbourne too, not just Cheerleader Phillips, was laboring under several (feigned?) misapprehensions when he cockily said that if he had written The City of Light, “I would then have written one of the great works of European fiction. It would be called ‘Picaresque Philosophical Novel Without Any Equal.’ Jacob d’Ancona would be my Don Quixote, I would be his Cervantes, and it’d certainly be worth the Nobel Prize for fiction” (quoted in Chang 1997).

If you believe that the narcissistic Selbourne was not the real “Jacob,” you must conclude that in the passage just quoted he was merely hypothesizing about what the situation would be if he were the real “Jacob” and that the passage tells us nothing about what Selbourne in fact thought of himself (= Conclusion 1).

If you believe that the narcissistic Selbourne was the real “Jacob,” you must conclude that in that passage he was merely pretending to hypothesize about what the situation would be if he were the real “Jacob” (= Conclusion 2).

If you have reached Conclusion 2, you must reach Conclusion 3 too, which is: Selbourne in fact believed himself to be on a par with Cervantes, he in fact believed that he had written one of the great works of European fiction, and he in fact believed himself worthy of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

As we will now see, we have a way (thanks to a statement that Selbourne made no later than 2000) of determining whether Conclusion 2 (and hence also Conclusion 3) or Conclusion 1 is right ( tertium non datur), namely, “[...] je ne nie pas que, pour quelque raison perverse, j’aurai pu théoriquement concocter toute cette histoire” (see subsection C in section 22), that is, ‘I do not deny that, for some perverse reason, I could have, theoretically, concocted this entire story’.

In light of that passage in French, you realize that you cannot reach Conclusion 1 because Selbourne has just admitted that he believed himself capable of writing the alleged “Jacob”’s tale (which is also an admission too that he could have made all the mistakes in that tale). Rather, the passage in French forces you to reach Conclusion 2, which in turn forces you to reach Conclusion 3.
That self-congratulator and fantasizer’s bloated image of himself thus appears starker than ever now that we have considered the two passages together. Let us poop Selbourne’s party:

A. If Selbourne resembled anyone, it was not Miguel de Cervantes, but Don Quijote, who reads romances, goes out of his mind, and believes them to be true.

B. As for “one of the great works of European fiction,” *The City of Light* was D.O.P. (dead on publication), a failure even as fiction (no teachers of literature put it on their students’ lists of required readings; it was the object of no positive literary analyses; it made no list of best-sellers; and, though Selbourne did get the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic for it [see section 21], it was awarded no prizes in the worlds of research or literature). Had it been remarked as what it should have been touted as, historical fiction, Selbourne’s book would have still been a clunker (Yiddish saying: *di zelbe makhsheyfe, nor andersh geshleyert* ‘the same witch but in a different veil’). Again, see the last five paragraphs in the Comment on Quotation H in section 20.

“Ezra Pound was a crackpot on social and political issues, but he knew what he was talking about in matters of the written language. In 1934, in ‘ABC of Reading,’ he said, ‘Literature is news that stays news’” (Hamill 2006). People hotly discussed Selbourne’s enterprise but nobody ever called *The City of Light* a first-class work of literature: it had no plot and it was boring (even Barbara Cartland was more gripping). Not quite a succès de scandale (because, although it was a scandal, it was not a succès), Selbourne’s book was fleeting news.

C. As for a telephone call or a telegram from Stockholm, it will materialize when the “present owner” and the “original manuscript” do.

That Selbourne considered Phillips’s two puff pieces (Phillips 1998 and 1999) to amount to “an investigation conducted for London’s *Sunday Times,*” in which, according to him, she “brilliantly exposed” “the machinations of scholars who stopped the work’s first intended US publication” (Selbourne 2000:x), likewise reveals that he was shallow and deluded about himself (just as Wang was shallow and deluded about Selbourne and his book -- see the comment on Quotation G in section 20 on Selbourne’s allegedly “detailed and persuasive argument”). All defenses of Selbourne published so far, whether by him or by others, were flimsier than airline-magazine writing. Phillips’s “investigation,” in fact, seemed to have been conducted not for *The Sunday Times* but for Selbourne (no serious investigation would have accepted Selbourne’s statements without analyzing them). The standards of *The Sunday Times* may be gauged from the fact that it once had stupidity to hire David Irving, a prominent Holocaust-denier.

Let the “investigators” try to publish in academic journals of the highest water -- then they will sober up.

See section 20 for more examples of those types of information.

36. We should not let the ease and frequency of travel today blind us to its difficulty and rarity in yesteryear:

The farthest that Martin Luther ever got from Eisleben, Saxony (his birthplace), was to Rome -- just once.

