

Chapter 9

THE EAST–WEST TRAJECTORY OF SEPHARDIC SECTARIANISM: FROM IBN DAUD TO SPINOZA

GREGORY B. KAPLAN

ABSTRACT

This study centres on a form of Jewish sectarianism, or Karaism, which traces its roots to ancient currents of thought in the Middle East and which “travelled,” or was intellectually transmitted, from east to west upon the establishment of Islamic hegemony in eighth-century Spain. The trajectory by which ideas that challenged rabbinic authority came to flourish in Islamic Spain as a result of the tolerant climate that facilitated their transmission is an object of focus, as is the reverberation of Karaism in the late medieval Jewish communities which came under Christian control during the Reconquest. Particular emphasis is placed on works that played key roles in documenting the transmission of Karaite doctrines to late medieval Spain, including Benjamin of Tudela’s *Itinerary* and Abraham ibn Daud’s *The Book of Tradition*, as well as on the dissemination of these doctrines during early modern times by *conversos*, descendants of forced converts from Judaism to Christianity. The “travel” of these doctrines from Spain to the places where *conversos* reunited in exile, in particular the community in seventeenth-century Amsterdam that included Baruch Spinoza, is ultimately understood to form a key component in shaping Spinoza’s anti-Rabbinism in his *Theological-Political Treatise*.

Keywords: *conversos*, Karaism, Sadducees, Baruch Spinoza, Benjamin of Tudela

AS A CONSEQUENCE of the late medieval decimation of Iberian Jewry, sectarian ideas that received currency within Spain for centuries resurfaced in communities formed in the Sephardic diaspora. The seeds of this sectarianism were sown in the wake of the eighth-century Islamic conquest of Christian Iberia. During the following two hundred years, Muslim hegemony in Al-Andalus produced the political stability that fuelled economic prosperity and a flourishing culture in which exposure to Middle Eastern schools of thought encouraged Jewish defiance of traditional religious authority. The legacy of this cross-cultural contact created a lasting impact in Karaism, according to which Rabbinic Judaism lacked the antiquity, and thus the authority, of the Old Testament.

Rather than physical movement from one place to another, the present study focuses on the travel and spread of religious concepts. My point of departure is the arrival to Spain of Karaism and the ensuing rabbinic reaction that perceived it as a continuation of a sectarian threat that had persisted since biblical times. The dissemination of this notion, grounded in a conflation of Karaites with Sadducees, would contribute to the inception of the Sephardic diaspora and would resurface again within the intellectual climate of the European nations where exiled Jews and *conversos*, descendants of Jews who had been forcibly baptized, escaped from the Inquisition. From the incursion into Spain of Jewish sectarianism to seventeenth-century Amsterdam, where the most important community of Iberian Jews formed in exile, a link can be established between the medieval tendency to denounce Karaism in anachronistic terms and the redirection of this sentiment in the most thorough attempt to undermine the Oral and Mosaic traditions, the *Theological-Political Treatise* of Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677).¹

In a supplementary note (Annotation 25) added in the years after the publication in 1670 of his *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza, the most renowned and influential thinker to emanate from the Sephardic community of Amsterdam, makes his only reference to the “opinion” of “Rabbi Abraham ben David,” the Arabic form of the Cordovan historian and philosopher Abraham ibn Daud (ca.1110–ca. 1180).² The source of Ibn Daud’s “opinion” regarding the antiquity of the Jewish canon is Ibn Daud’s *The Book of Tradition*, which was written in 1160–1161.³ With his chronicle of Rabbinic Judaism, Ibn Daud produced the most important medieval work against Jewish sectarianism and an ardent defence of an uninterrupted rabbinic tradition since biblical times.

The Book of Tradition was written at a crucial historical juncture in the evolution of Spanish Jewry, when Karaism had spread to Iberia from the Middle East. The popularization of Karaism is observed by Benjamin of Tudela, whose *Itinerary* documents his travels through the Middle East between 1169 and 1171. Tudela records the presence of Karaites within Jewish communities that were in proximity to centres of Islamic culture, including those of Cyprus, in the Holy Land in Askelon, where around “200 Rabbanite Jews dwell [...] [and] also about forty Karaites,” and in Damascus.⁴ He also observes that Jews are not permitted to reside within Constantinople, although both Rabbinites and Karaites inhabit a ghettoized area:

No Jews live in the city, for they have been placed behind an inlet of the sea. An arm of the sea of Marmora shuts them in on the one side, and they are unable to go out except by way of the sea, when they want to do business with the

1 Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

2 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 269.

3 Abraham ibn Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, intro. and trans. Gerson D. Cohen (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967).

