

JEWISH SCHOLARSHIP IN SYDNEY BETWEEN THE WARS

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INTRODUCTION

There seems to be an impression that Sydney Jewry was barren in terms of Jewish scholarship in the inter-war period. If indeed this is true, the late 1930s brought a change. Amongst the Jewish refugees from Nazism were men of both general and Jewish culture. Ministerial vacancies at the two major synagogues – the Great and the Central - brought significant scholars to Australian shores in the persons respectively of Rabbi Dr Israel Porush and Rabbi Dr Eliezer Berkovits. The community gained its first 'learned society', the Australian Jewish Historical Society, though years before there had been short-lived library and literary societies.

But the pre-war picture was not entirely bleak. Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen had come to Australia in 1905 with an already established reputation as a scholar in the field of Jewish musicology. Rabbi Leib Aisack Falk was possessed of wide rabbinic knowledge and was already building up his great library, even coming across Jewish scholarly works in the Sydney bookshops of the time. Hyam Sholom Himmelferb, Louis Joseph and Aaron Blashki were the leaders of a small group of learned laymen who played a major role in the *Chevra Midrash* at the Maccabean Hall, a weekly gathering of 'people of the book' founded in 1926. Morris A Cohen and Abraham Rothfield, headmasters of the NSW Board of Jewish Education, as well as Herbert I Wolff, Secretary of the Great Synagogue, were also well-read in Judaica.

True, the overall picture of Jewish knowledge in Sydney was patchy and largely threadbare, but the community was not without its scholars and authors. Two literary works stand out - *History of the Jewish People* in three volumes by Jack M. Myers, who wrote the

second and third volumes in Sydney, and a five-volume edition of the *Humash* (Pentateuch) with Rashi's commentary printed in square Hebrew type with translations and notes. Based on the efforts of Aaron Blashki and Louis Joseph of Sydney, the manuscript of this work was integrated with a similar manuscript compiled by Dr Abraham M. Silbermann and Rev Morris Rosenbaum of London. Part 1 of this article deals with the historian Jack (Jacob) Michael Myers and Part 2 looks at the story of this *Humash*, which was sponsored by Aaron Blashki and his brother Henry and dedicated to their parents, Phillip and Hannah Blashki of Melbourne, 'who devoted their lives to the betterment of their fellow Jews'.¹

1. Jack Myers and his History Books

Jack (Jacob) Michael Myers (*Ya'akov ben Asher*) was the son of Asher Isaac Myers (1848-1902), editor of the *London Jewish Chronicle*, and his first wife Alice, nee Cohen (1854-1891), who were married by Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler in London on 20 November 1878. Asher Myers was described by Cecil Roth as 'an antiquary by taste, a businessman by training, and a journalist – and an extraordinarily good one – only by chance'.²

Apart from working for the *Jewish Chronicle* from 1869-1902, Asher Myers was the instigator of The Wanderers, an idiosyncratic group of Jewish intellectuals (Solomon Schechter, Israel Abrahams, Israel Zangwill, Lucien Wolf, Joseph Jacobs and others) whose conversations constantly wandered from the point. They gathered in each others' houses in Kilburn and St. John's Wood, north-west London, a milieu which must have had an influence in moulding the minds of the Wanderers' children, particularly Jack Myers.

Jack was born in London on 29 August 1882. He arrived in Sydney in 1912, and died on 27 July 1932, aged 49, at Earlsdon Nursing Home in Manly, New South Wales. He is buried in Section 7, row 13, at Rookwood Cemetery in western Sydney. On 3 May 1916 he married Annie Meerloo at the Great Synagogue, Sydney, but the marriage did not last, and she died in London on 8 March 1927.

Annie was the daughter of Solomon and Amelia (nee Hartog) Meerloo. Her father was a tailor from West Hampstead, north-west London. They were a Dutch family involved in the cigar trade. Annie was an advertising consultant, an unusual occupation for a woman at that time. She may have come from London in order to marry as the marriage application on file at the Great Synagogue says she had only been in Sydney 'a few weeks'. As there were no children, in his will dated 10 December 1930, Myers left his

secretary, Kathleen Givney, one hundred pounds, and the remainder of his estate to his brother Maurice, a London journalist.

