

INTRODUCTION

Saul Levi Mortera: Chief Rabbi and Polemicist

Saul Levi Mortera (ca. 1596–1660) was the spiritual leader of Amsterdam’s Jewish community during the city’s Golden Age. Mortera (whose surname is sometimes spelled Morteira) was born in the Venetian Ghetto into a prominent family of Ashkenazic (German) Jewish origin. His grandfather, Judah Katzenelellenbogen (1521–1597), was the chief rabbi of the Jewish community of Venice, where Mortera may have begun his rabbinic career under the tutelage of another renowned Ashkenazic theologian, Leon Modena (1571–1648).¹ Mortera may have remained in Venice to follow in his grandfather’s footsteps were it not for the relationship he developed with Elijah Montalto (1567–1616), a physician from Lisbon seeking edification in Jewish doctrines.

Montalto was a *converso*: a descendant of Spanish or Portuguese Jews who had been forced to convert to Christianity in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Much has been written about this period of religious persecution, and there is scholarly consensus that the fact that conversions were forced and preceded by outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence, and without an official program of Catholic indoctrination, meant that many *conversos* were insincere Catholics.² While they behaved as Christians in public, these *conversos* practised a secret and skeletal form of Judaism, or crypto-Judaism, in fear of persecution by an Inquisition that operated as a moral police in Spain and Portugal. Crypto-Judaism was influenced by Catholic traditions, such as those that involved Mariology, personal salvation, and the adoration of saints, and involved practices that varied from one individual to another. The reduced and Catholicized nature of crypto-Judaism is evident in the few

¹ Saperstein first identified the relationship of Mortera to Katzenelellenbogen in *Exile in Amsterdam*, 381. Concerning the possibility that Mortera was Modena’s student, see Mortera, *Arguments Against the Christian Religion*, ed. and trans. Kaplan, 20–21 (henceforth, simply *Arguments*); and Mortera, *Tratado da verdade da lei de Moisés*, ed. Salomon, xl.

² See Cohen, *The Spanish*, and Ray, *Jewish Life in Medieval Spain*, for some of the most recent assessments of the period.

observances that were kept: 1. a belief in the Jewish concept of a unitary God; 2. messianic views that opposed Church doctrines; 3. a belief that personal salvation could be achieved through adherence to the Law of Moses; 4. a conviction that adherence to Judaism would bring good fortune; 5. devotion among many to “Jewish” saints (most notably Moses and Esther); and 6. a belief in the superiority of Judaism.³

Montalto travelled to the Venetian Ghetto because the open practice of Judaism was tolerated, and because Ashkenazic and Sephardic (Spanish and Portuguese) synagogues had been established during the sixteenth century. The first to come into existence were Ashkenazic congregations led by rabbis such as Mortera’s grandfather, Judah Katzenellenbogen, whose opinions concerning religious doctrines were treated as authoritative by Jewish communities throughout Europe. Montalto was one of many *convertos* who came to Venice to seek guidance in learning to practise Judaism—a process known as “rejudaization.” Mortera worked to rejudaize Montalto from 1610 to 1612, which appears to have been very successful insofar as Montalto developed his own desire to be a rejudaizer and wrote letters inviting relatives to join him in Venice.⁴

In 1612, Montalto was summoned to Paris to serve as a court physician, and Mortera formed part of a retinue that would remain in France until Montalto died in 1616. During this time, Mortera gained fame as a rabbinic authority and expert in Jewish mysticism (or Kabbalah), and in a French decree from 1617 he is described as being “known for his wisdom.”⁵ The need to bury Montalto in the closest Jewish cemetery, which had been founded in Ouderkerk aan de Amstel, approximately ten kilometres south of Amsterdam, fortuitously brought Mortera to the city. After Montalto’s burial, Mortera quickly established a reputation in Amsterdam and, in 1619, he was named chief rabbi of the Beth Jacob synagogue—a post that he held until he died in 1660. In addition to delivering weekly sermons, Mortera—whose marriage to a Jewish woman of Portuguese descent would produce five children—taught Talmud to seventh-grade students. In his role as spiritual leader, Mortera dedicated much of his time to rejudaization, and the success

3 These observances are identified and discussed by Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, 99–125.

4 For the letters written by Montalto, see Cecil Roth, “Quatre lettres d’Elie de Montalte,” 148–65.

5 “cognoist pour en sçavoir” (Mortera, *Tratado da verdade da lei de Moisés*, ed. Salomon, xliii).

he initially had with Montalto was one of many similar stories of *conversos* embracing Judaism and, in some cases, achieving renown as Jewish scholars.

One example was Moses ben Mordecai Zacuto (1625–1697), who was born in Amsterdam to *converso* parents whom Mortera rejudaised. Zacuto studied under Mortera before becoming a rabbi and Kabbalist in Venice. Zacuto was one of several rabbinic scholars trained by Mortera, and Zacuto's rise to prominence can be attributed to his thorough education in Jewish subjects and a talent for written communication that Mortera influenced. Zacuto authored many Hebrew liturgical poems as well as a dramatic work in Hebrew, *יסוד עולם* (*Yesod Olam*, or *Foundation of the World*), which portrays the midrashic legend about Abraham smashing his father's idols and his appearance at the court of King Nimrod, where he is thrown into a fiery furnace and saved by an angel.

Zacuto may have learned to dramatize a midrashic story while studying with Mortera, who in the early 1620s co-authored a play in Portuguese, *Dialogo dos montes* (The Controversy of the Mountains), with Rehuel Jessurun (1575–1635)—a *converso* and synagogue official at Beth Jacob. *Dialogo* anticipates Zacuto's Hebrew play by expanding on a midrashic tradition, which in *Dialogo* is a dispute among mountains in ancient Israel for the privilege of being the place where God would reveal the Torah.⁶ The midrashic tradition on which *Dialogo dos montes* is based is linked to Jewish eschatology. The resolution of the dispute among the mountains in the play is a symbolic portrayal of an event that will occur in the Apocalypse according to the Midrash: namely, the reunification of two mountains, Mount Moriah (where Isaac is brought by Abraham to be sacrificed in Gen. 22) and Mount Sinai: "In the future world, Sinai will return to its original place, Mount Moriah."⁷

The seven sermons composed by Mortera to conclude *Dialogo dos montes*, in which individual mountains (Zion, Sinai, Hor Hahar, Nebo, Gerizim, Carmel, and Zetim) present their cases to be considered superior, deviate from the midrashic tradition. Mortera includes five mountains not mentioned in the Midrash (Zion, Hor Hahar, Nebo, Gerizim, and Zetim), and he omits four that are mentioned in the Midrash (Hermon, Lebanon, Moriah, and Tabor). The way in which Mortera differs from the Midrash reflects the overarching importance of rejudaization in *Diálogo dos montes*. In this light, Polack interprets Mortera's decision to include Zion and Sinai as "a reminder to those

⁶ For a discussion of this tradition, which is found in Midrash Tehillim (68: 15–18), see Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 3:82–85.

⁷ Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 3, p. 84.

marranos who had not yet embraced Judaism as wholeheartedly as the author. It showed that Torah and Temple were more important than, among other things, the celebration of a death or triumph over the heathen.”⁸ Similarly, the omission of Mount Moriah—the mountain that is privileged in the Apocalypse according to the Midrash—speaks to Mortera’s perception of the distance between his congregants and *halachic* (biblical/rabbinic/Talmudic) Judaism.

Rejudaization is also the principal theme of Mortera’s polemical works, which he composed (mostly in Spanish but also in Portuguese) during the final decades of his lifetime, including the one translated from Spanish into English in the present volume, *Preguntas que hizo un clérigo de Ruan de Francia a las cuales respondió el excelente y eminentísimo señor hacham Saul Levi Mortera*. In general, these works establish a clear motivation for rejudaization: namely, that the free choice by *conversos* to practise Judaism would trigger the Apocalypse and the inception of a Jewish polity in which civil authority was subordinate to the Mosaic Law. Those who refused to conform could receive the penalty of *herem*, or excommunication, as in 1656, when Mortera imposed this penalty on his congregant, Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677).

Mortera went to great lengths in his writings to identify biblical justifications for rejudaization. While the Apocalypse is a constant theme, Mortera also contextualizes rejudaization in contemporary terms. For example, Mortera asserts in his writings that the abandonment of crypto-Judaism and the adoption of rabbinic Judaism promised economic benefits for *conversos* and the Amsterdam Jewish community at large, thereby enabling it to establish commercial ties with prosperous Mediterranean centres of Jewry by recognizing their rabbinic courts. Mortera expresses this view in a fictional dialogue between two *conversos* written around 1650, *Arguments Against the Christian Religion in Amsterdam*, in which he envisions rejudaization as a trigger for an apocalyptic establishment of a Jewish republic enjoying “continuous prosperity.”⁹ The link between rejudaization and economic prosperity resonates in *Questions* in what is asked of Mortera (for example, Question 11, “For what sins has God, for so many centuries, left the Jewish republic in ruins and captivity during such a long exile?”), and in Mortera’s replies (for example, to Question 13, “On what do the Hebrews base their enduring hope for their Messiah?” when he describes a Jewish “return to their ancient lands and property”).

8 Polack, “Introduction,” xxv.

9 Mortera, *Arguments*, ed. and trans. Kaplan, 64.

By the mid-1600s, Mortera's Beth Jacob congregation had grown from a few hundred individuals to more than two thousand and received a steady stream of *converso* refugees from Spain and Portugal.¹⁰ This influx contributed to the survival of crypto-Judaism and explains why Mortera felt compelled to write *Questions* toward the end of his career. Mortera's efforts were successful, as evidenced by the prosperity of Amsterdam's Jewish community. Through his writings, Mortera played a pivotal role in elevating the profile of his adoptive city as a hub for a community that adhered to rabbinic norms, which unified Jews throughout Europe and the Middle East. More broadly, Mortera's efforts at rejudaizing Amsterdam's *conversos* ultimately contributed to the rise of the city as an important global trade centre, a crucible of modern liberal political thought, and a laboratory of interconfessional tolerance. Christian polemicists such as Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) actively involved themselves in the city's governance. They composed treatises advocating for the protection of religious and cultural minorities to stimulate trade and economic development. Mortera's participation in interconfessional dialogues with these polemicists left a profound impact on his writings. The evidence of this impact in *Questions* demonstrates a fusion of rabbinic and philosophical thought that comprised a unique formula for religious indoctrination.