4 Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, trans. Nathan Adler (Malibu: Joseph Simon, 1987). Tudela’s references to Karaites can be found on the following pages: Cyprus (75), Askelon (88–89), and Damascus (91).

inhabitants. In the Jewish quarter are about 2,000 Rabbinite Jews and about 500 Karaites, and a fence divides them.⁵

In the cosmopolitan centres of Constantinople and Damascus, as well as in remote corners of the Mediterranean such as Askelon, Karaism was nurtured by Islamic ideologies such the primacy lent to sacred writings (in conjunction with logical analogy) in determining spiritual law by Hanafites, followers of the eighth-century legal scholar Abu Nu'man Thabit Abu Hanifah.⁶ The defiant character of Karaism has also been linked to contact with Islamic scholars in Babylonia who encouraged independent investigation of ambiguous passages in sacred texts.⁷

The east-west transmission of Karaism to all corners of the Mediterranean was completed with Islamic military conquests during the seventh and eighth centuries. As a result of the tolerant nature of Islamic hegemony in Al-Andalus, which achieved caliphal status in 929, ideologies arriving from the East informed cross-cultural dialogues in literary, scientific and religious spheres, including the evolution of Jewish sectarianism. At the zenith of the Cordovan caliphate, two of the most renowned intellectuals, Ibn Hazm (994–1064) and Samuel ibn Nagrela (993–ca. 1056), detected the fruits of this dialogue in Spain. According to the Muslim historian and theologian Ibn Hazm, Karaism had acquired a following among Jews on the frontier between an emergent Castile and a region that had been long held by Muslims:

The Ananites are the adherents of Anan, descendant of David, of the tribe of Judah whom the Jews call Karaites and heretics. Their teaching forbids the transgression of the laws of the Torah and what is enjoined in the books of the prophets, peace be on them. However, the doctrines of the rabbis, whom they regard as falsifiers, they reject outright. This sect inhabits Iraq, Egypt, and Syria. Within Spain they live in Toledo and Talavera.⁸

Ibn Nagrela, a contemporary Jewish theologian, also noticed the foothold gained by Karaism on the border between Islamic lands and those controlled by Christians (the latter called Edom by Nagrela) and the division among Jews this movement created: “there was never any sectarian practice among them [...] except in a number of villages near the land of Edom. These people are reported to have secret sectarian leanings, but they deny this.”⁹

Ibn Hazm and Ibn Nagrela identify the presence in Spain of a sect that took shape in eighth-century Babylonia, within the orbit of a rabbinic authoritative tradition whose

⁵ Benjamin of Tudela, *Itinerary*, 72.

⁶ On the influence of Islamic ideologies on Karaism, see Kaufmann Kohler, “Karaites and Karaism,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (New York: Ktav, 1906), 438–47, at 438–39.

⁷ Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 5, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 212–13.

⁸ The English translation of Ibn Hazm is by Gerson D. Cohen in his introduction to Abraham ibn Daud's *The Book of Tradition*, xlvii.

⁹ The English translation of Ibn Nagrela is by Gerson Cohen (Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, xlvii).

influence had been expanding since late antiquity. After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, Jewish spiritual authority was transferred from a centralized polity governed by Mosaic Law to centres where generation after generation of scholars interpreted the Old Testament as the Oral Law, which was reputed by Rabbinites to be contemporary to (and thus of the same authority) as the Law given to Moses. The allusions made by Ibn Hazm and Ibn Nagrela reveal a cross-cultural awareness of a revival of this polemic in the figure of Anan ben David (ca. 715–ca. 795), who gained a following among Babylonian anti-Rabbinites from various sects that became Karaism. As its growth was fuelled by contact with Muslim scholars and theologians working to develop doctrines that questioned orthodoxy, anti-Rabbinites “unite[d] under its aegis the chief opposition to the central controls administered by exilarchs and academies in the name of the Talmud.”¹⁰

The opposition to rabbinic authority around which Karaism formed is evident in the earliest known account of Anan’s activities by Natronay bar Hilay (ca. 795–ca. 865), the ninth-century *Gaon*, or chief sage, of the Babylonian Jewish academy in Sura. The account is found in the *Seder Rav ‘Amram Gaon bar Sheshna*, which was the first Jewish prayer book and which was widely used throughout Europe.¹¹ According to Natronay’s rabbinite assessment, Karaites are collectively categorized as “heretics, mockers, and despisers of the words of our Rabbis.”¹² The attention paid by Natronay in *Seder Rav ‘Amram Gaon bar Sheshna* and in response to denouncing Karaism reveals that the movement had concretized while acquiring more followers, as such renewing the process that had led to the formation of the Sadducees during the time of the Second Temple (516 BCE–70 CE). In some of the earliest observations on the Sadducees, the Romano-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (37 CE–ca. 100 CE) notes in *The Antiquities of the Jews* that their origins are ancient.¹³ Prior to that, in *The Jewish War*, he revealed that Sadducees were a discordant sect: “but Sadducees, even towards each other, show a more disagreeable spirit, and in their relations with men like themselves they are as harsh as they might be to foreigners.”¹⁴ While Josephus does not go into great detail, the anti-Rabbinism among those who came together under the rubric of Sadducees is evident in the few lines he devotes to them in *The Jewish War*: “The Sadducees, the second order, deny Fate altogether and hold that God is incapable of either committing sin or seeing it; they say

10 Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 230.

11 Rav Amram Gaon Bar Sheshna, *Seder Rav ‘Amram Gaon bar Sheshna* (Jerusalem: Mekhon, 2013).

12 The English quotation from the *Seder Rav ‘Amram Gaon bar Sheshna* is by Martin A. Cohen, “Anan ben David and Karaite Origins,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, n.s., 68 (1978): 129–45 at 135. On Natronay, see Marina Rustow, “Karaites Real and Imagined: Three Cases of Jewish Heresy,” *Past and Present* 197 (2007): 35–74, at 36–38.

13 Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston, bk. 18, chap. 1, para. 2: “The Jews had for a great while had three sects of philosophy peculiar to themselves; the sect of the Essens, and the sect of the Sadducees, and the third sort of opinions was that of those called Pharisees,” www.gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.htm#link182HCH0001.