Isaac Newton (1643-1727) “covered about 150 miles of the Earth’s surface: [from his birthplace in Woolsthorpe, Lincolnshire,] to Cambridge and then all the way to London. At least once he took a small boat across the River Thames to Greenwich. But he certainly never left England. And as far as I can discover, he never set eyes on the ocean -- never saw the shore of his small island nation” (Gleick 2003:A17; Gleick is the author of *Isaac Newton*, a biography).

In September 1749, King Louis XV of France, Queen Marie, the Duke d’Ayen, the Duchess de Brancas, the Marchioness de Pompadour, the Countess du Roure, the Countess d’Estrades, and other members of the king’s court visited Le Havre. Most of the party had never seen the sea before, even though everyone had always had more than enough leisure time and more than enough money to make such a trip earlier.
“In the summer of 1769 [Johann Gottfried von Herder] set out on a sea voyage from Riga to Nantes, which brought him a deeper understanding of his destiny. His Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769 (1769; ‘Journal of My Voyage in the Year 1769’), completed in Paris in December, bears witness to the change that it effected on him. Herder saw himself as a groundless being who had left the safe shore and was journeying into an unknown future” (Irmscher 1991:868). What major Western intellectual of today would be as moved as Herder was by a sea voyage from Riga to Nantes?

Immanuel Kant (1704-1804) spent his entire life in Königsberg. He wondered what the sea looked like, but even though it was only a few kilometers from the city, he never bothered to satisfy his curiosity (Simons 2003, writing from her rather than Kant’s perspective, claimed that he “grew up by the Baltic”; Kant would have been surprised).

The “traveler [formerly] set out on his distant journey with many a solemn preparation, made his will, and bade adieu to his friends, like one who might not again return” (unsigned 1843:137).

“Speed was something which Dickens never liked but had to accept and could later on profitably use in the saving of time. Radical in politics, he was conservative in travel, and up to his death in 1870 he liked to welcome his guests at Gad’s Hill near Rochester in Kent with an old-fashioned drive in a horse-drawn coach of the kind he had loved in his boyhood. ¶ He lived his early life in a world where distance had meaning. Our triumph, if triumph for mankind it be, has been to abolish distance. by express train, motor car, aeroplane, and rocket the increase of speed and expansion of range have been carried to such fantastic lengths that there is nothing left, not even the moon, that can be called ‘over the hills and far away’. The outer space of the earth is circled in the time that Dickens took to cover a few miles. It is not a victory in which he would have gloried, for his first thoughts were always with the effect of change on human beings and he was contemptuous of statistics. [....]” (Brown 1963:2).

“From the beginnings of man’s life until the nineteenth century movement and communication were limited by the speed of a sailing-boat or of a rowed galley at sea and of the human foot and some beasts of burden on land. When an Ancient Greek philosopher travelled in his country or through the islands of the Aegaean Sea in the fifth or fourth century B.C. he made his journey in the same way as the English Dr Johnson, who went by horse from London to Scotland and then sailed among the Hebrides in a.d. 1773. In 1844 Charles Dickens took his family across France to Italy and to do so bought an old and capacious horse-drawn coach, thus travelling no faster than a Roman officer or governor going from Britain or Gaul back to his capital” (idem, p. 5).

See too Blanning 2007 on the slowness of communication.

Many people have had the experience that I have: reading in travel literature from former times about the length or arduousness of a certain journey and then visiting the places in question, only to find that with modern transportation and paved roads the trip was speedily and easily made.

English travel and travail are etymologically related.

All of which is to say that the Jews of the sixth century BCE might well have considered Syene far away.

We thus have here a possible proportion: Selbourne : Florence = Gesenius : China (see section 8 on Florence). That is, just as Selbourne presumably thought, mistakenly, that what he knew about the latter-day Jewish history of Florence, namely that in recent times it had a significant Jewish population, allowed him to assume that that population was big in the thirteenth-century too, so that it was not unreasonable of him to write in “Jacob”’s tale that in that century “the great rabbi Israel,” “of noble rabbinical lineage” was living there (see section 8 for details), Gesenius presumably thought, just as mistakenly as Selbourne, that what he (Gesenius) knew about distances in his day (thus, the early nineteenth century) allowed him to assume that in Deutero-Isaiah’s day as well Syene was too close to western Asia to be considered far away.

37. Likewise unaware of Jewish tradition and of latter-day Biblical researchers’ confirmation of that tradition regarding sinim
was George Jochnowitz, who as late as 1997, asserted that “what [sinim] meant in Isaiah 49:12 is not clear” (Jochnowitz 1997). It has always been clear to Jews; and researchers of the Bible accepted their interpretation some time ago.