After leaving England, Myers lived and worked in Singapore for a time before moving to Sydney in search of good weather for his arthritis. At the time of his marriage he was living in Manly at The Mansions with Annie nearby at The Carlton. There must have been other Jews in Manly but there was no local synagogue and he played no role at the Great Synagogue, many of whose members had never heard of him. He had probably abandoned the orthodoxy with which he had been brought up, though he retained his interest in Jewish scholarship.

In London he had been active in the Jewish Religious Union, forerunner of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, and helped to found its East End branch. Australia had no non-orthodox equivalent, at the time, despite the reformist tendencies of some communal identities such as Isaac Jacobs of Melbourne. Nonetheless Myers must have been on good terms with Rabbi Cohen and Aaron Blashki, since they checked the manuscripts of the second and third volumes of his history. Rabbi Cohen could have known Myers in London as a young man. His education was at the City of London School. He was admitted as a solicitor and then became a journalist and worked for the *Morning Post*. He wrote for the *Jewish Chronicle* and its rival, the *Jewish World*, where he was for a time the business manager. As 'Uncle Jack' he also ran the children's page.

In order to anglicise the Eastern European Jewish immigrants, many leading figures, including Myers, were involved in social welfare work in the East End. With Leon Simon, Norman Bentwich and Mortimer Epstein, he was a founder of Lewis House, a Jewish social settlement. He lived nearby at Toynbee Hall. Like other scions of leading families, many of them Oxford and Cambridge graduates, he was active in the Jewish youth club movement, later known as the Association for Jewish Youth. He also commanded the Gravel Lane Company of the Jewish Lads' Brigade and was a manager of the Brady Street and Jews' Free School Old Boys' Clubs, an honorary secretary of the Murchison House Lads' Club, as well as a founder of the Gravel Lane Old Girls' Guild and several branches of the Happy Evenings Association and the Lads' Employment Committee.

As well, he worked for the Jewish Athletic Association and the Jewish Religious Education Board, where he formulated ideas for the reorganisation of Jewish education. In addition, he was a member of the Stepney Borough Council and active in many East End projects. In 1900 he accompanied Carl Stettauer and Dr. Paul

Nathan on a relief mission to 'Darkest Russia', and wrote about his experiences for the *Jewish Chronicle*. According to Cecil Roth, what Myers saw in Russia 'so profoundly affected him that the trip marked the beginning of the nervous disorder which cost him his health and ultimately his life'.³

Myers' journalistic expertise was in finance. He was Australian correspondent for the London *Financial Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* as well as the London *Daily Telegraph* and the *Chicago Tribune*, was consulted on Australian finance by the Bank of England, and compiled an Australian supplement for the *Financial Times*. He worked mainly for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, though he had a short-lived attempt at running his own paper, the *Sunday Mirror*, which folded during World War I. He visited New York at least twice, in 1918 and 1930.

Always interested in Jewish history, he embarked on writing a popular work which became the engaging three-volume illustrated *History of the Jewish People*. The first volume, written in England, has a prefatory note by Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler. The foreword thanks a number of scholars for 'suggestion, encouragement and criticism' and expresses appreciation to Dr M. Berlin of Manchester 'for his painstaking revision of the whole MS'.

The book is dedicated to the memory of Myers' parents as well as to 'the boys and girls who, in reading this book, may be interested in the story of a remarkable people. Being Jews, they may feel greater pride of race and faith when they learn something of their ancestors who lived noble lives and died heroic deaths in days of old. Or, being non-Jews, they may perhaps see in clearer and more accurate perspective the real meaning of Jewish history – the history of Judaism and those who have upheld the banner in the fierce blast of prejudice, ill-will, and persecution through the ages'.⁴

In the second volume he calls Dr Israel Abrahams 'the real "godfather" of this volume (who) inspired me (more than twenty years ago) to hope that I might publish a book of this kind'.⁵ Abrahams, a teacher at Jews' College and later at Cambridge University, was an authority on Jewish literature and a great encouragement to young writers.