14 Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War*, intro. and trans. G. A. Williamson (Harlow: Penguin, 1970), 130.

that men are free to choose between good and evil, and each individual must decide which he will follow.”¹⁵ In “act[ing] as they please,” the discordant Sadducees are united in their rejection of rabbinic authority. As Josephus explains in *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Sadducees, in opposition to Pharisees, centred this rejection on the grounds that rabbinic traditions lacked historical documentation:

The Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the laws of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers.¹⁶

In the same manner that Sadducees channelled the anti-Rabbinism of diverse sects, this animus was later reactivated by Karaites through merging discordant groups in Babylonia.¹⁷ Karaite preachers and scholars, including Benjamin Nahawandi (fl. ninth century) in Babylonia and Cid Abu'l-Taras (fl. eleventh century) in Castile, worked to popularize resistance to Rabbinic Judaism, which eventually met by opposition. Rather than engage in an intra-communal dialogue regarding Karaite doctrines, including ideas espoused by Nahawandi (who continued Anan's work of consolidating Karaism) that actually brought the sect closer to the Talmud, swift retribution from Christian authorities was sought.¹⁸ Against a heresy that could not be extinguished, anti-Karaite persecution organized by the Spanish rabbinate and influential Jews at court was successful in securing royal decrees in 1178 and 1232 that prohibited Karaism.¹⁹

The anti-Rabbinism common to Sadducees and Karaites caused the two groups to be conflated as Rabbinites reacted to the core issue of the polemic, as Gerson Cohen explains: “Since Sadduceeism had been defined in Rabbinic literature as a system acknowledging the validity of only the written Torah, medieval Jews generally designated Karaites by ‘sectarian’ and ‘Sadducee’ almost interchangeably.”²⁰ The tendency to confuse Sadducees and Karaites is a by-product of Ibn Daud's ignorance of contemporary Karaism in *The Book of Tradition*, in which he criticizes the views presented in only one Karaite text.²¹ Ibn Daud's claim that Karaites “never did anything of benefit for Israel,

¹⁵ Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 130.

¹⁶ Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, bk. 13, chap. 10, para. 6.

¹⁷ On the difficulties associated with this process, see Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 230–32.

¹⁸ On the approximation of Nahawandi's ideas to Talmudic law, see Kohler, “Karaites and Karaism,” 438–39.

¹⁹ On this period in anti-Karaite persecution, see Carlos Sáinz de la Maza, “Alfonso de Valladolid y los caraitas: sobre el aprovechamiento de los textos históricos en la literatura antijudía del siglo XIV,” *El Olivo* 14 (1990): 15–32, at 19–21.

²⁰ Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, xxxviii.

²¹ This text is an unidentified commentary on the Pentateuch by the eleventh century Karaite scholar Jeshua ben Judah, who is also known as Abu'l-Faraj (Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, 99–101).

nor produced a book demonstrating the cogency of the Torah or work of general knowledge or even a single poem, hymn or verse of consolation"²² reflects, as Gerson Cohen explains, the fact that Ibn Daud was not familiar with the many Karaite texts that were available, and his insistence in the biblical origins of the Karaite sect indicates, as Gerson Cohen asserts, that "[t]o Ibn Daud they were all of a piece—heretics, Sadducees."²³

Ibn Daud sacrifices historical accuracy to achieve his main goal of establishing the continuity of Rabbinic Judaism, and it may be said that he is motivated more by a desire to put a quick end to what he perceived as a long-standing threat than an attempt to engage in a polemic concerning particular Karaite doctrines. The popularity of Karaism is greatly diminished by Ibn Daud, who claims that the quasi-epic figure of Joseph ben Ferrizuel all but eliminated its presence in Castile, and that, after its resurgence, it was again suppressed. While these suppressions did occur, Ibn Daud's insistence in "the sheer meagerness" of the number of Karaites appears to contradict Tudela's revelation that Karaism had extended westward to Iberia.²⁴ Moreover, Ibn Daud provides an anachronistic account of the birth of the Karaite movement in Spain immediately after situating the sect in ancient Israel:

When the Jews used to celebrate the festival of Tabernacles on the Mount of Olives, they would encamp on the mountain in groups and greet each other warmly. The heretics would encamp before them like two little flocks of goats. Then the rabbis would take out a scroll of the Torah and pronounce a ban on the heretics right to their faces, while the latter remained silent like dumb dogs.

Among those [heretics] living in the Holy Land there was *al-Sheikh* Abu'l-Faraj, may his bones be committed to hell. It happened that a certain fool from Castile, named Cid Abu'l-Taras, went over there and met the wicked *al-Sheikh* Abu'l-Faraj, who seduced him into heresy. Under the guidance of the latter, Abu'l-Taras composed a work animated by seduction and perversion, which he introduced into Castile and [by means of which] he led many astray. When Abu'l-Taras passed on to hell, he was survived by his accursed wife, whom [his adherents] used to address as *al-Mu allima* and on whom they relied for authoritative tradition. They would ask each other what *Mu allima's* usage was, and they would follow suit. [This went on] until the rise to power of the Nasi R. Joseph b. Ferrizuel, surnamed Cidellus, who suppressed them even beyond their former lowly state. He drove them out of all the strongholds of Castile except for one, which he granted them, since he did not want to put them to death (inasmuch as capital punishment is not administered at the present time). However, after his death, the heretics erupted until the reign of King Don Alfonso son of Raimund, king of kings, the *Emperador*. In his reign there rose *nesiim* who pursued the ways of their fathers and suppressed the heretics [again].²⁵

22 Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, 99–100.

