Both from what Selbourne's "Acknowledgments" say and what they do not say we get the impression that he did not reveal to anyone much about his undertaking (whatever it was, whether, as he claimed, the translation of a manuscript, which we believe to be fake if it has ever existed, or "translation" of a "found" manuscript, if no such manuscript, as several critics believe, has ever existed):

A. The words "queries upon a hundred and one different matters" remind us of the Indian story about the three blind men each of whom feels the same elephant in a different place and thus gets a different impression of what animal it is. No one seems to have been associated with Selbourne's enterprize closely enough (except his wife?) to come to know its breadth and depth before publication of his book.

B. Even with regard to the named helpers, who were presumably involved more significantly than the unnamed ones, we get no specifics (in such acknowledgments one often reads sentences like "I thank so-and-so for reading a draft of chapters 3 through 5").

Selbourne's enterprize thus had all the markings of a loner's undertaking to which others (except his wife?) were associated unknowingly. As the saying goes, wherever there is a secret there must be something wrong. Yes, yes, we know Selbourne's "explanation" about the alleged "present owner"'s maniacal urge for utmost anonymity, and so on and so forth, but we believe it to be as fictitious as everything else in his enterprize.

Come to think of it, even if we accepted the alibi, Selbourne could have still shown the finished translation to others for constructive criticism -- what Selbourne did once he left the alleged "present owner"'s house was his own business and the "owner" had no way of checking up on him (just as that alleged person could not and did not stop him from turning to Mondadori). Or will Selbourne come up with an "explanation" here too, say, that he did not want to do anything without the "owner"'s permission, he knew that the "owner" would never grant him license to show anything to anyone, and therefore he never let anyone in on the secret? If so, why did Selbourne not hesitate to approach Mondadori without asking the "owner" for permission and to publish his book, later, in at least sixteen versions? As we see many times in this tragicomedy, when something was convenient for Selbourne, he claimed it happened (here, Selbourne dutifully abided by the "present owner"'s restrictions), and when the same thing was not convenient for him, it did not happen (sixteen times Selbourne published versions of the book as if the restrictions did not exist). Fictioneers can scribble their stories as they wish, with as many contradictions as they wish, but if they represent their fiction as nonfiction, they will have to face the music.

If I am wrong and Kaz's name was omitted from Selbourne 2000 for a different reason, let him (Kaz, of course) come forward and set the record straight.

C. Did Selbourne's helpers and supporters have any relevant credentials?
In any case, it would be good to know the relevant credentials of each of those helpers (including the "many others"), what their track record was in the relevant disciplines, what questions Selbourne asked each one, what each one answered, whether each one, except the first-mentioned, has now read the entire book and all the negative reviews and negative letters to the editor, and what opinion each of them now holds of Selbourne's enterprise. It would be useful too if we had detailed information on the alleged "correspondents, including Hebraists" allegedly approving Selbourne's book (see section 7). Naturally, an honest person can in good faith participate in an enterprise without learning its true nature, so that mention of the eleven and reference to the "many others" in the present essay are not intended to question their honesty. Will they all come forward spontaneously, candidly reveal everything they know, and release photocopies of all correspondence to and from Selbourne?

So far, information only about Matthew d'Ancona has turned up: "(born 1968) he is a British journalist. He is as of 2006 the editor of The Spectator, a position to which he was appointed in February 2006. He is a former deputy editor of The Sunday Telegraph. Born in 1968, he was educated at St Dunstan's College, Catford and Magdalen College, Oxford where he took the top First in Modern History for his year in 1989. The same year, he was elected a fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. After a year studying medieval confession, he joined the magazine Index on Censorship before proceeding to The Times as a trainee. There he rose swiftly to become Assistant Editor at the age of 26. He joined The Sunday Telegraph in 1996 as comment editor and columnist, before becoming Deputy Editor under Dominic Lawson and, latterly, Sarah Sands. He has written a weekly political column in The Sunday Telegraph for a decade and, more recently, in The Daily Telegraph on Wednesdays. He succeeded Boris Johnson as editor of The Spectator. He is also the author of two books on early Christian theology, The Jesus Papyrus and The Quest for the True Cross. He has written a novel, Going East. His new novel, Tabatha's Code, is due out in May 2006" (unsigned 2006b).139

All of which is to say that Matthew d'Ancona lacked relevant credentials -- as we should expect of someone unknowledgeable and naive enough to believe that The City of Light is "One of the most important manuscripts ever discovered ... the extraordinary adventure of a merchant-scholar which will lead us into a city of the past once again blazing with light" (the blurb he provided for Selbourne 1997a; see note 142). If any "manuscript" has been discovered, let us see it, even if just a photocopy of even just one side of one leaf.140

Since weird things can happen in people's minds, often unbeknownst to them, we wonder whether Matthew d'Ancona's family name prompted him to espouse the cause of the imaginary "Jacob of Ancona." A few weeks after the foregoing sentence was written, David Abulafia told me that Matthew d'Ancona "even speculate[s] that he is a descendent of the alleged 'Jacob d'Ancona'" (letter, 12 June 2006), which suggests that my hunch may be right. As for the "speculation" (a revealing word), it is as likely as a supposition that any real person bearing the family name Holmes is related to Sherlock Holmes. Furthermore, Selbourne stated that he made up the name: "J'ai donné à l'auteur le nom de Jacob d'Ancone; lui-même indique «Iacobo», «Giacobbe» et «Iacob»" (not having at hand any version in English, I quote from page 29 of the French version), so that if Matthew d'Ancona suspected a relationship, it could not be on the basis of names (in Matthew d'Ancona, by the way, we have a family name whereas in Jacob d'Ancona we have a surname) but, rather, on the basis of the fact that both were Jews with a connection of one kind or another to the same city. Is Matthew d'Ancona indeed a Jew? His evaluation of The City of Light tells us at least that he is not knowledgeable in any branch of Jewish
studies relevant to Selbourne's book. Not surprisingly, unsigned 2006b contains nothing of Jewish interest.\textsuperscript{141}

In any case, it would be good to know, in detail, how Matthew d'Ancona justified his approval of Selbourne's book. Can he refute every one of the criticisms leveled at it? Can he refute even just one? Naturally, d'Ancona's demonstration should consist of a step-by-step, point-by-point, cogent argument at the level of today's best research -- a demonstration that would be accepted, say, at St. Dunstan's College, Catford and Magdalen College, and All Souls College, a demonstration that would win its author the top First in any relevant field, a demonstration that would prompt those schools to make him a fellow, a demonstration that would be accepted for publication in a relevant, high-level, peer-reviewed academic journal in the West. If he will favor me with an offprint, I will dissect it in excruciating detail.\textsuperscript{142}

D. Will Selbourne open his files
and can he leave us an ethical will?

Will Selbourne open his files so that we can see, at least in part, how he proceeded? If he acted honestly at all times, he has nothing to hide. And will he preserve them for posterity or will he destroy them? Whatever he does with his files and his library (a complete catalog would be useful), whether preserving or destroying them, whether selectively or completely, we will learn something about him: if everything is preserved, new knowledge (about the enterprise) will presumably surface; if everything is destroyed, we will know that he had many things to hide; if a part is destroyed, we will know that he had some things to hide. One thing we will never see, however, is letters from the "present owner."

We also have these requests to make of him: is he willing to leave us an ethical will (a Jewish tradition) and is he willing to put the name, address, telephone number, and any other relevant particulars about the alleged "present owner" into a sealed envelope marked "NOT TO BE OPENED UNTIL [some date by which it is certain that the alleged 'present owner' will be dead]" and deposit it with a lawyer he trusts with the instruction that if the lawyer's practice is liquidated the envelope should be handed to some other trustworthy lawyer ready to keep it sealed until that date? In that way, Selbourne need not fear that the "present owner" will suffer harassment or persecution of any kind and, by leaving a paper trail, he will allow us to verify, at least in part, his story and, presumably, locate the Precious Gift and thus preserve it for all time -- surely the earnest desire of all the characters, major and minor, in this tragicomedy, both the imaginary ones, like "the great rabbi Israel of Florence," "Jacob of Ancona," the "original owner," the "Jewish family" which guarded the Precious Gift for generations, the "present owner," and the real ones, of whom there were at least sixteen: Hillel Black (see note 164), Chun-shu Chang (see section 2), Matthew d'Ancona (see earlier in this section), Robyn Davidson, Henri Gambourg,\textsuperscript{143} Philippa Harrison (see subsection G of section 22), Luc Kwanten (see section 2), Li Xueqin (see note 145), Alison Menzies (see note 106), Tudor Parfitt (see section 7), Melanie Phillips, David Selbourne, Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson (of the London branch of Little, Brown and Company), Paul Theroux (see note 141), Wang Lianmao (see sections 2 and 20), and
Andrew Wille (of the London branch of Little, Brown and Company).

Come to think of it, what does the alleged "present owner" intend to do with the alleged "original manuscript" (which surely he wants to be preserved after his death)? Selbourne, once he realized how zealously the "present owner" guarded his treasure, must have been curious to know what he wanted done with the Precious Gift after his death. What sayeth Selbourne on that account?¹⁴⁴

Or, to ask realistic questions, is not Selbourne's story a figment of his imagination and are not Selbourne, "Jacob of Ancona," and the "present owner" one and the same person?

E. The reaction to Selbourne's book in the highest relevant scholarly circles (the only reaction that counts)

The reaction to Selbourne 1997a in the academic world, so far as I can tell, is almost perfectly contoured by geography or political units (whether one or both is unclear): almost all of Selbourne's few supporters are in the People's Republic of China and almost all his critics are elsewhere. Probably three factors account for the difference:

A. At least with respect to evaluating Selbourne 1997a and Selbourne's related publications, standards of research, which include standards of evidence, are, overall, far higher in the West than in the People's Republic of China. For instance, whereas producing the alleged "original manuscript" and authenticating it were in that country not deemed to be essential first steps (except, so far as we know, by So Kee-long), elsewhere they are held to be indispensable before any alleged document can be considered further (see section 20). Also as a result of the significant difference in standards, Selbourne's supporters in that country naively believed whatever he said, whereas the Scourges of Jacob, being scientists, take nothing on faith (we are all from Missouri, as the American English idiom goes), we have put numberless holes in his tale and in his story, and his overall response to the criticism (vagueness, evasiveness, self-contradiction, far-fetched "explanations," further outlandish claims, new claims resulting in yet more anomalies, failure to adduce proof for his assertions, and so forth) gave us the impression that he should not be taken at his word (and that he in fact had no defense).

B. Either Selbourne's supporters in the People's Republic of China, who came across as naive and unfamiliar with standards of research, including standards of evidence, were unaware of the depth and breadth of the criticism elsewhere (for example, none gave any sign of knowing that many non-Chinese aspects of the book too had been dismissed as unauthentic) or they did not appreciate the fact that the criticism was often based on damning evidence. With the present essay, the depth and breadth of the criticism have increased appreciably, so that Selbourne and his supporters, if they still want to slog on, now face a bigger challenge. If they did not meet the smaller one (parrying all the few criticisms in the earlier reviews and letters to the editor), they have little chance of being able to meet the larger one (parrying all the criticisms leveled earlier and leveled now).

C. As remarked in note 5, a large number of people in China hold that anything positive you
say about them or where they live, whether right or wrong, is worthy of praise. That factor is absent elsewhere.\textsuperscript{145}

The net results of Selbourne's book and related publications were: he got into boiling water in relevant academic circles everywhere except the People's Republic of China; he failed to extricate himself; in the highest relevant scholarly circles he and his tiny band of supporters are in bad odor; his book derailed low-level research in that country but made not even a one-second ripple in high-level research circles anywhere.

"No scholar has come forward to support the text's authenticity in public" (unsigned 2006a, where the fourth and fifth words make superfluous the last two). "The text"? What text? No one has proven the existence of any text aside from Selbourne's alleged "translation" and much evidence suggests the non-existence of the Precious Gift.\textsuperscript{146}

**F. The more likely possibility:**

no "original manuscript" has ever existed

My impression is that there never was any "original manuscript" whether genuine or fake: no genuine one, because, as we have seen, the many anachronisms and anomalies pointed out in the present essay and in the other negative reviews and letters to the editor rule out that possibility; and no fake one, because nobody would have been motivated to spend so much time and so much energy to make one and it would be beyond belief that such an undertaking would, by coincidence, result in a document expressing ethical, philosophical, political, and social ideas which were either identical, or nearly so, with Selbourne's.

Rather, the fact that, after being black-balled at Ruskin College, Selbourne left not only that school but academia in general and he left not only the city of Oxford but the entire British Isles suggests that he felt hurt by losing his position and frustrated at no longer having that platform from which to disseminate his ideas. Selbourne's book thus seemed to be an attempt to gain a forum, this time one he hoped would be worldwide and eternal.\textsuperscript{147}

Had Selbourne not made those claims about a long-lost "original manuscript," a thirteenth-century Italian Jewish rabbi-doctor-merchant and all-time supergenius who visited China before the far-famed Marco Polo did, and so on, his submission would have been considered a historical novel, it would in all likelihood have been adjudged a sleep-inducing clunker, and, consequently, the tale would probably have been turned down for publication, in which case Selbourne would have achieved nothing. Might it in fact have originally been penned as fiction?

The success of Selbourne's story (the aim of which was to present "Jacob"'s tale as nonfiction) was thus essential to the success of the tale (which, the Scourges of Jacob maintain, was fiction), but both story and tale were overblown and thus not believable:

**A.** The tale was too crammed with Selbourne's own beliefs to prevent discerning people from
concluding that "Jacob of Ancona" -- a boring, nonstop jabbering machine spewing forth Selbourne's ethical, philosophical, political, and social ideas already well known in many circles -- gave every impression of being nothing more than Selbourne's mouthpiece.

B. The tale was crammed with too many "firsts" to be believable. They resulted from the ignorance of the real "Jacob," who did not know that before putting this or that word into the fictitious "Jacob"'s mouth, he should have checked whether it was attested for the 1270s (see the many anticipatory anachronisms noted throughout the present essay), before having the alleged "Jacob" visit this or that Jewish community, he should have checked whether such a community existed in the 1270s, before creating characters like "the great rabbi Israel of Florence," "Isaac d'Arezzo," "Dattalo Porat de Fano," "Haim ben Abraam Ha-Levi de Sinigaglia," "Jacob de Sinigaglia," and "Nathan ben Dattalo de Sinigaglia," he should have checked whether Florence, Arezzo, Fano, and Sinigallia had Jewish communities in the 1270s, and so on and so forth.

Inevitably, then, Selbourne's enterprise was dead on arrival, with the result that not only were his presumed goals not achieved but in the world of high-level relevant research he is, if we may judge from the negative reviews and letters to the editor, in bad odor. Publish and perish.

Referring to the early negative reviews and letters to the editor, Selbourne said that "Time and again the quibbles these critics raise reveal how shallow their knowledge really is. The fact that these people are biting and stinging like hornets is par for the course in academia. Because I'm not a Hebraist, because I'm not an Italianist, because I'm not a Sinologist, I'm regarded as a crude interloper who has been given access to something other people would have preferred to have for themselves" (quoted in Hillenbrand 1997).