The Contents of *Questions by a Christian Cleric from Rouen, France, and Answers by the Excellent, Eminent, and Wise Saul Levi Mortera*

Research by Miriam Bodian and Yosef Kaplan highlights the close interaction between rabbis and *conversos* undergoing religious instruction in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. Other scholars have focused on works composed by the Amsterdam rabbinate to facilitate this process, including Saperstein, who has analyzed the techniques used by Mortera in his sermons (*Exile in Amsterdam*), and Yaacob Dweck, who has studied the late seventeenth-century writings of Mortera's junior colleague, Rabbi Jacob Sasportas (1610–1698). Most recently, Benjamin Fisher suggests that Mortera was unique in persuading *conversos* because of his profound knowledge of "Christian doctrine" and his use of "philosophical deductions."¹¹ These are

¹⁰ Bodian observes that, "during its heyday in the 1670s, the community had a population of about 2,500" (*Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation*, 2).

¹¹ Fisher, *Amsterdam's People of the Book*, 169 and 193, respectively.

tendencies that will be identified below for the first time in *Questions*, which has been neglected because it is preserved only in manuscript form.

Questions has four textual witnesses housed by the Ets Haim Library of the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam. All four witnesses are available online in a digital format. One is found on fols. 1r–27r of MS EH 48 C 09 (23.8 × 17 centimetres), which is a copy made in the eighteenth century of a work with a title page listing a date of 1646.¹² This date would, therefore, be a *terminus ad quem* for the composition of *Questions*. Another eighteenth-century witness is included in MS EH 48 E 41 (21.4 × 16.1 centimetres), in which *Questions* occupies fols. 1r–19r.¹³ A third witness occupies pages 1–20 of MS EH 48 A 21 (22.9 × 29.3 centimetres), which was copied in 1712 as the title page reveals (and which includes page numbers rather than folio numbers).¹⁴ Finally, *Questions* is also found on fols. 86r–108r of MS EH 48 D 38 (19.4 × 15.6 centimetres), which is the copy made in 1712 on which my translation is based.¹⁵

In *Questions*, Mortera responds to twenty-three queries on Jewish doctrines posed by a Christian cleric from Rouen whose historical identity is unknown:

1. How is it proved that in God there cannot be a plurality, or three persons in one essence?
2. Has faith in the Saviour Messiah always been necessary for Jews to attain grace and forgiveness for their sins?
3. Will there be only one Messiah?
4. What evidence proves that the Messiah must be purely a man, and not both man and God?
5. Will the redemption of the Messiah be only corporeal and temporary?
6. Will the Law of Moses regarding ceremonies be kept in the time of the Messiah so that no other law or ceremonies need to be given?
7. By what means do the Jews obtain forgiveness for their sins at this time, since without it they cannot be saved?
8. How is it confirmed from Holy Scripture that the Messiah has not come?

12 Amsterdam, Ets Haim—Livraria Montezinos (hereafter EHLM), MS EH 48 C 09.

13 EHLM, MS EH 48 E 41.

14 EHLM, MS EH 48 A 21.

15 EHLM, MS EH 48 D 38 (hereafter *Questions*).

9. How does one respond to prophecies that Christians claimed to have been fulfilled, like those in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and the twenty-second Psalm?
10. Which people will receive and obey the Messiah, the Jews or the Gentiles?
11. For what sins has God, for so many centuries, left the Jewish republic in ruins and captivity during such a long exile?
12. What are the main articles of your faith, and how many are there?
13. On what do the Hebrews base their enduring hope for their Messiah?
14. What good do those who die before his coming expect from him in this life?
15. What use will your Messiah be at the final judgment and then in the afterlife, since he and everyone will die and the world will end?
16. Do the Jews now have the pure Hebrew text of the Holy Scripture with its ancient truth?
17. Is it permissible for Jews to interpret the Holy Scriptures, and are they free to follow the meaning they prefer?
18. Who has the authority to adjudicate in matters concerning the observance of the Law and the punishment of transgressors?
19. Will Jews who have converted to Christianity be saved or damned after abandoning the Law of Moses and living and dying as Christians?
20. What just cause exists for pardoning Jews who return to Judaism after having received and professed the Christian Catholic faith?
21. Can Jews still be saved if they have not been circumcised or observed the Law in the lands where it is not permitted, after having gone against it and their consciences by practising Christianity sincerely, worshipping idols, attending mass, and denying being Jews even though they are in their hearts?
22. What happened to the Ten Tribes that the Assyrians took captive, and where are they?
23. Do the Jews confess to the Original Sin with which we were all born, and if not, why do they deny it?

As the queries reveal, the central topics discussed in *Questions* are Jewish eschatology and the place Mortera envisioned for rejudaized *conversos* and other exiled communities in the Apocalypse.

Questions provides a unique rabbinic perspective on the Apocalypse, which was widely thought to be imminent in the Netherlands, as evidenced throughout the 1500s by the following acquired by a self-proclaimed Anabaptist messiah, David Joris (1501–1556).¹⁶ According to both Jewish and Christian eschatology, the ingathering of Jews and rejudaized *conversos* portends the restoration of the Hebrew Republic, which names the political system by which the biblical Jews were governed by civil magistrates (Moses, judges, kings, prophets) whose authority was not invested by or superseded by the Mosaic Law, from the time they received the Torah at Mount Sinai until the destruction of the Second Jewish Temple in 70 CE.¹⁷ The separation of civil and religious authority in the Hebrew Republic served as a model pre-apocalyptic polity in their fight to break from Spanish (Habsburg) divine right rule.¹⁸

Amsterdam rabbis forged two paths toward a revived Hebrew Republic. One was championed by Mortera's younger colleague, Menasseh ben Israel (1604–1657), who envisioned an apocalyptic ingathering in England of exiled Jews and rejudaized *conversos*, which would trigger the inception there of a Jewish polity.¹⁹ This vision anticipated the Jewish messianic fervour that escalated during the mid-1600s and culminated in the movement dedicated to Sabbatai Zevi (1626–1676), which reached its zenith in Amsterdam in the mid-1660s. Zevi was born in Smyrna, where he began to proclaim himself as the Messiah in the 1640s, and during the 1650s he travelled to major Jewish communities to spread the news of his arrival. Zevi attracted thousands of followers, including many European *conversos*, who sold their possessions and prepared for the Apocalypse. In 1666, Zevi's conversion to Islam (under pain of death) in Constantinople greatly diminished his movement and ended his call for the establishment of a Jewish homeland.²⁰

Mortera forged the second path in *Questions* and other works by grounding rabbinic exegesis in logical reasoning to argue that the practice of Judaism by

16 For more on the ideas espoused by David Joris, see Waite, "Writing in the Heavenly Language."

17 This eschatological tradition is based on Isa. 11:12 ("He will hold up a signal to the nations / And assemble the banished of Israel, / And gather the dispersed of Judah / From the four corners of the earth").

18 For more on the significance of the Hebrew Republic to Christian polemicists, see Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic*.

19 Menasseh depicted his messianism in *The Hope of Israel*. For more on this topic, see Fisch, "Messianic Politics of Menasseh ben Israel."

20 For the most comprehensive study of Zevi, see Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*.

descendants of *conversos* in Amsterdam would contribute to the reestablishment of a Jewish State in the Holy Land.²¹ This path would ultimately prove to be more enduring, as scribes continued to replicate the works of Mortera in the century after his death.²² However, Mortera's legacy would have both positive and negative aspects. Successful instances of rejudaization, such as that of Miguel de Barrios (ca. 1625–1701), would reflect the ongoing impact of Mortera's theological and philosophical arguments in persuading conversos to adhere to Judaism and act as catalysts for the Apocalypse. Barrios, who was born in Spain and who lived in Portugal before fleeing the Inquisition, arrived in Amsterdam in 1672—more than a decade after Mortera had died. As he declares in his *Triumpho del gobierno popular* (*Triumph of the Popular Government*), Barrios regarded Mortera as an authoritative figure who preserved “the fire of the Law,” and who inspired, even in death, rejudaized *conversos* “who, in the shadow of his obedience, are enlightened by his healthy doctrine.”²³

Mortera's attempt to establish to rabbinic authority would not be accepted by everyone with whom he came into contact, as was the case with Uriel da Costa (1585–1640), a Portuguese *converso* who arrived in Amsterdam in 1623 after being excommunicated in Hamburg for composing an attack on rabbinic Judaism, *Propostas contra a tradição* (*Propositions Against the Tradition*). Da Costa continued to disseminate anti-rabbinic concepts during the 1620s in *Exame das tradições phariseas* (*Examination of Pharisaic Traditions*) and, in 1623, his Hamburg excommunication was sanctioned by the Amsterdam rabbinate, which excommunicated him again in the 1630s, several years before he took his own life by suicide in 1640. Saperstein has shown how da Costa came to be at odds with Mortera after publishing *Examination*.²⁴ A more famous case of the rejection of Mortera's rabbinic authority, that of Spinoza, will be considered below.

21 For an analysis of this second path in Mortera's *Arguments* and *Tratado da verdade da lei de Moisés*, see Kaplan, *The Origins of Democratic Zionism*, 67–86.

22 For example, Mortera's *Providencia de Dios con Israel* (*The Providence of God with Israel*)—the Spanish translation of *Tratado da verdade da lei de Moisés* (*Treatise on the Truth of the Law of Moses*)—was copied on some thirty occasions from the late 1600s to the mid-1700s.

23 EHLM, MS EH 9 E 43, 65; the translation into English from *Triumpho del gobierno popular* is my own.

24 Saperstein, “Saul Levi Morteira's Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul,” 140–41. For more on the works of Barrios, see Lieberman, *El Teatro alegórico de Miguel*, and Scholberg, *La poesía religiosa de Miguel de Barrios*.