23 Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, xlix–l.

24 Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, 92.

25 Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, 94–95.

In spite of his assertion, with respect to the number of Karaites in Spain, that “[i]ndeed, they are dwindling steadily,” Ibn Daud describes an east-to-west transmission of Kariasm, the “heresy” he mentions, whose eleventh-century resurgence fuelled sectarianism in Spain, as detected by Ibn Hazm and Ibn Nagrela.²⁶

For Ibn Daud the true problem was the continuity of a sectarian challenge to authority since the biblical period, which enlisted it as a threat with profound implications for the survival of Judaism. The magnitude of this threat is elucidated by Gerson Cohen:

The tracing of the roots of medieval sectarianism to the schisms and heresies of the Second Temple had additional implications, particularly in the context in which the origin of heresy was narrated [...]. [T]he history of the Jews in the days of the Second Temple [...] constituted one long and progressive series of incidents leading to the destruction of the Temple [...]. Ibn Daud found this picture perfectly appropriate to his needs [...] he described the calamities that befell the Jews as consequences of the intemperate and irresponsible [...] defiance of the Rabbinic sages, and thus the calamities of Jewish history could all be traced to defiance of Rabbinic discipline.²⁷

The divisive consequences of currents of thought that challenged spiritual hegemony would have been clearly evident to Ibn Daud, who was born a few decades after the fundamentalist Almoravid conquest of Al-Andalus, and who witnessed the twelfth-century rise of Almohad reformism.

In a manner that foreshadows the introduction to *Mishneh Torah* by his younger contemporary, Moses Maimonides (1138–1204), Ibn Daud presents an ambitious objective in his prologue, in which he expresses the same discontent as Maimonides with respect to widespread ignorance of the Oral Law:²⁸

The purpose of this Book of Tradition is to provide students with the evidence that all the teachings of our rabbis of blessed memory, namely, the sages of the Mishna and the Talmud, have been transmitted: each great sage and righteous man having received them from a great sage and righteous man, each head of an academy and his school having received them from the head of an academy and his school, as far back as the men of the Great Assembly, who received them from the prophets, of blessed memory all. Never did the sages of the Talmud, and certainly not the sages of the Mishna, teach anything, however trivial, of their own invention, except for the enactments which were made by universal agreement in order to make a hedge about the Torah.

Now should anyone infected with heresy attempt to mislead you, saying: “It is because the rabbis differed on a number of issues that I doubt their words,” you

²⁶ Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, 99.

²⁷ Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, xxxix.

²⁸ Cf. (Moises) Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, ed. and trans. Moses Hyamson, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Boys Town, 1965), 4b.

should retort bluntly and inform him that he is “a rebel against the decision of the court”; and that our rabbis of blessed memory never differed with respect to a commandment in principle, but only with respect to its details; for they had heard the principle from their teachers, but had not inquired as to its details, since they had not waited upon their masters sufficiently.²⁹

Ibn Daud (like Maimonides) is openly disenchanted with contemporary Jewish spirituality, and this disenchantment is understood by taking into consideration Ibn Daud’s depiction of anti-Jewish persecution after the arrival to Al-Andalus of Islamic fundamentalism:

The rebels against the Berber kingdom had crossed the sea to Spain, and after having wiped out every remnant of Jews from Tangiers to al-Mahdiya [...]. They tried to do the same thing in all of the cities of the Ishmaelite kingdom in Spain [...]. When the Jews had heard the report that the rebels were advancing upon them to drive them away from the Lord, God of Israel, those who feared the Lord’s word fled for their lives [...]. Some were taken captive by the Christians, to whom they willingly indentured themselves on condition that they be rescued from Muslim territory. Others fled on foot, naked and barefoot.³⁰

The “rebels against the Berber kingdom” were Almohad forces, who initiated a movement to convert the Jews to Islam. Anti-Jewish persecution after centuries of co-existence repeated events that had placed Iberian Jewry into peril prior to the arrival of Muslim forces, which conquered a Visigothic monarchy that had mandated the conversion of Jews to Christianity during the 600s.³¹

The consternation caused by the perceived role of Karaism in deteriorating Jewish spirituality by undermining its authoritative base, which could make Jews vulnerable to conversionist efforts, is evident in Ibn Daud’s contention that Karaites are “rebell[ious]” and in Maimonides’ claim that “[t]he wisdom of our wise men has disappeared,” and both respond by defending the foundation of Rabbinic Judaism, which is the “Great Assembly” to which Ibn Daud refers above.³² While for Sadducees and Karaites the inability to historically document the Great Assembly made the Rabbinic tradition baseless, for Rabbinites the belief that it took place served as a direct tie between the prophets of the Old Testament and the earliest Rabbinic scholars whose historical identities are known. During the period when this synod is traditionally thought to have existed, from the fifth century BCE until the third century CE, the Great Assembly was comprised of 120 individuals, including Ezra, the prophet who established it, and later sages such as Simeon the Righteous, and established many Jewish conventions and doctrines in addition to setting the Jewish biblical canon.

²⁹ Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, 3.