If the self-important Selbourne indeed believed that people were envious or jealous of him for having gotten "access" to the alleged "original manuscript," he was laboring under a delusion, for who after the critics' onslaught wants to be in his shoes? Who covets his notoriety? How many people ever believed that he got "access" to anything and how many people believe so now? Since the critics are of the opinion that he got "access" either to nothing or to a fake, they cannot be envious or jealous.

As for Selbourne's confession, "I'm not a Hebraist, [...] I'm not an Italianist, [...] I'm not a Sinologist" (see note 157), he should have directed those words at himself before deciding whether to embark on his enterprise. Apparently, either nobody tried to stop him or somebody (his wife?) tried but failed.148

G. Selbourne later admitted

that he could have written "Jacob"'s tale

"The integrity of the original text stands. Thanks to the farsightedness and determination of Philippa Harrison of Little, Brown, and her editorial staff, Jacob's argosy is well and truly launched upon the high seas, and nothing -- certainly not the harpoons of the critics vainly pursuing in its wake -
- can stop its passage" (Selbourne 1997d). As Charles Dickens said, "I am the affectionate father to every child of my fancy."

Selbourne would do well to take off his party hat and put on his thinking cap. If he could put aside his cockiness, his feigned self-assurance (the "integrity" of the "original text"?), his self-fulfilling prophecies (all are signs of trying to mask insecurity), and instead assay his situation with a clear head (his critics see The City of Light as Claude Debussy saw Richard Wagner's music: a sunset which others mistook for a dawn), he would understand that his leaky tub, instead of landing him in any haven, left him stranded, to use his words, "upon the high seas."

Strange but wonderful to say, Selbourne, at least in the French version of his book, did budge a millimeter:

"À mes détracteurs mal renseignés, je ne ferai donc qu'une concession: je ne nie pas que, pour quelque raison perverse, j'aurais pu théoriquement concocter toute cette histoire dans mon bureau d'Urbino. Pour le non-orientaliste et le non-médiéviste que je suis, cette tâche aurait tout de même exigé une quantité de recherches prodigieuses, un temps infini, une incroyable habileté, une imagination héroïque, la connaissance d'un dialecte médiéval du Fujian méridional et le désir de mener en bateau tout le monde universitaire.

"Mais en pratique? Avec autant d'objectivité que j'en puis montrer, et malgré les efforts persistants des chercheurs occidentaux pour prouver que je suis l'auteur de La Cité de Lumière ou que j'ai été la dupe d'un autre, je crois la chose en soi peu probable. Et puis, les spécialistes chinois, et parmi eux les meilleurs connaisseurs de l'histoire des Song, se sont aujourd'hui prononcés. La décision de publier des traductions chinoises (à Shanghai et à Taipei--celle-ci se trouvant à proximité de l'ancienne Zaitun) en dit long. Je me réjouis donc de laisser aux Chinois eux-mêmes le soin de rendre leur verdict sur le texte...et sur les «sinologues» occidentaux" (pp. 573-574).

A dissection:

A. Selbourne’s critics (not "detractors") believe that they are not "mal renseignés" 'misinformed' but, at least for the most part, "bien renseignés" 'well-informed'.

B. In 1997, Selbourne confessed the obvious: "I'm not a Hebraist, [...] I'm not an Italianist, [...] I'm not a Sinologist" (see note 157). Now, fortunately, in the French version of his book he confessed not to being two other things we've known since that year he was not: he was not an Orientalist and he was not a medievalist (more "nots" need to be added but let's be grateful for his two confessions as far as they went). And we also surmise that his alleged "interest in Judaica, including the history of medieval Jewry in Italy" (see the last paragraph of note 58) was as imagined as the "present owner," who allegedly knew of that "interest," which allegedly spurred him to reveal the existence of the alleged Precious Gift to Selbourne.

You wonder why, if the two were friends of "many years," Selbourne's alleged "interest" did not spur the alleged "present owner" to gift him either the original of the Precious Gift or a full photocopy. Neither of those steps would have made his name or his whereabouts known to the public.

Selbourne having been unknown to name and fame in all relevant disciplines, what then were
his qualifications for the job -- his first, only, and failed foray into several disciplines -- aside from his obvious skill as a writer of Wardour Street English? The answer is presumably that no one knew Selbourne's ethical, philosophical, political, and social ideas (see section 16) better than he did, so that, if called on to serve as "translator," no one was better qualified to cram them into the fictitious "Jacob"'s mouth. That was Selbourne's only obvious and undeniable qualification. Indeed, no reviewer ever noted even the slightest disparity between Selbourne's ideas and "Jacob"'s and I dare say that none can be found, though maybe he inserted one or two lest critics note that their astounding identity of views was suspicious.

That was in fact the only "achievement" of Selbourne's book: he succeeded in making "Jacob" his mouthpiece. But in the end he failed to rebroadcast those ideas because he drowned them in drivel and because, as he himself recognized and lamented publicly, "the controversy over the authenticity of the manuscript and the debates over the accuracy of the details of Chinese history contained in The City of Light have deflected discussion of the book's broader political and philosophical ideas" (Hillenbrand 1997; the words are Hillenbrand's, not Selbourne's, but they express the latter's sentiment). Notice that Selbourne, like everyone else in his tiny camp of supporters, self-servingly began with the question of "the authenticity of the manuscript," that is, at stage 2, thus conveniently forgetting stage 1, namely the question of the existence of the alleged manuscript.

C. His avowal that "je ne nie pas que, pour quelque raison perverse, j'aurais pu théoriquement concocter toute cette histoire" is a step in the right direction:

i. It is an admission that he could have made all the mistakes in "Jacob"'s tale.

ii. Because it implies that Selbourne recognized that someone in our time could have written the alleged "Jacob"'s tale, it is almost an admission that the tale is fake or non-existent (though he did not go so far as to say that he is the culprit). Thus, we ask Selbourne: if not you, who could the culprit be?

iii. It explicitly raises the question of motive. Suspicion was thrown on Selbourne and only on him because, as the only character in this tragicomedy known for certain to exist, only he would have had a motive or motives for trying to stage it (only he would stand to gain from a rebroadcasting of his ideas and only he would be hailed as the "discoverer" or the "codiscoverer" -- actually, the creator -- of the "new" Marco Polo [see section 18]; if he is the culprit, he could have had the additional motive of wanting to take revenge on the academic world after being black-balled at Ruskin College). Furthermore, given his lack of knowledge ("I'm not a Hebraist," and so on), it is clear that he was capable of making all the blunders (in contrast to the fictional "Jacob," who could not possibly have erred because he was "an astonishing intellectual titan"). Selbourne was thus not just the perfect candidate to write Selbourne 1997a but also the only person likely to have done so. The alleged "present owner" could not have picked a better "translator."

iv. That avowal is a tacit confession. It would take but a tiny step forward to make it a realistic statement of fact: just replace "j'aurais pu théoriquement concocter" by "j'ai concocté" "I concocted". Is not the cat half way out of the bag already? Is it not the truth that Selbourne's enterprize had all the hallmarks of a hoax of some kind and none of the attributes of what in the highest scholarly circles in the West today would be accepted as a legitimate project of research? Is it not the truth that
Selbourne's name, and his only, was so blatantly written all over his enterprize that "Jacob of Ancona" could not have been anyone but David of Urbino and that at best his book could be classified as pseudonymous fictional autobiography.

D. The claim "Pour le non-orientaliste et le non-médiéviste que je suis, cette tâche aurait tout de même exigé une quantité de recherches prodigieuses, un temps infini, une incroyable habileté, une imagination héroïque, la connaissance d'un dialecte médiéval du Fujian méridional [...]" rests on Selbourne's misconception that his book is chock full of detailed, accurate information that would have been extraordinarily hard in our day to assemble. But since the book is actually a boring historical novel of no literary value (had it any such value, it would win prizes, be on lists of best-sellers, be the object of literary analysis and criticism, and win literary prizes) that is abrim with sins of commission and omission, of which only an ignorant botcher was capable, Selbourne could well have written it (as we believe he did), the fact and he and the imaginary "Jacob" often make the same mistakes being additional circumstantial evidence that Selbourne was the author.

Consequently, that quotation should be replaced by a realistic assessment, say this:

One of these three possibilities must be right because there is no fourth: (a) the "original manuscript" exists and is genuine; (b) it exists and is a fake; (c) it does not exist. The fact that "Jacob"'s tale is full of mistakes (a considerable number of them smoking guns and smoking cannons), contradictions, dramatic anticipatory anachronisms, impossibilities, and other absurdities rules out possibility (a). Both the remaining possibilities imply a hoax of some kind.

The fact that I do not believe that I have been the victim of a hoax ("[...] que j'ai été la dupe d'un autre, je crois la chose en soi peu probable") means that I do not believe that the hoaxer was somebody else.

Consequently, I must be the hoaxer.

Indeed, given the fact that I'm not a Hebraist, not an Italianist, not a Sinologist, not an Orientalist, not a medievalist, and many other non-thisses or non-thats, given the fact that I have no training in the relevant disciplines, given the fact that I have no track record in those disciplines and given the fact that "Jacob" and I often made the same mistake, it is obvious that I could be the hoaxer.

Given the fact that no one except me would have had a motive or motives to write "Jacob"'s tale and given the fact that the fictional "Jacob"'s ethical, philosophical, political, and social ideas are identical, or nearly so, with mine, the Scourges of Jacob have further reason to suspect only me of being the hoaxer.

Given the fact that neither "Jacob"'s tale nor my story is well-knit (both are in fact brimming with absurdities), neither should be believed.

Consequently, my entire enterprize is justly under suspicion.
As Sherlock Holmes says, "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth" (though in this case what remains -- yours truly, David Selbourne -- is not improbable).

Is it thus not obvious that I am the real "Jacob"?

Ironically, therefore, Selbourne's remark that he did not think himself the victim of a hoax damned him, for it tells us that he ruled out the possibility that one or more other people were the culprits. For him, it would have been wiser of him to say, "Yes, it is possible that I have been the victim of a hoax." Even wiser would have been, "Yes, I have been hoaxed." But the wisest of all would have been, "Yes, I am the hoaxer."

If Selbourne budged just another millimeter by making the wisest statement of all, the final curtain on this tragicomedy could come down.

E. As for "la connaissance d'un dialecte médiéval du Fujian méridional," it has not been proven that anything in The City of Light reflects that variety of Chinese (see the Comment on Quotation H in section 20).

F. As for "le désir de mener en bateau tout le monde universitaire," is it not the truth that one of Selbourne's motives in publishing Selbourne 1997a was a desire to avenge his black-balling at Ruskin College and any other major setbacks he may have suffered in academia?

G. The Scourges of Jacob do not believe that "les spécialistes chinois" are knowledgeable, stringent, and discerning enough to pass judgement on Selbourne's book. See H below. And, anyway, Selbourne's blunders concern much more than the Chinese aspects of his book.

H. As for the alleged "meilleurs connaisseurs de l'histoire des Song [qui] se sont aujourd'hui prononcé," as a wry comment on repeated calls in Yiddish-speaking circles in the United States for "a beserer yidisher tiyater' 'a better Yiddish theater' (the last word is to be taken in an abstract sense), Max Weinreich once said that we need not "a beserer yidisher tiyater" but "a guter yidisher tiyater" 'a good Yiddish theater'. Those whom Selbourne thought to be "the best" were not good.

I. The publication of Chinese translations of Selbourne's book only tells us once again that there's a sucker born every minute.

J. Naturally, Selbourne could not have been happier that those he termed "the best" ("les meilleurs") have rendered their verdict on his book and on Western Sinologists. But no one in his camp, including the "best," has published anything about the book that would pass muster in the most stringent Western research circles (and not only with respect to its Chinese aspects). Read in section 20 the dissection of Wang's remarks and decide whether even one card in his house of cards now remains standing.

H. Selbourne's deficient knowledge of Latin
Although Selbourne prominently quoted Terence's much-repeated line, "habent sua fata libelli" (he gave it an entire page of its own in Selbourne 1997a, Selbourne 2000, the French version of his book, and maybe in other or all versions too), like everyone else who quotes Terence out of context, he did not understand it. Yes, 'books have their fates', as the sentence is conventionally translated, but if Selbourne had bothered to learn Latin and to read *de Litteris de Syllabis de Metris*, he would have found out that Terence wrote "pro captu lectoris habent sua fata libelli," that is, 'the fate of books depends on the discernment of the reader'. How *The City of Light* and Selbourne go down in history thus depends solely on the opinions of the discerning, the most discerning of whom in this case being those with the highest relevant credentials and the best track records in the relevant disciplines -- not credulists unaware of their lack of preparation in the relevant subjects like a handful of Chinese and Selbourne's overeager lap dog (Tudor Parfitt), not gullible academics with irrelevant credentials, not commercial publishers with only dollar signs in their eyes and their robotic lackeys, not cub reporters who with their slack-jawed acceptance of everything they are told do not bother to dig -- and are often incapable, for lack of knowledge, of digging-- below the surface.

Rather than that truncated line from Terence, Selbourne should have chosen the English saying *fame is but the breath of the people* and the Latin one *iustitia suum cuique distribuit* 'justice gives everyone his due'.

Let Selbourne put aside too his whining and his quibbles (the real quibbler was he), his feigned hurt (as if he, not research and the truth, were the injured party), his desperate attempts to plug the many holes in his sunken bucket, his cowboy arrogance, his presumable self-image as an astonishing intellectual titan (see note 35 on how Selbourne, who, like Shakespeare's Falstaff, allowed his imagination to outrun his achievement and believed himself to be a literary equal of Cervantes and *The City of Light* to be "one of the great works of European fiction worthy of the Nobel Prize for Literature"). Instead, he should ponder a remark by Alex Collett -- "[...] writers are notoriously unreliable in assessing the literary merit of their own work" (Collett 2006) -- and recall how history comes to regard people who have blundered on a grand scale: quick! what first comes to mind when you think of James Macpherson, Benedict Arnold, Neville Chamberlain, and Richard Nixon? why, Ossian, treason, Munich, and Watergate, of course. Serious blunders, especially because they were never fully, sincerely, and publicly acknowledged, overshadow, possibly for all time, whatever good any of the four may have accomplished.

I. Does Selbourne now regret undertaking his enterprise?

"The whole history of morality is of people urging on others things which they themselves neither did nor relieved" (Arnold Goodman, quoted in Selbourne 1993:110).

Like Leonard Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses*, who squeezed himself into an ill-fitting myth, Selbourne
may now be sorry that he embarked on his enterprise, which locked him in a bind of his own making:

1. He cannot advance by convincing any relevant researchers of the first water that anything he said was true (not even his story about going to Mondadori has been authenticated).

2. He cannot retreat because the extravagance of his claims and the vehemence of his defense would make a retraction embarrassing.

3. Since in his expository writings he trumpeted from the rooftops his calls for "responsibility" and "civic duty," a confession from a champion of ethics, all the more so from a champion of ethics trained in the law and admitted to the bar, would be humiliating and lay him open to a charge of hypocrisy.