Jochnowitz also said that a 1997 dissertation “informs us that Judeo-Italian still survives among the Jews of Rome and that there is today a theater group writing Judeo-Italian plays.” Vestiges of Jewish Italian survive in the otherwise non-Jewish Italian of all of Italy’s Jews (in the same way that vestiges of Yiddish may survive in the languages of Ashkenazic Jews who do not know Yiddish), but vestiges are different from the full system known as Jewish Italian, which, so far as I can tell, is dormant. For more on Jewish Italian vestiges versus the full system, see Gold in preparation 6. For more on the need to read Jochnowitz critically, see Gold 1981 and note 91.

38. When I taught a course in General and Hebrew Lexicography at an Israeli university in the 1980s, one of the students’ assignments, towards the middle of the semester, was to write a review of Even-Shoshan 1977, which was then the latest edition of the dictionary in question. As a model, I told them to take as much of Gold 1981ff. as had appeared till then. Thus, if I said there, for instance, that Even-Shoshan was inconsistent in his listing of multi-word lexemes (to take hypothetical English examples, war of attrition listed under war and war of independence listed under independence; or, war of attrition listed under both its constituent nouns but treated differently each time), the students could look for examples I had not given. And, naturally, they were encouraged to find kinds of defects which I had missed.

Reading the students’ reviews, I was surprised to find in a few the remark that ‘because of the war’ the dictionary had to be printed on poor paper, which they phrased in different ways (for example, “biglal hamilchama hamilon hudpas al neyar zol”). What war in 1977, I wondered at first, could that be?

Soon it hit me: the first edition of the dictionary, which was indeed printed on cheap paper, had appeared during Israel’s War of Independence, in 1948, when good paper was not in abundance and cheap printing would permit the publisher to set a fairly low price, an important consideration when you think that in time of war a dictionary can be a luxury item. Somehow, I now guessed, the students had come upon one or more reviews of the first edition, where the cheapness of the paper and the war, I assumed further, were mentioned.

The 1980s being the time when material in print was beginning to be made available electronically too, teachers were already worrying about mass plagiarism, though, actually, the availability of electronically searchable databases also made it easier (as it still does) to see what sources students were using because we knew that they would take the easiest way out: instead of combing through printed bibliographies, they would google a word or a phrase and see what came up. Doing the same, I found that the electronic database available in the school’s library had one review of Even-Shoshan’s dictionary. You can guess the rest: it was of the first edition and there I found the remark about cheap paper and the war.

Most of the students had paraphrased the reviewer’s remark in various ways and some had copied it verbatim. None mentioned the review and none was clever enough to rewrite the remark in such a way that my suspicions would not be aroused, say, ‘This is a review of the latest edition of Even-Shoshan’s dictionary (1977), which has come a long way since its first edition, published in 1948, during Israel’s war of independence, when conditions in the country made a physically attractive edition next to impossible.’

In private, I questioned each of the plagiarizing students by asking what war of 1977 he or she had in mind. Not one, as expected, could give me a reasonable answer and not one confessed to having cribbed (the latter would have been the better course). Since much else in their papers had been lifted from that early review (naturally, without attribution either), I sent all the students to the school’s disciplinary committee rather than decide myself what to do, my evidence consisting of their papers and a photocopy of the review. The committee gave all of them failing grades in my course and put them on probation, their seemingly innocent mention of paper and a war having been their downfall.

In sum, paraphrasers, plagiarizers, and other rewriters, to be successful, must not only be knowledgeable about the subject matter but also know how to cover their tracks. It is often easier to write something original than to fake or plagiarize. Examples abound, one of them being the real “Jacob”’s multifaceted misunderstanding of Isaiah 49:12 and of
what Gesenius wrote about that verse.

39. We can say too of the author of the passage quoted -- to use a Yiddish idiom -- that he “shraybt noyekh mit zibn grayzn” ‘he spells “Noah” with seven mistakes’ (since the Yiddish for ‘Noah’, noyekh, consists of just two letters [nun and khes], one has to be “ingenious” to make seven mistakes spelling it, the largest conceivable probably being just six: 1 lange nun (instead of nun), 2-4 vov yud ayen (instead of Ø), and 5-6 khof (instead of lange khof, which itself would be a mistake, instead of khes). The idiom is applied to someone making many mistakes in spelling, though here we may apply it, by way of exception, to someone who manages to pack an astounding number of blunders into a short passage.