The Sources for Mortera's Ideas in Questions

Questions contains more than seventy-five biblical quotations from the Old Testament, many of which are incomplete. Mortera sometimes indicates omitted biblical text by using a symbol for “etcetera” (&^a). Most of the time, there is no symbol, and Mortera incorporates a condensed version of the biblical quotation. An example in which Mortera uses both techniques is found in his reply to Question 6 (“Will the Law of Moses regarding ceremonies be kept in the time of the Messiah so that no other law or ceremonies need to be given?”), where he quotes from Deut. 30:1–8, 10:

Primero. Lo que dice el señor quasi en el fin de la ley después de haber publicado el premio y pena a los obedientes y transgresores de ella. Dice, “Sucederá que cuando hayan venido sobre ti todas estas cosas, la bendición y la maldición que he puesto delante de ti, &^a y [91r] (*omitted from 30:1-te arrepientas en medio de todas las naciones adonde te haya arrojado Jehová, tu Dios*) te conviertas a Jehová, tu Dios, y obedezcas a su voz conforme a todo lo que yo te mando hoy, tú y tus hijos, con todo tu corazón y con toda tu alma, entonces Jehová hará volver a tus cautivos, tendrá misericordia de ti y volverá a recogerte de entre todos los pueblos adonde te haya esparcido Jehová, tu Dios. Aunque tus desterrados estén en las partes más lejanas que hay debajo del cielo, de allí te recogerá Jehová, tu Dios, y de allá te tomará. Jehová, tu Dios, te hará volver a la tierra que heredaron tus padres, (*omitted from 30:5-y será tuya; te hará bien y te multiplicará más que a tus padres.*) Y circuncidará Jehová, tu Dios, tu corazón, &^a y (*omitted from 30:6-el corazón de tu descendencia, para que ames a Jehová, tu Dios, con todo tu corazón y con toda tu alma, a fin de que vivas.*) Pondrá Jehová, tu Dios, todas estas maldiciones sobre tus enemigos (*omitted from 30:7-y sobre los que te persiguieron con odio.*) Tú te convertirás, escucharás la voz de Jehová y pondrás por obra todos sus mandamientos que yo te ordeno hoy. (*omitted 30:9-Entonces Jehová, tu Dios, te hará prosperar en toda la obra de tus manos, en el fruto de tu vientre, en el fruto de tu bestia y en el fruto de tu tierra, para bien; porque Jehová volverá a gozarse sobre ti para bien, de la manera que se gozó sobre tus padres,*) cuando obedezcas a la voz de Jehová, tu Dios, y guardes sus mandamientos y sus estatutos escritos en este libro de la Ley; cuando te conviertas a Jehová, tu Dios, con todo tu corazón y con toda tu alma.”

First, what the Lord says near the end of the law after having established the reward and punishment for those obedient to it and the transgressors: “When all these things befall you—the blessing and the curse that I have set before you &^a [91r] (*omitted from 30:1-and you take them to heart amidst the various nations to which the LORD your God has banished you,*) and you return to the Lord your God, and you and your children heed His command with all your heart and soul, just as I enjoin upon you this day, the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and take you back in love. He will bring you together

again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. Even if your outcasts are at the ends of the world, from there the LORD your God will gather you, from there He will fetch you. And the LORD your God will bring you to the land that your fathers possessed, (*omitted from 30:5-and you shall possess it; and He will make you more prosperous and more numerous than your fathers.*) Then the LORD your God will open up your heart &^a (*omitted from 30:6-and the hearts of your offspring to love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul, in order that you may live.*) The Lord your God will inflict all those curses upon the enemies, (*omitted from 30:7-and foes who persecuted you.*) You, however, will again heed the LORD and obey all His commandments that I enjoin upon you this day. (*omitted 30:9-And the LORD your God will grant you abounding prosperity in all your undertakings, in the issue of your womb, the offspring of your cattle, and the produce of your soil. For the LORD will again delight in your well-being, as He did in that of your fathers.*) since you will be heeding the LORD your God and keeping His commandments and laws that are recorded in this book of the Teaching—once you return to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul.”

In the passages above, the sections in italics comprise the biblical text omitted by Mortera on two occasions with “&” and three times without this symbol. For the most part, when Mortera omits part of a biblical passage, he does so without any indication, resulting in a condensed version of the original.

The likely reason for the omitted biblical text in *Questions* is that Mortera quoted the Bible from memory, which I have suggested as an explanation for the incomplete biblical quotations in Mortera’s *Arguments*.²⁵ Mortera wrote *Arguments* around the time that he wrote *Questions*, and the biblical quotations in both works reveal that Mortera was familiar with multiple versions of the Old Testament and both Jewish and Christian versions of the Bible. In *Arguments*, Mortera includes hundreds of biblical quotations, the vast majority of which derive from the Old Testament. (There are a dozen biblical quotations from the New Testament.)

The primary source for the Old Testament quotations in *Arguments* and *Questions* is the *Biblia de Ferrara* (*Ferrara Bible*), which was first published in 1553 and widely used by Jews.²⁶ For the composition of both works, Mortera also consulted the *Biblia Reina-Valera* (*Reina-Valera Bible*), which was first published in 1569 (in Basel) and then as a revised edition in Amsterdam in 1602. The *Biblia Reina-Valera* was widely available and several revised editions were published during the seventeenth century. Benjamin Fischer

²⁵ Mortera, *Arguments*, ed. and trans. Kaplan, 51–52.

²⁶ Saperstein believes that Mortera owned a copy of the *Biblia de Ferrara* (*Exile in Amsterdam*, 80).

argues that Mortera's affinity for the *Biblia Reina-Valera* owed much to the fact that it "was closer to the Jewish version of Scripture than any other Christian Bible written in Spanish."²⁷

The influence on *Questions* of both the *Biblia de Ferrara* and the *Biblia Reina-Valera* is evident, for example, in Mortera's response to Question 17 ("Is it permissible for Jews to interpret the Holy Scriptures, and are they free to follow the meaning they prefer?"), when he quotes from Deut. 5:27–28: "Go, say to them, 'Return to your tents.' But you remain here with Me, and I will give you the whole Instruction—the laws and the rules—that you shall impart to them." Although in the *Biblia de Ferrara* (p. 159) this quotation corresponds to Deut. 5:27–28, it corresponds to Deut. 5:30–31 in the *Biblia Reina-Valera* (fol. 58v), which are the chapter and verse numbers given on fol. 102r of EH 48 D 38. The reason for this difference is that Deut. 5 has three additional verses in the *Biblia Reina-Valera* (18, 19, and 20), which correspond to commandments (respectively, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not steal," and "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor"); these are all included within Deut. 5:17 in the *Biblia de Ferrara* (and in the *Jewish Study Bible*).

At the same time, while the chapter and verse numbers used by Mortera correspond to those used in the *Biblia Reina-Valera*, a comparison of Mortera's quote to those in the Bibles under consideration indicates that the *Biblia Reina-Valera* rendition was not the textual source:

anda di a ellos tornad a vuestras tiendas, y tu aqui esta conmigo, y hablare a ti todas las encomendanças, los fueros, y los juizios, y los enseñaras. (Mortera, *Preguntas*, fol. 102r)

Ve, diles, Bolveos à vuestras tiendas. Y tu estéte aqui conmigo para que yo te diga todos los mandamientos, y estatutos y derechos que tu les enseñaras. (*Biblia Reina-Valera*, fol. 58v)

"Anda, di a ellos: tornad a vos a vuestras tiendas. Y tu, aqui estaa comigo, y fablare a ti a toda la encomendança, y los fueros y los juizios que les abezaras. (*Biblia de Ferrara*, 159)

As is evident, the closest source for Mortera's quote is the *Biblia de Ferrara*, with the only significant difference being Mortera's use of the verb "enseñaras" (you shall impart) rather than "abezaras," which derives from the Ladino verb "ambezar" (to teach). However, the appearance of "enseñaras" in Mortera's quote, as well as the use of the numerical reference Deut 5:31 in EH 48 D 38, suggests the Mortera also consulted the *Biblia Reina-Valera* for the composition of *Questions*.

²⁷ Fisher, "Opening the Eyes of the 'Novos reformados,'" 128.

In addition to the Old Testament, Mortera also refers to other Jewish sources to establish the authoritative status of rabbinic Judaism. According to Jewish tradition, the foundation of rabbinic Judaism was dictated to Moses by God on Mount Sinai as the Oral Law and then preserved in two compilations of rabbinic commentaries: the Mishnah (ca. 200 CE) and the Talmud (or Babylonian Talmud, ca. 500 CE), which includes both the Mishnah and a later compilation known as the Gemara (ca. 500 CE). Mortera recognizes the importance of rabbinic Judaism in his response to Question 17: “Today, this tradition is recorded in the Mishnah and the Talmud, according to which the only way to know it is by consulting the Holy Scripture.”²⁸ Mortera’s use of the term Mental Law (in EH 48 D 38, “Ley mental”), rather than Oral Law, reveals that he consulted a work by Imanuel Aboab (ca. 1555–1628) for his response. Aboab was a Portuguese *converso* who emigrated to Italy, where he dedicated himself to the rejudaization of *conversos* and wrote *Nomología* (*The Theory of the Names*), a defence of the Oral Law first published posthumously (1629) in Amsterdam. Aboab uses the term “Ley mental” to refer to the Oral Law in *Nomología*, which anticipates Mortera’s use of the same term in *Questions*.

In replying to Question 18 (“Who has the authority to adjudicate in matters concerning the observance of the Law and the punishment of transgressors?”), Mortera again presents the rabbinic perspective that the Talmud contains the Oral Law:

Later, however, we were taken captive because of our sins from our land and dispersed throughout many places, and both prophecy and the great senate ended. Nobody had the authority to adjudicate the Law in any case, except in those cases for which we had a written record by the most learned men of the Talmud, who left us examples of what occurred in their time.²⁹

Since the Jewish Diaspora, which began after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the “authority to adjudicate in matters concerning the observance of the Law and the punishment of transgressors” is held by the rabbinate, as Mortera declares.

Aside from drawing on Jewish and *converso* texts, Mortera also bases his ideas on Christian sources in *Questions*.³⁰ In his response to Question 16

28 *Questions*, fol. 102v. Translation mine for all quotations from *Questions*.

29 *Questions*, fol. 103r.

30 For discussions of Mortera’s use of Christian sources in his other works, see Mortera, *Arguments*, ed. and trans. Kaplan, 60–61; and Kaplan, *The Origins of Democratic Zionism*, 67–93.

(“Do the Jews now have the pure Hebrew text of the Holy Scripture with its ancient truth?”), Mortera uses Augustine’s *City of God* for support:

To answer this question, it would be enough to point out that all the Hebrew Bibles found throughout the world do not differ from each other, not even a single syllable, which is very clear proof of their authenticity. Since the people of Israel are scattered throughout the world and subject to different nations, their Bibles are always exactly the same. There cannot be any doubt about this, so I will refer to declarations made by the most respected Christian scholars, including Augustine, who says, on pages 15 and 13 of his book *City of God*, that it cannot be believed that the Jews have in any way contaminated the Holy Books.³¹

Mortera refers to specific pages of an edition of Augustine’s *City of God* that has not been identified. It is interesting to consider that, while growing up in Venice, he may have had access to an edition published in Venice in 1475. In any case, it appears that Mortera is referring to Book 18 of *City of God*. In particular, Mortera’s declarations that “the fact that all the ancient and modern Hebrew originals are consistent in everything, and in all ways, even though they were written at different times and places, speaks in favour of their authenticity” and “it should not be presumed that such an innumerable people, who have no other good thing in their captivity than the possession of the holy books, would have wanted to falsify them to satisfy the ill will and rancor that could have been directed toward a nation, or people” are attributed to “the words of Augustine.”³²

Mortera’s declarations are likely grounded in Book 18, Chapter 42 of *City of God*:

When the high priest had sent them to him in Hebrew, he afterwards demanded interpreters of him, and there were given him seventy-two, out of each of the twelve tribes six men, most learned in both languages, to wit, the Hebrew and Greek and their translation is now by custom called the Septuagint. It is reported, indeed, that there was an agreement in their words so wonderful, stupendous, and plainly divine, that when they had sat at this work, each one apart (for so it pleased Ptolemy to test their fidelity), they differed from each other in no word which had the same meaning and force, or, in the order of the words; but, as if the translators had been one, so what all had translated was one, because in very deed the one Spirit had been in them all. And they received so wonderful a gift of God, in order that the authority of these Scriptures might be commended not as human but divine,

³¹ *Questions*, fol. 101r.