In London, where the first volume was written (by 1930 it had gone through thirteen editions) Myers had access to scholars and libraries and 'had to come to a decision on many matters on which scholars are divided and on which he is not qualified to judge'.⁶ He agreed with Dr Adolph Buechler, principal of Jews' College, that there were two Sanhedrins, one religious, one political, and he followed Isaac Hirsch Weiss 'with regard to the interpolations in the *Pirke Aboth* between sayings attributed to *Hillel*'.⁷ He had consulted

several scholars whom he names in the preface. In the second volume the preface lists works he has consulted, in English and in German.

Moving to Australia made historical work more difficult. There were no Judaica libraries other than a few private collections. He must have brought some books with him and had others sent out to Sydney. It is not known what happened to the books after his death, or what became of his papers including the plans for the fourth volume. He was, of course, unaware that there would be such massive events and changes after 1933, and how much Jewish historical research would take place thereafter. Myers must have had doubts about the second and succeeding volumes, and the project might have lapsed without Chief Rabbi J.H. Hertz, who on his Australian visit in 1921 met Myers and encouraged him to continue his Jewish writing and to remain in touch with scholars in England.

The foreword to the second volume says, 'If there is any merit in it, the Chief Rabbi must share the credit, for it was he who stimulated the completion of the task on his recent visit to Australia'.⁸ Myers showed his work to Rabbi Cohen and Aaron Blashki and then his brother Maurice, a journalist, saw it through the press. Maurice's wife worked on the index. Scholarly support was given by Dr Hartwig Hirschfeld, a professor at Jews' College, and Mrs Redcliffe N. Salaman in London, to whom Maurice must have submitted the material. Mrs Salaman (Nina Davis) was a poet and translator whose work was included in the festival liturgies entitled *Service of the Synagogue* edited by her father and Herbert M. Adler.⁹

Similar arrangements applied to the third volume. The first three volumes proved highly popular and were issued in an omnibus edition in 1930. Myers wrote with a light, confident style, though his attempt to popularise complex issues is sometimes worrisome. The story of the emergence of the rabbinate, for instance, is not fully satisfactory. The fourth volume was never completed because of Myers' ill health.

He did, however, produce *Stories of the Rabbis* (dedicated 'to my friends Norman Bentwich, M. Epstein and Leon Simon') and *The Jewish Story Book* (written whilst he was still married and dedicated 'to Annie, with fond love') which drew on his larger history. After moving to Australia he did not keep in touch with many of the family (they possibly never knew of his marriage) apart from Maurice.

How different Sydney Jewry would have been if Myers had been less of a recluse, and in particular if he had followed his father's

example and spearheaded a local group of Jewish Wanderers, even just to study Jewish history under his leadership. This is not quite what the *Chevra Midrash* was doing at the Maccabean Hall on Sabbath afternoons, but there must have been enough educated people to bring something of an intellectual ferment – albeit without Talmudic content – to people who lacked cultural stimulus. They played cards and talked *Shule* politics; some were exercised by Zionism; not many echoed Aaron Blashki's interest in the Bible, and hardly any had ever even heard of Maimonides or Rashi. Such a group could have been 'a kind of Fourth Party... concerned to make Judaism a living force... in arms against the complacent respectability of both the lay and spiritual leaders'.¹⁰ Whether things changed after the Second World War is another story.

2. The Blashki *Humash*.

In Part 1, dealing with Jack Myers and his history books, there is an incidental mention of the Blashki *Humash*. The name *Humash* (literally, "five") denotes the Pentateuch or Five Books of Moses, on which a series of great commentaries was produced in medieval Europe. The most famous commentary is that of Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo ben Isaac) of eleventh century France. It is a digest of interpretation of the Biblical text, so that the reader who knows *Humash* with Rashi is said to be on the way to rabbinic scholarship. Rashi senses what the ordinary reader wants to ask about a particular verse, so that when students ask, 'What is bothering Rashi?' they are *really* implying, 'What is bothering the ordinary person?'