40. Simon Lévy, a member of the faculty of the University of Rabat, is also the author of a 1820-page doctoral dissertation accepted at the University of Paris VIII in 1990, “Parlers arabes des Juifs du Maroc: particularités et emprunts - Etude historique, socio-linguistique et de géographie dialectale,” which, inter alia, discusses the Moroccan Arabic word under scrutiny in this section. A Jew, he was born and raised in Morocco. As is evident from his dissertation and his article, he is trained in linguistics, is familiar with relevant local Jewish and non-Jewish sources, and, consequently, writes on a high level. Furthermore, he placed his article in a proper journal, namely one having to do with history and linguistics, one published in Morocco, one published by the leading university in the country. When it comes to understanding the Moroccan Arabic word mell_h, nobody in Selbourne’s tiny camp, including its leader, not even the whole lot of them, was even a minuscule patch on Lévy.

41. Not surprisingly, the earliest citation for English “mellah” in volume II of A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary, published in 1976, is dated 1875 (the dictionary also gives citations dated 1893, 1963, and 1972, all four referring to Morocco), the first of those dates being good circumstantial evidence that the English word arose in the nineteenth century (see section 3 on how it would be unusual to find dramatic antedatings in a well-described language like English).

Likewise in French: Pierre Réseau wrote me on 27 June 2006 that the earliest evidence for French “mellah” in the files of the Institut National de la Langue Française is only from 1931: “[...] les moments capitaux de la vie religieuse, pâque, le nouvel an, le kippour, les anniversaires de deuil, sont honorés d’une assez semblable ferveur, malgré toutes les variantes liturgiques, dans la petite synagogue moyenâgeuse d’un mellah marocain ou dans le temple fastueux d’une aristocratique avenue de New-York” (Weill 1931:8; probably no latter-day synagogue in Morocco was built in the Middle Ages). That citation can be antedated by one year (French “mellah” appears several times in Saisset 1930). We note here too that the place name Mellah occurs in a French translation, dated 1867, of a Moroccan Arabic text (Lévy 1992:42 in fine).

In sum, the dates 1875 and 1930 (or 1875 and 1867) could probably be pushed back if we searched more, but in all likelihood not to earlier than the nineteenth century. If so, English “mellah” and French “mellah” are probably not more than two hundred years old. We submit, therefore, that the real “Jacob” took the word and the spelling “mellah” from nothing earlier than a nineteenth-century English or French text. Selbourne knew English and could at least read French.

* The definition of the English word in A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary is ‘The Jewish quarter in a Moroccan or Turkish city’, but Selbourne should not crow that mention of Turkey brings us closer to Iraq: for one thing, we are dealing here with English, not any language of Iran; for another, English dictionaries are, among cognoscenti, notorious for their amateurish treatment of lexemes of Jewish interest (see Jewish Language Review and Jewish Linguistic Studies, with references, for a few of the several hundred corrections that would have to be made in English dictionaries to bring them up to snuff in that area of the lexicon). Here, the definer, who did not know the English word at first hand and thus relied solely on the five citations, found that one of them, dated 1925, refers to Turkey and wrote the definition accordingly, though unjustifiedly.

The citation in question, from Phillip Guedalla’s Napoleon and Palestine (his 1925 presidential address to the Jewish Historical Society of England), reads, “Old men in Turkish mellahs muttered the undying Esperança de Israel” (not having read the address, I do not know what the dictionary means by “v. 41,” which it gives after the title: is that volume 41 of the
society’s transactions? page 41 of section 5? or what?).

Guedalla made the same mistake that the real “Jacob” did: in reading about Morocco, both of them came across either the latter-day English word “mellah” or the latter-day French word “mellah” and mistakenly thought that it had the broader meaning “Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area in any Arab or Muslim country].” It was thus Guedalla, not anyone in Turkey, who used “mellah.”

Not knowing the word either, the definer did not suspect that Guedalla had misused it. Hence the unjustified addition of the words “or Turkish” to the definition. Granted, all languages change, new usages come into being, words can acquire broader or narrower meanings, and so on, but compilers of dictionaries should be discriminating: one citation for “mellah” in reference to Turkey does not justify putting Turkey and Morocco on an equal footing in the definition, which should read:

‘Jewish quarter [in a Moroccan city].’ In quot. 1922 with reference to Turkey.

Thus, the definition is ‘Jewish quarter’. The bracketed addition shows that the word designates only a Jewish quarter in Morocco (the addition is bracketed to show that it is not part of the definition; were it parenthesized, it would be an optional part of the definition). The 1922 quotation is not neglected but by the same token its importance is not exaggerated. And the rewritten definition clearly implies that this was Guedalla’s usage, not someone’s in Turkey.

But there’s more. One wonders about “the undying Esperança de Israel.” Esperança de Israel is Portuguese for ‘Hope of Israel’, but Portuguese has not been one of the languages of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire. Presumably, Guedalla was trying to write something in Judezmo, but even had he gotten the romanization right (Esperança de Israel is correct only as Portuguese), we would still wonder what that “undying” phrase was. Might he have meant the Hebrew phrase shema yisrael! (literally, ‘Here O Israel!’, a call to a fellow Jew or Jews for help by someone in serious danger)? If so, he was confused.