³² *Questions*, fol. 101v.

as indeed it was, for the benefit of the nations who should at some time believe, as we now see them doing.³³

For additional support by Christian theologians in his response to Question 16, Mortera enlists Jerome and Thomas Aquinas: “Jerome affirms the same thing in his book *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, as does Bede, in *Greater Chronicle*, and Thomas Aquinas exonerates Paul’s Epistle in Chapter 9 of *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*.”³⁴ Mortera is probably alluding to Jerome’s stated intent to establish the authoritative status of the Hebrew biblical text:

Therefore it shall be my concern both to rebut the errors of those who make different kinds of conjectures about the Hebrew books, and to restore to their proper authority those things which in the Latin and Greek codices seem to burst forth in abundance; and to make plain through consideration of the native language the etymologies of objects, of names, and of territories which have no meaning in our own language.³⁵

Mortera also likely refers to the manner by which Bede privileges “the Hebrew Truth” while elucidating an aeonian chronology in Chapter 66 (“The Six Ages of this World”) of *Reckoning of Time*—a chapter that circulated independently under the title *Greater Chronicle*—and Chapter 9 of Thomas Aquinas’ *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, in which Aquinas explains that the “the Apostle...recounts the greatness of the Jews...shows how the Gentiles have been drawn into that greatness...[and] shows his affection for the Jewish people, lest anything he had said or was about to say against them should seem to proceed from hatred.”³⁶

As his response to Question 16 continues, Mortera utilizes a more contemporary source before returning to Augustine: “In addition, Alexander de Tartagnis upholds the same truth in *Queries* and Augustine calls us ancient treasurers of the Holy Books in *Expositions on the Psalms*, Psalm 40. He confirms this in Chapter 43 of Book 18 of *The City of God*, in which partial confirmation is worth more than one hundred witnesses.”³⁷ Alexander de Tartagnis (ca. 1424–ca. 1477) was an Italian jurist and author of *Consilia* (whose earliest textual witness is from 1477), which may be the work mentioned by

33 Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Dods, 875.

34 *Questions*, fol. 101v.

35 Jerome, *Saint Jerome’s “Hebrew Questions on Genesis,”* trans. Hayward, 29.

36 Bede, *Greater Chronicle*, trans. Wallis, 157–237; Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul*, trans. Larcher, 245.

37 *Questions*, fol. 101v.

Mortera, even though the work in question is called “Consultas” (Queries) in three of the four textual witnesses to *Questions*.³⁸

Concerning Mortera’s direct allusion to *Expositions on the Psalms*, although Augustine displays a derogatory attitude toward Jews in his commentary on Psalm 40, he does, like other Christian sources mentioned by Mortera, declare that the Jews possess the Law:

Hear wherein the Jews serve us, and not without reason.... With them are the Law and the Prophets, in which Law, and in which Prophets, Christ is preached. When we have to do with Pagans, and show this coming to pass in the Church of Christ, which before was predicted of the Name of Christ, of the Head and Body of Christ, lest they think that we have forged these predictions, and from things which have happened, as though they were future, had made them up, we bring forth the books of the Jews.³⁹

The authoritative status of the Hebrew Bible, which Augustine treats as equal to that of the Septuagint, and the truth revealed by exegesis, are core concepts that Mortera exploits in *Questions* to persuade *converso* readers to submit to his authority in spiritual matters, which was a gratifying process for most *conversos* but which was, on occasion, an exasperating one.

Questions as a *converso* Text

Like his patron Montalto, the large majority of Mortera’s congregation descended from Spanish and Portuguese Jews who were forced to convert to Catholicism. At great risk, these *converso* forebears maintained their Jewish identities secretly while living in nations where royally sanctioned Inquisitions punished any religious behaviour that deviated from Catholic norms. After the signing in 1579 of the Union of Utrecht, which united the northern provinces of the Netherlands in a revolt against Spain and prohibited anyone from being “investigated or persecuted because of his religion,” several hundred Portuguese *conversos* fled to Amsterdam. They founded the Beth Jacob synagogue in the early 1600s and soon discovered that they would not be accepted within the larger network of European and Mediterranean Jewry until they relinquished crypto-Judaism and followed norms that regulated every aspect of daily life for Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities. These norms, including the 613 biblical commandments, Talmudic laws and

³⁸ Camerino, Biblioteca Valentina, 28. In MS EH 48 C 09, the work by Tartagnis is called “*Exposición de los psalmos*” (fol. 20r).

³⁹ *Expositions on the Psalms*, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1801.htm>.

the *Shulchan Aruch*—a sixteenth-century codification of Jewish law—were unknown to the founders of Beth Jacob.

At the same time, an obstacle Mortera faced was the reluctance of some *conversos* to abandon crypto-Jewish practices and be rejudaized by adhering to rabbinic Judaism. While the toleration instituted by the Union of Utrecht created an opportunity to embrace Judaism, *conversos* lacked familiarity with rabbinic laws or the motivation to abandon crypto-Judaism. Mortera's rabbinic career and his writings responded to the need for *conversos* to receive a formal education in Jewish doctrines and traditions. Such education was prohibited in inquisitorial Iberia, where any evidence of Jewish religious or scholarly activity by *conversos* was treated as heresy and grounds for punishment. *Conversos* were not accustomed to expressing their crypto-Jewish spirituality in public and required encouragement to perceive the value of leaving what they considered to be Judaism and submit to communal norms.

Moreover, *conversos* were hesitant to replace their Catholicized beliefs with Talmudic norms that forbade their individualized practices by imposing a uniformity monitored by the rabbinate. Rejudaization required *conversos* to relinquish a spirituality that had evolved in the shadow of Catholic doctrines, such as individual salvation, which was perhaps the most ingrained crypto-Jewish tradition and is not discussed in rabbinic Judaism. Mortera was aware of the importance of this tradition and attempted to lead his congregants away from crypto-Judaism by redefining it in Jewish terms.⁴⁰

Mortera demonstrates this technique in his response to Question 2 ("Has faith in the Saviour Messiah always been necessary for Jews to attain grace and forgiveness for their sins?"). Mortera envisioned personal salvation as an attribute achieved through adherence to Judaism.⁴¹ His response to Question 2 describes a similar spiritual path:

It is necessary to identify the type of faith being asked about here, because if what is understood is the faith that the faithful are obligated to have in God and the Messiah, then this is due only to God, not to the Messiah, who will be a man. And if what is understood is the faith and belief that one must have that he will come to redeem the people of Israel, the Jews are obligated to possess this as one of the articles of faith of the Law of God, so much so that whoever does not believe that God will send the Messiah to redeem the Jews from the captivity in which they are because of their sins and gather them

⁴⁰ I discuss this theme elsewhere with respect to Mortera's *Arguments* (Mortera, *Arguments*, ed. and trans. Kaplan, 40–41).

⁴¹ Mortera, *Arguments*, ed. and trans. Kaplan, 157.

in their lands is banished and cut off from the people of Israel, and has no salvation.⁴²

Like Mortera's assertion in *Arguments* that Judaism "bestows salvation" on *conversos* who embrace Judaism, in Mortera's response salvation is not bestowed on the Jew who rejects Jewish eschatology.⁴³

Mortera reveals his attitude toward the spirituality of *conversos* living outside of Amsterdam in his response to Question 21 ("Can Jews still be saved if they have not been circumcised or observed the Law in the lands where it is not permitted, after having gone against it and their consciences by practising Christianity sincerely, worshipping idols, attending mass, and denying being Jews even though they are in their hearts?").⁴⁴ In his response, Mortera identifies three types of *conversos*:

The first are those who reside in the kingdoms where it is not only forbidden to observe the Law, but where the ports are also closed to prevent them from leaving. These people are guilty before the Lord for not trying to leave for free ports, even though they risk their lives, as the Lord explicitly commands: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."⁴⁵ Here it is revealed that we must leave all things for divine love, and the examples of Hanania, Mishael, and Azariah, in Babylon, show this truth because they were willing to jump into a fire alive rather than worship a statue. He is still merciful today, and slow to anger, and takes into account human weakness and the great respect owed to the ones who are persecuted in the lands I have mentioned. He tempers His severity and favours them when He sees that their spirits are willing to serve Him, as we have seen on many occasions.⁴⁶

The first type of *converso* evokes the most sympathy in Mortera. The phrase "those who reside in the kingdoms where it is not only forbidden to observe the Law" refers to the Jews of inquisitorial Spain and Portugal. The phrase "where the ports are also closed to prevent them from leaving" alludes to the order issued in 1496 by King Manuel I to close all Portuguese ports except Lisbon to prevent Jews who refused to convert to Catholicism from escaping the country. Thousands of Jews who went to Lisbon were forcibly baptized

⁴² *Questions*, fols. 88v–89r.

⁴³ Mortera, *Arguments*, ed. and trans. Kaplan, 157.

⁴⁴ The following text ("In his response...on the pulpit") is a revised segment extracted from my study, "*Converso Spirituality*."

⁴⁵ Deut. 6:5.

⁴⁶ *Questions*, fol. 105r.

in 1497. Mortera is aware in *Questions* of the difficulties faced by crypto-Jewish *conversos* living in Spain and Portugal, who risked being recognized as such by the Inquisition if they attempted to flee, which was essentially an inescapable situation. Therefore, Mortera proclaims that these *conversos* will be treated positively: “He tempers His severity and favours them when He sees that their spirits are willing to serve Him.”