Yet one of the two evils is lesser. Selbourne should ponder the Judezmo saying *pikáðu aturyáðu, méðju piðrunáðu* 'a fault confessed is half redressed' and Paul B. Brown's recent exhortation (not directed at him) to "Fess up. As generations of politicians have learned the hard way, it is not the mistake that is fatal, it is the cover-up" (Brown 2006). Everyone makes mistakes, even serious ones. Sometimes, as we assume to be the case here, people blunder in ways that make them look hypocritical (Selbourne being the author of *Moral Evasion* and *The Principle of Duty: An Essay on the Foundations of the Civic Order*, behaving unethically is the last thing people expect of him). Yet it is better to recognize one's mistakes (as Donald Forster has said, "No one who cannot rejoice in the discovery of his own mistakes deserves to be called a scholar"), better to grin and bear it through the inevitably uneasy catharsis (French-speakers would call it *un mauvais quart d'heure* 'a trying moment', literally, 'a bad quarter of an hour'), better to be rid of the albatross round one's neck, than to go down in history as having lost one's credibility in the highest relevant research circles.

If Selbourne is the hoaxter, as certain Scourges of Jacob believe him to be (some, before the present essay was written, left open the possibility that he may have been the hoaxee, it now remaining to be seen whether any are still of that opinion), he may think that keeping silent will, if not get him wholly off the hook, get him off partly, that is, by keeping silent, he may think that he can take to his grave the truth, whatever it may be, so that researchers will never be able to prove either whether he is innocent or whether he is guilty and in that way, he presumably hopes, the jury will always be hung, a situation which he presumably thinks is preferable to a verdict of guilty. If that is indeed his belief, he is mistaken inasmuch as textologists' dictum, which is nothing more than common sense, is that a document is considered not to exist until it is proven to exist; if it is proven to exist, it is not considered authentic until it is proven authentic; if it is proven authentic, it is not considered factual until it is proven factual (to whatever extent it is) and the Scourges of Jacob have already marshaled enough evidence to show that an authentic "original manuscript" is impossible and the existence of even an inauthentic one is unlikely in the extreme.

The question before us, consequently, has been not "Is the alleged 'original manuscript' authentic?" or even "Does the alleged 'original exist' and, if so, is it authentic?" but "Since we have every reason to believe that Selbourne's story is fiction (except, possibly, for the part about Mondadori, which has never been verified either), is there any reason to think otherwise?" Since non-existence of the alleged "original manuscript" is thus the status quo and it will continue forever unless Selbourne succeeds in proving its existence (and then its authenticity and afterwards its factualness), his hope
should be not that he will be able to stave off the critics until his death and then take his knowledge with him to the grave but that he will be able to prove existence, authenticity, and factualness before he dies.

Therefore, Selbourne should can his pious blather about "a matter of honour and of gratitude for an act of faith" (see note 125), which we do not believe. Coming clean, whatever the truth may be, would benefit him more than anyone else. If he is innocent, he should be able to prove that he is. If he is not, he will have to take the consequences. "Nothing so breeds a scandal as denial of it" (Mankowitz 1976:205).

Selbourne is now but a footstep away from an out-and-out confession:

A. We have now heard his quasi confession: "j'aurais pu théoriquement concocter toute cette histoire dans mon bureau d'Urbino."

B. His following that statement with "Pour le non-orientaliste et le non-médiéviste que je suis, cette tâche aurait tout de même exigé une quantité de recherches prodigieuses, un temps infini, une incroyable habileté, une imagination héroïque, la connaissance d'un dialecte médiéval du Fujian méridional et le désir de mener en bateau tout le monde universitaire" was an attempt to cast that quasi confession as merely "theoretical," but since his attempt was unconvincing (because writing Selbourne 1997a would not have taken, pace Selbourne, "une quantité de recherches prodigieuses," it would not have taken, pace Selbourne, "un temps infini," it would not have taken, pace Selbourne, "une incroyable habileté," it would not have taken, pace Selbourne, "une imagination héroïque," and it would not have taken, pace Selbourne, "la connaissance d'un dialecte médiéval du Fujian méridional" [but we will not disagree with him about the possibility of "le désir de mener en bateau tout le monde universitaire"]), we do not see the half confession as being in any way "theoretical."

C. If Selbourne is the real "Jacob," he would have had at least one motive (a desire to rebroadcast his ethical, political, social, ethical, and philosophical ideas, a desire which he presumably felt all the more keenly after his black-balling, his abandoning academia, and his leaving the United Kingdom, that is, after losing his soapbox there) and maybe a second one too (a desire to hoax the academic world to get even for having been black-balled?).

D. As he knows, the Scourges of Jacob can think of no other suspect.

All the pieces of the puzzle have thus been assembled and we lack just three words from Selbourne: "I am Jacob."

In any case, being trained in the law, Selbourne presumably realizes that a confession is not a sine qua non of a verdict of guilty.

As Selbourne himself may now understand, he, to say nothing of the world in general, would have been better off had the critics succeeded in suppressing all imprints of his book. Those whom he saw as his enemies (the "cabal") could have rendered him no better service.

J. Outdoing Al Capone
Selbourne and his enterprise having been put under the microscope, it is now clear that his book had more than enough smoking guns to shame even Al Capone, to say nothing of quite a few smoking cannons, and more di ex machina than the world's three score trashiest plays combined. His story appeared to be tailor-made to make him the "right" person in the "right" place at the "right" time, although an educated reader of Standard Italian should in our day have little trouble with "basically educated Tuscan" of the 1270s, especially since aids like dictionaries are available, and thus no Italian-speaker of today needs a translation (all the less so into English...), and although we do not understand why the two did not decide together what to do with the "translation" once it was finished (of course, we do understand, but we are pretending for the moment that the story is true) -- to mention just some of the highlights of Selbourne's story. Thus, Selbourne's story was just as cock-eyed and unbelievable as the alleged "Jacob"'s tale, the whole constituting a one-man, fantasy-filled, error-ridden tragicomedy.156

Of all Selbourne's affirmations, I believe just the confession that goes "[I'm] not a Hebraist [...], not an Italianist, [...] not a Sinologist," an admission which is not only incomplete but also damning.157

By embarking on an enterprise for which he was unqualified and by writing his own script, with no one to stay his hand (except his wife?) and warn him that this would be a disaster, Selbourne hoisted himself by his own petard.

I say again: ditch Ptolemy, accept Copernicus, and the galaxy of anachronisms, contradictions, ridiculous improbabilities, preposterous impossibilities, alleged serendipitous circumstances always favoring Selbourne, and seemingly endless other absurdities vanishes even faster than the alleged "present owner" did.158

K. Let us bring the matter before a court of law

"Pursuing a libel or slander suit has long been a dangerous enterprise" (the first sentence in "Be Careful What You Sue For," an editorial in The Wall Street Journal, 6 June 2007, p. A19)

Because Selbourne accused his critics of "risky libels about a 'fake'" (Selbourne 1997c), of "libellous activity" (Selbourne 1999), and of "cabal-like pressures" to prevent the American publication of his book (Selbourne 1997c; see note 4 and the third paragraph from the end of section 18), and he termed the criticism "scurrilous" (Selbourne 2000), but he did not show fight by pursuing legal action (in fact, Honigsbaum 1997 reports that after Irwin 1997 appeared, Selbourne "is no longer returning calls"), his accusations seemed to be:

A. bluster to scare the critics.

B. attempts to divert attention from the matter at hand, namely, reputable researchers in not
just one but several diverse fields have marshaled evidence of different kinds leading some of us to believe that no "original manuscript" exists other than the first draft of Selbourne's alleged "translation" and some of us to believe that, if what he claimed to be the "original manuscript" exists, it is a fake.

C. signs that he was unable to offer a convincing rebuttal (the old story of attacking the messenger if you lack arguments to rebut the message).

Selbourne having said that he would be not just prepared but "quite prepared to testify" at a meeting of his critics (Selbourne 1997d), he would presumably welcome airing the whole affair (the alleged "Jacob"'s tale, Selbourne's story, the critics' charges against Selbourne, and Selbourne's charges against the critics). That should be done not at a meeting but in a court of law, so that each side can subpoena witnesses and relevant documents (if they exist), all witnesses will testify under oath, the standards of evidence will be maintained, and the entire proceedings will be conducted according to the law.

At that time, Selbourne's critics, in driving home a powerful case against his entire enterprise, will, inter alia, make these common-sense points:

A. The tenet of freedom of speech ensures Selbourne's critics' right to publish analyses of his book and his related publications as much as it protects his right to publish defenses of himself and responses to his critics.

B. That tenet protects criticism all the more so when the person criticized is, like Selbourne, a published and thus a public person.

C. It protects it all the more so when the critics have marshaled abundant evidence to underpin their criticism.

D. Reviews, including scathing ones, have been customary for centuries in the academic world, they being one of the means by which we separate truth and falsehood.

E. Libel being a published statement damaging to a person's reputation, Selbourne appeared not to realize that only his book, lacking even a single claim on the gratitude of the educated public or on the respect of posterity, came close to being libellous (see Hillenbrand's remark quoted in the last paragraph of note 94) and that his critics only pointed out the many ways in which the book and his published reaction (including his unreaction) to the criticism hurt him. Selbourne should recall the Yiddish saying *zikh zet men nit* '[people do not see themselves [in a true light]]'.

F. Since in both the legal and the academic worlds, to say nothing of the world of common sense, the guideline is that a document is considered not to exist until it is proven to exist, if it is proven to exist, it is not considered authentic until it is proven authentic, and if it is proven authentic, its degree of factualness remains to be determined, the burden of proof will be on Selbourne to produce the alleged "original manuscript" (= stage 1). If he cannot do that, he has no case. If he can, we will go on to the other stages (see the seventh paragraph from the end of section 20) and then prove our other points.
At the discovery stage, certain documents will be requested of Selbourne and his publishers in order to verify the claims which they have made about them and to ascertain their authenticity:

i. the alleged "present owner"'s alleged conveyance of permission and vestment (see note 160).

ii. the "authentication" that one publisher -- just one? -- alleged having gotten, though it did not name the source (see note 3).

iii. the letters of support which Selbourne alleged he got, though he did not name the sources, from "many of my correspondents, including Hebraists [...]" (see section 6).

All those documents, as well as all the negative reviews, including the present essay, and the negative letters to the editor, will be put into evidence and all people having information about the alleged "present owner" (his name, his last known address, and so on) and his alleged "heirs" will be subpoenaed to provide it. Failure to comply with the request for the above-mentioned documents will be considered evidence that they do not exist.

Among those to be subpoenaed to testify will be -- aside from the star witness -- the alleged "present owner," his alleged "heirs," Selbourne's wife (see note 136), and his two children (Emilie and Raphael). It is hard to believe that one's husband or one's father would have a friend of "many years" living not far away whose name one did not know and it seems more likely than unlikely that one would have met him. Did the "present owner" not visit Selbourne over the years when his wife or children were at home too? Selbourne told us of at least one visit, when the alleged "present owner" first told him about the existence of the Precious Gift. Was no one else at home at the time? What did Selbourne tell his wife (and his children too?) when she (they?) realized, as she (they?) must have, that he was leaving the house frequently between September 1991 and June 1996. If the alleged "present owner" and his alleged "heirs" fail to appear and their deaths cannot be certified, their absence will be considered evidence of their non-existence.

Selbourne, once deposed, will be confronted with every one of the valid criticisms not only in the present essay but also in all the other negative reviews and in all the negative letters to the editor. He will be asked to present a fully articulated defense in which he rebuts the criticisms one by one in a manner acceptable in a court of law and in the world's highest academic circles (thus, not to be brought forth are the invalid criticisms mentioned in note 13 and the text to which it is attached and any others which he could prove were unjustified).

At the trial, I will reveal my by far most damning evidence -- it is most damning because it has to do not with a specific element or specific elements of Selbourne's enterprize but with the very "foundation," such as it is, of his entire enterprize. That "foundation" rests on a glaring, unresolvable contradiction:

In his book and/or related publications, Selbourne makes assertions A and B; both assertions must be right in order for the "foundation" not to collapse; yet if assertion A is right, assertion B must, by the rules of logic, be wrong, and if assertion B is right, assertion A must, by those rules, be wrong, so that once that irremovable contradiction is pointed out, the "foundation" will perforce come tumbling down. Put another way, in the world of fantasy one can make two assertions one of which contradicts the other whereas in the real world that is impossible if both assertions are true (we thus
have the old story here of Selbourne's asserting one thing when it was convenient for him but another thing when it was convenient for him on another occasion -- but with this difference: the two assertions to be revealed at the trial concern not details but the very underpinning of his entire enterprize).

In showing how those two assertions are both necessary to keep Selbourne's tub to Sinim afloat yet are in fact contradictory, I will first ask him to read aloud assertion A and assertion B from his book (if he wears eyeglasses, he will be asked beforehand to be sure to bring them so that he will have no excuse that he cannot read them aloud).

Then I will read aloud a short text in Latin well known to classicists. Next I will read aloud two brief sentences which I have composed in Latin, each consisting of a mere four words. Since the alleged "original manuscript" is alleged to contain Latin and "[Selbourne is] one of the few scholars who could have done justice to the translation and annotation of Jacob d'Ancona's many-faceted manuscript" (see note 157), he will have no trouble understanding.

Now everyone present will realize that doom is impending.

I will then put a few brief questions to Selbourne which so obviously go right to the heart of the matter that the audience will be astounded that no one till now has thought of asking them. None is a trick question. Each of them is phrased so simply that it uses only words in the active vocabulary of pupils in the third grade of primary school.

If Selbourne's story is true, he will be able to answer every one of the questions effortlessly, briefly, and correctly, but my guess is that he will be stunned, speechless, defenseless, unable to answer any of them to the court's satisfaction, writhing and staggering in his own shoes, whereupon it will become evident that either assertion A, or assertion B, or both assertions are wrong, whereupon his house of cards will again come tumbling down.

For the sake of truth, let us thus air the entire matter center stage (with no offstage and no offoffstage), under a bright spotlight, coram publico, where only hard evidence will be accepted, where all witnesses will be under oath, where it will be demonstrated that Selbourne is without muniments and that his enterprize, refractory to evidence, withstands neither legal nor academic nor logical scrutiny, and where, to his detriment and to his alone, Pandora's box will be flung open.

See notes 129 and 160 for more legal ramifications.159

L. In sum

If people read only Selbourne's book and see nothing wrong with it, they lack training in all of the relevant disciplines and are unqualified to express an opinion about it. If they read both the book and the negative reviews and letters to the editor and still see nothing wrong with it, they are not intelligent.
If the best relevant researchers will never be on Selbourne's side, he gains nothing in the long run. His presumably one-man enterprise derailed only dilettantish research and praise, but instead he paid a heavy price, becoming his own worst enemy. As Horace says, "Nil mortalibus ardui est / Coelum ipsum petimus stultitia" (Odes 1; 3, 37) 'nothing is too daring for humans; we seek to reach heaven itself in our folly', and as a Yiddish saying puts it, az me kunt nokh yerushe, muz men oft batsoln di kvure 'if you come for an inheritance, you often must pay for the burial instead'.