If the drift of the preceding paragraph is not clear, let us make it explicit: Guedalla, at least in that passage, was unreliable.

Two more components of the entry for “mellah” in A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary need comment:

A. The pronunciation which that dictionary shows for the English word is “mellah” (= [‘male]), which is an English spelling pronunciation. Is it really used? I know only [mel’lah], which is also the pronunciation of Moroccan Arabic mell_h. In any case, nonpronunciation of word-final h in English words of immediate or non-immediate Arabic or Hebrew origin in which that letter originally stood for /h/ is an English spelling pronunciation found not only in that rendition of “mellah” but also in Noah, Shiloh, and maybe other words too.

B. The dictionary gives the etymology of the English word as being “unknown.” Since the entry was written before the appearance of Lévy 1992, we cannot fault it for not giving the full picture, but at least it could have said “< Moroccan Arabic mell_h ‘Jewish quarter [in Morocco]’ < (??) < Arabic mدلh ‘salt.’”

The second edition of Oxford English Dictionary, published in 1989, has exactly the same entry, without any improvement, which was to be expected because that edition is largely a conflation of the first edition (which has no entry for the English word in question) and A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary (which does) without any significant amount of new material. See Gold 2005c for another example of how the second edition perpetuates a definer’s mistake in a predecessor dictionary.
Here are some recent citations for the English word:

A. “The depressed economic condition of Algerian Jewry today is matched by the squalor and overcrowding in the mellahs or ghettos, which exist in the cities of Algiers, Oran, Constantine, Setif and Tlemseen” (Ausubel 1953:224; so too in all later imprints). Algerian Jews either do not even recognize the word, much less use it, or, if they have wider knowledge, will tell you ‘That’s a Moroccan usage.’ Ausubel thus made the same mistake that the real “Jacob” and Guedalla did. The word “ghetto” and its cognates (like Spanish gueto) are often misused, as in the quotation; see Weinreich 1967 for a partial corrective.

B. “Within the enclosure is the Old City, with its medina and small Jewish quarter called the mellah [...]” (Fabricant 1993:8).

C. “[...] we passed the city’s little Jewish quarter, known as the Mellah” (Spano 1997:33).

D. “We parked at the mellah, where the Jews of Fez were moved in 1438. We walked in the Jewish cemetery, which has been restored, orange and olive trees planted. The streets of this quarter were far wider [than those we had seen in other old quarters of the city] and many of the houses had balconies of wood and wrought iron decorated with plants and flowers” (McGahern 1997:32).

42. Here are two variants of a misetymology of Moroccan Arabic mell_h ‘Jewish district, Jewish neighborhood, Jewish quarter, Jewish section [of an urban area in Morocco]’ which was put into circulation in 1902 and is widespread among the laity even today:

A. “This was because the wretched inhabitants were forced to pickle the heads of rebels and criminals before these were stuck on spikes over city gateways” (Jacobson 1981:970).

B. Muslim rulers in Morocco had the heads of decapitated criminals salted and hung up, for exposure to the public, in the Jewish quarter, that quarter allegedly having been chosen because the Muslims did not want such an ugly sight where they lived (I have heard that explanation from several Moroccan-born Jews in Israel). Lévy 1992:42 disproves that explanation.

For an expanded version of his article, Lévy will want to quote and comment on Saisset 1930:33 and 223.

43. Sel bourne’s choice of Wardour Street English to “translate” the alleged “original manuscript” (see the first paragraph of section 5) appears to have played a role similar to that of the word antiquity as he applied it to the word “mellah”: the all too obvious “quaintness” of his English, we assume, is supposed to stress the hoary age of the alleged “original manuscript.”

An additional motive may have been, if Sel bourne’s “translation” is an original piece of fiction of his (as certain critics believe), a desire to write in a style radically different from his consistently lean expository prose in order to avoid detection (since critics have already noted that the alleged “Jacob”’s ethical, philosophical, political, and social ideas are identical with or close to his [see section 16], if the scourges of Jacob had noticed that not only the content but also the form were similar to writings published under Selbourne’s real name, the independent status of the alleged “translation,” that is, its being a free-standing work rather than a translation of someone else’s writing, would have been all the more glaring). In any case, the “translation” is overwritten in both form and content.