Like many other Jewish boys, Aaron Blashki, who spearheaded the English translation of Rashi, was brought up in a home where *Shabbat* and *Torah* study went together. His father Phillip Blashki studied the weekly portion with Rashi, which gave Aaron Blashki an addictive interest in the subject. In his memoir published under the title of *Blashkiana*, he says:

When I lived with my parents in Melbourne it was our custom to read over with my father the weekly portion of the *Torah* every Friday night. After we had finished my father would then study the portion by himself, using the Rashi commentary. I often asked him about it, but got no more than a general idea that to understand the inner meaning of the *Torah* one had to get the benefit of such commentators as Rashi, Ibn Ezra and others, but Rashi was always my father's favourite, and he never seemed to tire of him. I made up my mind that some day I would try to have Rashi translated. I

remember asking the librarian of the Melbourne Public Library if he had an English translation of Rashi. He searched everywhere, but told me that he didn't think Rashi had ever been translated into English.¹¹

Years passed and Aaron Blashki became well-to-do but never abandoned the thought of an English translation of Rashi. The result – five volumes published between 1929 and 1934, was known in Australia as 'the Blashki *Humash*'; elsewhere, for reasons we shall discover, it is 'the Silbermann *Rashī*'. The work was the outcome of two independent projects, later combined. In Australia the prime movers were Aaron Blashki and Louis Joseph and in England Rev Morris Rosenbaum and Dr Abraham Silbermann.

The story of the Australian project is bound up with the life of Aaron Blashki, about whom information is available in the memoir mentioned above. Born in Melbourne in 1860, he played an important part in the commercial life of both Australia and South-East Asia; his travels are a fascinating chapter of Jewish and commercial history.



Aaron Blashki in Nice, France, 1937

Reproduced from Blashkiana, The Memoirs of Aaron Balshki, JP, AJHS Special Publication, 2005, plate opposite p.53.

Unusually for his time in Australia, Blashki combined his business career with a firm adherence to religious tradition and a love of Jewish sacred books. He was in a way like Rashi himself, earning a living from commercial pursuits (in Rashi's case vineyards and winemaking) whilst devoting himself to Jewish

learning and observance. Blashki was a member of the Great Synagogue, Sydney, holding office as president in 1913-14 during the era of Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen with whom he did not always see eye-to-eye, and he was involved in Jewish educational and charitable work.

He did not at first envisage undertaking the Rashi project on his own, even with help. He relates in his memoir¹² that when Chief Rabbi J. H. Hertz visited Australia in 1921 and wanted ideas on Jewish education, he responded by suggesting an edition of Rashi in English. The Chief Rabbi agreed and said that with financial backing he could produce the work within a year. He suggested a sum of £2000, which Blashki agreed to provide. The money was placed on deposit in London, but the project did not go ahead even though Hertz later said he could find clergy who could help him provided he had another £500. Blashki paid the five hundred and kept asking for a progress report. Nothing eventuated and about six years later when Blashki's daughter Viva married Wilfred S. Samuel, Blashki asked Samuel to go and see the Chief Rabbi. After an interview with the Chief Rabbi, Samuel advised Blashki not to expect any results from Hertz. Eventually Hertz produced a *Humash* commentary on quite different lines.

Blashki, having given up on Hertz, decided 'to take the matter in hand myself'. He looked for 'a sound Hebrew scholar' to be his co-worker and regarded himself as 'fortunate in enlisting the help of L. Joseph, then teacher of Hebrew at the Eastern Suburbs School'. L. (Louis) Joseph was also known as Joe Joseph and sometimes simply as Joseph, but his real name was Joseph Abov Louwisch (in Hebrew, Yosef ben Avraham Abba). Other versions of his surname were Louvish, Luvich and Luvis; he probably inverted Joseph Louwisch to become Louis Joseph. As Joseph he was a Hebrew teacher, and as Louwisch a property owner and military interpreter. When he died, aged 71, on 12 February 1962, he was buried - as J.A. Louwisch - in the ex-service section of Rookwood Jewish Cemetery; the tombstone not only records his military rank of captain but says he was a Talmudic scholar. There is a view that he had a Military Medal but it is unlikely since no such award is mentioned on the tombstone. He left a legacy to the Hebrew University.