Did David Maurice Selbourne not create a rod for his own back?2160

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REFERENCES

A complete bibliography of publications relating to Selbourne 1997a being desirable, the author of the present essay would appreciate copies of the articles and letters to the editor marked "unseen" below and copies of relevant publications of which he is unaware (much appeared in Italy, but only Nissan 2000 and unsigned 2001 turned up).

Thirty-six publications (asterisked below) present evidence unfavorable to Selbourne: twenty-four appeared in 1997, five in 1998, two each in 1999, 2000, and 2001, and one I have been unable to date (Moore's review). How curious, therefore, that the French version of his book, which came off the press in April 2000, reprints (in French translation) only one of the negative reviews (Wasserstein and Wasserstein 1997), although only Henige 2000, Halkin 2001, and possibly Moore's review are understandably absent from that version (Abulafia 2000 was available before April 2000 as Abulafia 1997c). Therefore, either Selbourne and his supporters were unaware of the full extent of the criticism (it would now fill a goodly book) or they ignored most of it (for tacit rejections of his book, see, in section 16, the paragraph beginning "So far as I can tell, outside the People's Republic of China, the book changed nothing in the world of learning").

Selbourne's book appeared in at least sixteen imprints (see Selbourne 1997a for a list): 1 in 1997, 2 in 1998, 4 in 1999, 5 in 2000, 2 in 2001, and 1 each in 2002 and 2003, his best year thus having been 2000. Which is to say that, as often happens in commercial publishing, which is often antipodal to scholarly publishing and where the paramount consideration is usually money, even after at least thirty-six negative reviews and letters to the editor appeared, imprints kept coming out. In fact, most of the imprints came out after most of the negative reviews and letters were published. And the Library of Congress (see note 146) continues to classify the book as nonfiction and to indicate a year of birth for "Jacob."


Burlington, Singapore, and Sydney. Ashgate Variorum [this article is numbered "Essay IV" and is paginated as in Abulafia 1997c].


Ausubel, Nathan. 1953. Pictorial History of the Jewish People from Bible Times to Our Own Day Throughout the World. New York. Crown Publishers, Inc. [sloppy, like all the author's other books of Jewish interest, but yielding useful information, especially in the graphic material, if used critically].

Barandiarán, José Miguel. 1960. Geografia histórica de la lengua vasca (siglos XVI al XIX). Donostia-San Sebastián. Editorial Auñamendi [the chapter entitled "El euskera en Álava a fines del siglo XVIII" (pp. 61-66) reproduces the text of Pueblos de Álava por vicarías, repartidos sus vecinos en cinco clases].


Davidzon, Yisrael bar rabi david zichrono livracha. 1970. *Otsar bashira bairit minyan chatimat kitve bakodesh ad resbit tekuft babaskala*. 2 ed. With an introduction by J. Schirmann. New York. Ktav Publishing House [the reader not having access to the second edition may consult the first one (= 4 vols., New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1924-1933) and the supplement (in *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vols. 21-23, 1937-1938, pp. 715-783); the second edition consists of the first one, photographically reproduced, and Schirmann's introduction (vol. I, pp. IX-XXXVI); that introduction is available nowhere else; the Hebrew title of the second edition and the added English title, *Thesaurus of Mediaeval Hebrew Poetry*, are misleading, for the words *otsar* and *thesaurus* imply an anthology whereas this is a bibliography; and the word *mediaeval* misstates the scope of the work (compare paragraph E in note 96).


Dien, Albert E. 1997. "Jacob of Ancona: A Review of Reviews." <http://www.silk-road.com/artl/jacob.shtml> [admitting that "I myself have not had an opportunity to read the book," the author merely summarizes some of the reviews of Selbourne 1997a; the subtitle should thus be "An Uncritical Summary of Some Reviews"].


Dufresnoy, Lenglet. 1713. *Méthode pour étudier l'histoire*.


Finn, Elizabeth Anne. 1929. Reminiscences of Mrs. Finn. London.


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Gold, David L. in preparation 2. "For Whom Was Queens County, New York, Named: All the Queens of England or Just Charles II's Wife?"


Harkavy, Alexander. 1925. Yiddish-English-Hebrew Dictionary. New York. Published by the Author [see the remark at Harkavy 1928].


Irwin, Robert. 1997. "Books: Merchant's Tale: our morals are in decline, capitalism is out of control, our entertainment is full of violence and we have no respect for our elders. We might be living in 13th-century China...." *The Guardian*. 16 October. P. T12.


Manley, Mary de la Riviere. 1714. The Adventures of Rivella [...].


McInerney, Jay. 1984. Bright Lights, Big City.


*Opera del vocabolario italiano.* <http://colet.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/search2t?author=&title=&date=&oviperiod=&ovispearea=&ovigenarea>.


Selbourne, David ["translator" and "editor"]. 1997a. *The City of Light: An Authentic Traveler's Tale*. London. Little, Brown and Company [we wonder in what ways Selbourne "edited" the alleged "original manuscript"; is there not a 1997 London imprint with the subtitle *An Epic Journey to China Predating Marco Polo's Celebrated Journey*?].

Below, in chronological order (possibly approximate if two or more versions appeared in the same year), are the fifteen later versions which Robert Singerman could identify from library catalogs (which, he writes me, "are always suspect"). Some of the entries are incomplete. Especially revealing
are the subtitles (see section 18), which are often not shown on cards in library catalogs. My comments are bracketed.


*Ir haor* (Tel-Aviv, Zemora-Bitan motsiim laor, 1999, translated by David Shaham; "tirgem leanglit vearch et ketav-hayad haatik, deyvid selborn") [the words in quotation marks mean 'David Selbourne translated into English and edited the ancient manuscript'; it is significant that Selbourne called himself *deyvid* in Hebrew].

[title?] (Shanghai, 1999) [the first Chinese version].

*Stadt des Lichts: ein mittelalterlicher Händler berichtet von seiner Reise nach China (1270-1273)* (Bergisch Gladbach, Gustav Lübbe Verlag, 1999; translated by Peter A. Schmidt).


*Guang ming zhi cheng: Yi ge you tai ren zai Citong de jian wen lu* (Taipei, Chu ban, 2000, translated by Yang Min) [the second Chinese version].

*La cité de lumière* (Paris, Fayard, 2000, translated by Pierre-Emmanuel Dauzat) [the publisher announces on the cover that "Trois ans avant Marco Polo, Jacob d'Ancône arrivait en Chine..."].

*A cidade da luz: romance* (Lisbon, Editorial Bizâncio, 2000, translated by Fernanda Barão and Isabel Fernandes; "traduzido e adaptado por David Selbourne") [Portuguese *romance* was intended here in the sense of 'tale', a meaning which the word indeed has, though it also means 'novel', 'fiction', 'fable', which are more appropriate].


*The City of Light* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).


Stutshkov, Nokhem. 1950. *Der oytser fun der yidisher shprakh*. New York. Yiddish Scientific Institute [now YIVO Institute for Jewish Research; "this edition" of 1991 is merely a photographic reprint, with no additions or corrections, not even of misprints, of the only edition this book has ever...
had, namely the first edition, of 1950; for more proof of the death of Yiddish lexicography see the comment in the entries for Harkavy 1928 and U. Weinreich 1968.


unsigned. 1997a. "The City of Light." *Kirkus Reviews*. 1 September.\textsuperscript{166}


unsigned. 2006b. "Matthew d'Ancona." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia* [last modified at 15:48 on 21 October 2006; accessed on 19 May 2006].


and Keypunch-Compatible Transliteration); Weinberg was the architect of all four styles, Gold offered many comments on several drafts; the others offered some comments; and Zafren coordinated the committee's work.


Weinreich, Uriel. 1968. Modern English-Yiddish Yiddish-English Dictionary. New York. McGraw-Hill Book Co. and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research [the 1990 "edition" is merely a photographic reprint of the only edition this book has ever had; one of the few serious contributions to Yiddish lexicography, this posthumously published dictionary has little explanatory and even less generative power because of its small size (though none of those defects are the author's fault, for he wrote it under the most trying of conditions: terminally ill with cancer, he was not only writing his dictionary but carrying out myriad other obligations as teacher, researcher, and family man); despite his wish that the dictionary be corrected and expanded, every later imprint has been nothing more than a reprint; see the comment in the entries for Harkavy 1928 and Stutshkov 1950 for more proof of the death of Yiddish lexicography, to which may be added the failure of Der groyser verterbukh fun der yidisher shprakh, the first all-Yiddish dictionary of any size, to get beyond the first letter of the alphabet, the closing of Yiddish studies programs at Columbia University and the University of Haifa, the need of Bar-Ilan University, located in the allegedly "Jewish" state, to import a non-Jewish Japanese person to teach Yiddish, the cessation of almost all publishing in Yiddish].


For possible clues

Anyone who cares to devote more time to evaluating Selbourne 1997a and later versions might want to see whether the following publications have relevant information. Robert Singerman helped put the list together.

Adler, Elkan Nathan. *Travels in Many Lands.*


D'Ancona, Alessandro. 1874. *I precursori di Dante.* Florence. G.C. Sansoni [a survey of pre-Dantean medieval visions].

D'Ancona, David A. 1975. *A California-Nevada Travel Diary of 1876.* William M. Kramer, ed. Santa Monica. Norton B. Stern [unlikely to be relevant but one can never be sure].


Margariti, Roxani Eleni. 2007. *Aden and the Indian Ocean Trade: 150 Years in the Life of a Medieval Arabian Port.* Chapel Hill. University of North Carolina Press [since the alleged "Jacob" was allegedly in Aden and allegedly described what he allegedly saw there, this book might be useful].


Renaudot, Eusebius. 1718. *Anciennes relations de l'Inde et de la Chine de deux voyageurs mahométans qui y allèrent dans le IX-ième siècle.* Paris [Renaudot's first translation of the Arabic originals; see Renaudot 1845].

Renaudot, Eusebius. 1733. *Ancient Accounts of India and China by two Mohammedan Travellers Who Went to These Parts in the 9th Century, Translated from the Arabic by E. Renaudot.* London [a translation of
Renaudot 1718].


Torrance, T. *China's First Missionaries, Ancient Israelites* [rev., TLS: The Times Literary Supplement, July 1937].


137. "Selbourne is one of the few people to have seen the manuscript of Jacob's travels" (Wood 1997). The few? Who are the others? Where is the proof that even just Selbourne has seen it? Where is the proof that it has ever existed? In connection with the second question, we are intrigued by this footnote in the French version of Selbourne's book: "Mot presque illisible et biffé dans le manuscrit; avec l'aide de Shu-ching Naughton, de la Bodleian Library, Oxford, que je remercie, je me suis hasardé à proposer cette version, qui serait proche de guangmang zhi cheng, la «Cité de Lumière»" (page 163 of the French version, in reference to Selbourne's reading "Hanmansicien"). Did Selbourne show the relevant leaf of the "original manuscript" to Naughton? A photocopy of it? Did Selbourne use tracing paper? If so, did he not risk damaging the Precious Gift and did the "present owner" not stay his hand? If not, what did Naughton see? Is Naughton willing to come forward to speak for the record now or is a subpoena necessary?

The beginning of the sentence just before the one cited in the previous paragraph reads "Cette cité, les Mancini l'appellent aussi la cité ha-Bahir [...]" (p. 163) and in a footnote Selbourne said: "En hébreu dans l'original: littéralement, «de la lumière»" (ibidem). Jenner 1997:51 has already noted that "no foreign traveller would ever have heard Manci or Mangi in Song territory in Song times as the name of the country. ¶ The term implying 'southern barbarians,' has all the appropriateness of 'Wops' or 'Spics.' It was a term of abuse that would have been used only by northerners such as the Mongols to denigrate their southern neighbours. Yet Jacob never moves beyond Quanzhou and its vicinity while in China, never ventures into Mongol-held territory, and leaves several years before the Mongols conquered the south and used Manci as an official label for their new subjects." Thus, like "mellah" (see section 7), "Manzini" is another anticipatory anachronism and ectopism combined (see notes 49 and 96).

Moreover, the form "Mancini" is anomalous (see section 6 for an analysis of "Sinimiani," which, mutatis mutandis, applies to "Mancini").

Furthermore, because of the existence of the Italian adjective mancini (the plural of mancino 'left-handed; left-handed person'; figuratively 'treacherous'), anyone using the alleged but unattested ethnonym "mancini" would have remarked on its homonymy with the adjective and the alleged "Jacob," being the Jewish scholar that he allegedly was, would not have failed to think of the Hebrew saw kishmam ken hem 'as their name is, so are they', which could not have been more apposite here.

But we are not yet finished with the quoted passage. We wonder why the alleged "Jacob" would have used such a weird noun collocation (Italian noun + Hebrew adjective). Even stranger, this rabbi-physician trader who was an "astonishing intellectual titan" of "noble rabbinical lineage" who was also the grandson of "the great rabbi Israel of Florence" (thus, someone who, if he had existed, would have know Hebrew-Aramaic well) could not possibly have been ignorant of the elementary fact that Hebrew ir 'city' is feminine (as elementary for someone who knows Hebrew as, say, the fact that the plural of the English noun fool is fools for someone who knows English) and this Italian Jew who penned no fewer than 280 leaves in a variety of Italian which hardly any Jews at the time could even read, much less write, did not know that the Italian noun città is feminine (for Italian-speakers as elementary a fact as for English-speakers the fact that the plural of the English noun book is books), so that whether he had the Hebrew for 'city' in mind or the Italian for 'city' in mind, he would have used the feminine definite, not the masculine definite, singular form of the Hebrew adjective, which is habehira.

Furthermore, bahir is an adjective meaning 'bright', not 'of light'. The latter meaning would in Hebrew be expressed not by an adjective but by a noun collocation consisting of two nouns, the first of them in the construct state. The possibilities are therefore bair bahelhira 'the Bright City' and ir-ba'or the City of Light'.

Might Selbourne, who confessed coram publico that "I'm not a Hebraist" (see note 157), have started out with the idea of putting words meaning 'the City of Light' into the imaginary "Jacob"s mouth, looked up the word bright in an English-Hebrew dictionary, found 'bahir,' the masculine indefinite singular form (= the citation form of Hebrew adjectives), was unaware of the fact that it is just one of four forms of the word (Hebrew adjectives vary for gender and number: masculine singular, feminine singular, masculine plural, and feminine plural), and stuck the word into his English "translation" (= the "original manuscript") without knowing that he needed the feminine singular?
Apparently, the only rule of grammar in Higher Macaronic, a gallimaufry of a (non-existent?) language if ever there was one, is "anything goes" (see the discussion of "sinimiani" in section 6).

It would be good to know what the alleged "original manuscript" has because whatever Selbourne will say it has, I foresee that he will fall into a trap.

138. At least in the French version of Selbourne 1997a we do find some explicit acknowledgments, but they are for small pieces of information (one person helped Selbourne with a certain Chinese name, another brought a certain publication to his attention, and so on). We again get the impression that nobody (except Selbourne's wife?) saw any substantial portion of Selbourne's entreprise.

139. We are grateful that the author avows Tabatha's Code to be a novel (compare Gold in preparation 4). Is the spelling Tabatha deliberate?