Mortera does not have the same faith in *conversos* of the second type, who have not taken advantage of the opportunity to be rejaudized:

The second type of people are those who live in kingdoms where they are not prevented from leaving, and who are free to go wherever they choose. These people are an utter abomination to God and are destined for damnation because they are truly worshippers of gold. Since they act in the sheer interest of accumulating property, they deceive God, or think they can deceive God, for the love of worldly things. And they deceive the world for love of God. They think that because they love in their hearts, they have fulfilled their obligation, but they do not see what the Lord explicitly says in the Law, in Deut. 30:14: “No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.”⁴⁷ Here it also explicitly says that to observe the Law, it is necessary to proclaim it with one’s mouth, believe it in one’s heart, and carry it out through one’s acts. It would have been better if they had not known the truth, rather than having it and pretending the opposite. In the latter case, they would have had some excuse, which they do not have, although they do know what suits them.⁴⁸

The second type described by Mortera appears to refer to communities of *conversos* like those that inhabited the coast of France: “Marrano settlements had been formed in several of the French seaports, notably Bordeaux and Bayonne. The country was Catholic, and officially in sympathy with the policy followed in Spain and Portugal. Declared Jews were, indeed, unable to settle there. Marranos, on the other hand, might immigrate without interference, so long as they continued to call themselves Christians.”⁴⁹ Implicit in this observation by Roth is the notion that many *conversos* who lived in French seaports were crypto-Jews who lived outwardly as Catholics, perhaps because of a desire to take advantage of economic opportunities that were unavailable to “declared Jews.”

A realization of the benefits of continuing to live publicly as a Catholic may also explain failed cases of rejaudization, such as Esteban de Ares de Fonseca,

⁴⁷ Deut. 30:14.

⁴⁸ *Questions*, fols. 105v–106r.

⁴⁹ Roth, *A History of the Marranos*, 222.

whose encounter with Mortera is recorded in a deposition Fonseca gave in 1635, in Madrid, before an inquisitorial tribunal.⁵⁰ Fonseca was a Portuguese *converso* who emigrated to Bayonne, where he continued to live as a Christian. Fonseca's reluctance to practise Judaism motivated some of his *converso* friends to send him to Mortera and, in 1625 or 1626, he arrived in Amsterdam to undergo rejudaization by Mortera. For six months, Mortera unsuccessfully attempted to persuade Fonseca to stop practising Christianity, and Fonseca was ultimately excommunicated by a rabbinic tribunal overseen by Mortera.

It is instructive to underscore that this case of failed rejudaization, like those of da Costa and Spinoza, was an exception. The growth of Mortera's congregation during the 1600s attests to his success in persuading most *conversos* to abandon crypto-Judaism and follow rabbinic norms. However, the need for Mortera to write about rejudaization during the 1640s testifies to lingering reluctance among *conversos* to abandon their Iberian identity. Communities such as those in Bordeaux and Bayonne formed among *conversos* who were required to be Catholics in public. In his response to Question 21, Mortera condemns the unwillingness of such *conversos* to take the next step and undergo rejudaization in Amsterdam.

Mortera reserves his harshest criticism in *Questions* for a third type of *converso*:

To these we might add a third group, which resembles the first two in its pretence. They are the people of Israel who, though Christians in their hearts, for fear of torture and death, confess to being Jews although they are not. They deceive God so that they can know the truth, as if they possessed an understanding. This is a result of the moral failing of the Inquisition, which spills so much innocent blood. For they see explicitly that they were forced to confess against their conscience what they were not. About such people, the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 20:32–33, says: “And what you have in mind shall never come to pass—when you say, ‘We will be like the nations, like the families of the lands, worshipping wood and stone.’ As I live—declares the LORD God—I will reign over you with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with overflowing fury.”⁵¹ These are the ones who, by the “strong hand” of torture, the “outstretched arm” of prisons, and with “overflowing fury” from apprehension about life, confess to being Jews and that the God of Israel is their king. If they do not deny what they said afterwards, it is because they know the punishment they deserve.⁵²

50 This document, titled “Vida y aventuras de un malsín” (The Life and Adventures of an Informer) is transcribed by Caro Baroja, *Los judíos en la España*, 332–36.

51 Ezek. 20:32–33.

52 *Questions*, fol. 106r–v.

Mortera opens his discussion of the third type by asserting that this type “resembles the first two in its pretence.” The “pretence” to which Mortera refers is an insincere spirituality that, in his opinion, is shared by the three types of *conversos*. Concerning the first two types, this insincere spirituality is the Catholicism they practise in public. However, each of these types has the potential to be rejudaized. Mortera criticizes the willingness of the first type to “worship a statue,” or live publicly as Catholics, although he recognizes “that their spirits are willing to serve Him, as we have seen on many occasions.” Mortera thus commands such *conversos* to flee the Inquisition and undergo rejudaization “even though they risk their lives.” Similarly, Mortera accuses the second type of *converso* of “pretending the opposite,” or acting publicly as a Catholic, even though they possess “knowledge of the truth.” Mortera proclaims that these *conversos* “are free to go wherever they choose,” which enlists them as candidates for rejudaization.

In his depiction of the first type of *converso* in *Questions*, Mortera demonstrates a willingness to accept that his *converso* congregants might never fully abandon the crypto-Judaism practised by their ancestors for centuries at great risk. After escaping Iberia, the first type of *converso* can, therefore, be guided toward rejudaization, albeit by preserving the Catholic tradition of reverence for personal salvation. Conversely, while the second type of *converso* knows the “truth,” the refusal of such a *converso* to stop practising Catholicism in public and “and carry it out,” or practise Judaism, prevents rejudaization.

Like the first two types of *conversos*, the “pretence” of the third type is an insincere spirituality. However, while the first two types are insincere Catholics, the third type of *converso* is an insincere Jew. The third type includes *conversos* who, while they “are the people of Israel,” are also “Christians in their hearts, [who] for fear of torture and death, confess to being Jews although they are not.” Mortera lays the blame for the false confessions of such *conversos* on the “moral failing of the Inquisition, which spills so much innocent blood. For they see explicitly that they were forced to confess against their conscience what they were not.” At the same time, Mortera refers to Ezekiel 20:32–33 to illustrate the reason that their forced confessions do not reveal sincere Judaism: namely, because they are sincere Catholics, “worshipping wood and stone.” Although the Inquisition, along with what Mortera attributes to an “apprehension about life,” motivates the third type of *converso* to “confess to being Jews and that the God of Israel is their king,” such a *converso* merits additional “punishment” until they “deny what they said afterwards.”

In comparison with type one, Mortera's *converso* typology presents a relatively negative view of types two and three. Type one has the potential to be rejudaized by travelling to places such as Amsterdam and Rome, although Mortera appears to realize that their crypto-Judaism will never be fully erased. Mortera reviles types two and three because they remain outside of the sphere of rabbinic influence. Type two *conversos* are "destined for damnation" because they pretend to be Christians, and type three *conversos* will face "the punishment they deserve" because they are "Christians in their hearts." Mortera's depiction of type three is, in fact, a continuation of a rabbinic attitude toward *conversos* that had formed in Spain during the early fifteenth century, shortly after the initial waves of conversions occurring from 1391 to 1416. According to the Catalan Jewish philosopher Profiat Duran (1350–1415) and subsequent rabbinic authorities, *conversos* were not "forced converts [but rather] gentiles," which is the viewpoint Mortera maintains in his depiction of type three.⁵³

Mortera's attitude toward type one invites a comparison with textual and artistic portrayals of his congregation made by two non-Jews: Philipp von Zesen (1619–1689) and Jan Veenhuysen (ca. 1631–ca. 1685). In his chronicle of life in mid-seventeenth century Amsterdam, *Beschreibung der Stadt Amsterdam* (*Depiction of Amsterdam*), Zesen observes that Jews of Portuguese (*converso*) origin preserved their Iberian identity by celebrating Catholic festivals.⁵⁴ Fernando Pancorbo has recently asserted that a similar expression of this "doble identidad,"⁵⁵ or double identity, surfaces in an engraving by Veenhuysen of the interior of Mortera's synagogue that is included before page 263 of Zesen's *Beschreibung der Stadt Amsterdam*. Zesen and Veenhuysen were, like Mortera, commenting on the *conversos* from a non-*converso* perspective; it is noteworthy that Zesen and Veenhuysen, who had much less contact with the *converso* community than Mortera, detected the same double identity as the rabbi who oversaw rejudaization. One logical conclusion is that some *conversos* fled the Inquisition to Amsterdam to practise publicly the crypto-Judaism they perceived to be authentic Judaism. Rather than just reluctance, the fact that the persistence of crypto-Judaism among *conversos* inside and outside of Iberia made a significant impact on Mortera's writings suggests that instances in which *conversos* refused to be rejudaized occurred with some frequency over the course of Mortera's four decades on the pulpit.

⁵³ Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain*, 282.

⁵⁴ Zesen, *Beschreibung der Stadt Amsterdam*, 263–65.

⁵⁵ Pancorbo, "Retratos de una minoría," 124.

Another example of how Mortera appealed to *conversos* on their own terms was his awareness of the fact that they were refugees from religious persecution, which Mortera himself experienced.⁵⁶ Mortera began on this path after meeting Montalto, a *converso* refugee from Portugal. Mortera was undoubtedly well versed in rabbinic doctrines concerning a particular form of travel, namely, flight from religious persecution. One such doctrine traces its origins to the onset of anti-Jewish sentiment in southern Spain after its conquest by the Almohads in 1146. In contrast to Almoravid rulers who permitted Christians and Jews to live within their realms, the Almohads mandated conversion to Islam under pain of death or exile. While many Jews fled, many Jews chose conversion, an act that was condemned in a rabbinic responsum enlisting as an apostate “any Jew who publicly uttered the Moslem confession, although secretly performing all of Jewish precepts,” and which declared that “the only course for a steadfast Jew was not to submit to compulsion in any form but accept martyrdom.”⁵⁷

A reply to this responsum, the “Letter of Apostasy” (or “Iggereth ha-Shemad”), was composed by Moses Maimonides (ca. 1135–1204) around 1160.⁵⁸ Writing from the Maghreb after he and his family had escaped Almohad persecution in Córdoba, Maimonides takes issue with the responsum and proclaims that Jews can remain within the faith after being forcibly converted to Islam by “practicing the six hundred and thirteen [Jewish] precepts in secret.”⁵⁹ Maimonides then expands his definition of what constitutes sincere Judaism among forced converts: “Notwithstanding the fact that we may be forced to commit many serious transgressions such as the desecration of some crucial laws of the Sabbath, this should not preclude the possibility of observing less significant laws, such as carrying forbidden articles on the Sabbath.”⁶⁰ Maimonides’ classification of converts who fail to secretly observe all the Jewish precepts as sincere Jews recalls the minimal form of Judaism practised by crypto-Jewish *conversos*, and it is logical to speculate that Mortera would have looked to the “Letter of Apostasy” for insight into how to approach the spirituality of his congregants.

56 The following text (“Mortera began...favorable location”) is a revised segment extracted from my study, “*Converso* Refugee Travel.”

57 Stitskin, “From the Pages of Tradition,” 104.

58 The final sections of the “Letter of Apostasy” have been translated into English by Stitskin (“Letter of Apostasy,” 107–11).