³⁰ Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, 97.

³¹ On Visigothic anti-Jewish persecution, see James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (London: Soncino, 1934), 345–70.

³² Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, 3; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, 4b.

The crucial role of Ezra, a biblical figure who is thought to have organized the Great Assembly and served as its first high priest, is an essential point for both Maimonides and Ibn Daud.³³ Maimonides presents this concept in direct terms, as historical fact:

Ezra and his court received it [the Oral Law] from Baruch and his court. The members of Ezra's court are called 'The Men of the Great Synagogue.' They were Haggai, Zechariah, Malachai, Daniel, Hanniah, Mishael and Azaria, Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah, Modechai, Zerubel and many other sages, numbering altogether one hundred and twenty elders. The last of them was Simon the Just, who is included among the hundred and twenty. He received the Oral Law from all of them and was a high priest after Ezra.³⁴

While Ibn Daud does not allude to the prophet Ezra directly among the early members of the Great Assembly, his inclusion in that body is implied in Ibn Daud's depiction of the birth of the Karaite threat during the second generation of the Great Assembly:

Then the people were divided in two: half of the people followed Simeon the Righteous and his pupil Antigonus and their school in accordance with what they had received from Ezra and the prophets; and the [other] half followed Sanballat and his sons-in-law. They offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings outside the house of the Lord and enacted statutes and ordinances as they devised out of their own heart. In this temple Manasseh son of Joshua son of Jehozadak served as priest, and Zadok, with his colleague Boethus, assumed leadership. This was the genesis of the heresy.³⁵

Ezra's importance as a patriarch of Rabbinism is a concept that Ibn Daud and Maimonides emphasize for a common motive, namely, that of his role as perhaps the most important figure in the transmission and preservation of the Oral Law in the face of growing sectarianism.

The success of Ibn Daud in enlisting Karaites as heretics contributed to mounting anti-Judaism in Spain that ultimately lead to the forced conversion to Christianity of a sizeable part of Spanish Jewry and the expulsion of all remaining Jews in 1492. A direct connection can be postulated between Ibn Daud's conflation of Sadducees and Karaites and the perpetuation of this notion by Abner de Burgos (ca. 1270–ca. 1347), a Jewish theologian who converted to Christianity and became a renowned anti-Jewish polemicist whose most significant work was an anti-Jewish dialogue that was originally composed in Hebrew before being translated into Castilian in the fourteenth century as *Mostrador de justicia*.³⁶ Abner reveals early on that one of his principal motives for composing

³³ For an assessment of the debate over this issue, see Reuven Chaim (Rudolph) Klein, "Was Ezra a High Priest?," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 41 (2013): 181–86.

³⁴ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, 1b–2a.

³⁵ Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, 17–18.

³⁶ Abner of Burgos (Alfonso de Valladolid), *Mostrador de justicia*, ed. Walter Mettman, 2 vols. (Opladen: Westdeutscher, 1994–96).

Mostrador is to loosen the grip of Rabbinic authority: “los más de los judios creen en los dichos de ssus ssabios del Talmud, e muy pocos sson dellos que ossan yr contra aquellos sabios. Por ende enfforçarsse-a la nuestra rrazon contra ellos quando nos aduremos prueuas contra ellos de los sus grandes ssabios abtenticos e onrrados entrellos.”³⁷ In his assessment of *Mostrador*, Ryan Szpiech observes that Abner’s depiction of sectarianism touches on a broader historical context that enlists Rabbinic persecution of Karaites as part of a “strategy [...] to awaken in his reader a real sense of uncertainty and concern over the state of the Jewish community in Christian Castile and to present himself as one who can help unify and defend tradition.”³⁸

Szpiech’s conception of Abner’s view is more fully understood in the context of the traditional conflation of Sadducees and Karaites as anti-Rabbinites. Abner groups all anti-Rabbinites as heretics and points out that the expression of their beliefs is suppressed and that they are denied the truth by rabbinic oppression, which in turn is the source of his anti-Rabbinism:

Como que diz que el ereje judio, el que despreçia en lo que tienen rresçebido los judios de ssus anteçessores [...] tal omne como éste non puede auer endereçamiento por ninguna rrazon quel rrazonassen los otros judios, despues que desdennan e ponen dubda en sus opiniones rresçebidas dellos e que niega[n] las opiniones entendidas, las que podrian endereçar e ssoltar ssus dubhas. E por esto sson fallados en los judios muchos omnes que niegan el ssu Talmud dellos.³⁹

[It is said that the heretical Jew rejects what they have received from their elders [...] such a man cannot be set straight by any reasoning that his fellow Jews offer him, because they refute and doubt any received opinions and they repudiate those learned opinions which could contribute to setting him in the right course and dissipate his doubts. And for this reason, one can find among the Jews many men who deny their own Talmud.]

Abner appears to inherit from Ibn Daud the tendency toward anachronistic accounts of historical anti-Rabbinism. Like Ibn Daud, Abner depicts Sadducees as a continuation of a biblical tradition and Sadducees, rather than Karaites, inhabit the Castilian towns of Carrión de los Condes and Burgos.⁴⁰

Abner’s anti-Rabbinite platform became an integral component of *Fortalium fidei contra Iudaeos*, which was completed in 1460 by the Franciscan monk Alonso de Espina,

³⁷ “Most of the Jews believe in the sayings of their Talmud wise men and very few of them dare to go against those wise men. Therefore, our arguments to convert them will be strengthened when we are able to furnish proofs to go against the said wise men, so honored among them.” Abner, *Mostrador de justicia*, 1:43.