140. Consider four points:

A. Selbourne's failure to produce even so little as a page or two of transcribed text of the alleged "original manuscript" (surely, if he copied out words and phrases from the alleged "original," as we know he did from the fact that he published them, as an "earnest," in Selbourne 1997a and 2000, he could have copied out the entire text of a page or two -- or did he want us to believe that, say, the "owner" put a limit on the number and length of transcriptions and stood over his shoulder with a tally sheet and a measuring tape?).

B. the unbelievability of "Jacob"'s tale.

C. the unbelievability of Selbourne's story.

D. thus, the unbelievability of Selbourne's entreprise.

The four points suggest just one conclusion: the only "original manuscript" appears to be Selbourne's first draft of a badly written historical novel or pseudonymous fictional autobiography (with an impossibly overdrawn main character) which he put together from scratch, its background material presumably coming in part from reliable primary and secondary sources (see, for example, in the Comment on Quotation A in section 20, mention of old factual knowledge, like "the tenth of Tishre is a Jewish fast day"), in part from unreliable primary and secondary sources (see, in that Comment, mention of "old mistakes, like misromanization of Huang Chao's name with B"), and in part from his own fantasy (see, in that Comment, mention of "new mistakes, like a Jewish circumcision before the eighth day after birth").

However, as always, I will revise my impressions, assumptions, inferences, and conclusions about Selbourne's book if he or his defenders offer counter-evidence that would be accepted in a court of law and in the highest relevant research circles. "Feci quod potui: si quid novisti rectius istis, candidus imperti; si nil, his utere mecum" (Horace, Epistulae I.6.68).

141. How interesting that the alleged "Jacob" never referred to himself by his Italian Hebrew given name or his Jewish Italian given name, both of which would be romanized by Italian Jews today as Iagnacov. Could it be that Selbourne found various Italian equivalents of 'Jacob' but was unaware of those two Jewish forms? What Selbourne seemed not to know "Jacob" seemed not to know either and vice versa.

142. Selbourne 2000 has five blurbs, written by:

1. Paul Theroux, a writer of popular works, all of which are irrelevant to the fields of research in question. He hedged his praise: "The manuscript [...] seems to me like an old treasure, newly unearthed. If it is genuine [...]"

2. Melanie Phillips, a writer for newspapers, whose blurb was taken from a "review" of hers in Observer Books of the Year, which I have not seen.
3. some unnamed person, presumably a writer for newspapers, writing in *Daily Telegraph*.

4. Robyn Davidson, a writer for newspapers, taken from a "review" of hers in *The Times* of London.

5. Matthew d'Ancona, a writer for newspapers.

Thus, all unknowns in the disciplines relevant to the book, three of them sounding off in popular prints ("the snappy but empty opinions of broadsheet poseurs," as Jeffrey Feldman has said in another connection [Feldman 2007]), and three whom the present essay dissects in the exquisite detail they deserved.

One on-line publication which I have mislaid speaks of "the generalists Robyn Davidson and Paul Theroux," but today, the sum of knowledge being as vast as it is and forever growing (even in 1625, when Francis Bacon said in *The Essays or Counsels, Civill and Morall* that "I have taken all knowledge to be my province," he was biting off more than he could chew), generalist is a euphemism for jack-of-all-trades, master-of-none.

Why no blurbs taken from reviews by relevant researchers of the highest caliber writing in relevant specialist journals of the first water?

143. Not recognizing the name Henri Gambourg and unable to find anything by or about him with the limited tools at my disposal, I asked Robert Singerman, a Judaica librarian and bibliographer of many years (now retired), and Roy Rosenstein, a student of literature who has likewise had many years of experience navigating the bibliographical seas and has the advantage of living in the same city as Gambourg, to make searches. Singerman came up with nothing. Rosenstein found just a letter to the editor of *Paris Match* (on a subject unrelated to any mentioned in Selbourne's book or in any review of it) and got this letter (dated 28 June 2007) from Gambourg:

> Mon étude initiale portait sur les Routes de la Soie, et le rôle qu'y tinrent les Juifs, mais comme nul éditeur ne s'y est intéressé, je me contente d'envoyer un CD aux rares personnes qui me semblent pouvoir en tirer profit.

Votre CD contient:

- "*un siècle de Rhadanites*" où, si vous avez la force et le courage de le lire attentivement, vous trouverez quelques hypothèses malheureusement très peu étayées, mais si plausibles que mes rares lecteurs m'ont dit qu'elles expliquaient et clarifiaient bien des points obscur et confus de l'histoire mondiale... et peut-être une étymologie rigolote du mot "Rhadanites". Hélas, n'étant qu'un simple amateur, mon travail est assez rebutant, confus, incohérent, etc... et je vous prie de m'en excuser.

- "*a modne mameleshn*" : quelques hypothèses sur ma langue maternelle, ses origines éventuelles et son rapport à l'histoire des Ashkénazim. Là aussi, j'ai l'impression d'avoir été considéré comme un hérétique, infidèle à Mieses et à Weinreich, que je respecte, alors que j'ai seulement tenu compte de données récentes qu'ils ne pouvaient connaître. Y compris le rôle des incursions hongroises dans les origines de notre langue.

- "*cognats du yiddish*" qui, à ma grande surprise, m'a fait découvrir des mots yiddish de sens et aspect proches de langues aussi bizarres que l'alsacien, le breton, le gaulois, le letzeburger, le turc ...et le français.

- enfin "*poussière au vent d'Autan*", petite autobiographie, qui vous informera sur l'auteur.

En échange, je vous prie de me signaler toute erreur ou remarque, je me ferai une joie d'en tenir compte, et si vous le jugez bon, de diffuser ces essais aux gens susceptibles de les apprécier, les utiliser, voire les
améliorer, car bien des questions que je pose auraient besoin d'être approfondies.

Thus, a by all standards well-meaning, humble person, aware of his lack of training, eager for constructive criticism, and hopeful that his three articles, all unpublished despite the author's efforts to place them, might increase our knowledge (the diskette, prepared on 27 June 2007, also contains an introduction, "Bienvenue - juin 2007").

To take just the article relevant (albeit distantly) to Selbourne's book, one which Gambourg himself calls in his letter to Rosenstein 'the work of a simple amateur, quite unprepossessing, confused, incoherent, etc.', the Radhanites were Western European Jewish men of at least the ninth century CE who journeyed to China to trade (in one Arabic source they are called \( r\_d\_b\_n\_i\_y\_a \) and in another \( r\_h\_d\_n\_i\_y\_a \), both of which romanizations are the basis for the simplified romanization \( r\_a\_d\_a\_n\_i\_y\_a \) and for their usual name in English- and French-language research publications, \( R\)adhani\( e \)ts ("Rhadanites' is presumably a slip of the pen).

In no way does Gambourg's article on the Radhanites help Selbourne (no scholarship even of the first water can turn fiction into nonfiction) and in no way does Selbourne's book help Gambourg (not even the best fiction can create reality).

Characteristically, Selbourne never revealed how his book "confirms" Gambourg's ideas (for lack of solid arguments, Selbourne never went into detail on anything when trying to defend himself), though to anyone who took his side he was quick to hand out high-sounding but empty titles with the same nonchalance that "royals" bestow their hollow titles of "nobility" (see R in note 70): "scholar of the participation by Jews from biblical times onward in the trade with the Orient in silks, spices, and other things," a title which nobody else has recognized, not even, presumably, the modest Gambourg.

The fact that outside the People's Republic of China the only support which Selbourne could find was Gambourg's article, now unpublished for more than twenty-seven years, and that Gambourg could find only Selbourne's fiction as support for that article tells us how desperate they were for recognition. Transported by their emotions rather than by the facts, they remind us of the Yiddish idiom tsvey meysim geyen tantsn 'two corpses go dancing' -- each clings to the other for help in standing erect but neither can provide it.

144. A few years after writing the foregoing paragraph, I got an answer from Selbourne (naturally, it was he, not the always unseen and unheard "present owner," who responded) when coming across this passage in Selbourne 2000: "I [have] been made aware that [the present owner] would probably not permit the book's [sic (D.L.G.)] exact whereabouts to be identified during his lifetime, and [...] his heirs might do likewise" (p. 2).

It is easy to agree with almost everything Selbourne said in that passage (but for other reasons):

A. We will never see the "original manuscript" (because it has never existed).

B. We will not see it in the "present owner's" lifetime (because he has never existed).

C. We will not see it in the lifetime of his "heirs" (because they have never existed and will never exist either).

We do, however, disagree with the words probably and might do likewise, the purpose of which is to create the impression that the alleged "present owner" and his alleged "heirs" exist, that they therefore have a will of their own, that they are therefore uncontrolled by Selbourne, and that he is therefore not sure of their intentions. However, we believe that they are imaginary puppets who told Selbourne what he wanted them to tell him. A critic once said of Otto von Bismarck that he believed in a God who always agreed with him. Sic voluit sic iussit, fuit pro ratione voluntas.

We also note Selbourne's use of the agentless passive ("I [have] been made aware"), a favorite ploy of purposely
vague humbuggers ("made aware" by whom? when? in what fashion?), and his not saying even a word about all the "heirs" of all the "heirs" down to the end of time (naturally, they will "do likewise," as we should assume from Sinim's revered Journal for Weird Diseases, which has reported this fictitious family as being the only one suffering from hereditary incurable virulent paranoia -- another "first" for "Jacob"). It would be have been too obviously contrived, even for Selbourne, to speak of the "heirs" "heirs," their "heirs," and so on, though you may rest assured that they have or will have every intention of remaining anonymous.

Selbourne could try, all he wanted, to bolster his paper fortifications around the alleged Precious Gift, but no amount of cocooning would help him (see note 116 and section 21, including note 124). Maybe even the credulous lecturer in Hebrew and Jewish studies Parfitt ("What we're all waiting for is him to come out of his corner with his manuscript") shares by now our opinion that Selbourne was trying to string us along by generously offering us an "earnest" (see section 3) -- as if Exhibition of the Precious Gift were just around the corner (see mention of "the interim" in that section).

Is it not the truth that no one, not even Selbourne, has ever seen the alleged "original manuscript" and that no one, not even he, will ever see it because it has never existed?

Is it not the truth that, by offering us an "earnest" and alleging what the alleged "heirs"'s "might do," Selbourne has once again fallen into an exitless trap of his own making? Consider:

A. If he learned what the alleged "heirs" "might do" before he offered the "earnest," he knew that the "earnest" was no earnest (but he called it an "earnest" anyway in order to string us along).

B. If he learned what the alleged "heirs" "might do" after he offered the "earnest," imprints of his book after Selbourne 2000 (if not earlier ones too) should not have called it an "earnest." But they do.

Either way, then, Selbourne once again said in one passage of his book what was expedient there and something contradictory in another passage because it was expedient there.


Good wine needing no bush, strike the word "éminent" (see section 7 for another occurrence of that Selbournesque tic). As for membership in the American Oriental Society, that is no honor, for, as Selbourne would had learned had he bothered to look at the inside front cover of any issue of Journal of the American Oriental Society, membership is open to anyone sending in the appropriate dues. In 1997 or 1998, when I offered to review Selbourne 1997a for Journal of the American Oriental Society, the editor said that were he to accept for publication even the most scathing of reviews, he would be dignifying the book beyond all measure.

Now for the thrust of my parry: will Li favor us with an offprint of his exhaustive refutation -- meeting the highest research standards in the West -- of all the criticisms leveled at Selbourne's book? or, if he disclaims expertise in matters non-Sinological, an offprint of his exhaustive refutation -- meeting the highest research standards in the West -- of just the Chinese-related criticisms (all of them)?

146. Since the proper procedure when a literary historian, a reviewer, or a cataloger is trying to place a controversial piece of writing on the fictional-factual continuum is to choose the unmarked category or the default mode and that category or mode is fiction because it is prudent to assume fiction when factualness is not self-evident (see the dictum enunciated in Comment on Quotation B in section 20, note 144, and the paragraph to which note 153 is attached), it would be good to know on what grounds the Library of Congress classified Selbourne's book as factual (it even stated the fictitious "Jacob"'s
year of birth) and whether it still does. At least in Selbourne's case, the library seems to have taken the publishers and the
author at their word -- and since the publishers did nothing more than take Selbourne at his word, once again Selbourne,
who turned out to be an unreliable witness, was the fons et origo of everything (but actually of nothing).

In the following quotation, LC means 'the Library of Congress':

Will Manley's comments on LC's peculiar definition of "fact" are long overdue (Feb., p. 104). He could have extended his argument by referring to Alex Haley's Roots (LC E185.97) as an even more egregious example. Immensely popular, but is it history? Haley's purported connection with Africa through his equating his ancestor Toby with someone named Kunta Kinte has been completely demolished; but in any case the book was written in an anecdotal, conversational way. Haley himself regarded it only as "faction." However, LC simply excised the "ion" and rendered it more historical than Haley would ever claim.

In 1997, a work titled The City of Light was published, purporting to be a pre-Marco Polo travel account of China. Its modern editor attributed it to one Jacob d'Ancona but steadfastly refused to let anyone see the manuscript or determine its provenance. Sinologists and medievalists read it as woefully lacking in credibility, but not LC, which has classed it as G370--where it shares shelf space with other works purporting to be factual but long since proven not to be.

How many myths has LC arbitrarily turned into history during the past century? Few entities have the capacity to turn fiction into fact so easily. Should not catalogers feel a special need to get things right and to be especially responsive to criticism? (Henige 2000, reprinted here with the author's permission)

I am reminded of the Yiddish pornographic book written by a secular Eastern Ashkenazi which New York Public Library (following the Library of Congress?) classifies as "rabbinical literature" because it has a Hebrew title, possibly starting with the word sefer and thus reminiscent of the many Hebrew titles of rabbinical works so beginning. The (anonymous? pseudonymous?) author chose the title presumably as a joke and maybe also to provide readers with a quick, convincing response if suddenly asked 'what's that you're reading?' The book, written in the twentieth century (if memory serves me), was brought to my attention in the late 1960s or early 1970s by Zosa Szajkowski, who told me its full name, which I have forgotten. Who can identify it?

Neither librarians in general nor catalogers in particular have the last word, by virtue of being librarians or catalogers, in questions of fiction or fact. In the early 1970s Lawrence Marwick, then head of the Hebraic Section of the Library of Congress, told me, "kin gute katelegirers ken'ekh nit krign" 'I cannot get good catalogers'. At that library, the problem seems to be chronic.

147. Carvajal 1997 and the abstract of her article on the Web site of The New York Times called Selbourne "a former Oxford University professor" and Carvajal claimed that "Inside Oxford University, where Mr. Selbourne taught the history of ideas at Ruskin College, he still has some supporters." Another article or a review, the details of which I have mislaid, called him an "Oxford professor with an interest in Judaica." Selbourne's onetime position at Ruskin College was not reported uniformly in the articles and reviews, which spoke of him also as a former "college lecturer," "don" (an informalism), "professor," "teacher," or "tutor." The subject he taught was reported variously as "history of ideas," "history of political philosophy," "politics," "political science," or "political theory."