Joseph was born in Marculesti, Russia, on 26 July 1890. Why and when he came to Australia we do not know; he may have spent time in England first. He had a sister, Naomi Kelly, who was living in Engadine at the time that Joseph/Louwisch died. According to some, he had a relationship with a non-Jewish woman, Mary Wingrove. At various times he lived in Kensington and Panania,

presumably too far to walk to a synagogue on Shabbat. Whatever his degree of orthodoxy may have been, he had a thorough knowledge of rabbinic texts and his discourses at the Sabbath afternoon *Chevra Midrash* were spell-binding and full of personality. Everyone agrees that he was brilliant; most say he was erratic or eccentric. Like many Eastern Europeans he was an accomplished linguist. There are reports that he taught himself Japanese (in three weeks!) early in the Second World War in order to become an interpreter. As Louwisch he worked at Defence headquarters, probably as an interpreter, and in the same capacity seems to have been sent to Japan after the war.

Joseph taught for the New South Wales Board of Jewish Education from the mid-1920s until about 1940, not only at the Central Synagogue but also as a Right of Entry teacher at Woollahra Opportunity School and elsewhere. Education Board reports call him 'a Hebrew scholar and a competent hard-working colleague', though former pupils use other words such as 'an angry man' and say he had little patience for small classes or small children, and sometimes gave the students something to read while he fell asleep. Nonetheless any child who tried to play a trick on the teacher would soon find the tables turned. He also taught at the Great Synagogue Sabbath School, where he scared his pupils but inspired them too.

Joseph seems to have had ample time available to work on *Rashi* with Aaron Blashki. The latter wrote: 'Mr Joseph eagerly and enthusiastically joined in the work. Every day we put in some hours of hard work. On Sundays and holidays much longer time. On some days we spent as much as 12 hours together, and in 12 months we had finished the whole of Rashi's Commentary on the Torah.'¹³ Since Blashki paid Joseph, the work was seen as Blashki's property. The manuscript may have remained in Blashki's handwriting or it might have been typed in his office.

There are various versions of *Rashi*, with significant differences between them. Some remain in manuscript form, including one held by the University of Sydney. We have to presume that Blashki and Joseph based themselves on whatever printed edition they had available. Maybe Aaron Blashki had inherited his father's copy and this was the one they used. Joseph obviously had his own copy but we do not know if it was identical with Blashki's. It is not known what happened to Blashki's Hebrew books after his death, nor does anyone seem to possess a copy of his and Joseph's translation. It is doubtful whether anyone in London would have preserved it; the publisher has since gone out of business. Blashki wrote:

Although we translated every word that Rashi wrote as literally as we could, after many discussions we decided to cut out a lot of Rashi's grammatical explanations and repetitions, leaving just such commentaries as we thought would interest the ordinary reader. I mention this because when I came to have the work published in conjunction with Dr Silberman and Reverend Rosenbaum, it was decided that all the matter we had so carefully eliminated must be re-inserted and everything that Rashi wrote must appear and even be added to in order to explain as far as possible what Rashi meant.¹⁴

The question of which Rashi text was used does not apply to Rosenbaum and Silberman's version since the preface says that 'the text itself is by no means settled; Berliner's edition is, of course, indispensable but still leaves many textual problems unsolved.' Abraham Berliner (1833-1915) was a lecturer at the Hildesheimer Seminary in Berlin, who in 1866 published the first critical edition of Rashi and continued to carry out Rashi research. Utilising Berliner gave Rosenbaum and Silberman an advantage over Blashki and Joseph, who had little access in distant Sydney to scholarly research.