³⁸ Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 159.

³⁹ Abner, *Mostrador de justicia*, 2:419.

⁴⁰ Abner, *Mostrador de justicia*, 2:422.

to whom, as Henry Lea posits, “may be ascribed a large share in hastening the development of organized [anti-Jewish and anti-*converso*] persecution in Spain.”⁴¹ *Fortalitium* was the first text to propose that the monarchy support popular anti-Judaism, which had been mounting since the late fourteenth century, by expelling from Spain all Jews who would not convert to Catholicism, and by establishing an inquisition in order to eradicate heresy among *conversos*, who descended from hundreds of thousands of Jews forcibly baptized during a period lasting from the outbreak in 1391 of violent pogroms throughout Spain to 1412–1416, when renewed anti-Judaism produced a second wave of conversions.⁴² Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of *converso* history is that conversion did not produce harmony among neophytes and those whose ancestors had been Christians for centuries. Instead, a discriminatory socio-religious hierarchy developed between the former, known as *conversos* or New Christians, and the latter, an Old Christian population of some seven to nine million individuals who acquired a sense of spiritual superiority because they were free of Jewish stock. Much has been written on why this situation occurred. In addition to the fact that the number of conversions was unprecedented, the nature of the conversions themselves, which were conducted *en masse* and which were not accompanied by instruction in Christian practices, ensured that many became insincere neophytes and continued to practise Jewish rituals in secret, a phenomenon known as crypto-Judaism. At the same time, some *conversos*, such as Christian theologians such as Alonso de Cartagena (1384–1456), became what appear to be sincere Christians.

The knowledge that crypto-Judaism existed became a dominant social preoccupation in Spain, and the result was the creation of a lower order of Christians who were perceived as inferior, whether this perception was based in reality or on the mere awareness that Jewish rituals were being performed in private. Medieval anti-Judaism fuelled anti-*converso* sentiment and Lea’s assessment of the influence of *Fortalitium* reveals one of many occasions on which Spanish clergymen, at times *conversos* themselves as in the case of Abner, took advantage of a popular animus in order to perpetuate anti-Jewish and anti-*converso* persecution. Espina continues this tradition by giving a clerical voice to popular anti-Jewish libels, during the course of which he names a lost treatise by Abner as a primary source, although it is apparent, as Sáinz de la Maza has ascertained, that Abner’s *Mostrador* was also a significant influence on *Fortalitium*.⁴³ In particular, as

41 Alonso de Espina, *Fortalitium fidei contra Judaeos* (Lyon, 1511); Henry C. Lea, *A History of the Inquisition in Spain*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 148–49.

42 Although Benjamin Netanyahu (*The Marranos of Spain: From the Late Fourteenth to the Early Sixteenth Century* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1966), 235–45) and Norman Roth (*Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 332) speculate that the number of *conversos* was much higher, scholars accept more conservative estimates such as Antonio Domínguez Ortiz’s theory that there were 225,000 *conversos* in Spain around the time of the expulsion of 1492 (*Los judeoconversos en la España moderna* (Madrid: Mapfre, 1992), 43).

43 This lost treatise is Abner’s, *Libro de las batallas de Dios* (Sáinz de la Maza, “Alfonso de Valladolid y los caraítas,” 30).

part of his invective against Jewish sectarianism Espina perpetuates the conflated notion of Sadducees and Karaites inherited from Abner, which in turn perpetuates the same notion employed earlier by Ibn Daud. For Espina, both Karaites and Sadducees are biblical sects, and Espina also evokes the Castilian Kabbalist Moses de León (1250–1305) as his source for asserting that Sadducees can be found Burgos and Carrión de los Condes.⁴⁴ With respect to the impact of Espina's *Fortalitium*, while his objectives were not realized during his lifetime, as confessor to Enrique IV of Castile (r. 1454–1474) Espina was able to convince the king in 1461 to request a papal bull to authorize a Castilian inquisition, which foreshadowed the process by which anti-*converso* persecution became institutionalized when Pope Sixtus IV granted such a bull to Queen Isabel of Castile (r. 1474–1504) in 1478.

After the inception of the Inquisition in 1480 and the dispersion of Sephardic Jewry after the expulsion of 1492 from Spain, and five years later from Portugal where many Jews had fled, a Sephardic diaspora, including expelled Jews and fleeing ex-*conversos*, resulted in the creation of exiled communities throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. The most prosperous and the most intellectually important of these communities formed in the 1590s in Amsterdam, where ex-*conversos* emigrated in order to practise Judaism openly in Reformation Holland. The tolerant atmosphere, evidenced by legislation such as the doctrine of freedom of conscience that formed part of the Union of Utrecht of 1579 (thus bringing into existence a Dutch republic that lasted until 1795) attracted Spinoza's forebears, who may have come from northern Spain before arriving in the Netherlands from Portugal.⁴⁵ Whereas Jews and ex-*conversos* who returned to Judaism encountered restrictive legislation in seventeenth-century France and were forced to live in ghettos in Rome and Venice, Amsterdam's Sephardic Jews reached new levels of prosperity in the most important European commercial centre of the period (commonly referred to as the seventeenth-century Dutch Golden Age), and they supported a flourishing rabbinic culture in which Spinoza received his early intellectual formation.