59 Maimonides, “Letter of Apostasy,” trans. Stitskin, 107.

60 Maimonides, “Letter of Apostasy,” trans. Stitskin, 108.

One topic discussed by Maimonides in which Mortera may have found inspiration is the importance for converts to commit themselves to the practice of Judaism after fleeing from intolerance. In this spirit, Maimonides advises forced converts to seek refuge in lands where they can practise Judaism openly: “the crucial advice I wish to give to those and to those I admire and to those who seek my opinion is to leave those places of hostility and go to a location where one could fulfill the Law without compulsion and fear.”⁶¹ Moreover, Maimonides obligates converts as well as Jews to join “Jewish communities...[that are] superior...in the promotion of good deeds, well established customs and strict observance of the *mitzvot*.”⁶² Further on, Maimonides establishes that it is incumbent on converts and Jews “to make every effort, no matter at what peril, to leave a hostile, non-Jewish place where religious practices cannot be observed properly and move to a more favorable location.”⁶³

Mortera knew well the work of Maimonides, whom he often quoted “approvingly in his sermons,” and Maimonides’ call for converts and Jews to seek refuge in tolerant lands is a theme treated in *Questions*.⁶⁴ Specifically, the spirit of Maimonides call to refugees informs Mortera’s response to Question 21 (“Can Jews still be saved if they have not been circumcised or observed the Law in the lands where it is not permitted, after having gone against it and against their consciences by practising Christianity sincerely, worshipping idols, attending mass, and denying being Jews even though they are in their hearts?). To encourage *converso* refugee flight, Mortera replies that there are two groups of uncircumcised Jews, or potential refugee *conversos*, to whom his answer applies. Mortera’s second group includes *conversos* such as those of Rouen, who “are not prevented from leaving, and who are free to go wherever they choose.”⁶⁵ Although they can go to places such as Amsterdam to practise Judaism openly, Mortera condemns these *conversos* for not fleeing and for choosing wealth over faith: “These people are an utter abomination to God, and are destined for damnation because they are truly worshippers of gold.”⁶⁶

61 Maimonides, “Letter of Apostasy,” trans. Stitskin, 108.

62 Maimonides, “Letter of Apostasy,” trans. Stitskin, 108.

63 Maimonides, “Letter of Apostasy,” trans. Stitskin, 109.

64 Saperstein, *Exile in Amsterdam*, 212.

65 *Questions*, fol. 105v.

66 *Questions*, fol. 105v.

Mortera expresses greater hope for refugee travel among members of the first group, which includes *conversos* living:

in the kingdoms where it is not only forbidden to observe the Law, but where the ports are also closed to prevent them from leaving. These people are guilty before the Lord for not trying to leave for free ports, even though they risk their lives, as the Lord explicitly commands: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”⁶⁷ Here it is revealed that we must leave all things for divine love...⁶⁸

In making a clear allusion to *conversos* in Spain and Portugal by speaking to *conversos* “in the kingdoms” where Judaism is prohibited, Mortera finds a biblical justification for flight from persecution. Moreover, his conclusion that *conversos* “must leave all things for divine love” at the risk of life itself, to reach “free ports,” echoes the instructions by Maimonides for Jews “to make every effort, no matter at what peril, to leave a hostile, non-Jewish place where religious practices cannot be observed properly and move to a more favorable location.”

The parallels between the call in *Questions* for *conversos* to flee Iberia and the “Letter of Apostasy” speak to the broader philosophical influence of Maimonides on Mortera’s attitude toward rejudaization. For Maimonides, as for Mortera with respect to *conversos* in Iberia, Jews who have been forced into apostasy must make every effort to recover their spiritual heritage even in the face of extreme adversity. This pragmatic view of returning to God, or “teshuvah,” one of the fundamental tenets of Judaism, is complemented in *Questions* by philosophical ideas that sprang from Mortera’s contemporary Christian milieu.

Mortera’s Philosophical Approach and Its Impact on Spinoza

Mortera’s responses in *Questions* are intended not only to convince the cleric of the superiority of Judaism over Christianity but also to reach his congregants by discrediting their Catholicized crypto-Jewish beliefs. Mortera’s method for reaching *conversos* was shaped by the philosophical knowledge he acquired through his involvement in Dutch Christian intellectual circles. One of the most influential figures on Mortera was Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), a jurist and theologian whose works Mortera knew well enough to quote verbatim.

⁶⁷ Deut. 6:5.

⁶⁸ *Questions*, fol. 105r.

Mortera reveals in *Questions* that he had views like those of Grotius concerning the Catholic doctrine of mediated individual salvation, which was disapproved by many Protestant thinkers and the most popular Catholicized crypto-Jewish belief Mortera worked to eradicate. In a Latin treatise published in 1627, *De veritate religionis Christianae* (*The Truth of the Christian Religion*), Grotius rejects the Catholic doctrine of the necessity of the mediation of the Church and argues instead that salvation is a matter of personal choice and that individuals can attain salvation through faith, good works, and philosophical reasoning. By elucidating logical proofs, Grotius concludes that salvation is found not in the Catholic Church but in Scripture. Grotius also highlights the importance of reason in understanding God's will and asserts that individuals can reason their way to a correct understanding of faith without the intervention of an intermediary.

Like the Protestant philosophy of Grotius, the Jewish theology that Mortera taught opposed the Catholic belief in a priestly intermediary authorized by the Church with a decisive role in individual salvation. Grotius encourages his reader to proceed "without any Mixture of human Decrees" because "every one is absolutely obliged to follow the Light of his own Mind."⁶⁹ Such a reader will "know no other Laws of obtaining eternal Salvation, but those laid down by Christ and his Apostles in the Books of the Gospel Covenant, as everyone can understand them."⁷⁰

Similarly, Mortera insists in *Questions* that his reader "proceed logically" and look for "proofs and demonstrations" of the correct spiritual path to follow.⁷¹ For example, in his reply to Question 2 ("Has faith in the Saviour Messiah always been necessary for Jews to attain grace and forgiveness for their sins?"), Mortera asks his reader to consider the matter logically and "identify the type of faith being asked about here."⁷² Mortera explains that the type of faith that Jews are "obligated to have" according to the Old Testament is in "God and not the Messiah...who will be a man."⁷³ As Mortera continues, individual salvation is not achieved through an intermediary but, in

69 Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, trans. Clarke, 268 and 269, respectively.

70 Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, trans. Clarke, 270.

71 Mortera, *Questions*, fol. 87r.

72 Mortera, *Questions*, fol. 88v.

73 Mortera, *Questions*, fol. 88v.

a manner echoing Grotius, by understanding that Scripture contains all the necessary “articles of faith” for salvation.⁷⁴

Mortera situates this salvation in an apocalyptic Jewish homeland in which all Jews observe the Law of God, a concept that he amplifies in his response to Question 11 (“For what sins has God, for so many centuries, left the Jewish republic in ruins and captivity during such a long exile?”). Mortera first presents the traditional rabbinic view that the destruction of the Second Jewish Temple in 70 CE—the event that “left the Jewish republic in ruins”—was orchestrated by God to complete an exile that had begun with the expulsions of the Ten Tribes by the Assyrians around 720 BCE and the Tribe of Judah by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, which preceded the destruction of the First Temple.⁷⁵

Mortera then modifies this view through cause-and-effect reasoning, according to which one entity, or cause, produces another entity, or effect. For Mortera, the fact that the Ten Tribes remain lost proves that their exile by the Assyrians is not the “cause” of the exile that he endures with his congregants, which began seven centuries later, after the destruction of the Second Temple.⁷⁶ The causes for the continuation of the exile in Amsterdam are seventeenth-century “serious sins,” or crypto-Jewish practices, which “instead of paying old debts, create new ones”; Mortera posits that the spiritual gap between crypto-Judaism and Judaism prevents an end to exile and a Third Temple in an apocalyptic Jewish homeland.⁷⁷

While cause-and-effect reasoning has been employed since ancient times, the popularization of scientific investigation in Mortera’s Pre-Enlightenment milieu enhanced the importance of understanding the cause-and-effect relationships responsible for natural and spiritual phenomena.⁷⁸ *The Truth* is heavily grounded in cause-and-effect reasoning and, for Grotius, “God is the Cause of all Things” and “Every Thing that is, derives its Existence from God.”⁷⁹ Mortera employs similar terms in his response to Question 12 (“What are the main articles of your faith, and how many are there?”), when he declares that the first article of faith is “to believe that there is only

⁷⁴ Mortera, *Questions*, fol. 88v.

⁷⁵ Mortera, *Questions*, fol. 96v.

⁷⁶ Mortera, *Questions*, fol. 97v.

⁷⁷ Mortera, *Questions*, fol. 97r.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of the place of cause-and-effect reasoning in Enlightenment thought, see Trundle, *From Physics to Politics*.

⁷⁹ Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, trans. Clarke, 35.

one God who is the cause of all causes, [98r] and that everything depends on Him and He does not depend on anyone.”⁸⁰

The cause-and-effect reasoning by Grotius and Mortera finds parallels in the writings of Spinoza. One example is Spinoza’s assertion, in his posthumously published *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well Being*, that “God is a cause of all things.”⁸¹ Spinoza amplifies this assertion in his *Ethics*, which was also published after his death:

Proposition 18

God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things.

Proof

All things that are, are in God, and must be conceived through God, and so God is the cause of the things that are in him, which is the first point. Further, there can be no substance external to God; that is, a thing which is in itself external to God—which is the second point. Therefore, God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things.⁸²

Scholars are beginning to understand the impact of Mortera on Spinoza. Jonathan Israel has recently suggested that Spinoza’s “antipathy...to all dominant churches” was rooted in his perception that rejudaized *conversos* underwent a transition from one “superstition” (crypto-Judaism) to another (Judaism).⁸³ The influence of Mortera’s philosophical approach to rejudaization in *Questions* on Spinoza casts new light on the origins of Spinoza’s disdain for religious authority and religious laws.⁸⁴

Mortera wrote *Questions* shortly after he may have served as Spinoza’s elementary school teacher during the 1640s, when Mortera was also busy persuading *conversos* to abandon crypto-Judaism and submit to rabbinic authority. The possibility that Spinoza was Mortera’s “disciple,” as Steven Nadler suggests, is reinforced by the fact that Spinoza knew Mortera’s writings.⁸⁵ As I explain in a previous study, Spinoza’s knowledge of works composed by Mortera before his excommunication in 1656 is exemplified by Spinoza’s depiction in his *Theological-Political Treatise* of God’s covenant with

⁸⁰ Mortera, *Questions*, fols. 97v–98r.

⁸¹ Spinoza, *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well Being*, trans. Shirley, 50.

⁸² Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Shirley, 229. For a discussion of cause-and-effect reasoning in Spinoza’s *Ethics*, see Lin, “The Many Faces of Spinoza’s Causal Axiom.”