Silberman and Rosenbaum also carried out 'a careful examination of the translation made by Dukes, the greatest Hebraist who ever attempted the task of rendering Rashi into a modern language'. This was Leopold Dukes (1810-1891), born in Pressburg, an historian of Jewish literature. Between 1833 and 1838 he published an annotated translation into German with the approval of his teacher Rabbi Moses Sofer. Though in German, it was printed in Hebrew characters. An earlier German attempt was made by L. Haymann, who issued only one volume, on Genesis, in German characters and without the Hebrew. There had been Latin translations of all or part of Rashi's commentaries, but these, though useful for consultation, do not come within the category of renderings in a modern language.

Presumably Silberman and Rosenbaum began work without knowing of Blashki and Joseph. Since Rosenbaum was a leading member of the Anglo-Jewish ministry - at this point at the Borough Synagogue in South London - it is possible that the Chief Rabbi said something to him about a Rashi translation but we cannot be sure if Hertz and he were on good terms. Hertz is not likely to have revealed that he had been in contact with Blashki.

Silberman may have planned the work before leaving Berlin for London. To assist him he needed an English scholar with knowledge of rabbinic exegesis and a good turn of phrase in

English. Rosenbaum, born in London in 1871, had wide scholarly interests that ranged from Anglo-Jewish history to the Jewish calendar; his writings on Freemasonry are still consulted with profit by Masonic researchers. When Silbermann became involved with the bookselling and publishing firm of Shapiro Vallentine he probably soon discovered that *Vallentine's Hebrew and English Almanac* utilised Rosenbaum's services and in this way the two became associated with one another.

Dr Abraham Moritz Silbermann was born in Hungary in 1889 and gained ordination in Berlin. He did not pursue a rabbinical career but concentrated on writing, publishing and selling books. In Germany he was joint editor of a Hebrew-German dictionary and a Talmudic dictionary. When he settled in England he became publishing director of Shapiro Vallentine and issued a number of significant works. He personally produced a Children's *Haggadah* as well as *Vallentine's Jewish Encyclopaedia*. In all these projects he worked with others – the *Haggadah* was jointly produced with Arthur Saul Super, the son of Rabbi Isaac Jacob Super of Melbourne, and the *Encyclopaedia* with Albert Montefiore Hyamson, a well-known Anglo-Jewish historian – so that collaborating with Morris Rosenbaum on the Rashi project fitted into this pattern. Silbermann died in 1939 and the Bible Readers' Union was founded in his memory.

How the two Rashi projects came to be merged happened in this way. Some time after Wilfred Samuel's meeting with Hertz – Blashki says it was six months later but if he only started on the translation at about the time of his daughter's marriage and it took twelve months, the time interval must have been longer – Blashki went to London, and on the way showed the manuscript to a New York publishing firm. They were interested and set up a sample page, but they wanted \$35,000, which Blashki was not willing to provide. In London, Hertz sent for Blashki and told him he had most of the work – presumably on the Rashi translation – done but had decided not to limit the commentary to Rashi but to broaden its scope. He wanted Blashki and his brother Henry to sponsor it for £300 for each of five volumes. Blashki confirmed the arrangement but when the terms were changed, by Hertz or the publishers or both, Blashki withdrew.

Blashki came to be in touch with Shapiro Vallentine – we do not know at whose initiative – and they introduced him to Silbermann. When Blashki found that Silbermann and Rosenbaum were working on a translation he entered into an agreement to surrender his manuscript to them to be used at their discretion and to pay a hundred pounds for each volume when it was published. A contract

was entered into between Aaron Blashki and, on behalf of Shapiro Vallentine, Fanny Nirenstein. Andrew Samuel, Blashki's grandson, has a copy of the contract, which provides for the first volume (Genesis) to appear before 1 March 1929, for the Hebrew text of *Rashi* to be in square letters (not the so-called Rashi script, which has no intrinsic connection with Rashi himself but is the font used by the early printers in 1475 to distinguish the commentary from the Biblical text), and for each volume to bear a dedication to Blashki's parents, Phillip and Hannah Blashki of Melbourne. There is also an undertaking to name Aaron Blashki, Dr A Silbermann, L. Joseph and a 'Mr Rosmarin' as authors or compilers. As far as we know no Mr Rosmarin was involved in the project and this name is probably meant to be Rev M. Rosenbaum.