Setting most of the record straight is easy. Since Ruskin College, located in the city of Oxford, is sponsored by the United Kingdom's trade unions (on its Web site it describes itself as "specialising in education for adults with few or no
It is not part of the University of Oxford, and it is not affiliated with that university in any way, the description "Oxford University professor" and the belief that Ruskin College is part of that university are wrong (the farther one moves from the city of Oxford, the more one is bound to encounter the misunderstanding that every postsecondary school there is part of the University of Oxford, especially with respect to schools the names of which include the word Oxford; in fact, the founders of not a few schools choose to locate them in Oxford for no other reason than to put that word in their names and thus give the unwary the impression that they are part of the university).

Selbourne was an untenured tutor at Ruskin College from 1966 to 1986 and from 1973 to 1975 he was also a member of its Governing Body. Precisely what he taught is unclear, that being the only part of the record which I have not been able to clarify.

That Selbourne failed to set any part of the record straight about his former affiliation -- not "the University of Oxford" but Ruskin College -- and his former title -- not "Prof. David Selbourne" (see the text to which note 114 is attached) but David Selbourne -- not even in a publication over which he had total editorial control ("Prof. David Selbourne" occurs in Selbourne 2000) -- is a measure of his soul.

Too bad that Carvajal does not name Selbourne's alleged supporters at the University of Oxford. Their anonymity reminds us of the anonymity of the alleged "Hebraists" allegedly backing his claims, the anonymity of "many" of Selbourne's alleged "correspondents" (see sections 6 and section 7), the anonymity of the alleged "original owner," the anonymity of the alleged "Jewish family" later owning the alleged Precious Gift for hundreds of years, the anonymity of the alleged "present owner," and the anonymity of the "present owner"'s alleged "heirs" -- have we left any major imaginary characters out?

Playwright Selbourne's tragicomedy may be unique not only in that most of the characters sound fictional but also in that most of the chief ones are nameless (generally it's the opposite in the theater, where, say, bystanders are likely to be identified in the dramatis personae as "bystanders" or, at most, by generic words like "little girl" or "police officer").

That dichotomy does not appear to be coincidental. Rather, it seems that the purpose of leaving the main characters nameless (at least "the noble rabbinical lineage," "the Jewish family" allegedly owning the "original manuscript," "the present owner," and the "present owner"'s "heirs") or, at most, giving them extremely frequent Jewish given names ("the great rabbi Israel of Florence," "Jacob of Ancona," and so on) was to make the job of any snooping disbelievers as hard as possible (compare searching for a certain John Smith and searching for Jacobo Fitz-James Stuart Falcó Portocarrero y Ossorio, who bore a name never borne by anyone else either before or since his death on 24 September 1953).

Unlike the theater, in science we lay our cards on the table -- face up. See note 50 and the text to which it is attached.

As for Selbourne's alleged "interest in Judaica, including the history of medieval Jewry in Italy," see the last paragraph of note 58.

Phillips told us that Selbourne "left his post at Ruskin College, Oxford, in the mid-1980s after being black-balled by the hard left for writing for The Times. Disillusioned with intellectual life in Britain, he went to live at his holiday home in Urbino [...]" (Phillips 1998). Since he went from being a member of the Governing Body in 1975 to being black-balled in 1986 and in two decades he was presumably unable to secure promotion with tenure or even just promotion without tenure or just tenure without promotion, the administration or the faculty at Ruskin College or both must have become dissatisfied with him for reasons more serious than disagreement with some articles, presumably anodyne, in a mainstream newspaper (it is not as if Selbourne had in a neo-fascist or neo-nazi publication called for genocide). By attributing his downfall at Ruskin College to writing for The Times, was he not trying to depict himself as the innocent victim of wicked detractors who on the flimsiest of pretexts got rid of him when the true reason or reasons for his downfall at Ruskin College were grave? In more ways than one it would be enlightening to learn from the school why he was sacked.

Moreover, since people black-balled at one school usually find positions elsewhere, especially if they are not close
to retirement (Selbourne was born in 1937), his abandoning academia and leaving the United Kingdom at the age of forty-eight suggest that his black-balling might have been just the latest in a string of disappointments, frustrations, or disillusionments. We are reminded here of Selbourne's alleged low regard for Italian research (see section 21), which seems to be of a piece with his alleged dismal view of intellectual life in Britain: both appear to be exaggerated, self-serving rationalizations:

A. His allegedly "dismal view" seemed intended to mollify his hurt when not securing tenure or even a renewal of his contract at Ruskin College (as if to say, it's not that they were disappointed with me -- it's I who am disappointed with them). One is reminded of the Spanish idiom, "¡Adiós, Madrid, que te quedas sin gente!" -- y se fue un zapatero de viejo 'Goodby, Madrid, you are now left without people!', the cobbler said as he departed'.

B. His allegedly "low regard" seemed intended to explain to the public why the "present owner" turned for help not to knowledgeable people in Italy (as any rational owner in Italy of a thirteenth-century manuscript in "basically educated Tuscan" would) but, of all people, to someone singularly unqualified for the task of translating it.

Selbourne's state of mind during what must have for him been a trying time may thus be related to the genesis of Selbourne 1997a: he may have felt the need for psychological compensation, possibly of a dramatic kind, compensation which would allow him to cock a snoot at those who had gave him grief at Ruskin College (and elsewhere in the British Isles?). If it is indeed true that he sought revenge, his enterprize could, he may have thought, fit the bill, for we could imagine him, in the manner of Malvolio in Twelfth Night ('I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you'), saying to himself, "They claimed I didn't play by the rules of the academic world, so I'll hoax them by pretending to play fair, by publishing a dazzling piece of research -- a 'translation' of an 'ancient manuscript' accompanied by the entire critical apparatus that the rules require -- and the joke will be on them, but only I will know it. They'll fall for the ruse hook, line, and sinker, I'll be famous as the discoverer of the real Marco Polo, and go down in history by eclipsing every single one of those nobodies." If that was indeed Selbourne's plan (see section 18), we could say, paraphrasing Miguel de Cervantes, "Para Selbourne solo nació Jacobo de Ancona" ('Jacob of Ancona was born for Selbourne alone') and, paraphrasing John Seeley, "The City of Light was written in a fit of absence of mind."

Naturally, I am only guessing at what went on in Selbourne's mind, but those appear to be the only suppositions reasonable in the circumstances. Two details lend the guesses some support:

A. Selbourne complains that the controversy over the authenticity of the manuscript and the debates over the accuracy of the details of Chinese history contained in The City of Light have deflected discussion of the book's broader political and philosophical ideas" (Hillenbrand 1997). He thus presumably saw the book chiefly as an opportunity to rebroadcast his ideas (see section 16 for more comment on the complaint) and was piqued that others did not tune in, instead focusing on what for him was secondary.

B. Plodding through "Jacob"'s tale, I got the impression that an arrow which he shot ostensibly at "the sages of Zaitun" -- namely, "they are led astray by hatred and envy, so that they become governed by ill-will towards those who show the greatest learning, to whom they display much malice" -- was actually aimed at his black-ballers at Ruskin College (and others in the United Kingdom?) who provoked the presumable emotional crisis culminating in Selbourne's abandoning academia and the country for good (and I thought to myself, "Given Selbourne's apparent self-importance, it would not be surprising were he to count himself among those who 'show the greatest learning'". Sure enough, soon after I came across that line in Selbourne 1997a, in the same year, Selbourne directed the arrow at the Scourges of Jacob: "as Jacob splendidly observes of the sages of Zaitun, 'they are led astray by hatred and envy, so that they become governed by ill-will towards those who show the greatest learning, to whom they display much malice'. I could not have put it better myself" (Selbourne 1997d). Verily, no one expressed Selbourne's feelings so accurately as did the thirteenth-century "Jacob" and, we submit, no one expressed "Jacob"'s thoughts so accurately as did Selbourne. How marvelous that Selbourne, who knew Holy Writ backwards and forwards, had that chapter and verse at his fingertips when penning Selbourne 1997d. See note 70.

Selbourne may have managed always to pat himself on the shoulder ("splendidly"), but the important thing is that
no relevant researchers of the first water believe what he wrote.

148. Selbourne having avowed that he was "not an Italianist" (see note 157), it is intriguing that the chapter headed "La langue de Jacob" in the French version of his book (pp. 543-552) consists mostly of a description of the Italian of the alleged "original manuscript." The description being unbelievably detailed for a non-Italianist, we wonder whether he took a description of thirteenth-century Tuscan, of thirteenth-century Florentine, or of a certain thirteenth-century Italian literary text, and on those pages of his book presented all or part of it as a description of the Italian component of Higher Macaronic. It would be good to see whether the order in which Selbourne listed the alleged features of "La langue de Jacob" (the French translator should have written "Le langage de Jacob") and his examples match those in descriptions of real texts.

If no evidence of Selbourne's possibly copying from other descriptions turned up, it would be good to evaluate the likelihood that all the features which he gave for the "basically educated Tuscan" component of Higher Macaronic would co-occur in one late-thirteenth-century Italian text.

149. See note 35 for more comment on the avowal.

150. Selbourne's deficiency in Latin is also seen in Selbourne 1993, where he failed to respond to Arnold Goodman's misinterpretation of the dictum mens sana in corpore sano. "G. had told me at our last meeting that he wanted to speak about doctors. So I asked him how he regarded 'mens sana in corpore sano' as a motto-for-life. 'As a principle, it has a general validity,' G. replied, but there are exceptional cases where it has no validity at all. The supposition that because a person is in perfect health physically he is in perfect mental health also is unmitigated nonsense. There are many lunatics,' G. added, 'who will respond to a physical test very well" (p. 56; G. = Goodman). The expression does not mean that physical health results in mental health. Rather, Juvenal meant, as is clear from a literal translation of the dictum, that the ideal is 'a healthy mind in a healthy body.'

151. We often remember only the most dramatic episode in a famous person's life: Davy Crockett at the Alamo, George Armstrong Custer at Little Big Horn, Nikita Khrushchev banging his shoe in the General Assembly of the United Nations, and so on. "You wish you could remember something about Spinoza, besides the fact that he was excommunicated" (McInerney 1984).

Macpherson's "initiation of the Ossianic controversy has obscured his genuine contributions to Gaelic studies" (The New Encyclopædia Britannica, 15 ed., 1991, vol. 7, p. 646). The controversy began in the 1760s, with the publication of his Fragments of ancient poetry [...] translated from the Gaelic or Erse language (1760), and continued with his Fingal (1762) and Temora (1763), all three of which, he asserted, were based largely on the poems of Ossian, who, he claimed, lived in the third century. Suspicions were immediately aroused because Ossian was known, as he continues to be today, only as a mythological figure, because Macpherson refused to produce the alleged Irish "originals" (we know that part of the story only too well) and because the earliest known document in Irish dated only to the tenth century (therefore, although it would not have been unusual to discover a document in Irish dating to the ninth or even the eighth century, a hiatus of about seven hundred years was rightly felt to be unusual). After Macpherson's death (in 1796), the alleged "originals" were found among his papers. "The Ossianic controversy was finally settled in the late 19th century, when it was demonstrated that the only Gaelic originals that Macpherson had produced were translations in a barbarous Gaelic of his own English compositions" (idem, vol. 8, p. 1031).

If that sounds familiar (except for the discovery of the "originals"), do not be surprised, for the makers of works of doubtful or definite inauthenticity follow one or more patterns (see notes 133 and 156). In Macpherson's case, we have a double fiction and presumably in Selbourne's case too: a claim that a fake text is authentic and a story to explain how it was "found." In Macpherson's case, however, we have the "mitigating" factor that Ossian was at least "known" from Irish mythology whereas the only "evidence" we have for "Jacob of Ancona" is Selbourne's word.

Or, consider this description:
"[...] author of a collection of travelers' tales from all around the world [...], which are selections from the narratives of genuine travelers, embellished with [his] additions and described as his own adventures. ¶ All that is known about [him] is what he states in [...]. ¶ It is not certain whether [he] himself ever traveled at all, since he selected his material almost entirely from the encyclopaedias and travel books available to him. [He] enriches these itineraries with accounts of the history, customs, religions, and legends of the regions visited, culled from his remarkably wide reading, transforming and enlivening the originals by his literary skill and genuine creative imagination."

Much of that passage applies to the real "Jacob" but it is actually about John Mandeville (The New Encyclopædia Britannica, 15 ed., 1991, vol. 7, pp. 766-767). Not surprisingly, Barrett writes, "Perhaps the most important historiographic conclusion is to say that Jacob is the Mandeville of our age" (Barrett 1998a:1023).

152. A reading of Selbourne's other publications gives one the impression that he was a person of accomplishment whereas in Selbourne 1997a and related publications he came across as long on rhetoric but short on facts, as having an exaggerated opinion of himself, as not being above sanctimonious posturing (see, for example, section 21 on how he found "quite reasonable" the alleged "present owner"'s lack of "trust in disclosing [the alleged 'original manuscript'] to an Italian"), and, like his melancholy of supporters, as shutting his eyes to a demonstration of the facts. He would do well to end up, as Shakespeare's Coriolanus does, in "the napless garment of humility" rather than prompt Yiddish-speakers to jeer him by saying der shames klapt in shul areyn un leygt zikh aleyn shlofn 'the sexton [of the synagog] awakens the community for [the morning or the penitential] prayers but he himself then goes to sleep' (it was once the custom in Ashkenaz for synagog sextons to go through the streets, tap on the windows of Jewish homes, and call the men to Morning Prayers [the year round] and everyone to Penitential Prayers [which are recited late every night beginning one or two Sundays before the Jewish New Year]).

If I have misread Selbourne, correct me.

153. In 1944 George Orwell said that "Pacifism is a tenable position, provided that you are willing to take the consequences." Selbourne should replace the first word by Silence and reflect.

154. Researchers trying to detect a hoax rightly look for what's wrong with the picture (as the Scourges of Jacob have done, uncovering anachronisms, blunders, and other anomalies in plenty), but at least in the instant case they should also look for what's right with it. Consider these proportions:

A. "Jacob"'s tale contains numerous anomalies.

A'. Selbourne gave every evidence of lacking knowledge in the fields relevant to those anomalies, like diachronic Italian lexicology, Jewish studies, and Chinese studies.

B. The fictitious "Jacob" chatters incessantly about ethical, political, social, and philosophical matters that happen to be identical or nearly so to Selbourne's.

B'. In other publications, Selbourne enunciated his own ethical, political, social, and philosophical idea better than anybody else could have.

Thus, A and A' concern what's wrong with the picture whereas B and B' concern what's "right" about it. The Scourges of Jacob have correctly pointed out numerous anomalies but in the case at hand what's "right" about the picture (namely, "Jacob"'s accurate mouthing of Selbourne's ideas) is actually part of what's wrong with it because the mouthing is so accurate that it is unlikely to be due to chance (what is the likelihood that the ideas of any late-twentieth-century
commentator on ethical, political, social, and philosophical matters will have already been enunciated in a text written hundreds of years earlier?).

Which is to say that what the fictitious "Jacob" did badly (A) Selbourne too did badly (A') and what the former did well (B) Selbourne too did well (B').