In at least the French version of his book, Selbourne responded to the critics of his English style, though without mentioning them:

“Je ne cacherai pas que je me suis si souvent laissé prendre par la fougue et la langue de l’original italien (comme
It’s a matter of much more than “a few archaisms” (“quelques archaïsmes”). The entire style of the “translation” sounds contrived; and because it sounds contrived, we suspect an ulterior motive on Selbourne’s part. Also, it is impossible to imagine what thirteenth-century Italian Jew could have written in such a way that would prompt anybody to translate the way he allegedly did. Can Selbourne back up his defense of Wardour Street English by quoting, say, a page of the “original manuscript” and then showing how his “translation” preserves “les rythmes, les couleurs et l’ordre des mots”?

44. For another of Selbourne’s attempts to pull the wool over our eyes by ignoring the time factor, see the paragraph beginning with the sentence to which note 17 is attached and the paragraphs following that one. His readiness to engage in casuistry is also seen in this retort to a critic: “One claims that Jacob could not have heard the sound of carriages because everyone went about in sedan chairs. I presume therefore that the peasants were carried to the market in sedan chairs and their pigs and rice harvest were carried in sedan chairs too. Their proposition is absurd” (quoted in Honigsbaum 1997). The criticism is that the alleged “Jacob”’s mention of carriages was anachronistic because at the time and in the place in question people needing transportation used sedan chairs or coolies, not carriages.

Selbourne seemed to be playing naive here, for it must be obvious even to moderately intelligent people that the criticism leveled at him with regard to carriages would in a more explicit wording read something like this:

At the time and in the place in question, people who wanted to go from one place to another, could not or did not want to walk, and could afford either to maintain or to hire a sedan chair or coolies, used such chairs or people, not carriages; consequently, the alleged ‘Jacob’ could not possibly have heard the sound of carriages, but since Selbourne said that he did, the “original manuscript,” whatever it is, is inauthentic on that score.

Thus, the important words are could afford, which rule peasants out of the discussion. Way, way back in secondary school we learned that a reductio ad absurdum (“pigs and rice [...] carried in sedan chairs”) or a reductio ad impossibile is not a valid form of argument.

Now that Selbourne has read the criticism in its most explicit form, can he respond to it intelligently?

How curious that, in the same year that Honigsbaum quoted him about carriages, Smith 1997, in connection with the same criticism about such vehicles, quoted him as saying “I may have mistranslated.” Which Selbourne are we to believe? The Selbourne who claimed on one side of his mouth that the passage about carriages was factual or the Selbourne who claimed on the other side of his mouth that he may have mistranslated? And if he did mistranslate, what does the alleged “original manuscript” have and what is the right translation?

See note 96 and the Comment on Quotation H in section 20 for more on Selbourne’s casuistry.

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Before leaving the subject of carriages, let us quote in full the relevant sentence in Selbourne’s alleged “translation” and comment on another unusual aspect of it: “Streets are crowded with a vast ebb and flow of men and carriages.”
The Italian for ‘ebb and flow’ is *il flusso e il riflusso*. According to *Opera del Vocabolario Italiano*, our earliest evidence for *flusso* in reference to the tide (thus, in the literal sense of the word) is from 1292 and for *riflusso* in reference to the tide (again, the literal sense) it is from 1314. For the irreversible binomial *il flusso e il riflusso*, that dictionary gives one citation, from a work probably written in 1314: “Anche li elimenti di sua natura non si muovono intorno alla terra imperciò ch’è troppo dilunga dal cielo, ma muovesi quasi circulamente, cioè che fa flusso e riflusso, imperciò che quando l’acqua discorre sopra la terra, perché essa non discorre perfettamente, torna indietro [...].” (*Glosse al volgarizzamento della “Sfera di Alfragano”* (Trattato della Sfera di Giovanni Sacrobosco). Since in that passage the phrase is used in connection with a liquid other than tidal water (namely, “l’acqua discorre sopra la terra” ‘the water runs over the earth’), we have a transferred use.

For the figurative sense, as in “Streets are crowded with a vast ebb and flow of men and carriages,” *Opera del Vocabolario Italiano* has no quotations. Since that dictionary is a concordance to every known piece of writing in Italian up to 1375 (and some beyond that year), the figurative sense is likely to postdate that year. Unfortunately, Palazzi et al. 1992 is silent on the date of the earliest known use of the binomial.

*Il flusso e il riflusso*, which is presumably what the alleged “original manuscript” has, is thus probably an anticipatory anachronism.

45. “‘My dear Louisa must be careful of that cough,’ remarked Miss Tox.

“‘It’s nothing,’ returned Mrs. Chick. ‘It’s merely a change of weather. We must expect change.’

‘Of weather?’ asked Miss Tox, in her simplicity.