Sephardic culture was disseminated with the Sephardic diaspora, and Spinoza had access to a wide range of Hebrew works that he might have read after receiving a thorough education in Hebrew at the Talmud Torah school in Amsterdam, where he was educated until at least the fourth grade (typically completed by the age of fourteen), by which time he would have studied the Old Testament as well as rabbinic commentaries.⁴⁶ Whether or not Spinoza was ever a student of Saul Levi Morteira (ca. 1596–1660), who was trained in Venice and became the chief rabbi and Talmudic authority (and teacher of Talmud at Talmud Torah) during over four decades to some 1,500 descendants of ex-*conversos*, Spinoza would have undoubtedly been exposed to the anti-Karaite rabbinic view in Morteira's weekly sermons in the synagogue. Some of Morteira's critical

44 Sáinz de la Maza, "Alfonso de Valladolid y los caraítas," 31.

45 For the most comprehensive biography of Spinoza, see Stephen Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). The possibility that Spinoza's ancestors lived in Spain before migrating to Portugal is examined by Lewis Brown, *Blesséd Spinoza: A Biography of the Philosopher* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), 3–18.

46 On Spinoza's education at Talmud Torah, see Nadler, *Spinoza*, 61–65.

references to Karaites have been identified by Marc Saperstein, including one from a sermon delivered during the 1640s that may have contributed to Spinoza's pejorative depiction of them. According to Morteira:

There are three categories of those who arise against the divine Torah at various times. The first are those who deny the divinity of the Torah. The second are those who accept the divinity of the Torah but who claim that their religion is superior to ours. The third are those who accept our religion but who deny one part of it. Now the first are the philosophers; the second are the new religions, such as the Christians and Ishmaelites. The third are such as the Karaites and Boethusians.⁴⁷

In listing Karaites with Boethusians, a sect from late Antiquity "closely related to, if not a development of, the Sadducees," Morteira perpetuates the medieval conflation of medieval and late ancient heresy, which he would have learned during his rabbinic training in Venice.⁴⁸ It is instructive to note that Morteira's conception of non-believers in "the divinity of the Torah"—which would naturally include acceptance of the doctrine that the Oral Law was received from God simultaneously to the Mosaic Law—situates philosophers on a plane with other enemies of the rabbinic tradition, at attitude that may have encouraged Spinoza to question spiritual authority on his own terms.

While Spinoza was living within Amsterdam's community of *ex-convertos* in the process of returning to Rabbinic Judaism, an opposing view of Karaites became popular among Christian intellectuals. Classic Sephardic texts became available to Sephardim and *convertos* in exile because of the surge in Jewish and Christian presses that published these texts to appeal to a wide readership that not only included those with Sephardic ancestries but also many Protestants (and some Catholics) who participated in the sixteenth-century European revival of Hebraism. Upon learning Latin and entering non-Jewish cultural spheres such as his meetings with Collegiants that begun during the 1650s, Spinoza would have learned of the interest in Karaism among Hebraists. As Richard Popkin explains, influential polemicists such as the Scottish Calvinist John Dury (1596–1680) considered Karaites to be "pure Jews" and equated them with Protestants in their fight for freedom from the oppression of Catholics (who are equated to Pharisees).⁴⁹ Within academic circles, with which he was also familiar, Spinoza was no doubt aware of the important place reserved for Karaism among Dutch

⁴⁷ Marc Saperstein, *Exile in Amsterdam* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2005), 213. The translation of Morteira's sermon into English is by Saperstein.

⁴⁸ Leopold J. Greenberg, "Boethusians," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 3 (New York: Ktav, 1906), 284–85, at 284.

⁴⁹ Richard H. Popkin, "Les Caraites et l'Empancipation des Juifs," *Dix-Huitième Siècle* 13 (1981): 137–47; "The Lost Tribes, the Caraites and the English Millenarians," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37 (1986): 213–27. As Daniel Lasker explains: "Since Karaites did not follow standard rabbinic Jewish practices, and eschewed the Talmud, which the Christians attached as blasphemous and heretical, they were seen as following a purer form of Judaism. For Protestants in particular, Karaism was considered a Protestant form of Judaism as compared to Phariseism (Rabbanism),

Christian Hebraists such as Levinus Warner (ca. 1618–1665) and the German Hebraist Johannes Rittangel (1606–1652), who visited Karaite communities in Eastern Europe before spending time in Amsterdam during the early 1640s.⁵⁰

Dury, Warner and Rittangel exemplified a positive perception of Karaites that contrasted with the medieval rabbinic view. Perhaps in reaction to the newfound reverence for Karaism among Christian Hebraists, Spinoza was inspired to criticize the medieval perception of Karaites by the vision he had acquired during his Hebrew formation as a continuation of the heresy of the Sadducees. While ignoring contemporary reevaluations of the sect, Spinoza reveals the influence of the traditional conflation of Sadducees and Karaites in his *Theological-Political Treatise*. During his discussion of the antiquity of the Old Testament in chapter 10 (“Where the remaining books of the Old Testament are examined in the same manner as the earlier ones”), Spinoza asserts that, with regard to the prophets: “these books were composed long after Judas Maccabeus restored worship in the Temple, and the reason why they were written was that spurious books of Daniel, Ezra and Esther were being published at that time by certain malcontents, who were doubtless of the sect of the Sadducees.”⁵¹ In chapter 12 (“On the true original text of the divine law, and why Holy Scripture is so called, and why it is called the word of God, and a demonstration that, in so far as it contains the word of God, it has come down to us uncorrupted”), Spinoza classifies Sadducees as “infants” for their dependence on written texts:

To the early Jews, religion was handed down in writing as law, evidently because in those times they were looked on as if they were infants. Later, however, Moses (Deuteronomy 30.6) and Jeremiah (31.33) proclaimed to them that a time would come when God would inscribe his law in their hearts. It was therefore appropriate for the Jews alone, and especially for the Sadducees, in their time, to fight for the law written upon tablets, but it is not at all appropriate for those who have the law inscribed on their minds.⁵²

The fact that Spinoza never mentions Karaites directly is misleading. His knowledge of Sadducees, whom he names on five occasions in his *Theological-Political Treatise*, is limited, and it is based on part on what was written about Karaites during the Middle Ages as in Ibn Daud’s *The Book of Tradition*. The division Spinoza creates between Pharisees and Sadducees is drawn along the same lines that inspired rabbinic oppression of Karaism. This concept is clear in the aforementioned Annotation 25, in which Spinoza elaborates on his conclusion in chapter 10 that “no canon of sacred books ever existed before the time of the Maccabees”.⁵³

which they deemed to be Catholic” (Daniel J. Lasker, “Karaism and Christian Hebraism,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 59 (2006): 1089–116, at 1096).

50 On Warner and the Dutch Christian Hebraist interest in Karaism, see Yosef Kaplan, “‘Karaites’ in the Early Eighteenth Century,” *An Alternative Path to Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 234–79.

51 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 149–50.

52 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 163.

53 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 153.

The so-called “Great Synagogue” did not begin until the conquest of Asia by the Macedonians. The opinion of Maimonides, Rabbi Abraham ben David and others that the presidents of this council were Ezra, Daniel, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah and so on, is a ridiculous fiction, and rests on no other foundation than Rabbinical tradition, which insists that the Persian empire lasted a mere thirty-four years. This is the only way they can argue that the decrees of this Great Synagogue or Synod which was composed solely of Pharisees were accepted by the prophets, who had received them from God himself and handed them on to posterity by word of mouth not in writing. The Pharisees [i.e., the rabbis] may persist in believing these things with their usual obstinacy; but experts, who know the reasons for councils and synods and who are also aware of the controversies between the Pharisees and the Sadducees will readily be able too infer the reasons why this Great Synagogue or Council was called. It is certain in any case that no prophet participated in this Council, and that the decrees of the Pharisees which they call traditions, received their authority from this Council.⁵⁴

Here Spinoza reveals that Ibn Daud was an important source for the *Theological-Political Treatise* by enlisting specifically as “ridiculous fiction” the first two chapters of Ibn Daud’s *The Book of Tradition*, in which Ezra, Daniel, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah are situated within a line of rabbinic authority whose legitimacy is uninterrupted since biblical times. Ibn Daud displays in his epilogue his confidence that he has demonstrated the antiquity of “the written Torah as well as the oral Torah”⁵⁵—with “oral Torah” referring to what would later be called rabbinic Judaism—to the detriment of anti-Rabbinites (to whom Ibn Daud refers collectively as Sadducees):

Now that we have completed the history of tradition we will recount the history of the kings of Israel during the days of the Second Temple, in order to refute the Sadducees, who claim that all of the consolatory passages in the books of the prophets were fulfilled for Israel in the days of the Second Temple.⁵⁶

Spinoza’s source is, in fact, one in which the history of Karaism is fabricated to the benefit of Rabbinism, both of which Spinoza endeavours to undermine.

This exploration into the impact of medieval Sephardic culture on Spinoza prior to his excommunication in 1656 suggests that medieval Hebrew texts exerted a strong influence on the formation of his ideas. With regard to the reception of one of the longest-standing Jewish sectarian movements by Spinoza, which is repeatedly depicted in terms concretized by Ibn Daud, it may be concluded from Spinoza’s comments that his interest in anti-Rabbinism contradicted a Christian Hebraist view that he undoubtedly knew well. For Spinoza, the long-standing tradition of heresy, whether Sadduceism or Karaism, is, like Phariseism, exemplary of what he in essence perceives as the “ridiculous fiction” of both the Talmud and Mosaic Law.

⁵⁴ Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 269–70.

⁵⁵ Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, 9.

⁵⁶ Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, 103.

In a broader context, the present study illustrates that textual discourse evoking the travel of an idea, just as travel narratives, as Montserrat Pierra asserts in the Introduction to this volume, “provide us with a privileged *locus* of investigation of issues of multiculturalism”. With respect to the present textual analysis, religious discord may be understood as springing from “multiculturalism,” and the involvement of an Islamic dimension reveals what Pierra identifies as “the pivotal role that a common maritime and mercantile *ethos* had in the forging of interactions between several supposedly inimical traditions”. As I point out above, the toleration practised in Al-Andalus was the inspiration for cross-cultural dialogues, and the travel from east to west, or intellectual development, of the Jewish sectarianism fuelled by these dialogues is an illustration of what this collection of essays endeavours to demonstrate, that is, a “remapping” of the impact of pre-Renaissance east–west cross-cultural interaction.