This is not the place to analyse the substance of the translation and notes as they finally appeared, but one wonders why the books do not include a translation of the Aramaic text of the *Targum Onkelos*,¹⁵ which is added to each page. It could be argued that Rashi has more to say to the ordinary reader than does *Onkelos*, but on the other hand the traditionalists would have welcomed an English version of the *Targum* in line with the Talmudic recommendation to study the weekly portion not only in Hebrew but also in Aramaic. Translating *Onkelos* could have been practical, bearing in mind that scholars such as Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler had extensively researched the *Targum* text.

The five volumes did, however, have two added features - the *Haftarah* (prophetic reading) and the text of the Sabbath services, which made the books more practical for the Sabbath worshipper. A number of congregants at the St Kilda Synagogue in my childhood used their Blashki *Humash* both for the weekly readings and to say their own prayers, perhaps because Aaron Blashki sponsored the distribution of the books.

The publishing history of the work is a success story, which enhanced the eminence of Shapiro Vallentine as a Jewish publisher. A number of editions appeared and at one stage the original five volumes were reduced to two, the first comprising Genesis and Exodus and the second containing Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Rashi scholarship has continued to progress and other translations have appeared, including a linear version produced in New York in the 1940s. The Blashki *Humash*/Silbermann Rashi is not seen in synagogues as often as in the past, but students constantly consult its notes for the wide variety of in-depth and background information that they contain.

For the purposes of this article the question is whether Blashki's project retains any importance in Australian Jewish history. The

answer is definitely yes. The work proves that Australian Jewry in the supposedly threadbare period between the two wars had its accomplished scholars, men of vision and generous philanthropists, and in Aaron Blashki all three epithets came together. It also proves that Australia was not a mere backwater in the Jewish history of the period, almost totally irrelevant in the global Jewish scheme of things, but a community – however small, however distant - capable of making a solid contribution to Judaism and Jewish literature. It indicates a way in which Jews living in the midst of other cultures can, like Rashi, remain totally true to their tradition whilst utilising the idiom of their environment. It could not single-handedly 'roll away the reproach'¹⁶ of grass-roots Jewish ignorance and indifference, but it strengthened those who were already valiantly committed and amongst others may have sparked a fresh interest in the Jewish identity which some found so hard to uphold.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In preparing Part 1, I received valuable assistance from Terry Newman, Helen Bersten, Andrew Samuel, Gael Hammer and Benseon Apple of Sydney, and members of the Myers family in London. Also, I am grateful to Gary Luke, Andrew Samuel of Sydney and his brother Edgar Samuel of London for their advice and assistance with Part 2.

ENDNOTES

1. *Blashkiana: The Memoirs of Aaron Blashki JP*, (Melbourne: AJHS special publication, Hybrid Publishers, 2005), pp. 90-94.
2. Cecil Roth, *The Jewish Chronicle, 1841-1941*, (London, 1949), p. 91.
3. Roth, op. cit., pp. 117-118.
4. Jack M. Myers, *The Story of the Jewish People*, vol. 1, Dedication, (London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, & Co. Ltd, 1909), p. v.
5. Myers, op. cit., Vol. 2, Preface, p. v.
6. Myers, op. cit., Vol. 1, Preface, p. viii.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Myers, op. cit., Vol. 2, Preface, p. iii.
9. Herbert M. Adler & David M. Davis (eds.), *Service of the Synagogue*, 6 vols., (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1906).
10. Norman and Margery Bentwich, *Herbert Bentwich, the Pilgrim Father*, (Jerusalem, nd), p. 67; Norman Bentwich, 'The Wanderers and Other Jewish Scholars of My Youth', presidential address to the Jewish Historical Society of England, *JHSE Transactions*, vol. 20, (1959-61), pp.51-62.
11. *Blashkiana*, op. cit. pp.90-91.
12. *Ibid.*, p.91.
13. *Ibid.*, p.92.

14. *Ibid.*
15. *Targum* is the Aramaic paraphrase of Scripture. The best known *Targum* to the Torah is by a proselyte named Onkelos, whom some identify with Aquila.
16. Joshua, 5:9.