‘Of everything,’ returned Mrs. Chick. ‘Of course we must. It’s a world of change. Any one would surprise me very much... and would greatly alter my opinion of their understanding, if they attempted to contradict or evade what is so perfectly evident. Change!’ exclaimed Mrs. Chick, with severe philosophy. ‘Why, my gracious me, what is there that does not change!...’” (Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, chapter 29).

46. Oh, those funny little dots under some letters and those lines going this way and that on others -- what does it all mean? The laity has no conception of what transliterations, phonetic transcriptions, phonemic transcriptions, and morphophonemic transcriptions are and how important it is in our discipline that they be accurate down to the last diacritic. Selbourne’s and Parfitt’s inability to present the words *mell_h* and *mahallah* in a form acceptable in linguistics was tantamount to someone’s claiming to be a physician without even being able to accomplish something so elementary as writing a prescription in the professionally accepted way.

Arabic has two phonemes, /h/ and /h/, which are obligatorily distinguished graphically in Arabic-letter spelling (respectively by *h* ‘., the sixth letter of the Arabic alphabet, and *h* ‘., the twenty-sixth letter) and therefore must be distinguished in romanization too (respectively as *h* and *b*). To omit the diacritic (and thereby nullify the difference between the two representations) would be like failing to close the circles in the digit 8 so that it looked like the digit 3 -- it’s that essential.

With regard to Jewish-letter languages, I have used the General-Purpose Romanization of the American National Standard Romanization of Hebrew (Weinberg et al. 1975), the Standardized Yiddish Romanization (Gold 1985), and, since no romanization for Judezmo is accepted widely, different schemes -- for variation’s sake -- for Judezmo: in subsection B of section 4 and in note 23, the romanization is phonemic and reflects all occurring pronunciations; in subsection C of section 6, in section 11, and in subsection B of section 17, it is phonemic and reflects a widely occurring pronunciation; and in subsection I of section 22, it is phonetic and reflects a fairly widespread pronunciation.

47. Here are two examples of going from good to bad:

A. How four Yiddish-English dictionaries treat the (solely Eastern?) Ashkenazic game called *kodshim-kalim* in
Yiddish:

1. “‘minor sacred sacrifices.’ (A game in which all participants, except one who is chosen president, arrange themselves in a circle, the former placing himself in the center. By lots held out in an urn by the president it is determined who is to be the first sacrifice; the latter is to bow, resting his hands on his knees and thus presenting his buttocks to the company; the president then covers up the face of the sacrifice whereupon one of the company hits him on his buttocks; that done, his veil is removed and he is required to guess who his hitter is; if he does, his hitter is to take his position, but in case of failure he must place himself again in the same position, holding out his buttocks for new attacks until he does guess the name of his hitter.) (Harkavy 1898).

2. “‘sacrifices of a lesser degree of holiness,” a kind of game’ (Harkavy 1925 and 1928).

3. [no entry] (Weinreich 1968).

Were it not for Harkavy 1898, how the game is played would probably have been lost forever.

B. The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia, in ten volumes, was by far the largest and the best general English dictionary when it was published in 1890, it reaching an even higher summit when two supplementary volumes appeared in 1911. Since then, general English lexicography in the United States has declined: *Webster’s New International Dictionary of the English Language: Second Edition: Unabridged* (with several imprints between 1934 and at least 1957), though far smaller, is still a good desk dictionary; *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language: Unabridged* (with many imprints since 1961) has less explanatory power than its predecessor but is still a respectable dictionary; since 1961, general English dictionaries published in the United States have gotten smaller and smaller.

Notice too the intervals: *Webster’s International Dictionary* first appeared in 1890; *Webster’s New International Dictionary*, in 1909; *Webster’s New International Dictionary of the English Language: Second Edition: Unabridged*, in 1934; *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language: Unabridged*, in 1961; and what would be the fourth edition in that line of dictionaries is not even being planned probably because the market has by now shrunk in the United States for a large English dictionary. Thus, intervals of 19, 25, 27, and at least 45 years.

48. “Malkiel’s evaluation of L. de Eguilaz y Yanguas’s *Glosario etimológico de las palabras españolas...de origen oriental* (Granada, 1886) and of R. Dozy and W. Engelmann’s *Glossaire des mots espagnols et portugais dérivés de l’arabe* (Leyden, 1869) is correct: the former ‘was less precise’ (p. 114) than the latter, but both need to be re-viewed and reviewed from the Jewish viewpoint” (Gold 1983:255-256; what comes after the comma is my addition to Malkiel’s assessment). Dozy was a historian whose dabbling in etymology was merely a byproduct of his historical research. No entry of Jewish interest in Dozy 1867 or in Dozy and Engelmann 1869 is fully acceptable today and many are not acceptable at all (give me the space and I will show why).