⁸³ Israel, *Revolutionary Jews*, 43.

⁸⁴ Spinoza’s contemptuous attitude has been studied by James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*, and Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*.

⁸⁵ Nadler, *Spinoza*, 90.

Israel at Mount Sinai as a “democracy,” which was influenced by Mortera’s depiction of rejudaization in *Arguments* as a democratic choice.⁸⁶

At the same time, Spinoza’s reverence for Mortera’s views on democracy conflicted with his vision of Mortera’s leadership of the Amsterdam community. Whereas the construction of arguments in which determinate causes lead to solutions, or cause-and-effect reasoning, is a tendency that reflects the positive impact of Mortera on Spinoza, *Questions* reveals that Spinoza was opposed to Mortera’s method of conflating Jewish theology and Protestant philosophy to persuade *conversos* to abandon crypto-Judaism. Spinoza saw such conflation as meaningless, and in *Theological-Political Treatise* he endeavours “to separate faith from philosophy which, indeed, has been the principal purpose of the whole work.”⁸⁷ Additionally, Spinoza argues that philosophical rabbinic exegesis misinterprets prophecies about Jewish doctrines by condemning “anyone who makes reason and philosophy the servant of theology,” which are terms that speak directly to the influence of Mortera’s philosophical approach in *Questions*.⁸⁸ For Spinoza, Mortera’s efforts to rejudaize *conversos* were tantamount to coercion, which is an attitude that informs Spinoza’s depiction of the inception of the Mosaic Law:

Moses did not attempt to persuade the Israelites with reason but rather to bind them with a covenant, by oaths and with benefits; he then constrained the people to obey the law by threatening them with penalties and encouraging them with rewards. These are all methods for inculcating obedience not knowledge.⁸⁹

Further on, Spinoza proclaims that “no one is faithful except on the ground of obedience.”⁹⁰ In fact, Spinoza perceives the pursuit of religious obedience to cause “harm” and “danger”:

I think that I have done sufficient justice to my own case in showing how philosophy is to be separated from theology, and what both essentially are: neither is subordinate to the other; each has its own kingdom; there is no conflict between them. Finally, I have also demonstrated, as opportunity arose, the absurdities, harm and danger, caused by men’s amazing confusion

86 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Silverthorne and Israel, 214. Spinoza is commenting on Deut. 5:23–27. See Chapter 6 of Kaplan, *The Origins of Democratic Zionism*, 87–104.

87 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Silverthorne and Israel, 179.

88 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Silverthorne and Israel, 186.

89 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Silverthorne and Israel, 179.

90 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Silverthorne and Israel, 184.

of these two branches and their not knowing how to distinguish accurately between them and separate the one firmly from the other.⁹¹

Spinoza's assertion that "harm and danger, [are] caused by men's amazing confusion of these two branches and their not knowing how to distinguish accurately between them and separate the one firmly from the other" may be understood as a direct attack on Mortera's method for rejudaization.

Spinoza also dissociates individual salvation from the type of philosophical "truth or falsehood" on which Mortera bases his arguments in *Questions*.⁹² To discredit this method, Spinoza argues that individual salvation can be attained through logical cause-and-effect reasoning, rather than Scripture, which:

offers no demonstration of anything, and does not teach the things about which it speaks by means of definitions and their own first causes. According to Maimonides, therefore, its true sense cannot be established from itself and should not be sought from the Bible itself. But...this too is incorrect. We have shown by both reason and examples that the sense of Scripture is established from the Bible itself and, even when it speaks about things known by the natural light of reason, is to be sought from the Bible alone.⁹³

Spinoza attempts in this passage to undermine *The Guide to the Perplexed*, whose author, Maimonides, was highly revered by Mortera in his writings.⁹⁴

Traces of the interaction between Spinoza and Mortera during the 1640s surfaced decades later in *Theological-Political Treatise*, in which Spinoza discredits:

some arguments by which certain people seek to persuade themselves that the election of the Jews was not temporal and applicable only to their commonwealth, but eternal. We see (they say) that, after the loss of their state, the Jews were scattered everywhere for so many years and separated from all nations, and yet they still survived, as no other nation has. The sacred books, we see also, seem to teach in many places that God has chosen the Jews for himself for ever, and therefore although they have lost their state, they still remain the chosen of God. The passages which they think show this

⁹¹ Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Silverthorne and Israel, 194.

⁹² Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Silverthorne and Israel, 182.

⁹³ Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Silverthorne and Israel, 115.

⁹⁴ More broadly, Spinoza's attitude contrasts with a longstanding rabbinic reverence for the ideas of Maimonides, which during early-modern times impacted rabbinic attitudes toward mysticism (Kabbalah), messianism, philosophical thought, and science. On this topic, see Robinson, *Cultures of Maimonideanism*.

eternal election most clearly are: (1) Jeremiah 31:36,⁹⁵ where the prophet testifies that the seed of Israel will remain the people of God for ever and goes so far as to compare them with the fixed order of the heavens and of nature; (2) Ezekiel 20:32ff.,⁹⁶ which apparently means that although the Jews give every sign of abandoning the worship of God, he nevertheless will gather them together again from the many regions to which they have been scattered, and lead them to a place which is empty of peoples, just as he had led their parents to the empty places of Egypt, and in the end, after separating them from the rebels and the backsliders, he will bring them from there to his holy mountain, where the whole household of Israel will worship him.

Other passages besides these are frequently cited, especially by the Pharisees [i.e., the rabbis], but I think that responding to these two will adequately cover them all. I shall do it without much difficulty by demonstrating from the Bible itself that God did not choose the Hebrews for ever, but only on the same condition on which he chose the Canaanites before them. They too, as we showed above, had priests who worshipped God zealously yet God rejected them because of their luxury and idleness and bad behaviour. Moses warns the Israelites (Leviticus 18:27–28)⁹⁷ not to be polluted with inces like the Canaanites, lest the land spit them out as it had spat out the nations that inhabited those places before them. And at Deuteronomy 8:19–20 he threatens destruction in very explicit words saying, “I warn you this day that you shall certainly perish; like the nations that the LORD will cause to perish before you, so shall you perish.”⁹⁸ Other things to this effect are found in the Law, which expressly indicate that God did not elect the Hebrew nation absolutely and for ever.⁹⁹

Spinoza sees contradictions in the rabbinic interpretations of biblical passages that, in his view, “expressly indicate that God did not elect the Hebrew nation absolutely and for ever.” As the chief rabbi of Amsterdam and an

95 “But now, assuredly, thus said the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the city of which you say, ‘It is being delivered into the hands of the king of Babylon through the sword, through famine, and through pestilence’” (Jer. 31:36).

96 “And what you have in mind shall never come to pass—when you say, ‘We will be like the nations, like the families of the lands, worshipping wood and stone’” (Ezek. 20:32).

97 “for all those abhorrent things were done by the people who were in the land before you, and the land became defiled. So let not the land spew you out for defiling it, as it spewed out the nation that came before you” (Lev. 18:27–28).

98 “If you do forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve them or bow down to them, I warn you this day that you shall certainly perish; like the nations that the LORD will cause to perish before you, so shall you perish—because you did not heed the LORD your God” (Deut. 8:19–20).

99 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Silverthorne and Israel, 53–54.

individual who spent his life persuading *conversos* to practise Judaism, Mortera is a likely one of the “certain people [who] seek to persuade themselves” mentioned by Spinoza, who concludes:

there is no interaction and no affinity between faith or theology, on the one side, and philosophy, on the other. By now this must be obvious to anyone who knows the aim and the foundations of these two disciplines, which are certainly as different from each other as any two things could be. For the aim of philosophy is nothing but truth, but the aim of faith, as we have abundantly demonstrated, is simply obedience and piety.¹⁰⁰

Spinoza’s assertion that there is “no affinity between faith or theology” is exemplified by his interpretations of biblical verses that contradict Mortera’s philosophical approach in *Questions*. In a broader context, Spinoza’s contempt for the conflation of theology and philosophy, his vision of religious obedience, and his assertion that “the method [of Maimonides] is plainly useless” may be understood as components of his negative attitude toward religious authority that first evolved during the time he spent with Mortera before informing his own works decades later.¹⁰¹

In his response to Question 8 (“How is it confirmed from Holy Scripture that the Messiah has not come?”), Mortera declares:

We have already said that whoever asks in this way does not pay the respect owed to science, which requires proofs about such matters. The one who asks is the one who must offer proof, and the one who is asked only needs to respond with a simple *nego* to end the discussion. However, since the path to the truth is long, I will point out some of them. There are many signs given to us by Scripture and the prophets that foretell the coming of the Messiah, although none has been fulfilled until now, so I will choose only four for the sake of brevity.¹⁰²

Mortera’s reference to “proofs” and his use of the Latin term “*nego*” (I deny) speak to the influence of science and philosophy on *Questions*. One of these “proofs” is a passage from Jeremiah that precedes the one mentioned by Spinoza:

Second, we will consider what the prophets say about religion and the knowledge of God. The whole world will be without division in the time of the Messiah, as the prophet Jeremiah says, chapter 31, verse 34: “No longer will they need to teach one another and say to one another, ‘Heed the

100 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Silverthorne and Israel, 184.

101 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Silverthorne and Israel, 115.

102 Mortera, *Questions*, fols. 92v–93r.

LORD'; for all of them, from the least of them to the greatest, shall heed Me— declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquities, / And remember their sins no more."¹⁰³

Spinoza uses Jer. 31:36 as an example of why "God did not elect the Hebrew nation absolutely and for ever," while Mortera asserts that Jer. 31:34 reveals that the Jews will form part of an eternal bond with God in a "world [that] will be without division in the time of the Messiah," which was at the cornerstone of his desire to lead *conversos* toward rejudaization.

The extent to which Mortera insisted that *conversos* become practising Jews surfaces in his response to Question 21, in which he refers to the same biblical passage that Spinoza would use many years after *Questions* was written. As discussed above, Question 21 concerns three types of *conversos* that Mortera wished to rejudaize: The first type includes *conversos* who refused to leave Spain and Portugal, who must "risk their lives" to be rejudaized because "their spirits are willing to serve Him," that is, because they are crypto-Jews. The second type includes *conversos* "who live in kingdoms where they are not prevented from leaving" but who resist rejudaization because "they are truly worshippers of gold." However, Mortera insists that these "worshippers of gold" are also crypto-Jews who "love [Judaism] in their hearts but who refuse to practise it in public. The third group includes *conversos* who "confess to being Jews although they are not." Mortera condemns these insincere crypto-Jews to the "punishment they deserve" by the Inquisition.