Furthermore, whereas there are Copernicans, Einsteinians, Freudians, Marxists, and so on (people other than Copernicus, Einstein, Freud, Marx, and so forth who have espoused, written about, and tried to popularize the ideas of those people), there are no Selbournians, so that Selbourne would have been the only one with a motive for rebroadcasting his ideas.

From every angle, therefore, Selbourne's enterprize appears to have been a one-man enterprize -- and a one-man tragicomedy -- to say nothing of the fact that of all the characters on stage, off stage, and off off stage, he is the only one known for certain to exist. Once again, therefore, I ask, is it not clear that "Jacob of Ancona" can be only David of Urbino?

155. Outside the British Isles, Selbourne seems to have been little known until the publication of Selbourne 1997a. For example, before Kristof 1997 appeared, The New York Times had mentioned him just once: an account of William Jefferson Clinton's visit to the University of Oxford on 8 June 1994 reported that he had bought four books at Blackwell's that day, one of them being Selbourne's The Principle of Duty (Dowd 1994:A8); and since the appearance in that newspaper of the four articles and one letter to the editor about The City of Light (Carvajal 1997, Jochnowitz 1997, Kristof 1997, Smith 1997, and Spence 1997), Selbourne has not been mentioned there. Consequently, if he is guilty of any wrongdoing, he would have to clear his name only within relatively small circles: the pertinent research circles, the British Isles, and the publishers and readers of the several versions of his book.

156. A well-known ploy in fabrications of various kinds is to claim the existence of an "anonymous" person who stands or stood between a certain controversial object (here, an alleged but never seen and probably non-existent controversial object) and his disbelieving critics. The person making the claim would just love the "anonymous" person to come forward and vindicate the claim, but, alas! for one reason or another the "anonymous" person cannot appear on stage, so that we must take the claimant's assertions, however ridiculous they may sound, on faith. Here are two examples of many:

In 1794, William Henry Ireland claimed to have discovered many manuscripts from the pen of William Shakespeare. "How had manuscripts like a love letter Shakespeare wrote to Anne Hathaway, with a lock of his hair attached, come into William Henry's possession? As he explained, they were given to him by a Mr. H., who would allow publication but demanded anonymity. And what's more, he said, they were an inheritance" (Niederkorn 2003:E1).

"The experts talk and I listen. The archaeologists are absolutely convinced the piece is a fraud. The geologists say you can't fake that stuff. And I have now seen two long reports in Ma'ariv, the newspaper, that examined the collector, the dealer, the expert and the intermediary (who is probably the owner) and everyone else in great detail" (Zanger 2003:6).

See Farquhar 2005 for more examples and, on a similar ploy, note 124. See the comment on quotation C in section 20 and notes 133 and 151 on patterns. When searching for patterns that reveal trickery of one kind or another, the researcher should consider proportions to be kinds of patterns. For the suspicious proportions discovered in the instant case, see the text before and after the line to which note 124 is attached as well as note 154.

157. We first cite the statement in full and then dissect it: "Time and again the quibbles these critics raise reveal how shallow their knowledge really is. The fact that these people are biting and stinging like hornets is par for the course in academia. Because I'm not a Hebraist, because I'm not an Italianist, because I'm not a Sinologist, I'm regarded as a crude interloper who has been given access to something other people would have preferred to have for themselves" (Selbourne quoted in Hillenbrand 1997).
A. "Quibbles"? Since more than a dozen of my criticisms have to do with minor points, they could be dismissed as quibbles (see subsection C of section 4, note 23, subsection D of section 6, part B of section 8, sections 11 and 13, subsection A of sections 17 and 18, subsection F of section 17, note 112, and sections 18, 19, and 20), but:

i. To quote a Yiddish saying, a bisl un a bisl vert a fule shisl 'many a little makes a mickle'. As with the quibbles over possibly minor imperfections, so in fact with all the criticisms, major and minor, of Sebourne's book: if you bend over backwards to give Selbourne the benefit of the doubt by assuming that this or that anomaly in particular does not invalidate his story (for example, in light of the following quotation, one might want to overlook the fact that "Jacob of Ancona" is not mentioned in any source known to us: "In 1896, an event occurred which had a profound impact upon Jewish studies in general and upon the study of Hebrew poetry in particular. In that year, Solomon Schechter transferred to Cambridge, England, most of the geniza fragments which remained in an old synagogue in Cairo. Substantial portions of this cache, to be sure, had already been sold many years earlier to different libraries without any knowledge of their place of origin. However, in all fairness, the geniza gained its great reputation only after Schechter's epoch-making discoveries. [...] the geniza has revealed thousands of works which had been completely lost in the course of time, and betrayed the existence of authors of whose very names no trace had remained in our literature" [Schirmann 1970:XXII], you are soon bending over backwards so many times that before long your spine has snapped (see the sentence to which note 16 is attached). It is as if someone with a counterfeit dollar bill having myriad imperfections tried to explain that it was genuine, only "the Bureau of Engraving and Printing made a mistake here, it made a mistake there, it made a mistake on this side, it made a mistake on that side, it made a mistake [...]." Thus, when Selbourne frantically tried to parry each of several criticisms (he in fact overlooked most of them, but that is another story) by alleging this or by alleging that, someone should have called his attention to the entire picture, to the entire heap of anomalies pointing to fakery of some kind. See too the last paragraph of the present note.

ii. Even if the critics' quibbles are disregarded, the many smoking guns and smoking cannons remain.

iii. If they are mere quibbles, Selbourne should find it easy to explain those "minor" anomalies convincingly.

B. "Shallow"? If the critics' knowledge is "shallow," how to describe Selbourne's and his supporters' ignorance of their ignorance? Update: till now, he and his team were ignorant of their ignorance, but now they cannot not be aware of it. The wheels of progress, like those of justice, turn slowly, but they do turn.

C. "Biting and stinging like hornets is par for the course in academia"? The apposite word is angry and anger is in this case justified. We are angry not because someone made a few minor mistakes inadvertently (even the best researchers make innocent mistakes, even serious innocent mistakes) but because we have strong reason to believe that the norms of research have been violated deliberately, that the truth has been insulted deliberately, that one or more people have perpetrated a hoax, and that an expectation of money and fame made commercial publishers forget their obligation to respect above all else the protocols of research. Gaining neither much money nor any fame, they in fact became infamous.

D. If Selbourne was by his own avowal "not a Hebraist [...], not an Italianist, [...] not a Sinologist" (and more, like a non-Orientalist and a non-medievalist), it was unwise and unethical of him to foray not just into one field but into many in which he was untrained. Researchers make a name for themselves not only by putting good material on library shelves but also by turning down offers if they feel incompetent. In academic circles, it's known as the art of saying no: "Sorry, that's not my field" or "Sorry, I don't have the training" or "Sorry, such and such a person can do the job better" (see section 21 on Selbourne's once saying the right thing but at the wrong time). Let us not, however, be falsely naive: nothing supports the assumption that any "present owner" turned to Selbourne with a request to help him understand an existing, authentic, and factual thirteenth-century text whereas much evidence suggests that Selbourne created the job, offered it to himself, and accepted it.

If, as we assume, Selbourne foresaw that people would wonder why he would -- allegedly -- undertake a job for
which he was unqualified, the purpose of the following (overly?) defensive statement would presumably be to preclude any such puzzlement on the public's part: "I wrestled with my own doubts about translating a manuscript to which others would not have access. I decided, as I became aware of the gift that I had in my hand, that I had a responsibility to make its contents known" (quoted in Kristof 1997:A18). The Scourges of Jacob believe that he did not wrestle, that he had no doubts (though maybe now he wishes he had), that for him it was a gift of poison, and that the "contents" have changed nothing in the world except to derail low-level research in the People's Republic of China, though fortunately with no serious consequences for high-level Sinology or other first-rate research anywhere else in the world.

Had Selbourne tried to publish The City of Light as a historical novel, all its unrealistic details would have aroused nobody's ire, for fiction need not be factual. But then no publisher, probably even no commercial publisher, might have accepted the manuscript, for it had no plot, it was too long, it was boring, and, in essence, it was nothing more than a rehashing of Selbourne's well-known ethical, philosophical, political, and social ideas drowned in "Jacob"'s drivel and Selbourne's sleep-inducing Wardour Street English (thus, something which only a vanity publisher, presumably, would have accepted).

E. If Selbourne was by his own avowal "not a Hebraist [...], not an Italianist, [...] not a Sinologist," and so on, and so forth (he did not bother to complete the list), how curious to find this boast, presumably written either by Selbourne himself or, if not, presumably with his approval, in the biographical blurb on the jacket of Selbourne 1997a: "[David Selbourne is] one of the few scholars who could have done justice to the translation and annotation of Jacob d'Ancona's many-faceted manuscript." Again, therefore, we see an element of his modus operandi: saying one thing when it suited him on one occasion and the contrary when it was expedient on another. Who are the "few others" whom the commercial publisher had in mind? Since no one else would have benefitted from writing a poorly written historical novel or a poorly written pseudonymous fictional autobiography (see Manley 1714 for a better example of the latter genre) as a framework for rebroadcasting Selbourne's ideas, no one else would have been motivated to "do justice" here. As for "justice," Selbourne did himself a gross injustice.

F. If Selbourne was by his own avowal "not a Hebraist [...]" how curious that he claimed that "Les multiples mots et locutions du texte en hébreu sont d'une main exercée [...]" (page 22 of the French version). Or, if he claimed that "Les multiples mots et locutions du texte en hébreu sont d'une main exercée [...]" how curious that he disclaimed being a Hebraist. Is anyone keeping score on the number of Selbournesque self-contradictions we've noted?

G. "A crude interloper"? Crude, yes, but not an interloper, for it was not as if he had taken a genuine manuscript and botched his translation and analysis. One can trespass only where there is something to trespass on. Here, his critics believe, he was wandering in a Fantasyland of his own creation.

H. "Access to something"? Did the entity allegedly giving access (the so-called "original owner") ever exist? Did the "something" (the so-called "original manuscript") ever exist? Is the "original manuscript" not Selbourne's first draft (Codex Urbinatensis I) of a poorly written historical novel or pseudonymous fictional autobiography?

I. "Something other people would have preferred to have for themselves"? If we supposed, for argument's sake, that Selbourne's entire story were true (a genuine and factual original manuscript and so on), none of the negative reviewers would have accepted the owner's invitation because his restrictions would have required them to violate protocols of research (production of the manuscript, its authentication, determination of its degree of factualness, and its photographic reproduction) and because we would have known that violation of the protocols would have landed us in hot water, as it indeed did Selbourne.

If Selbourne's implication of sour grapes were right, respected researchers in many fields would have long ago beaten a path to his door (see the paragraph beginning "The City of Light was not a best-seller [...]" in section 16), but only a tiny tubful of people have, none of them possessing first-rate relevant credentials or having an excellent relevant track record. What are the names of the "other people"?
Selbourne did not give the impression of having a clear-eyed picture of himself.

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In 1997 too, Selbourne claimed that "Uncreative academics are always distressed when a fellow academic writes something which attracts attention and becomes popular or sells. [The objections to my book are] the product of destructive spite" (quoted in Smith 1997). Certain noncreative people are indeed jealous of creative ones, but that is not the case here, for Selbourne was the envy of no self-respecting researcher and his suggestion of sour grapes thus again wrong. Not for all the gold in "Sinim" would any of us want to be in his shoes. Presumably even he himself now wishes he were not in his own shoes.

If it be true that Selbourne's book became "popular" (let's have the proof) and "sold" (let's have the proof), he was again telling the truth but not the whole truth. Popular among whom? Sold to whom? In the world of learning, popularity and unpopularity among the laity are yardsticks of nothing.

The critics' objections are not the result of spite. They stem from justified outrage: Selbourne's catchpenny book was an affront to research, it was an insult to the truth, it misled certain people, and, as abundant strong evidence suggests, it was either based on a hoax (in which case Selbourne was duped by one or more hoaxers) or, more likely, it was itself a hoax (in which case he was the hoaxer). Selbourne was indeed creative in his enterprize, but in a way harmful to himself, not in a way that pushed back the frontiers of knowledge.

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Chang 1997 quotes another of Selbourne's rejoinders-that-are-no-rejoinders ("The vipers are hissing in the groves of academia") and Jenner 1997:50 yet another ("Most of what scholars are saying is trivial and pettifogging, claiming as certitudes things that are of grave doubt. Jacob D'Ancona and I will survive these academic peashooters"). If "most" of the criticism is "trivial and pettifogging," why was Selbourne incapable of disproving his critics?

And what about the rest of the criticism, which he did not dismiss as "trivial and pettifogging," which he could not disprove either?

Everyone is entitled to have "grave doubts" about everything, but only the grave doubts of people with knowledge are worthy of consideration -- does any serious person pay mind to the "grave doubts" of the flat-earthers that the Earth is round? Regarding "trivialities," we are reminded of Ernest Renan's quip that "La Vérité consiste dans les nuances" and the words of an anonymous poet writing before 1856, "Trifles, they say, do often find, / A courteous welcome from the mind, / In changing shadows flitting there, / From dark and dull to bright and fair; / If so, my friends, perhaps 'twould be, / Prudent in you, as well as me, / To get said 'Items' in possession, / For clearing up some wrong impression."

Coming from someone who could not keep even a tutorship, even an untenured one, even at Ruskin College, the words "academic peashooters" suggest envy.

158. Each Scourge of Jacob seems to have a favorite absurdity. For instance, "But more amusing than the absolute impossibilities are the general absurdities. Among these my own favourite is the way Jacob hires a pilot at Ancona to guide him through the China seas - rather like taking a London taxi-driver with you to help you get around Edinburgh. ¶ Perhaps the publishers, Little, Brown and Company, could market The City of Light here by offering a prize to whoever can identify the most and best of these" (Larner 1997).

My favorite is the one dissected in section 7: the fictitious "Jacob" visited a presumably fictitious Jewish community in Persia in the 1270s, where he allegedly picked up an allegedly local word which in point of fact arose in Morocco, it arose after 1667, and it has always been limited to Morocco -- and, to boot, he recorded it in his alleged 280-leaf account in the nontechnical spelling which the English and French reflexes of that Moroccan Arabic word have. Unbelievably also, to that
quarter came, in secret, a "sultan" -- when Persia at that time had no sultans -- to visit a probably fictitious Jew at home and, just as implausibly, to discourse with him. Non è vero e non è ben trovato.

Might the entire voyage have been planned by a naive, inexperienced, self-important, minor travel agent who in the late twentieth century was living near Ancona?

159. Given Selbourne's "interest in Judaica," the alleged presence of much Hebrew in the alleged "original manuscript," his ability to judge that "Les multiples mots et locutions du texte en hebreu sont d'une main exercée [...]" (page 22 of the French version), his being "one of the few scholars who could have done justice to the translation and annotation of Jacob d'Ancona's many-faceted manuscript," and his descent from countless native, primary, and habitual speakers of Yiddish, many of whom also knew Hebrew (among them being his maternal grandfather, who was, inter alia, Chief Rabbi of Antwerp and later Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Tel-Aviv and Jaffa), I propose that the proceedings be held in Israel, of which I am a citizen, and that they be held in Hebrew or in Yiddish, so that Selbourne will feel at home in an eminently Jewish Jewish society, many of whose members, moreover, share his "interest," so that, I assure him, he will be the cynosure of much of the country.