49. “Mellah,” so spelled, is actually a smoking cannon, for it is a blatant anachronism, a blatant ectopism (as if the sentence “Hey, dudes, we gotta stick some gas in the car” were alleged to occur in a text alleged to have been written in 1500 in England), and, as we will soon see, a spelling impossible in older Italian. For two anticipatory anachronisms and ectopisms combined, see notes 96 and 137.

50. In Selbourne’s world of fantasy, shadowy entities came in and out of the dense fog of make-believe (among the many others were “Jacob of Ancona,” “the original manuscript,” a “sultan” in a country without sultans at the time, a Jewish community in a city not known to have had any Jews at the time, and, as we will see in part A of section 8, “the great rabbi Israel of Florence,” “Isaac d’Arezzo,” “Dattalo Porat de Fano,” and other probably just as non-existent beings), but only he could see them. As suggested in note 126, Selbourne’s enterprize could have been the basis of a religion. See too note 146.

51. When I was a member of the faculty of an Israeli university, from 1975 to 1990, first in the Yiddish Studies Program and then in that program and in the Department of Hebrew Language, I would get letters, as did many of my colleagues in other departments and programs of Jewish interest, from foreign “professors of Jewish studies” or, as the more pompous ones
styled themselves, “professors of Judaic studies” who inquired (in English, of course) about spending a semester or two of their sabbatical leaves teaching at the school.

Since at that time we had a Department of Biblical Studies, a Department of Hebrew Language, a Department of Hebrew Literature, a Department of Jewish Thought, a Department of Land-of-Israel Studies, a Yiddish Studies Program, and a Talmudic Studies Program, but no “Department of Jewish Studies” or “Department of Judaic Studies,” I would ask for a more detailed description of backgrounds, specialties, and accomplishments, from which it often became apparent that the applicants’ preparation was scant (jacks and jills of all Jewish trades, masters and mistresses of none).

For example, there once came across my desk the curriculum vitae of the vice-president of “The American Association of Professors of Yiddish” (mind you, not teachers, as modesty requires, but “professors”), who was looking for a position in our program. Naturally, it was in English. I needed no more information to take a well-grounded decision. Expectedly, when I later met him (pro forma), he could not hold even a simple conversation in Yiddish, even to the point of being unable to understand a simple question like vi ayay heyot ayer kherev ay Yidish? “what’s your group’s name in Yiddish?”, to say nothing of being proficient in the language and being able to teach it (later I learned that the group had a grossly ungrammatical Yiddish name; in good Yiddish, it should be called di amerikane kherev yidisher-terser). He was, however, a good teacher of German and was hired in that capacity.

In Israel, we had our specialties within specialties within specialties in Jewish studies and I for one would not have thought of overstepping boundaries. For example, in the Yiddish Studies Program it would never have crossed my mind to consider teaching literature (my field was language and linguistics) and in the Department of Hebrew Language I gave courses having to do only with Modern Hebrew (and because even that smaller field was too broad by Israeli standards for one person to master fully, my real specialty was the influence of other languages on Modern Hebrew -- but even in that much smaller field, my knowledge had many gaps).

In contrast, tertiary schools in other countries have “professors of Jewish studies” or of “Judaic studies,” who often teach just a dash of this and a smidgen of that. Everything is relative -- Norwegian studies are not the same in Australia as in Norway and Australian studies are not the same in Norway as in Australia, though it must also be said that many exceptions occur:

1. “There was nothing in England [of the eighteenth century] comparable to the brilliant Shakespeare criticism of Lessing, Goethe, and August von Schlegel in Germany. [...] Here modern Shakespeare criticism begins. Indeed, from the time of Lessing, in the 18th century, to the mid-19th century, German critics and scholars made substantial and original contributions to the interpretation of Shakespeare, indicating Shakespeare's superlative artistry, at a time when in England he was admired more as a great poet and a brilliant observer of mankind than as a disciplined artist” (Brown et al. 1991:268).

2. The best work (but also most of the bad work) on Judezmo has come from the pen of non-Sefaradim.

3. Sinologists outside the People’s Republic of China have evaluated the Chinese aspects of Selbourne’s book far more competently than most Sinologists in that country (see section 20).

In sum, Israel has no “professors of Jewish studies” or “professors of Judaic studies” and those sporting such titles abroad would not be able to secure appointments in the country if they had no specialties. Which is not to say that to see a small part of the picture you do not have to try to see all of it.

“Dr.” Parfit’s title being “lecturer in Hebrew and Jewish studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies,” he needs no translation of the Yiddish saying der rebe iz groyf ven n’hot kheyne tamidimolekh. Selbourne does: ‘teachers are big when their pupils are small’. 