While Mortera sought to eradicate widespread crypto-Judaism, according to Spinoza, the rejudaization of *conversos* was not necessary because crypto-Judaism did not exist:

When the king of Spain at one time compelled the Jews to accept the religion of his kingdom or go into exile, a large number of Jews converted to the Catholic faith. All those who accepted it were granted the privileges of native Spaniards and were considered worthy of all positions of dignity. Hence they immediately integrated with the Spanish, so that in a short time there were no remnants of them left and no memory of them. But quite the opposite happened to those whom the king of Portugal compelled to convert to the religion of his kingdom. For though they submitted to this faith, they continued to live apart from all men, doubtless because he declared them unworthy of all higher positions.¹⁰⁴

103 Jer. 31:34. Mortera, *Questions*, fol. 93v.

104 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Silverthorne and Israel, 55. The phrase "When the king of Spain at one time compelled the Jews to accept the religion of his kingdom or go into exile" refers to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in

Since the Jews of Spain “immediately integrated with the Spanish, so that in a short time there were no remnants of them left and no memory of them,” and the Jews of Portugal “submitted to this [Catholic] faith,” they arrived in Amsterdam, in Spinoza’s opinion, without any need to be rejudaized. The efforts to persuade *conversos* to become Jews that Mortera describes in *Questions* corroborated Spinoza’s conviction that “the aim of faith...is simply obedience,” which stands in opposition to his vision of individual liberty:

For no one can transfer to another person his natural right, or ability, to think freely and make his own judgments about any matter whatsoever, and cannot be compelled to do so. This is why a government which seeks to control people’s minds is considered oppressive, and any sovereign power appears to harm its subjects and usurp their rights when it tries to tell them what they must accept as true and reject as false and what beliefs should inspire their devotion to God. For these things are within each person’s own right, which he cannot give up even were he to wish to do so.¹⁰⁵

Spinoza’s perception of Mortera’s persuasive techniques in *Questions* resonates in these words. For Spinoza, rejudaization was tantamount to coercion, and his excommunication for “heresies” in 1656 by a rabbinic panel led by Mortera may be understood to reveal the profound impact on this view of sermons and works such as *Questions* produced by his rabbi.¹⁰⁶ It is ironic that Mortera’s philosophical approach ultimately contributed to the disdain for faith by one of the great early-modern philosophers. However, the prosperity of the Amsterdam Jewish community testifies to the general success of *Questions* as a tool for rejudaization.

Observations on MS EH 48 D 38 and on the Spanish-to-English Translation of *Questions*

The copy of *Questions* on which I base my translation of *Questions*, MS EH 48 D 38, was produced in 1712 by a copyist, Miguel López (1662 or 1663–ca. 1740), most likely in Amsterdam, where it later acquired an ornate leather cover with a marbled book board that indicates that it was bound around 1800.¹⁰⁷ I decided to use MS EH 48 D 38 for the sake of continuity—namely, because

1492. The phrase “the king of Portugal compelled to convert to the religion of his kingdom” refers to the forced baptism of thousands of Jews in Lisbon, in 1497.

105 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Silverthorne and Israel, 250.

106 Nadler, “The Excommunication of Spinoza,” 40.

107 Richard Wolfe explains that “the real beginnings of marbling in the Netherlands occurred...just after the turn of the nineteenth century” (*Marbled Paper*, 55).

that is what I used for my translation of *Arguments*. In fact, MS EH 48 D 38 includes three works by Mortera: fols. 1r–84v contain *Obstáculos y oposiciones contra la religión cristiana en Ámsterdam* (which I translated into English as *Arguments Against the Christian Religion in Amsterdam*); fols. 86r–108r contain *Questions*; and fols. 109r–181v contain *Preguntas al mismo clérigo de Ruan por el autor* (*Questions for the Same Cleric from Rouen by the Author*).

The reason that these three works were copied together may be that they all deal with Jewish eschatology. This may explain the imagery on the title page to MS EH 48 D 38, which includes a woman standing on top of a figure who appears to represent the Devil and who exhales a smoky substance that may be his last breath. This scene is meant to symbolize an apocalyptic triumph of liberty (evoked by the woman) over evil, and the other scene at the bottom of the title page, which includes a representation of the Davidic Messiah mounted on a horse being led by the prophet Elijah, symbolizes the inception of a messianic age.

Although the identity of the person who created this imagery is unknown, the italic handwriting style is consistent throughout MS EH 48 D 38, revealing that all three texts were copied by the individual named on the title page, Miguel López, who made copies of Mortera's works for several decades during the early eighteenth century. The fact that these works were copied by López many decades after having been written reveals that they continued to interest readers after Mortera's death. Mortera's works were never produced in printed editions, perhaps because Mortera never intended to publish them or perhaps because of their polemical content, which might arouse attention if they circulated in places, such as Italy and France, which were in reach (or close to being in reach) of inquisitorial scrutiny cast on printed works.

In any case, Mortera's works survive as copies, perhaps of his autographs, with the sole exception being his last work, *Tratado da verdade da lei de Moisés*, which he completed shortly before his death in 1660. As copies, they contain errors that can be safely attributed to the copyist, including the following examples in *Questions*:

- “pergunta” rather than “pregunta” (question) (fol. 89a);
- the repetition of “desta” (of this) (fol. 89a);
- “absoluto” rather than “absuelto” (fol. 93r);
- the repetition of “sin” (without) (fol. 95r);
- the repetition of “que el mundo” (that the world) (fol. 100v);
- the omission of “la ley” (the law) (fol. 104 v);

- the omission of “no” (no) (fol. 104 v);
- “reçibe” (receives) rather than “reside” (resides) on fol. 105r;
- the omission of “dice” (says) (fol. 105v);
- “y” rather than “ir” (go) (fol. 105v);
- “si” rather than “se” (fol. 107r);
- two different spellings for the word “tribe” (“tribus” [fol. 106v] and “tribos” [fol. 107v]);
- the repetition of “y que las almas” (and that souls) (fol. 107v).

Likely copyist errors also include those involving gender agreement, explained in the notes to my Spanish edition. In my Spanish edition of *Questions*, I have corrected errors by the copyist and included the original (incorrect) text in the notes.

During the translation of *Questions*, I made minor emendations to Mortera’s text for clarity. For example, in Mortera’s response to Question 13 (“On what do the Hebrews base their enduring hope for their Messiah?”), he introduces a quote from Jeremiah without including the verb “says” (“Jeremias en sus lamentaciones, viendo la dilacion deste cauptiverio”), which I have added in my English translation (“Jeremiah, in his Lamentations, sees our captivity linger, and says”).¹⁰⁸ For consistency, in several cases, I have changed the indirect questions used by Mortera to direct questions:

Question 2: If faith in the Saviour Messiah has always been necessary for Jews to attain grace and forgiveness for their sins. = Has faith in the Saviour Messiah always been necessary for Jews to attain grace and forgiveness for their sins?

Question 5: If the redemption of the Messiah must be only corporeal and temporary. = Will the redemption of the Messiah be only corporeal and temporary?

Question 6: If the law of Moses regarding ceremonies will be kept in the time of the messiah so that no other law or ceremonies will be given. = Will the law of Moses regarding ceremonies be kept in the time of the Messiah so that no other law or ceremonies be given?

Question 16: If the Jews now have the pure Hebrew text of the Holy Scripture with its ancient truth. = Do the Jews now have the pure Hebrew text of the Holy Scripture with its ancient truth?

108 Mortera, *Questions*, fol. 99r.

I have also used cardinal numbers for the questions for consistency, and I have, therefore, changed to cardinal numbers some of the ordinal numbers used by Mortera to introduce the questions (Questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13).

I have preserved Mortera's style of sometimes citing a biblical verse by chapter and verse number, as in the following example from Question 8:

Fourth, we will consider what the prophets foretell about the prosperity of Israel in the time of the Messiah. Isaiah, chapter 52, verse 1, says: "Awake, awake, O Zion! / Clothe yourself in splendor; / Put on your robes of majesty, / Jerusalem, holy city! / For the uncircumcised and the unclean / Shall never enter you again."¹⁰⁹ The prophet Jeremiah, chapter 3:17, says: "At that time, they shall call Jerusalem 'Throne of the LORD,' and all nations shall assemble there, in the name of the LORD, at Jerusalem. They shall no longer follow the willfulness of their evil hearts."¹¹⁰ The prophet Ezekiel, 48, verse 35, after having described the magnificence of the city of Jerusalem and its impressive dimensions, says at the end of his book: "and the name of the city from that day on shall be 'The LORD Is There.'"¹¹¹ Today, we see the city of Jerusalem destroyed and controlled by barbarians. Therefore, the Messiah has not come.¹¹²

Concerning the chapter and verse numbers in *Questions*, there are twenty places in MS EH 48 D 38 where these numbers do not correspond (or correspond only partially) to the biblical quotation introduced in the text. These discrepancies, which I have indicated in the notes to my Spanish edition, may be divided into two groups. The first group includes ten biblical references, in Questions 5, 8, 10, 13, 14, 17, 19, 20, 21, and 22, that involve a partial reference to a quotation, which Mortera indicates at times with the symbol for etcetera ("&^a") and which can be explained as abbreviated references by Mortera, or perhaps the copyist.

The second group of biblical references includes ten that do not correspond to the biblical quotations, which occur in Questions 6, 7 (two references), 8 (two references), 9, 13, 19, and 23 (two references). The notes to my Spanish edition reveal that these discrepancies often differ from one textual witness to another, as described, for example, in a note¹¹³ to the Spanish version of Question 23 ("Do the Jews confess to the Original Sin with which

I 09 Isa. 52:1.

I 10 Jer. 3:17.

I 11 Ezek. 48:35.

I 12 Mortera, *Questions*, fol. 94r-v.

I 13 See below, note 87 in the Spanish edition of *Questions*.

we were all born, and if not, why do they deny it?"): "Isa. 25:8–9. EH 48 D 38 refers to Isa. 25:10. EH 48 C 09 (fol. 26v) refers to Isa. 25:8. EH 48 E 41 (fol. 19r) and EH 48 A 21 (20) do not contain chapter or verse numbers." The presence of many discrepancies that vary among the textual witnesses speaks to the popularity of *Questions*. In other words, the discrepancies cannot be attributed to Mortera, a renowned rabbinic scholar who would not have included inaccurate biblical references, and the discrepancies must be errors made by copyists who were using copies that had been made previously. These previously made copies may not have included all the biblical chapter and verse numbers and, in this context, it is instructive to point out that these numbers are omitted on several occasions in MSS EH 48 E 41 and EH 48 A 21. The omissions in some copies of the chapter and reference numbers that are included in others, as in the example above from Question 23, suggest that *Questions* was copied on many more occasions than can be confirmed by extant witnesses. More broadly, the existence of many copies of *Questions* testifies to the popularity of the work and suggests that it was an effective tool for rejudaization.