We Israeli Jews are hard-headed, tough-sinewed, and fearless.

160. Outside the People's Republic of China, "Jacob of Ancona" is for Sinologists now a distant memory at best. Two letters to the author of the present essay are eloquent in that regard:

A. "I am interested that this matter should continue to exercise your attention some time after the original publication of The City of Light" (T.H. Barrett [see note 4], letter of 5 November 1999). Thus, a mere two years after the publication of Selbourne 1997a, practically surprize on Barrett's part.

B. "It took me a while and some internet searching to understand what your letter was about" (Jonathan Chaves [see note 4], letter of 27 May 2006). I began my letter by mentioning "David Selbourne's The City of Light."

Anyone interested in dissecting Selbourne 1997a and related publications further will want to compare them, as has been done in the present essay to some extent. Comparisons give us a peak into some of Selbourne's and his commercial publishers' strategies and stratagems, an opportunity to read between the lines, and to find contradictions. We have already noted, for example, the change in subtitle (see section 18) and the disappearance of Boris Kaz's name from Selbourne's acknowledgments (see subsection B of section 22).

Another difference was in the change of author: from "David Selbourne" in 1997 to "Jacob d'Ancona / Translated by David Selbourne" in 2000. Plus ça change, plus c'est le même auteur.

* *

If, as Selbourne claimed, the alleged "present owner" cut off all contact with him after he went to Mondadori with his alleged "translation" (see section 1), it is curious that under the heading "Acknowledgments" in Selbourne 2000:xv we read this:

I should like to thank the owner of the manuscript of Jacob d'Ancona for giving me access to it for extended periods between September 1991 and June 1996, for permitting the publication of this translation, and for generously vesting the rights over the translation in me.
From whatever angle you look at that sentence, it does not correspond to reality. Consider the only three possibilities, just the last of which corresponds to a possible reality (the events are listed in chronological order):

### Possibility 1

**Event A.** The alleged "present owner" told Selbourne that he could publish the translation and, generous beyond dreams, he vested the rights in him.

**Event B.** Selbourne offered the alleged "translation" to Mondadori.

**Event C.** When the alleged "present owner" learned that Selbourne had turned to Mondadori, he got angry and broke off all contact with him for compromising his anonymity.

A and B are compatible with each other, as are B and C, but A and C cannot both be true. That is, if the "present owner" had gotten angry and broken off all contact with Selbourne, he would have canceled his "generous" vestment of rights. Possibility 1, therefore, cannot be right.

### Possibility 2

**Event A.** Selbourne offered the alleged "translation" to Mondadori without the alleged "original owner"'s permission or even knowledge.

**Event B.** When the alleged "present owner" learned that Selbourne had turned to Mondadori without his permission, he got angry and broke off all contact with him for compromising his anonymity.

**Event C.** The alleged "present owner" and Selbourne were reconciled, after which happy event the former "generously" vested rights in the latter.

A and B are compatible with each other, but C cannot be true because it is incompatible with Selbourne's statement that the "present owner" cut off all contact with him after he turned to Mondadori. Possibility 2, therefore, cannot be right.

### Possibility 3

Selbourne's story, like the alleged "Jacob"'s tale, is all fiction (except, maybe, for the part about going to Mondadori).
If possibility 3 is right, nothing is puzzling or questionable.

Quartum non datur.

For two reasons, we settle on possibility 3: by process elimination it must be right and the available evidence strongly suggests that it is right. Do not all three possibilities imply shenanigans of one kind or another?

The foregoing notwithstanding, for the sake of argument let us believe Selbourne if only to ask these questions:

1. Did each of the commercial publishers get the alleged "present owner"'s permission and vestment in writing? Might we know when it was signed? When can we see the entire document? If we are not allowed to see it, why not? Or did the commercial publishers just take Selbourne's word (as they apparently did about everything else)?

2. Precisely when did the "present owner" "generously" permit and vest? What form did permission and vestment take? Trained in the law and admitted to the bar, Selbourne knows that only written permission and vestment preferably notarized or at least witnessed will stand up in a court of law. Can we see the presumable document?

3. Did Selbourne really visit Arnoldo Mondadori Editore S.p.A. and, if so, precisely when? Did he visit its Milan office?

4. How does Selbourne explain the notation "traduction mise en conformité avec le manuscrit original par David Selbourne" (that is, 'David Selbourne conformed the translation to the original manuscript') on the title page of the French version of Selbourne 1997a if the French translation was begun after the publication of Selbourne 1997a, which appeared after the alleged "present owner" allegedly broke with Selbourne? Unless Selbourne memorized the text of the "original manuscript," we cannot see how he could have compared the French translation and the text in the alleged "original manuscript."

5. What do the words "texte de référence" mean in the statement "la remarquable traduction de Pierre-Emmanuel Duizat [est] elle-même certifiée conforme au texte de référence par David Selbourne" (that is, 'David Selbourne has certified that Pierre-Emmanuel Duizat's remarkable translation conforms to the texte de référence), found on page 8 of the "Avertissement de l'éditeur" of the French version?

6. Taking those quotations from the French version together, we see that "texte de référence" and "manuscrit original" must refer to the same text. If so, Selbourne had access to the "original manuscript" after the alleged break with the "present owner." But, if so, it's possibility 2, not 3, that's right. But, if so, Selbourne would have joyously announced a reconciliation and his friend of "many years" would have been eager to come forward to clear Selbourne of all suspicions. But he did not. Round and round we thus go in Selbournian circles, until we recall the Yiddish dictum of a mayse fregt men nisht ka kashes 'you don't ask questions about a tale [because tales are not logical]' (see the text to which note 69 is attached).

The only reasonable conclusions to draw are that the French translator worked from Selbourne's English text, that Selbourne's English text is not a translation but an original piece of fiction penned by Selbourne.

Thus, in any case, we see once again that however we try to interpret Selbourne's story logically, we reach a cul-de-sac at the end of which are only contradictions: Selbourne said one thing at one moment because it was expedient at the time and another thing at another moment it was expedient at that time but if you compare the two, you see that both cannot be right. Apparently, he did not have a good memory.

Do we not have serious legal issues here waiting to be resolved? See note 129 for more thereon.

If, however, I am wrong, tell us which possibility is right and come up with a scenario that accounts for all the real
and alleged happenings logically.

161. I thank Robert Singerman for putting together a bibliography of publications about Selbourne 1997a, providing other pertinent references, and furnishing photocopies of most of those quoted here; Federico Corriente for comments on part of section 7; Sol Steinmetz for comments on some passages of Jewish interest; and Jonathan Chaves for help with Chinese. I bear sole responsibility for the contents of the present essay.

162. Glazebrook spoke of Selbourne's alleged "translation" as being "smooth" and unsigned 1997b called it "lucid," those being two of the three hackneyed adjectives (the third is "seamless") common in shallow reviews (they are frequent in The New York Times Book Review). To evaluate a translation, you have to be a translatologist and you have to compare the entire translation against the entire original. Glazebrook and the anonymous writer met neither of those conditions. The important point here, however, is that we have no proof that Selbourne's "translation' is a translation. Until someone proves that it is, we should consider it to be his original piece of writing in Wardour Street in English and classify it as fictitious autobiography.

163. Nissan took Selbourne seriously: "[...] come dimostrato recentemente da David Selbourne nell'edizione dell'itinerario di Giacobbe d'Ancona [...]."

164. From unsigned 1999a we learn that Hillel Black, at the time editorial director of Birch Lane Press, had decided to publish Selbourne's book because he "believes that the story is legit." After the American office of Little, Brown, and Company canceled publication of Selbourne's book, its British office got "a letter from the director of a museum in Quanzhou, noting that many Chinese scholars believed the account to be true, and asking to publish a Chinese edition. It was that letter--and the resulting coverage in the British press--that sparked renewed U.S. interest. ¶ Routledge considered bidding for the book and adding an appendix of documents--including Mr. Spence's review--to let readers decide for themselves if the story was authentic. But Birch Lane beat Routledge to the punch. It will publish the book this fall, without an appendix, but with a new afterword by Selbourne, discussing the controversy," because ""There's nothing in this world that's without a doubt,' says Black. 'But [the Chinese scholars] make a very convincing argument'" (unsigned 1999a).

Our comment:

A. Black only "believed" Selbourne's tale to be "legit"? Did he not have proof that it was "legit"?

B. As for "the director of a museum in Quanzhou," we have seen in section 20 that Wang's attempt at a defense failed.

C. Chinese "scholars"? "Many"? What are their relevant credentials and where is their step-by-step detailed defense of Selbourne? How would they know that the account was true? What do they say after reading (and understanding) all the negative reviews and letters to the editor?

D. The "scholars" only "believed" the tale to be true? Did they not have proof that it was true?

E. Routledge should be happy that "Birch Lane beat [it] to the punch" for Selbourne's kitsch.

F. If Black had been as sure of himself as he claimed to be, he would not have been scared to include the appendix, which should consist of all the reviews, including the present essay, and all the letters to the editor.

G. "Selbourne, discussing the controversy"? What were Selbourne's credentials entitling him to discuss it? Allowing him to "discuss" the controversy was tantamount to making him his own judge and jury. Naturally, Selbourne never failed to rule in his own favor. See, for example, section 2 for his ruling that the modest Henri Gambourg, who has not succeeded in publishing even one of the no more than four articles he has written in his whole life, was "a French scholar of the participation by Jews from biblical times onward in the trade with the Orient in silks, spices, and other things," section 7 for his ruling that Dozy was "un éminent savant arabe" (as a historian, yes, in his day, but never in linguistic or Jewish subjects),
section 22 for his ruling that the Chinese agreeing with him are "the best" students of Song-dynasty China ("les meilleurs" -- but as Max Weinreich would have asked, "tsi zaynen zey take gute forshers?" "are they in fact good researchers?"), note 157 for his self-serving ruling that "Most of what scholars are saying is trivial and petitifogging, claiming as certitudes things that are of grave doubt," the same note for his ruling that his critics are "academic peashooters," and note 70 for his ruling that those supporting him were "spécialistes, parmi lesquels d'éminents érudits chinois."

H. "There's nothing in this world that's without a doubt"? Skepticism, part of Western thought for at least about 2500 years, has indeed been a leitmotif of the present essay, but it is only a preliminary: after objective analysis, rational people do reach conclusions about what is certain, probable, possible, doubtful, unlikely, improbable, impossible, of undetermined status, and of indeterminable status, about what is fully right, partly right, fully wrong, and partly wrong; and, though science does not have all the answers, it may never have all the answers, and any number of scientific certainties of today and of tomorrow may turn out to be wrong, civilization would be impossible if we refrained from making determinations, when we are sure of our findings, about what is right and what is not. If, however, after deep thinking, epistemologist or gnosiologist Black believes that nothing is without a doubt, he is required to doubt obvious statements of truth like (1) The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion is a fake, (2) the Holocaust occurred, (3) two and two make four, (3) the Scourges of Jacob have demolished Selbourne's house of cards, and (4) Hillel Black is an intelligent, objective, and rational commercial publisher, he sets the dissemination of truth as his highest goal, and he is not self-serving.

H. The Chinese "scholars" make "a very convincing argument"? What are the relevant credentials of those "scholars," what precisely was their argument, in what way was it not just "convincing" but "very convincing," how did they demolish the arguments of the Scourges of Jacob, and what part of my demolition of Wang Lianmao's remarks (see section 20) wrong.

I. What were Black's relevant credentials enabling him to pass judgment on that not just "convincing" but "very convincing argument"? What precisely was the "argument"? How much of the criticism did Black read and on what basis did he reject it? Is the present essay "very unconvincing"?

J. Was Hillel Black a credentialed epistemologist or gnosiologist?? Did he have relevant academic credentials of any kind?

In sum, talk is cheap. Black attempted a feint by casting the controversy over Selbourne's book as having to do with a profound epistemological question when in reality it was nothing more than a matter of show-and-tell: the imaginative Selbourne had much to tell but nothing to show.

165. Phillips 1998 triumphantly announced that a "paperback [edition has] just [been] published in Britain, and rights sold to 13 countries," which would make fourteen countries in all. So far as Robert Singerman could determine, imprints appeared in eleven or twelve countries (depending on whether the Shanghai and Taipei imprints are considered to have appeared in one or two countries). Thus, either my list of imprints is incomplete or two or three more publishers saw the light.

166. Since all "reviews" in Kirkus Reviews and Publishers Weekly are unsigned, brief, cliche-ridden, cheerleaderish, and shallow (always upbeat, never critical or negative, they are in fact mere announcements), we need not dwell more than a few seconds on the two listed here and in the next entry. Unsigned 1997a says, for example, "a fully annotated, very readable translation," "An exciting, stimulating, and unique human document, and one that will no doubt become a much-trumpeted addition to the historical record."

167. See the previous note.

Three excerpts from unsigned 1997b:

A. Selbourne's "engrossing commentary." An accurate description would be "commentary whose many errors of commission and omission support the hypothesis that Selbourne was the real Jacob."
B. "Wherever [Jacob] stopped, there was usually a Jewish community to offer hospitality and a temple for praying." Finding "hospitality" with local Jews is expected in a tale of endless serendipity ("Jacob" found a Jewish community even in at least one place where we have no evidence of there being one at the time: Hormuz). The writer, unfamiliar with Jewish ways, did not know that Jews can pray almost anywhere and therefore do not need a "temple," a word suggesting Reform Jews, of whom there were none in the thirteenth century.

C. "[Jacob's] vivacious portrait of Zaitun." Of "Jacob"'s vivid wife we are told little.

168. Here is a sample of the anonymous writer's remarks, followed by mine:

A. "una ricerca compiuta di recente dall'Università di Urbino" 'a piece of research recently finished at the University of Urbino'. Reference is to Selbourne's enterprise. See C below.

B. "Tradotto [...] dal vulgare umbro-marchigiano" 'translated from the Italian vernacular of Umbria and the Marches'. The existence of the "original manuscript" would have been a tad less hard to believe had the claim been made that "Jacob" wrote in that variety of Italian rather than "basically educated Tuscan," but in that case Selbourne would probably not have been able to take the job.

C. "attualmente in forza all'ateneo di Urbino" 'now on the staff at the University of Urbino'. Apparently, Selbourne's being a resident of Urbino was enough to make the anonymous writer think that he was on the staff of the local university.

D. "profondamente erudito di cultura umanistica e classica, conoscitore del greco e del latino, ma anche del persiano e dell'arabo" 'deeply imbued with humanistic and classical culture, knowing Greek, Latin, Persian, and Arabic'. The anonymous writer had the imaginary "Jacob" in mind.
David L. Gold, a student of the humanities with a particular interest in human language and Judaica, began publishing in 1968. His work has appeared in Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This is his first publication in Cyberspace. Later this year, Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alicante will release his next book, *Studies in Etymology and Etiology (With Emphasis on Germanic, Jewish, Romance, and Slavic Languages)*.